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Title: The experiences of Accession 8 migrants in England: Motivations, work and agency.

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a recently completed qualitative study in a northern, English city this paper explores motivations and experiences of Accession 8 migrants who have entered the UK following the expansion of the European Union in 2004. The paper considers commonalities and differences among the group of migrants routinely referred to as A8 migrant workers/labourers. Diversity is apparent in respect of three particular aspects. First, the motivations and forms of movement undertaken. Second, their experiences of work within the UK paid labour market. Third, the extent to which the act and experience of migration offers new individual and collective opportunities and potentially opens up spaces for people to negotiate structural constraints and reconfigure aspects of their identity.

INTRODUCTION

Following enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, when rights to live and work in the EU were granted to nationals of the Accession 8 (A8) countriesⁱ, it is estimated that in excess of one million Central and Eastern European migrants have arrived in the UK (Pollard et al. 2008). The UK has proved to be a popular destination for these new European citizens for several reasons. First and foremost, although transitional arrangements allowed old Member States a seven year phasing in period for the extension of rights to A8 nationals, the UK was one of only threeⁱⁱ among the existing 15 EU Member States that granted A8 migrants immediate access to the paid labour market (PLM). The requirement that those who wish to seek paid work first have to enrol on the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) does not appear to have acted as an impediment. Between May 1st 2004 to September 30th 2007, 715,000 A8 migrants' requests to work in the UK were approved by the Home Office (Lemos and Portes, 2008). Additionally, a long sustained period of economic growth (which has now ended), a favourable disparity in wage earning potential between A8 migrants' countries of origin and the UK, alongside a comparatively low and differentiated (regressive) tax system all helped to make the UK an attractive proposition for A8 migrants looking to exercise their new right to freedom of movement as EU citizens (Stenning et al. 2006).

Some previous discussions of A8 migration (e.g. Home Office, 2006) have characterised the typical central/eastern European migrant entering the UK as a young, single, Polish male, migrating on a temporary basis to make some money before returning home. Whilst there is an element of truth in this stereotype, this paper argues that viewing all A8 migrants as merely short-term economic opportunists is too simplistic. The factors underpinning the migration of many A8 migrants are more complicated and the importance of gender and ethnicity in mediating the motivations behind and, experiences of, migration need to be acknowledged. As Ryan et al. (2009) recognise, the expansion of the EU opens up a range of new options for A8 migrants from which a diversity of movements may ensue; from permanent residence at one end of the scale, to more fleeting circulatory and multiple short-term moves at the other.

Against this backdrop, and drawing on qualitative data generated in a study completed in March 2008, the paper considers the experiences of A8 migrants who have recently relocated to a major city in northern England. Although this research reveals a number of commonalities amongst A8 migrants it also implies heterogeneity within the group often categorised simply as ‘new A8 migrant labourers/workers’. Diversity is apparent in respect of three particular aspects. First, the motivations and forms of movement undertaken by A8 migrants. Second, their experiences of work within the UK paid labour market. Third, the extent to which the act and experience of migration offers new individual and collective opportunities and potentially opens up spaces for people to negotiate structural constraints and reconfigure aspects of their identity. This last issue requires an analysis of A8 migrants’ lives that considers both changing broader/macro frameworks (e.g. the extension of freedom of movement rights, differences in wage levels and/or the cost of living between sending and receiving countries, shortages or surpluses of labour in sectors of the PLM), and the individual attributes (gender, ethnicity, qualifications, language skills etc.), that may enhance or inhibit the opportunities that migration can bring.

This not to suggest that A8 migrants are merely passive victims of circumstance, indeed, the decision to migrate is itself an act of agency,ⁱⁱⁱ and as Lister notes, “people can be, at the same time, both the subordinate objects of hierarchical power relations and subjects who are agents in their own lives, capable of exercising power in the generative sense of self-actualisation” (1997 :40). The ability of A8 migrants to maximise agency is, however, unevenly distributed and is mediated not only by social structures and regulatory frameworks but also importantly by aspects of individual biography and identity that are subject to change as migrants live their lives across time and space (McDowell, 2008). For example, feminist migration research has demonstrated how migration impacts on women’s (and men’s) lives in particularly gendered ways (Anderson, 2000; Koffman et al. 2000; Silvey, 2004). Others have noted how aspects of ethnicity (e.g. differences in education, English language fluency and cultural traditions), all shape the labour market and broader social

participation of migrants (Bhavnani, 1994; Burholt, 2004; Torres, 2006). Furthermore, the differential skills and qualifications that individual migrants bring with them also impact on their lives in host communities. Migration is, therefore, layered, with differential experiences related to complex inequalities and identities.

An important aim of this paper is to question the usefulness of the homogenising category 'A8 migrant worker' as a tool for understanding the diverse experiences of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe that have recently come to live and work in the UK. Three key areas are, therefore, addressed in subsequent discussions. First, the various motivations that underpin the different types of migratory movements undertaken by A8 migrants are explored and their stereotypical depiction as essentially short term, transitory labour migrants is challenged. Second, in exploring workplace experiences, discussions highlight how A8 migrants' tendency to work alongside fellow nationals emerge from their particular, and differing, perceptions of disadvantage within the hierarchically structured UK migrant labour market. Third, in spite of the difficulties that many new European migrants may face, the paper evidences the ways in which international migration may increase individuals' abilities to actively reshape their lives. Before addressing these key issues in more detail a brief contextualisation of the fieldwork location and outline of the study on which this paper draws is required.

STUDY OUTLINE AND METHODS

The qualitative data used in subsequent discussions was generated in a research project that focused on the needs, experiences and expectations of A8 migrants, newly resident in a northern English city. The city in question has reinvented itself in the post-industrial era into an urban location of considerable renewal and prosperity. It is now characterised by a diverse and dynamic economy with tertiary sectors such as retail, call centres, offices and media being important to the labour market. The city also, however, has sizeable low-skilled and low-paid labour market sectors (i.e. hospitality, construction, manufacturing, food-processing) and the particular groups of

workers in these sectors are more likely to experience the social inequalities that are often the underbelly of ostensibly prosperous cities. The parts of the city that are characterised by poverty, exclusion and multiple deprivation are unsurprisingly shaped by ethnic, racial and class dynamics, and the city's history of migration, particularly from the South Asian continent, has contributed to its current demographic profile. New waves of immigration have led to a greater diversity of migrants and the significant number of recent arrivals from A8 countries have joined an established Polish community that first settled after the Second World War.

Eighty nine people participated in the fieldwork. A series of group interviews were held with members of three, newly resident, A8 migrant groups i.e. Polish, Slovak and Slovak Roma^{iv} migrants. Ten key informants, who recruited, employed or acted as community support workers for A8 migrants were also interviewed (see appendix 1). Additionally, four parallel focus group interviews were convened with members of the established West Indian, Pakistani (differentiated by gender) and 'white' host communities in neighborhoods that had recently experienced the arrival of significant numbers of A8 migrants. Finally, three focus groups were held with agencies involved in the provision and/or administration of local public services e.g. City Council services, primary care trusts, housing providers and schools.

Two basic principles, informed consent and anonymity, underpinned the fieldwork. Participant information and consent sheets were translated as necessary and participants were briefed about the aims of the research. Experienced interpreters were present at interviews as required. Interviews were routinely recorded on audiotape transcribed verbatim (translated into English by interpreters as appropriate), and analysed using grid analysis and thematic coding techniques (Mason, 2002; Ritchie and Spencer, 2003^v).

MIGRANT WORKERS? MIGRATION MOTIVATIONS AND TYPES OF MOVEMENT

At the heart of the EU project lies a preoccupation with the mobility and residence rights of workers rather than citizens per se (Dwyer, 2001). Much subsequent literature has routinely used the term ‘migrant workers’ when discussing those who entered the UK post 2004 (e.g. Audit Commission, 2007; LSCYH, 2007). Indeed, a desire to find work, often enhanced by a favourable disparity in wage earning potential between countries of origin and the UK was seen as the pre-eminent motivation behind the migration of many in our study.

There are no jobs in Slovakia and the wages are very low. One week wage is as much as one month wage in Slovakia. (FG1 Slovaks)

We are doing easy work for small money. But small money here is big money in Poland. If we did the same in Poland - we would have no money. (FG2 Polish men)

However, whilst economic motivations and the search for paid work were important to many A8 migrants, a more complex picture emerges from the range of motivations and types of movement undertaken.

With the students they very often come for just three months, go back and the next summer they come again. There is a certain percentage of people who have stayed and are planning to *stay... How many? Probably 50%*. (KII recruitment agency)

Some routinely saw their presence in England as finite and envisaged returning to their country of origin after a year or two.

The situation is that about half of us will return after one year home...replaced by new people. (FG1 Slovak)

For some time - maybe. Maybe for one year or two. Not forever. (FG3 Polish women)

Nonetheless, the stereotypical fleeting labour migrant was very much in the minority. The data above about intended length of stay should also be read with caution. Other studies (Spencer et al. 2007) have observed differences between participants’ stated

intended length of stay and the actual duration or permanency of their period of residence. In earlier waves of labour migration to the UK many migrants originally intended to return home. The reality is that many have settled permanently (Anwar, 1979). This was reiterated in our discussions with more established migrant communities when a man laughingly noted 'I come here 48 years ago; I only come for 5 years. *A long 5 years! (FG7 West Indian).*' As people become aware of the potential benefits of their migration they remain for longer periods or take up permanent residence.

They plan to go back to Poland. Quite a few don't because the life here is so much easier and quite peaceful and they realise that the possibilities here are much greater than in Poland. So they will stay here. (KI3 Polish community worker)

As plans change short term transitory migration often becomes more permanent with family members relocating to join a loved one who had initially moved alone (Currie, 2008; Ryan et al. 2009). Family joiners were certainly a prevalent feature in our study, particularly in the case of Polish and Roma migrants. Routinely male migrants would 'lead' the migration and establish themselves with a job and appropriate accommodation before being joined by other family members, usually their partners and children.

Escaping persecution: the motivations of A8 Roma

Although the history and treatment of Roma across Eastern Europe is complex (with identifiable differences across East European states), much current A8 Roma migration takes place against a common backdrop of severe exclusion and discrimination within their countries of origin. Under the communist regimes that flourished post World War II the Roma were routinely subject to forced settlement and recognition of their ethnicity and cultural practices denied (Barany 2000; Klobucky and Strapcova; 2004; Guglielmo, 2005). Following the post-communist transition Roma communities have often found themselves bearing the brunt of

economic restructuring with steep falls in living standards linked to low levels of educational attainment and a very high incidence of, often long-term, unemployment (Vermeersch, 2002; Hancock, 2000, 2005).

A8 Roma migrants now resident in the UK have migrated from a variety of EU states and are diverse in terms of language and culture. However, these populations have common experience of widespread prejudice and racist abuse in their homelands. The need to migrate to find paid work is clearly valued, but this is augmented by a strong desire to escape persecution and discrimination in their country of origin and the opportunity to provide a better and safer environment for their children (THPR, 2006).

Racism against the Roma [in Slovakia] has escalated. I came to England to escape the racism in Slovakia. I was educated but work was out of the question due to racism and discrimination. We are normal human beings, but [in Slovakia] I could not work in a restaurant, people would not take food from me. (Roma 2, Mother)

The view that the Roma migration, post 2004, may be prompted as much by the search for freedom from persecution as by work was further endorsed when two other participants described previous unsuccessful attempts to relocate their families to the UK by claiming asylum prior to EU enlargement. Generally, the Roma participants stated an unwillingness to return to their country of origin due to the high levels of discrimination and violence that they had suffered there. All of the Roma families intended to settle permanently in England and make new lives for themselves.

Whilst short term, transitory labour migrants remain an important element of the latest phase of new European migration it is increasingly problematic to discuss A8 migration in such a stereotypical manner. Length of stay varies from a few months to permanent settlement, and, as family joiners become increasingly commonplace, it is likely that more will stay for longer (BCEEWG, 2006). Post 2004, the relative economic advantages available, for the first time, to A8 nationals looking for work in

a booming UK labour market were undoubtedly a strong pull factor in many initial decisions to migrate. The search for temporary work, however, is only one part of an unfolding story. Roma migrants are also motivated by a wish to escape the endemic prejudice and persecution they face in their country of origin. Others, (in our study a substantial minority of Polish migrants), are keen to maximise the financial and emotional advantages of more permanent residence and look to “improve their standard of living by relocating the entire family...[so they can] be together and enjoy the fruits of their labour together.” (Ryan et al. 2009 :65). Decisions to settle on a more permanent basis are, however, often dependant upon migrants’ experiences within the UK labour market.

WORKPLACE PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

The poor quality of many jobs occupied by A8 migrants is well documented (Anderson et al. 2006; Mackenzie and Forde 2006; CIC, 2007). The majority of A8 migrants in England are routinely employed in the relatively low skilled, manual and repetitive jobs within the hotel and leisure sector, warehousing and manufacturing, processing and construction industries (Pollard et al. 2008). This new pool of labour has been broadly welcomed by the majority of British employers who prior to the current economic downturn struggled to fill such “3D, (dirty, dangerous and dull) jobs” (Favell, 2008 :704) with more locally available workers (Dench et al. 2006; Spencer et al. 2007). As new arrivals filling gaps in the PLM that others choose not to take, A8 migrants (particularly those who are recruited by employment agencies) often find themselves required to work long hours on unsociable shifts.

A diversity of disadvantage? Hierarchies within the migrant workforce

Previous studies report a large proportion of A8 migrants as overqualified for the jobs they undertake in the UK (BCEEWG, 2006; Stenning et al. 2006; Mackenzie and Forde, 2007). The majority of participants in our study were also employed significantly below their skill levels and abilities. The more highly qualified reported

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frustration at attempts to move into better jobs and cited an unwillingness on the part of employers to recognise qualifications and work experience attained in their countries of origin.

They did not have any respect for Polish education. They did not take it into account. I was quite high in Poland as a physiotherapist. Here I did not work as a physiotherapist. (FG2 Polish women)

I worked as a clerk for 6 years in Poland, coming here they say no it doesn't count at all. I went on specialised courses, recognised worldwide to increase my *ability as accountant clerk...It is a closed circle.* (FG3 Polish men)

Concentrated in largely unskilled sectors of the PLM, undertaking unpopular work and often thwarted in their attempts to find better employment, many A8 migrants commonly perceive themselves to be discriminated against and disadvantaged in comparison to more established white British and B&ME workers. This sense of being at the 'bottom of the pile' was strongly articulated by Polish workers.

Being foreigner puts you in a worse position... English people are scared of black people. Black people can take you to court and say that you are racist. You don't have this problem with Poles, so Polish people are now on the end. (FG3 Polish women)

Likewise, the Slovakian participants, who all worked at a food production factory outlined at length the grievances they had with other, relatively more established, B&ME workers who they worked alongside on the night shift.

R2: You know all the team leaders and supervisors are Kurdish or Indian but no Slovaks or Polish. So Kurdish team leader prefers Kurdish workers, for example...

R1: They are having easier work, Kurdish get easy jobs. We get the work they *don't want to do...* They were here before us.

R2: There is discrimination towards us. If a Slovak or Polish worker has got problem, it's ignored.

R1: Our versions of events is never taken as a truth.

R3: If there is an argument, the Kurdish worker always wins.

R4: I'm suspended now. I had an argument with a Kurdish worker. He hit me and then complained that I did hit him. He quickly gathered a few gypsy witnesses who never even saw the incident. He then threatened my mother and my girlfriend. I have not been working for a month and I'm awaiting a disciplinary decision. (FG1 Slovaks)

Whilst it is impossible to confirm the veracity of the last incident outlined above, the data is, nonetheless, indicative of the discontent felt by many A8 migrants who clearly believe themselves to be worse off than other B&ME people who share the same workspace. Perhaps such sentiments arise because, “many A8 migrants see themselves as whites in a largely white country and expect to not suffer discrimination or even be in a privileged position the job market” (McDowell, 2009 :30). Mutual mistrust and tension between white British, and more particularly established B&ME workers and A8 migrants is a feature of many shared workplaces. Among A8 migrants, who themselves feel ‘deskilled and devalued’ (see Currie, 2008), such sentiments at times may develop into less tolerant and/or racist attitudes towards their ‘fellow’ workers (McDowell et al. 2007; McDowell, 2008).

Beyond the commonly held perception of shared disadvantage which was strongly expressed by all three groups of A8 migrants interviewed, further analysis point to emerging inequalities within the general population of A8 migrants. Both Slovak and Roma participants believed themselves to be disadvantaged in the workplace in comparison to their Polish counterparts.

I go everyday to an agency and they say there is no work. I would be happy with a job. People from Poland get jobs but not me? There is a little

discrimination in the agency. But Polish can get jobs. Banks translate in Polish but nothing in Slovak. (Roma 3, Son)

We would like to have a better chance to find different work like Polish people. *They have their own agencies which will help them... It is much harder for us* because we have to communicate with English people. (FG1 Slovaks)

Slovak and Roma participants clearly felt that Polish migrants occupied a relatively privileged position that enabled them to find work and/or access the best positions available to new European arrivals. Polish workers are by far the largest single A8 new migrant group (Audit Commission, 2007). The sheer numbers involved has resulted in specialist Polish recruitment agencies being set up to facilitate labour migration to the UK. These factors, in combination with pre-existing Polish community networks established by the earlier wave of post-WWII Polish migrants, and a thriving, and well networked Polish community centre in the city in which the study took place appear to have been important in facilitating and supporting newly arrived Poles (Christiansen, 1996). Such resources did not exist for the Slovak and Roma migrants. An awareness of differing migration histories and contexts and how they may shape contemporary workplace disadvantages and inequality among the diverse population of A8 migrants is important. As the migrants above note, banks are happy to translate for Polish customers because the Poles are a sizable and, therefore, potentially lucrative new customer base. Similarly, there are no specialist Roma or Slovak recruitment agencies to approach for help when looking for work. In the absence of translated services and bi-lingual intermediaries in employment agencies and elsewhere, Roma and Slovak migrants were acutely aware that a lack of English language fluency further disadvantaged them in comparison to those Poles with English language skills.

An understanding of the ways in which UK employers have utilised successive waves of migrant workers may offer some insights into the A8 migrants' perceptions of the various labour market hierarchies outlined above. Drawing on the work of Rodriguez (2004), MacKenzie and Forde note that many employers view migrant workers as a,

“self regulating, self training, self disciplining workforce” (2009 :144) that offers a cheaper and compliant alternative to local workers for managers who are looking to recruit in hard to fill sectors of the labour market. They argue that employers engage in the repeated recruitment of marginalised migrant labour to cut labour costs and to establish or maintain a competitive advantage. The expansion of the EU in 2004, therefore, offered employers a new pool of cheap, hard working and compliant labour to exploit which compared favourably with local workers, who in a period of low unemployment, were able to exercise more choice about where they worked and the terms and conditions of their employment.

Like many other groups from abroad who preceded them, MacKenzie and Forde (2009) argue that A8 migrants were, initially at least, favoured by employers as they were willing to sign opt out clauses in respect of the maximum Working Time Directive and work long, unsociable shifts and available overtime largely to maximise their income. However, employers reported that over time, “[migrant] workers became more demanding as they became more aware of their entitlements and alternative opportunities” (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009 :150). The evidence presented in this paper would support such assertions. As subsequent discussions illustrate, those A8 migrants with appropriate English language skills who became aware that more favourable work opportunities existed elsewhere (usually Polish migrants), wasted no time in seeking out better paid and less arduous employment. Whilst employers were somewhat resentful of A8 migrants who exercised individual agency in this way they were not unduly concerned as long as new migrants (from Europe or further afield) who were prepared to work long and hard for the minimum wage were available to replace them.

A8 MIGRANTS AND AGENCY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WORKPLACE

Previous discussions have highlighted how many A8 migrants routinely work on shifts alongside fellow nationals within workforces where the majority of employees are from other B&ME groups. Allied to this many are engaged in, “low skilled and

poorly paid jobs” that are at odds with the, “high levels of education that many post enlargement migrants have” (Pollard et al. 2008: 37). Within our study, however, a minority of Polish migrants (male and female) relayed accounts of more positive workplace experiences and instances when they were able to access better employment opportunities. Beyond the workplace a number of participants also spoke about how the act of migrating to the UK had enabled new possibilities for empowerment and opened up space for individuals to develop a new sense of self. Before embarking on a discussion of how migration may facilitate positive opportunities for identity development it is necessary to explore how English language capability plays a vital role in enhancing A8 migrants’ agency within the UK PLM.

English: the key to occupational mobility?

The minority of the Polish migrants who were able to exercise occupational mobility all had English language skills that set them apart from their peers. Employers in mundane sectors of the labour market were keen to hold on to the more capable A8 migrants.

He started off as a linen porter, his English was good, he'd been to university in Poland. We had a conference porter/ driver vacancy so he transferred over *to conference porter... then we had a supervisor vacancy and he applied along with external candidates and some other UK internal candidates and we actually gave it to him. (KI2 hotel/hospitality company)*

After 6 weeks my company proposed a contract... They sent me on many courses... my company was actually investing in me. Because I told them straight away I could read and write in English, which was a very big bonus for them. They said, 'we will put you in office and administration'. (FG2 Polish men)

Management in companies that employ significant numbers of Poles clearly recognise that workers with bi-lingual abilities who are able to operate as an interface between

the shop floor and management are a valuable asset. For individual workers this ability to communicate in English and Polish can often lead to internal promotion within a particular company and/or more control over the type of work they do and the conditions that they work under. For example, a young Polish woman spoke of how her employer, rather than lose her from the payroll, had allowed her to reduce her hours and work flexitime so that she could begin to study at university and continue to work.

In common with other studies (e.g. FRCG, 2007) a large proportion of migrants in our study were over qualified for the jobs they were doing. However, among the Poles several had skilled or management level jobs that reflected their qualifications and experience in Poland. This was not the case for the Slovakian factory workers even though many of them were educated beyond a basic level; for example, one was a qualified computer programmer, another a trained chef. The major factor that distinguished the minority of Poles in better jobs, from the majority of other A8 migrants in low status work, was an enhanced ability to understand and communicate in English. Those who did not possess such skills were acutely aware that their lack of English acted as a significant barrier to them finding better employment in the future.

It's hard to change this work because we at least understand what we have to do and what shifts. But yes, naturally we would like better jobs. (FG2 Polish men)

I'm not happy with the type of work I do but a lack of English is holding me back... *I'm working when classes are held. Language is very important.* Speaking better English would make all the difference. I don't like having to rely on my children and also I could get better work. (Roma 2, Mother)

Most of our problems arise from not speaking English language. (FG1 Slovaks)

For many the desire to attend classes to improve their English was strong. However, unsociable shifts and long hours at work made it difficult for them to English classes

that many believed were the key to securing better work. Employers presented a somewhat different view with several stressing that they provided opportunities for A8 workers to improve their language skills at work, but that workers were reluctant to spend time away from the production line attending classes as this impacted negatively on take-home pay. This kind of disinclination perhaps makes sense if migrants see their stay as finite and temporary, but it does not correspond with the opinions offered by the migrants themselves.

The importance of English language capabilities in respect of a migrant's ability to exercise agency within the labour market is further evidenced by the accounts of two English speaking Poles who, aware that they had other options, actively took steps to improve their working lives.

When I handed in my notice they laughed at me...I went to the bank because I had some queries on my account and I just asked if there was an opportunity to work there, they said – 'yes, just bring your CV'. So I got my CV and they employed me without further interview. (FG3 Polish women)

[Be] aware of your value to the company. Sometimes you need to fight to be promoted, to be given your rights. And the way to do it, is by giving notice. *Then they will appreciate you, 'OK let's sit down and review your contract'* (FG2 Polish men)

Sick of working below her abilities, the woman above successfully obtained clerical work that was more in keeping with her work experience at home in Poland. Her male counterpart threatened to use a similar exit strategy to renegotiate better terms and conditions. Although employers have been keen to exploit the additional pool of labour that A8 migrants represent, it appears that they harbour a certain level of resentment towards employees who act to improve their working lives. The data below is typical of several comments made by employers who were dismayed when migrants looked to exercise their right to seek new employment elsewhere as their skills (particularly language skills), developed.

What we found was that they learnt their English, we paid for it, and then they went... to somewhere else in the city that wasn't hotel work and they got more money. (KI2 hotel/hospitality company)

Labour market inequalities initially situate many new A8 migrants in low paid, low status work. Nonetheless, migrant workers are not, as Rogaly (2008) reminds us, merely passive recipients of imposed conditions. Those A8 migrants who entered the UK PLM with more than an elementary grasp of the English language (i.e. in our study exclusively Poles), used their abilities to secure more skilled and better paid employment, often alongside English workers, at the earliest opportunity. Those who couldn't speak English fully understood that developing their language capabilities was key to them exercising occupational mobility in the future. **Realistically, however, the ability of such workers to choose to attend language classes is severely constrained by the necessity to continue working long shifts and overtime (given their low, hourly wage rates), in order to earn a living wage. As MacKenzie and Forde (2009 :156) note, this situation is likely to persist for as long as employers are able to continue to offer opportunities to successive waves of migrant workers on the basis of a, "maximum hours for the minimum wage" principle as a way of maintaining competitiveness.**

MIGRATION, AGENCY AND IDENTITY

Feminist scholarship has done much to theorise the concept of intersectionality and has built on work which suggests that identities are complex, fluid and changing but at the same time structured by gendered and racialised norms and practices (see e.g. Minow, 1997; Valentine, 2007; McDowell, 2008). The potential for migration to disrupt individual identities in both positive and negative ways has also been acknowledged (Silvey, 2004). As previously noted, choosing to migrate can in itself be considered an indication of individual agency. Members of two particular groups of migrants outlined the ways in which migration to the UK had positive impacts on their perceived and projected senses of identity.

On several occasions female Polish migrants articulated the subtle but significant ways in which moving to live and work in the UK had generated unanticipated benefits. Several expressed feelings of liberation due to the enhanced opportunities for personal development that their new lives in England had bought about.

R1: It's school of life.

R2: The experience is important because we learn something.

R3: Living in multicultural society opens up your mind. In Poland we have like one nation so we have lots of prejudices and here you can get rid of them and try to cross the border. (FG3 Polish women)

Their experience of living and working in different cultural and social spaces had clearly allowed them to question the custom and practices of their homeland. In physically moving across national borders they had also begun to metaphorically challenge previously accepted views about the roles ascribed to themselves and others. One woman spoke of the tangible benefits that relocation had bought within the workplace in terms of the greater rights and respect afforded to women employees who became pregnant in the UK.

I think for women here it is less scary to get pregnant. It is a big advantage of living in Britain. In Poland it is not accepted when you get pregnant as an employee. Here you get some respect when you are pregnant. I worked in an office in Poland and after the birth I did not have job anymore to get back to. My employer was very unhappy that I got pregnant. (FG3 Polish women)

The experiences of many of the Polish women reflect long standing debates in the gender and work literature around the importance of context in shaping women's choices and expectations about paid work (see Hakim, 1995 and the responses from Ginn et al., 1996; Bruegel, 1996; Walby, 1997). While parental leave provisions in the UK are considered of a lower standard in contrast to other Western European countries, they are more generous in comparison to Polish legislation. The formal differences to some extent can be considered marginal, 20 weeks paid leave in Poland

(increased in 2009 from 16 weeks) compared with 26 weeks in the UK (Dulewicz and Stobiński, 2009). However, the real advantages experienced by the Polish women in this study relate not only to improved entitlements, but also to the attitudes of their employers towards maternity leave and differences in the extent to which parental leave legislation is enforced and perceived within these different national contexts (Rubery and Fagan, 1996; Gregory and Windebank, 2000). The positive experiences of post-migration employment will inevitably be contingent on the type of contact under which individuals are employed. Migrant women recruited overseas, via an agency, for a specified period of work are unlikely to enjoy maternity rights. Another important experiential factor is the expectations they have of paid work based on their lives prior to migration. For the Roma women, the sheer ability to engage in paid work was celebrated.

The women in this study were engaged in a range of jobs, mostly full-time and in employment sectors typically occupied by women; for example, catering, care work, clerical work and low skilled factory work (Bitc, 2008; Kirton and Greene, 2000). Three of the Polish and two of the Roma women were currently full time carers. They spoke of the problems of balancing paid work with care responsibilities and of finding out about support for care in a new country. As one Polish community worker explained '*women are kind of powerful in Polish society...it's a rare situation when a women stays at home*'. But several of the women who had migrated with families had found it hard to find work due to lack of childcare support which leads to many of them '*feeling so frustrated that they don't have access to any help.*' (KI3 Polish community worker). The existence of a Polish community centre meant that this issue was being addressed for the Polish women via Sure Start programmes and advice on Child Care Tax Credits and other benefits.

To some extent our research confirms the broader literature on gender and migration around the predominance of migrant women in the worst paid and most insecure jobs

in the labour market with little opportunity to accrue welfare rights and pensions (Ginn and Arber, 1995; Nazroo et al., 2004). However, the way that post-migration work is experienced depends also upon expectations and the context of work in the country of origin; as reflected in the positive views towards employment protection and parental leave rights. Our data also demonstrates the agency of some of the better educated and qualified women with fluency in English who, like their male counterparts, had managed to move into better jobs after initial periods in low-paid agency work. Drawing on Ho (2006), Ryan et al. (2009:68) note how, “migration may reinforce as well as disrupt traditional gender roles”. Although a number of the Polish women interviewed had followed their partners to England, they spoke of mobility reconfiguring aspects of their lives positively. Moving abroad had allowed them the space to develop a different personal perspective on who they had been and, in some respects, who they might be in the future. Their lives continued to be mediated by gender but relocation to a new social setting had allowed them in some ways to reconsider and reconfigure their identities as women.

Throughout discussions Roma participants stressed how they much preferred their new lives in England, not just because of the possibility of work, but also because of the chance to escape the virulent, and at times violent racism, that routinely blights their everyday life in their countries of origin (THPP, 2006). In the context of her discussion of current and the previous waves of Polish migration to the UK, McDowell is right when she states that, “what unites the old and new EU migrants, as well as their commitment to hard work is their skin colour” (2009 :27). This does not, however, hold true for darker skinned Roma migrants. Ethnicity and skin colour continue to be important aspects of identity for Roma in England but their impact is played out in different ways in their new home. For example, a Roma woman related how, in Slovakia, her husband was the only family member able to find work because “*he has blue eyes and is fair like you*” [to interviewer]. In England most of the Roma participants were able to find factory work and reported no problems with workplace discrimination. However, some of their new neighbours clearly resented the non-

white newcomers in their midst. Interestingly, two Roma families reported that the antipathy of certain locals towards them had receded once it was known they were not of Pakistani origin.

When we moved here some people thought we were Pakistani, once they realised we are Christian, from Europe, everything was fine. (Roma 2, mother)

In light of the above quotation, Favell's assertion that, "European publics are likely to be more comfortable with the scenario of getting used to Balkan and Slavic accents, rather than seeing the black and brown faces in the same jobs, or (especially) hearing them speak the language of Allah" (2008 :712) is both right and wrong. The data presented supports Modoods' (1992) assertion that 'cultural racism' (which includes oppression around differing religious practices), is often as fundamental an aspect of racism as one based on colour and suggests that Favell is right to recognise that some in the West harbour a particular hostility towards Muslims. On the other hand, the Roma are simultaneously Eastern European, Christian and 'brown'. It is, therefore, too simplistic to equate A8 migration exclusively with the movement of white people and experiences of racial harassment were still part of the everyday lives of the Roma in our study. Nonetheless, overall the Roma participants strongly believed that migrating to England had enabled them to more freely express their particular ethnic identity. This sentiment was best expressed by a Roma woman who spoke of being more secure and better able to be who she really was, within the relatively anonymous setting of a multicultural UK city (cf. Pollard et al. 2008). Her migration had allowed her to celebrate her identity as a 'gypsy', something that had been an impossibility in her country of origin, due to endemic prejudice and persecution.

Here I am a gypsy. In Slovakia I am not a gypsy - we don't have our own country. We feel free here because there are other nationalities. No one cares about me and that is good, I'm just some lady. (Roma 1, daughter)

CONCLUSIONS

Favell (2008:706) has argued that the expansion of the EU has opened up, “European territorial space” which encourages, “temporary and circular migration trends”. Such relatively short-term movements appear to be a significant element of the A8 migration flows. The IPPR has estimated that approximately one million A8 migrants have arrived in the UK since 2004 but also believe that around half of those who entered have already left the UK (Pollard et al. 2008). However, Favell’s claim that we may have to rethink some of the previously held truths about permanent settlement and that the paradigm of ‘immigration and integration’ is now redundant is perhaps too bold. A8 migrants engage in a diversity of migration strategies that encompass a range of movements from short-term movements linked to specific working contracts through to permanent settlement. Of the estimated fifty per cent of A8 migrants who remain in the UK many may have originally envisaged a short stay but significant numbers are now choosing to reunite their families in their chosen destination (Ryan et al. 2009). Such family joiners were certainly a feature in our study. This was especially true for Roma participants who, although motivated by a search for work, were also eager to escape the prejudice and discrimination of their homelands and settle in the UK on a permanent basis.

There is much discussion around the potentially transformative role of English language proficiency in promoting the wider integration of migrants (Audit Commission, 2007; ICoCo, 2007; BIA, 2008; Revill, 2008). It was certainly a key enabling factor in promoting the agency of A8 migrants who operated most successfully in the UK labour market. In particular, some of the Poles with English language abilities were able to negotiate improved terms and conditions with their employer or move to new jobs elsewhere which better reflected the skills and experience they had acquired before migrating. Consequently, they were far more likely to work alongside British workers. The ‘everyday encounters’ (Laurier and Philo, 2006) of these migrants in the work place also appear to have been significant in promoting their integration into wider society.

However, the majority of A8 migrants do low paid, low skilled jobs and are often located in workplaces that are routinely populated by fellow A8 migrants and/or workers from Black and minority ethnic communities. As the latest group of workers to arrive in the UK, A8 migrants feel they are disadvantaged compared to the other groups that they work alongside. The tendency to homogenise the experiences of different nationalities and ethnic groups who make up the A8 migrant category also needs to be resisted. The Slovak and Roma participants who took part in our study clearly believed that they were relatively disadvantaged compared to Polish migrants. As already noted the evidence suggests that those Poles with good English language abilities were able to get better work. Additionally, all the Poles were able to draw on social networks of support that had been established following the earlier post World War II migration to the UK. Such informal support systems were lacking for other nationalities.

Finally, it is also important to note that for some A8 migrants the decision to move to the UK has brought about additional advantages beyond any economic rewards that may ensue. For some Polish women their new life abroad had opened up the space for them to critically review their own attitudes and beliefs. The Roma families interviewed had managed to escape the entrenched discrimination and prejudice of their country of origin. Gender and ethnicity remain important factors in the lives of A8 migrants. The act and experience of migration offers new individual and collective opportunities and potentially opens up spaces for people to negotiate structural constraints and reconfigure aspects of their identity.

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Key informant participants

KEY INFORMANT NO.	ROLE AND ORGANISATION
KI1	Recruitment agency specialising in Polish migrant labour
KI2	Manager for a company in the hotel/hospitality sector that employs A8 migrants
KI3	Community worker with Polish migrants
KI4	Services manager for a logistics/distribution company that employs new migrants
KI5	a) Human resources manager b) Group head of corporate responsibility c) Training manager for Leeds operations All work for a logistics/distribution company that employs new migrants
KI6	Regional representative of a trade union
KI7	Community worker for new Roma migrants
KI8	Human resources manager of a food manufacturer which employs new migrants

Table 2. New migrant participants

CODE NO./ NAME	INTERVIEW TYPE	NUMBERS AND GENDER	AGE RANGE
FG1 Slovaks	Focus group	3 men 3 women	Late 20s to mid 50s
FG2 Polish men	Focus group	8 men	20s to late 50s

FG3 Polish women	Focus group	9 women	20s to mid 50s
ROMA 1	Joint interview	1 man 2 women (Mother, brother and sister)	30s to early 70s
ROMA 2	Joint interview	2 women (Mother and daughter)	Late teens to late 30s
ROMA 3	Joint interview	2 men 1 woman (Father, mother and son)	Late teens to 50





























