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‘‘In Poland I would never work in a coffee shop’’: migration, work and career choices in a (post) socialist context.

Abstract

Using 25 life histories of Poles this paper explores the way in which migration has had an impact upon the trajectories of individuals' working lives both under socialism and after 1989. In doing this we explore some of the connections between different waves of migration, bringing together historical and contemporary research on migration as well as engaging with current debates on post-socialism which problematise the disjuncture between socialist and post-socialist experience. Our contention here is that one way in which socialism and post-socialism might be integrated is through exploring the experiences of individuals whose lives span these eras. We suggest that while there are continuities across the periods, there are also disjunctures created not only by the changed politico-legal context, but also through changed attitudes towards the role of migration as part of individual career trajectories.

Introduction

Poland has long been recognised as a place of emigration. As a consequence of rising population, limited livelihood opportunities at home coupled with the prospects of greater chances for prosperity abroad, and technological advancements allowing for development of passenger transportation by sea, from the mid-nineteenth century there were significant waves of migration of Poles to other parts of the world. A strong body of extant historical research relating to pre-1950 migration of Poles (e.g. Morawska, 1985; Wyman, 1993; Znaniecki, 1918) mirrors this phenomenon. Additionally, the contemporary explosion of Poles travelling abroad has increasingly captured the attention of social science and migration studies research – conducted both in Poland and elsewhere – following the collapse of socialism in 1989 and the country's accession to the European Union in 2004 (e.g. Burrell, 2009, 2010; Drinkwater and Garapich, 2007; Kicingier and Weinar, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007; Datta et al., 2007). As Iglicka (2007) argues, studies carried out by researchers in different academic contexts have tended to be influenced by a set of national as well as international paradigms and agendas. Polish national perspectives have stressed the long history of the country as a place of emigration, with research focusing on the links between the society and the Polish diaspora all over the world, the return of Poles to their motherland and their reincorporation into the society. International research, on the other hand, has responded to the concerns of western politicians about the potential dangers posed by the influx of large numbers of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to western European countries. Consequently, studies have sought to identify such dangers and ways of addressing them.

In contrast to research covering Polish migration pre-1950 and post-1989, very little attention has been paid to the population movements that, as a result of establishing new country borders, took place immediately after the World War II. More generally, the whole post-1945

period until the late 1980s has hardly been studied with the view to gain insights into international migration of Poles. In Poland, this lack of research interest in contemporary Polish migration was motivated ideologically. As Iglicka (2007: 12) states:

until the year 1989, official propaganda did not acknowledge emigration or fluxes out of Poland as a fact. [Moreover, it was] impossible to conduct a research on migration not only due to the “official political line” but also simply no data were collected on international population mobility on Polish territory, and particularly through Polish borders.

At the same time, in western countries, the developing discipline of ‘Sovietology’ from the 1950s focused on studying the countries of CEE. Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008) point out how it played a role in constructing the image of the region as that of ‘the west’s other – largely homogeneous, monolithic, totalitarian and pan-Slavonic’. Both conceptually and empirically then, the period from the end of WWII to the collapse of socialism was conceived of as a time of separation of CEE from the west, with disregard for the movements of people and other types of connections that existed between the two political blocs.

Against this background, our first intention in this paper is to explore some of the connections between the historical and contemporary waves of migration. In doing this, we hope to bring together historical and contemporary research on migration, thus responding to the calls of scholars such as Bade (2003) and Lucassen (2007) to see migration as an important and intrinsic part of Europe’s history. Rather than privileging some types of migration over others (e.g. international over urban-rural), they stress the importance of examining in a broader historical context the link between migration and changes in social structure, culture and economy. Moreover, we wish to add to the current debates on post-socialism, especially to the voices of those researchers whose work moves away from normative representations of transformations in CEE as constituting an unproblematic, linear movement from ‘serfdom to freedom’ (Hayek, 1944). Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008) propose that one way of enriching the current conceptualisations of post-socialism could be through problematising the disjuncture between socialist and post-socialist experience and it is in this spirit that we conduct the discussion of our empirical material analysed here.

In pursuing our objective of presenting migration as integral to the European experience, through considering rural-urban, internal or seasonal migrations alongside international movements, and linking the historical with the contemporary to contribute to our conceptualisation of post-socialism, we place the experience of migration in the context of an individual’s life. Our contention here is that one way in which socialism/post-socialism might be integrated is through exploring the experiences of individuals whose lives span these eras. Our focus, however, is not on individuals’ experiences of migration in general viewed in a historical context. As interdisciplinary researchers, interested both in history and management and organisation studies, we are interrogating the migration of Poles from a specific angle – namely, we view migrants as workers and in particular we explore the way in which migration has had an impact upon the trajectories of individuals’ working lives. In doing this, we contribute to what Clark and Rowlinson (2004) refer to as the ‘historic turn’ in

management and organisation theory. Viewed from the perspective of management and organisation studies, our research adds to extant literature on career choice and development, whereby the term career can be used both as a qualifier, referring to any process related to work or working, and as a noun, denoting a series of occupations – both paid and unpaid – an individual holds throughout her or his life (Sears, 1982). The interdisciplinary nature of our study suggests that, in addition to the literature from history, some of the contributions from the area of career choice and development can be usefully introduced to our discussion.

Since the seminal works of Hughes (1937) and Goffman (1968), the notion of career has attracted research interest in different fields, such as economics, occupational psychology and social sciences in a broad sense. Although far from abundant, extant economics literature provides some explanation regarding the factors influencing career choices of individuals, including the choice to pursue one's career outside the country of origin. In general, this literature depicts individuals as utility-maximising agents wishing to maximise returns to their occupational skills. In line with this conceptualisation, when discussing decisions regarding the country in which an individual undertakes employment, it portrays the choice of migration destination in terms of the interaction between the skill demand by different labour markets and the supply of occupational skills by individuals (Christiadi and Cushing, 2008). Whilst few studies have focused on the relationship between career and migration, researchers in economics tend to agree that migration results in upward occupational mobility (e.g. Blau and Duncan, 1967; Chattopadhyay, 1998; Odland, 1996; Schaeffer, 1985). In addition to exploring the link between career and migration, within contemporary labour economics, one of the important topics studied by researchers is the effect of family background on the choice of occupation or employment by individuals. Empirical evidence suggests that, both in the case of native and migrant workers, parental education and occupation affects young people's education and career choice. Similar observations have been made by researchers who have explored the effect of family background on educational and career choice in different country settings, both in relation to native and migrant workers (e.g. Black et al., 2005; Constant and Zimmermann, 2003; Harding et al., 2005; Iannelli, 2002; Sjorgen, 2000; Tsukahara, 2007).

The question of what determines an individual's choice of occupation has also been a subject of interest to researchers in occupational psychology, who have focused on the internal goals, needs and pursuit of satisfaction as the main factors determining the occupational choices of individuals. The assumption underlying most psychological theories of career choice and development is that individuals are unconstrained in making their career choices, whether when they first enter the job market or when they make subsequent career decisions later in life (Duffy and Dik, 2009). Extant theories emphasise the importance of person-environment fit, whereby the specific interests, skills and values of an individual are matched with a particular job setting (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997). Moreover, individuals are conceptualised as being in a constant state of development, and choose those careers which are best suited for the implementation of their self-concept at a given time (Savickas, 2002; Super, 1990). Occupational psychology also stresses the role of social learning and cognition of individuals – specifically, their work experiences and perceptions regarding their ability to

perform tasks necessary in certain occupations and careers – for their decision making regarding their occupational choices (Krumboltz, 1996; Lent et al., 1994).

The individual-volitional stance taken by occupational psychologists has been challenged by more recent studies across the social sciences, whereby authors have pointed out that decisions about career trajectories do not necessarily take place under the conditions of abundant options and are often made in a collectivist context (e.g. Blustein et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002). Moreover, external influences such as those related to gender stereotypes and prestige (Gottfredson, 1981; 2005) as well as the availability of resources and the presence of barriers for occupational and career choice goals and actions (Lent et al., 1994; 2000) have been highlighted as important factors. A variety of macro-level impacts, such as the changing economy, the changing world of work, the educational structure of the society, and the changes in the life roles fulfilled by individuals have also been recognised (e.g. Hansen, 1997; Hotchkiss and Borow, 1996; Johnson and Mortimer, 2002). Additionally, research has acknowledged the impact of external factors, for example the environment in which an individual was raised and her or his socialisation experiences, family expectations and needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, and social service motivation upon the internal expectations and beliefs regarding her or his career trajectory (Duffy and Dik, 2009; Fouad, 2007; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Halpern, 2005; Schultheiss, 2006). For example, family expectations and needs can restrain the individual's career choices (Greenhaus et al., 2001; Halpern, 2005), but family can also contribute to extending and enhancing the options available to a given person, through providing her or him with financial and emotional support, networking and social resources (Pearson and Bieschke, 2001; Schultheiss, 2003; Young et al., 2001). Similarly, life circumstances can have both negative – as in the case of poverty, marginalisation, or stigmatisation (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003; Blustein et al., 2002) – and positive impacts, for example through presenting individuals with random, serendipitous occurrences, leading to beneficial career outcomes for them (Mitchell et al., 1999). Religious factors have also been shown to influence individuals' career development decisions and outcomes (e.g. Colozzi and Colozzi, 2000; Duffy, 2006; Duffy and Lent, 2008), as has the motivation to pursue work in line with one's desire to fulfil broader societal needs (Dik and Duffy, 2009; Hardy, 1990).

Whilst research in occupational psychology on career choice and development provides insights into the factors influencing individuals in their career decision making, a great majority of empirical studies to date have focused on a privileged category of individuals, i.e. young, single, wealthy, white students, with little attention given to those who do not belong to this part of the overall population (Duffy and Dik, 2009). In this context, our research contributes to the literature on factors influencing career choice and development in two ways: first, through providing examples of how external and internal factors enhance or constraint the agency of individuals in their career decisions, and second, through concentrating empirically on individuals from diverse social backgrounds.

Methodology

As Booth and Rowlinson (2006) point out, an attempt to conduct historically oriented research poses questions regarding the methods to be employed in the processes of data collection and analysis, as well as the styles of writing that researchers adopt in presenting their argumentation. In gathering the empirical material for the purposes of this article, we relied on collecting oral histories as our sources of data. Recent studies (e.g. Burrell and Panayi, 2006; Herbert 2008) have demonstrated the role of oral testimony and life histories in developing an understanding of migration, including such aspects of the migrant experience as the effects on (non)return, estrangement and belonging. Methodologically, our use of oral histories opens up two important ways into addressing the aims of the article: it allows seasonal migration and other forms of movement which might not have been officially recorded to be revealed; and it firmly connects decisions to migrate and to undertake (or not) employment of a given type and in a given location to the contingencies of everyday life, experience, and emotion as much as to macro-economic and structural change. Such emphasis on the complexity of the context in which individuals make their career-related choices and on gaining an historical perspective on migration and work – both in relation to personal life histories individuals and the history of their country of origin – allows us to move away from the ‘universalist and presentist’ (Zald, 2002, 381) approach that currently dominates much of writings in management and organisation studies. Specifically, using oral histories enables us to see how migration – both within Poland, and internationally – during socialism was used by Poles as part of a family’s wider portfolio of livelihood strategies (Wedel, 1992), and often formed the basis for a similar approach post-1989. Life histories also allow us to consider the role of an individual’s early life experience – for example, of being brought up in a family or region where migration was common – as part of what influences later life choices regarding work, migration, and becoming (or not) a migrant worker.

The study from which this article stems is based on 25 in-depth life history interviews with Poles: eight living in the UK at the time of the interview, eight living in Poland, but were return migrants, and nine living in Poland who had never migrated. Fourteen of the interviewees were female and eleven male, and their ages ranged from their mid-20s to their mid-60s, with the highest proportion of participants (n=11) clustered in their 30s. The UK-based sample was composed of individuals currently living in Greater London, recruited through personal contacts and via a Polish social networking site for migrants in London. They originated from a range of towns and villages across Poland, while those interviewees who were currently resident in Poland lived in or around the cities of Kraków and Ostrowiec – the former being a famous university city and tourist destination in the south-west, and the latter an ex-steel town in central Poland. They were reached initially using personal contacts and then via standard snowballing techniques.

The interviews were conducted in Polish and English and recorded. They lasted between 1.5h and 3.5h. All interviews were transcribed and those in Polish were translated into English by one of the authors. The transcripts were analysed using traditional qualitative techniques in textual analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The remaining sections of the article are structured as follows. We first discuss the working lives trajectories of Poles in the context of different forms of movement which were part of the everyday experiences of migration during the socialist era, considering the links between individuals' lives in Poland and outside the country pre-1989. We then explore migration and people's working lives trajectories in the period following the collapse of socialism and prior to Poland's accession to the European Union. Finally, we consider a cluster of life histories of a number of Poles who made their decision to emigrate or not to emigrate from Poland post-2004.

Moving under socialism

Lifelong employment for all citizens and wide ranging social provision ensuring that individuals were able to work full time regardless of their personal and family situation constituted socialist ideals, promoted by government policies in Poland post-WWII. The traditional image of a socialist worker was thus of a person who would spend all her or his working life – possibly from apprenticeship until retirement – in one workplace and hence would not move to live and work in a different location even within the country. In parallel with the existence of this image, throughout the whole socialist period the official propaganda in Poland did not acknowledge as a fact emigration or fluxes out of Poland (Iglička, 2007). These two factors have for a long time obscured the actual complexity of individual work trajectories characterising that period. In this section, we present, in the context of Poland's post-WWII history, examples of migrations that took place in Poland under socialism. Our aim in this part of the discussion is to draw attention to the relationship between the macro-level economic and political conditions of the country and the micro-level working lives trajectories of individuals.

Internal migration

Unsurprisingly, the time soon after the war saw strong waves of rural-urban migration, associated with the accelerated industrialisation of Poland – a major aim of the consecutive governments of the new state (Górz and Kurek, 2000). Industrialisation required people to move from villages to towns and cities to work in factories. Sometimes, such towns and cities were on territories which prior to WWII had not been Polish and were only incorporated into the country following the decision of the Yalta Conference in 1945. Hence, the internal migration of people to undertake employment in new workplaces was underpinned by a combination of economic and political factors, reflecting a point previously made in the literature about the link between the occupational choices and career development of individuals and broader changes in the economy and society (e.g. Hotchkiss and Borow, 1996; Johnson and Mortimer, 2002). An experience of this kind of resettlement is described by Krystyna – a 53 year old who was brought up in Wałbrzych, a town in Dolny Śląsk which used to be part of Germany:

These were the western territories... People would move in there from different regions of Poland: to Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Dolny Śląsk. These were all people from the outside... It used to be German, but with all this, divisions and so on, people would come there from the whole of Poland because it was a working people's region. Factories and this... Whoever wanted to, stayed there. But the majority [of Germans] left.

Socialist governments' agenda was not limited to industrialisation of the country. Education of the society constituted another important political aspiration. Thanks to the expansion of free education, those from poorer and rural backgrounds were able to go to high school and university. The chance to obtain education often had an impact upon the individual's career choices, confirming the assertion about the link between then changing educational structure of society and the occupational choices available to individuals (Johnson and Mortimer, 2002). This was reinforced by the fact that post-graduation, employment in line with one's qualifications was guaranteed by the state and hence the decision not to return to the place of origin could be carried out without great difficulties. Gosia, a 33 year old living in Kraków, comes from a family with roots in the deeply rural Podhale region near the Slovakian border. She explains how free education provided her parents with the opportunity to remain in Kraków after university and to build their careers there:

They certainly wouldn't have wanted to stay [in Podhale]. They both studied and they both got jobs after they graduated. They were good students and at that time things were different, so both of them did quite well, both my mum and dad received good job offers. Where they came from they wouldn't have got this kind of work, it wasn't available there. And they wanted to get it. It was a completely different life.

Whilst the expansion of free education and work availability was what enabled Gosia's parents – and thousands of other Poles – to move from a village to a big city, this does not mean that their ties with their place of origin became weak. Rather, the family home remained very important to them, both for reasons of emotional attachment and because of the help with childcare and the provision of accommodation they had benefited from before they were able to move to a flat in Kraków:

G: They got jobs immediately after graduation. My mum at the University of Mining and Metallurgy, as a ceramics engineer, they kept her there, and my father in an institute specialising in drilling engineering... When my sister was born, they still lived in student halls, then when I was born for two years we all lived back in the countryside, and when they got the flat we all moved to Kraków... we lived there, our parents worked here and were coming back for the weekends. We were looked after by our grandmother.

Gosia's parents' example shows how despite the widespread understanding that under socialism, workers' livelihood needs – such as those related to accommodation, childcare and healthcare – were catered for in one location, making commuting to work and other aspects of family logistics easy to organise, the socialist era was also characterised by the emergence

of ‘transregional’ lifestyles, which developed in response to the need for finding a way of reconciling work demands with family arrangements. Although the mass entry of married women with children into the formal workplace was supported through subsidised nursery places, many parents preferred to use their extended families for child care, or relied on them, for example to care for their school-aged children during the holidays. Through such means the formal aims of the socialist state were supported through contingent personal networks spanning rural and urban Poland, and great gender employment equality was intimately bound together with a new form of inter-generational ties and obligations, demonstrating the role of family support in facilitating the development of individual’s careers (Parish et al., 1991).

International migration

While industrialisation of the economy and the development of large-scale education led to internal rural-urban migration with the aim of undertaking long term employment, certain types of short term movements through international holiday work travel, within the Eastern Bloc, were also supported by socialist authorities. The most common type of this kind of travel opportunities were summer work camps for students. Whilst they offered the participants the chance to earn some money during the time of university holidays, their objective was also to establish good social relationships among young people from different socialist states. To some, they would also open up the opportunities for making use of their entrepreneurial abilities, as evident in the story of Andrzej who recalls the time he first met his wife during a summer work camp in East Germany:

We first met at a labour camp, how I call it, in East Germany, we were picking tomatoes... if one wanted to go to DDR and buy flat needles size 90, and sell them well in Komis later on, or electric train toys, then one had to go there, work hard, literally for a few Deutschmarks... it was a camp of ‘international friendship’ and work, but we had to get our allocated amount of work done, on a bean field, tomatoes, I have bad memories from that time. That was the first time I went abroad...¹

The state sponsored short term international travel to other socialist countries not only for students but also for employees of state-owned companies. Again, the underlying aim of such trips was to foster solidarity between socialist nations, and although organised as tourist excursions, they also gave individuals the opportunity to gain extra income. Wojtek tells a story of how his trips with work colleagues in the early 1980s to Czechoslovakia allowed him to generate income to supplement his family budget and to buy goods which at the time were not available in Polish shops, pointing to the link between family needs and the paid activities individuals undertake at different points in life (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006):

¹ Andrzej refers to purchasing in East Germany goods unavailable though in demand in Poland, such as needles for sewing machines or children’s toys. Those bringing such goods from abroad were able to sell them in Komis – a chain of second-hand shops which, under socialism, served as an intermediary between individual private sellers and buyers.

I used to go often to Czechoslovakia. One would go partly as a tourist, but would also look to financially... sell something, bring something. Because over there, there was more merchandise. The children were young so, you know... In Poland, many things were missing, so I would bring shoes for children or something... When I went to Czechoslovakia [I sold] jeans. They'd buy jeans there immediately... In Poland there were jeans and it paid off to buy them in Poland, and sell them for three, four times as much. When we went to a [hotel] kitchen, the cooks would take everything from us. Jeans, jackets, I tell you, one just had to invest. I invested, let's say, a hundred dollars but I'd bring back \$300... I would bring back wool, for example, Shetland wool. In Poland, it was very expensive, that as well. Also, one had to smuggle it a little bit because one couldn't just bring everything back then. In a bag, under the seat...

In their stories, Andrzej and Wojtek reveal an important characteristic of the working lives of Poles under socialism: while the structure of the economy did not, in general, allow for establishing private companies, and the great majority of individuals were employed by the state, they would still seek to act as entrepreneurs and take advantage of the commercial opportunities which the socialist system presented them with. Individuals expended great time, energy and resources on building and maintaining social networks within their wider family as well as with friends, colleagues and acquaintances, which would allow them to access scarce goods and services. While Pawlik (1992) considers this in some depth within Poland, here we see opportunities provided through international travel might feed into such 'intimate commerce'.

Moreover, to gain additional earnings through short term international trips, enterprising individuals were prepared to get around various legal restrictions, for example through hiding the goods purchased abroad or bribing the guards to bring products across borders, since, as one of the interviewees put it, 'It would have been a shame not to take advantage [of the opportunities to earn some extra money]'. It was not always successful, as Wojtek remembered:

My brother-in-law went [to the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union], that was, maybe in the 80s. He took a lot of things there to sell. He wanted to sell them there and bring money and they cheated on him – they gave him fraudulent money – and he lost everything. And he couldn't even go to the police because they would have said that he was selling things illegally. A very, very dangerous country.

Consequently these interviews reveal how an awareness of the importance of migration in socialist Poland is crucial to an understanding of the working lives trajectories of Poles at that time: not as passive, state-reliant employees, but as people attempting to use creatively their situation in order to build for themselves and their families more prosperous livelihoods than those designed for them by the socio-political system in which they lived. These life histories also show that, contrary to the assumption of occupational psychology theories (Duffy and Dik, 2009), individuals are not unconstrained in making their career choices, but that their actions are influenced by a variety of barriers present both in their direct environment and at a macro-level of political and economic systems (Lent et al., 2000).

Workplaces used to organise international travel for their employees also on a longer term basis. Some types of workers, for example construction workers, would be sent abroad as a result of their companies entering into business contracts with firms in other countries. While this allowed individuals to earn significantly more money than they would have been able to in Poland, it also had profound implications for the organisation of family lives. Piotr's story reveals a number of aspects of his father's work stay in Iraq, which took place when Piotr – 41 at the time of the interview – was in his mid-teens:

P: [In the 1980s] nothing was missing at home. At that time, my father was in Iraq, he worked there – he didn't fight there, unlike fathers at present – so, in general, it wasn't bad at home.

M: How did he come to work in Iraq?

P: These were construction contracts. Polish firms would build things in Iraq. (...)

M: Did your father get salary in dollars?

P: It is more complicated. At that time, there were so called 'vouchers' issued by the Polish National Bank. They had their value designated in dollars. So he would earn in dollars but on his bank account he would receive the 'vouchers'... That was certainly a big quality jump because there was money which allowed us to decorate the flat and we even started buying clothes in Pewex so certain goods were available to us. At that time, nothing was available and in Pewex shops there was everything. It was like an abyss.

Piotr's narrative not only offers examples of how his father's period of working in Iraq brought improvement to the financial situation of the family, but it also gives an insight into the two tier system of provision of consumer goods in socialist Poland. Despite the widely declared equality of access to goods for all citizens, the state privileged those who – under the conditions of a very low value of the Polish zloty compared to western currencies – were able to pay for things in US dollars or the state bank issued dollar substitute 'vouchers'. Through the chain of dollar-based shops called Pewex, those who were in a situation similar to Piotr's parents, were able to get access to western products unavailable to the rest of the society, both due to the economic shortages in the country and the high prices precluding the majority of the population from shopping in the Pewex chain. Thus, Piotr's story points to yet another dimension of migration under socialism: the way in which it contributed to the creation of economic inequalities in a society which was otherwise presented as one characterised by equality of life standards and prospects for all its citizens.

In addition to taking part in trips organised by the workplace, some Poles would also arrange seasonal work abroad for themselves, thus becoming familiar with life in countries outside the Eastern Bloc. Logistically, this involved organising transport for all family members, and even travelling to countries not very far away from Poland would turn into a memorable expedition in itself, since the lack of availability of air travel meant that the necessary

distance had to be covered by land and sea. Magda recalls how her parents used to take her with them to Sweden, where they would go in the 1980s to carry out seasonal work:

My parents used to work in Sweden during summer... working fields, picking strawberries, driving tractors, things like that. [They used to go there] before I was born, and after I was born as well. We went together once when I was two years old, so that was my first journey abroad. And then we went again when I was a bit older. I remember we went through East Germany... I don't know all the technical details of getting passports or anything, my parents did that. We had an old car, and I remember being stopped at the German border and they put those mirrors under the car, and we all had to get out and they were checking the car for ages... It was expensive, I guess, to get the petrol and everything but what my parents made in Sweden during those two months was like, phew, probably twice as much as they were making here during the whole year.

Again, whilst not as common under socialism as it is now, seasonal migration for work was an important source of income for those Poles who took this route – although, counter to the argumentation put forward by writers in economics, these kinds of movements did not result in maximising returns to individuals' occupational skills (Christiadi and Cushing, 2008), nor did they involve upward occupational progression (Chattopadhyay, 1998; Odland, 1996; Schaeffer, 1985). Nevertheless, it used to bring those involved and their families financial rewards and access to products that were unavailable in Poland. It also constituted an opportunity to see some of the world outside Poland, providing individuals with firsthand evidence that compared to both some other Eastern Bloc countries as well as the west, socialist Poland was far from the prosperous land it had been promised to become. Taken together these stories open up the spatial and temporal connections created by migration: even under socialism, despite narratives of the separation of East and West, they show the links across borders; they equally reveal continuities through time, suggesting how migrations under socialism provided a model for migrations after 1989, a theme we return to in the following section.

Migration post-1989

The election of a non-Communist government in Poland in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of socialism throughout East Central Europe which precipitated major migration movements has been amply documented elsewhere (see for example Iglicka, 2001). While borders were easier to cross, until the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004, Poles still had difficulty working legally in the UK, but the continuing weakness of the zloty meant it paid to work abroad, if only for short periods. It is therefore important to pay attention to the periodisation of the post-1989 era, recognising that while the period up to 2004 saw increased migration, this was accompanied by work restrictions and attendant problems for migrants. Similarly, the period of rapid migration to the UK post-2004 slowed drastically after 2008/9 following the recession in western Europe and the strengthening Polish economy (Pollard et al., 2008).

While current research has emphasised the importance of economic opportunities in encouraging migration from Poland to the UK (Drinkwater et al., 2006; Pollard et al., 2008), there has been a growing interest in the personal and social reasons prompting migration. This research has taken a very different stance compared to the economics-based explanation of career and migration choices as rooted in the conceptualisation of individuals as utility maximising agents, acting in accordance with the principles of economic rationality (Christiadi and Cushing, 2008). Noting the number of highly educated young people involved in post-2004 migration, Eade et al. (2007) characterised ‘searchers’ as those migrants seeking out new life experiences, new social circles and aiming to improve their English, while Kathy Burrell (2006) has suggested that migration can be seen as a movement forward in time in the personal biographies of the migrants rather than simply a spatial journey. Building on these insights our work points to the importance of recognizing the ‘messy’ mix of personal/structural, strategic/contingent factors influencing migration, return and non-migration. The growing aspiration to use migration not only to earn money but also to improve one’s social status suggests that some migrants would experience personal feelings of failure and express the ways in which longer term migration hampered personal career trajectories. In this section, considering a selection of life histories in some depth we explore changing experiences of migration post-1989.

Since using life histories as a source allows us to reveal the continuities between the socialist and post-socialist period, it enables us to see, for instance, how changes began in the 1980s and the impact of socialism continued to be felt well after 1989. Wojtek, a 53 year old current resident of Peckham Rye, and a trained bespoke tailor, provides an example of how international movement was part of his life before 1989, and also how his relationship with it has changed over time. Having completed an apprenticeship as a tailor in his teens, he joined a state firm:

I thought I’d stay [with his employer] there because some people worked there until retirement, 30 years or so. But then the crisis came, the 80s, and everything was going for the worse, and I had to change jobs and I had to go to a private company, a different one. Because the first one was a co-operative... [The 1980s] were the years of Solidarity, the beginning of capitalism, the end of communism in Poland... Private firms were being set up then. Later on, when the co-operative went bust, I went on to work for a private company, where I was working on cutting fabrics, and it was already a little capitalism. And one was aware that communism was falling and that finally it was going to fall.

It was during this period that, as we saw in the previous section, he started travelling to Czechoslovakia and Hungary to trade goods, as ‘everyone had a job but the salary wasn’t great. Everybody would try to earn some extra money, to live a little better’. He continued to supplement his income in this manner after 1989, and as the economic restructuring began to bite, his working life changed significantly:

[By] 2000, people stopped getting clothes tailored made for themselves, and tailoring companies started to go bust. More things were imported, ready, from China, and

people stopped sewing suits for themselves. And that paid off less, at the end of the 90s... More large companies were created which would produce lighter things and that was much cheaper. It didn't pay off for the people to have things tailor made anymore... Bespoke tailoring collapsed then.

However, it is too simplistic to suggest that it was simply economic motivations which caused his move to London. We also saw, during the course of the interview, the role of more intangible factors in his decision making – illustrating the point made by occupational psychology literature about the link between the interests, self-concept and life circumstances of an individual on the one hand, and her or his career choices taken at different points in life (Holland, 1997; Super, 1990). For example, Wojtek spoke of how he had wanted to be a lorry driver: 'in my youth I used to read a lot of travel books, and certainly I always wanted to travel, see other countries', but had been prevented from doing this as a result of health problems. He had also, in the 1980s, wanted to travel to the US, not just to earn money, but because his girlfriend emigrated there:

In those days people would go there for money. To work, to earn, because in Poland it was very hard then. But for me it would have certainly been something interesting because one would have been able to see something, to get to know something.

Consequently, one of his reactions to the collapse of state socialism was intimately tied with ideas of movement: 'I knew that one was going to be able to go abroad freely, that there would be freedom. I was pleased because I was always waiting for the moment when communism would collapse'.

Eventually following his children to London in 2002, he came to London to look for work, and loved the experience:

I was under a great impression. Because just the big city, everything. And I found a job very quickly and there was more money. I'd send money to [my wife in] Poland and here one would live differently. The impression was big. A completely different life. A different mentality of the people, freedom. I acclimatised here very quickly. I had basic English, I was able to communicate, ask about... For example, [my wife] was coming here every three months, and she didn't like London. She would always say that she wanted to go back because the city was big, everything. And I, somehow, felt very good here, from the beginning. So I said: 'I don't want to go back'.

After having worked for some time in London in a range of casual jobs, Wojtek found work in Saville Row in his trade as a bespoke tailor. While he spoke with great pride about the quality of his work – and in fact showed us a sample which he had brought home with him – it was in fact the ambiance of London he valued most, characterising it as 'normal':

The freedom, that everybody walks around the way he wants, dresses up the way he wants, there is freedom. In Poland, if someone dresses differently, everybody looks as if he was a weirdo. And here, whether it is a homosexual or something, they can walk around hugging each other, and no one pays attention. And in Poland, they would

immediately take him, throw stones at him or something. You know, there is a different mentality. And tolerance. They all live here: black, white, Muslim, and no one insults anyone, chases anyone, there is somehow a symbiosis. It is simply normal. A normal country.

If Wojtek's life story reveals the links between socialism and post-socialism, and complicates the idea of post-1989 migration as an economically driven phenomenon, then so too does Czarek's, although in a very different manner. Czarek, 47, a history teacher in a high school in central Kraków, worked on a construction site in London seasonally throughout the 1990s. Not unlike under socialism, for a number of years he maintained a dual pattern of work: teaching at school in Poland during the school year, and labouring on a construction site in the UK in the summer. For him migration was not about progressing his career, but rather focussed on maximising his income. However, again, the interview revealed a more complex story than first impressions suggested, pointing to the difficulties in establishing, at the level of an individual, what it means that one is in a constant state of development and makes occupational choices to fit in with her or his self-concept at a given time (Duffy and Dik, 2009; Savickas, 2002). When asked what he did with his money, Czarek replied:

I spent it. I brought some of it back but, generally, unlike others, I used to travel around the area a lot. I visited all museums in London. *Tate Gallery*, *British Museum*, all these, what else... contemporary ones... I wanted to see the regattas, Oxford-Cambridge, the Thames... National Gallery was free on Sunday and British Museum on Monday, when I was there. I saw Munch's exhibition, I saw Toulouse-Lautrec, I saw Monet as well, these were the ones I had to pay for...

M: And why did you keep going [to London]?

C: To buy records. Really. I have lots of records. Would you like me to show you? Financially, it didn't pay off much, the journey, one had to pay for everything. A week of work was necessary to cover the costs of the journey. But still, I was able to bring some money back, for example, to cover the groom's expenses at our wedding... But also, when I was working in London on the construction site and I told them that I was a teacher, they looked at me as if I was crazy. So afterwards, when someone asked me 'what do you do in Poland?', I'd say 'I do the same thing as here'...

M: Since you had one life here as a history teacher, and another life there as someone working on a construction site, did you feel that it was some kind of a 'double life'?

C: No, I didn't feel it that way.

M: But you were doing work there which you wouldn't be doing here...

C: No, if I could I guess I would be doing it here. It wasn't a problem for me in London. I was working honestly, I was earning good money, it was about £500-£600 a week and that was very good money. Except that, unlike my colleagues, who used to go partying on Saturday and Sunday, I would buy books, records, travel around and visit places...

M: Did you miss this travelling to London?

C: Yes, there was a time when I got used to being in London. So when holidays were coming, I felt that I had to go to London, it was like fresh air.

Other migrants chose to live abroad in a more sustained fashion, and again their experiences show both the ways in which people responded to new opportunities, and the strong continuities with the socialist era. Piotr went to Luxemburg in 1990 after completing his military service, and like his father (who had worked in Iraq in the 1980s) he worked in construction and was able to enjoy higher wages than in Poland. Family networks, which in the socialist era had been so central in supporting rural-urban migration, were now utilised across national borders. But there were also differences:

M: The idea of going to Luxemburg, did you see it as something exciting or...?

P: Exciting, of course, exciting. The first thing is that I was then going to the West for the first time, before then I had only been to socialist countries. And second, it was associated with financial benefits. I used to laugh that at that time I would earn in a day as much as in a month in Poland... it was legal work. My cousin worked there and he arranged the work for me.

M: Did you think about staying [there]?

P: Well, Luxemburg wasn't *user-friendly* because it is a strongly nationalistic country. At that time, they had big problems with the Portuguese and they were closing off... Put differently: staying in Luxemburg would have closed development opportunities... Zero social progression. Poland wasn't part of the [European] Union then. Things were different. Perhaps nowadays, all the legal arrangements would allow us to be treated more equally but at that time we felt that we were from the Eastern Bloc.

Here we see the importance to Piotr, like both Czarek and Wojtek, of the excitement of going abroad – he spent some time in his interview outlining how he used to take the opportunity to travel in France with his girlfriend when he had time off. However, in contrast to both he also expressed a concern over the lack of social advancement which he perceived as structurally engrained in his social position of a migrant, something which had not worried either of the other men.

The tension between the excitement of travel and the socially constraining nature of migration – a conviction which contradicted the evidence from the economics literature viewing migration as a source of upward occupational mobility (Chattopadhyay, 1998; Odland, 1996; Schaeffer, 1985) – was something that younger migrants, particularly those with a university background, returned to repeatedly when narrating their life stories. In the 2000s, not long before Poland's accession to the EU, seasonal international migration had become a popular and easy to organise option for university students wishing to work during the summer in order to support themselves throughout the academic year. For some, what was intended as a short term stay had turned into a longer sojourn, and the employment they

undertook during the first months as migrant workers would determine the development of their work trajectory in the following years. Karolina, 33, for example, describes how she left Poland in 2003, without finishing her law degree, and how the fact that she first arrived in the UK before Poland joined the EU has had an impact on her career trajectory ever since:

I came here for the summer and I never went back... I just enjoyed the life here. I was working in this restaurant in Camden, a Mexican restaurant. It was a funny place, because it was a Mexican restaurant, and the chefs were from Algeria, Sudan and Poland. But it was a nice place, because we were paid a low wage, for a day, £20, but all the tips and service charges were ours. So it was actually quite a good place for a first job... We were all illegals, all Polish there... I stayed there for two or three months... After that I worked in an internet cafe, and I was working for three Algerian guys. And they were paying me some shit money. Like £3 per hour. When they were paying me, because most of the time they weren't paying me. That was a crap job. And then I had a lot of jobs like this... Now I'm working in Starbucks, I'm so stuck that I'm not really sure what I'm gonna do. I'm still planning to go back go to the university, because of this I cannot carry on like this now. I don't like my job... But I'm getting to a dead end because I know I'm not doing anything about it... When I came here, because I didn't have a visa, the only places I could look were cafés and restaurants, and I just got stuck in that. And then, you don't even think about looking for a normal job, because you are so stuck in that thinking of going from one restaurant to another restaurant... But here if I say I work in a coffee shop, it's like we have this foreigners' community, all of us do more or less the same, so we have an excuse here as well. 'Oh, we work in a coffee shop because we are foreigners'.

Karolina's story exemplifies the arguments about the impact of contextual barriers – in this case, the legal framework restraining the employment options available to Polish migrants in the UK pre-2004 – upon an individual's career development (Lent et al., 1994; 2000). Whilst the particular barriers which initially precluded Karolina from the possibility of applying for white-collar jobs do not exist anymore, viewing her situation in the context of her life history allows us to see the continued impact of the past macro-political structures within Europe upon the career choices open to individuals at present.

Post-2004 migration

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 brought about a major change in the opportunities to migrate, especially to the UK, as it opened its borders for Polish workers. For Lena, 29, EU enlargement provided the opportunity to work abroad, first in the summer, and then for a longer time, when she decided to leave Poland as a way of coping with personal tragedy. A zoology graduate, Lena had consciously decided to work on a strawberry farm in Northamptonshire, where she had first arrived as a student, and then to completely change her occupation after returning to Poland:

I started going there to earn some money in my third year... It was hard work and we didn't have a lot of free time to do anything else. We were just picking [strawberries] from 4am till 6pm... I was there for six seasons, and the last one was a long one because I was there 1.5 years, but I was a supervisor and then I was a team leader of the supervisors... I finished university almost four years ago. After that, I stayed here 1.5 years and then... I decided to change my life... I had a boyfriend for seven years, and when I finished my university he got sick... and after one year, he died... I lost everything. So I decided to move somewhere. And I knew that I could always come back on this farm, so I decided to start my new life from the farm, to earn some money and then move somewhere. But I stayed there... I wanted to stay in England one more year, but then one day I got so pissed off... Because one person asked me a hundred times the same question, 'What is the grading on...? What kind of...?'... I said, 'That's it. Fuck!'... I decided to come back [to Poland], stay here for some period, maybe for two years and then probably I will move somewhere... I decided if I come back here, I have to find some job with animals, and actually I found it already. I'm working now for three weeks and I am a groomer... And I really enjoy this. I have to stay there for two years because I signed a contract... But the problem is that I can't imagine that I can work in one place thirty years. I have no memories: every single day is the same. So I'm terrified of doing something like that. So probably after two, maybe three years, I will go somewhere to do something else, yeah...

Lena's story shows how the opportunity to migrate can shape an individual's work trajectory not necessarily through opening up occupational options and adding to one's advancement in career or financial terms, but also through contributing to the open-endedness and postponement of decisions to follow a particular occupational path for those who do not feel inclined to commit to any one location and type of employment. Whilst understandable in the context of her personal circumstances, Lena's narrative further undermines the notion of an individual as an economic-rational agent, taking her or his employment decisions in order to maximise utility and returns to her or his skills.

The life histories of those Poles who have experienced international migration in the post-2004 period certainly convey a sense of easiness to move between countries, at least in comparison with the narratives of those who used to move from and to Poland before the country became a member of the EU. For young people, especially those without family commitments, initial student holiday work abroad has resulted in more regular employment, and the option to take advantage of their qualifications both in and outside Poland. An example of this is provided by the narrative of Magda, a 27 year old graduate of political science, who talked to us about her history of working abroad during her university years and the link between that experience and her current employment as an English language teacher in Poland and the UK. Six months after being interviewed by us, Magda went to China where she currently teaches English as a foreign language. The following excerpt comes from our interview with her prior to her decision to leave her job in a language school in Kraków:

After my first year at university, that was the first time I went abroad to work, and so I worked every summer... Firstly I went to the United States... Next summer, I worked

in Italy in a bar... And the third summer, then was the first time I went to London... I went to that place where my university friend worked just a couple of months before, she advised me to go there because she worked there, and that maybe they had a job for me... they didn't but on the same street I found another job. It was just a waiting job in a restaurant, it was a very nice restaurant and I liked it... After three weeks of working there, my manager called me and he said, 'We need to talk'. I said, 'Alright'. I came in, and he said, 'I see you're working really hard, and you seem to be quite'... I don't know what he said... 'enthusiastic', or something like that, 'and you have a lot of common sense, would you like to be a part-time manager?' I said, 'Well, why not?' So I stayed, only for two months at that time because I had to go back to university... but during those two months I enjoyed it so much, that I thought that I would come back... And next year I went there and spent a year and a bit, and then I had a difficult relationship, with London and with a man, so I would go to London every two months just to visit... I finished university here and then I started teaching English during that year [2007] and I enjoyed it and I thought this was something I could do so I found this teaching training programme and this is what I did when I went to England, I got the certificate, it's called CELTA, a one-month intensive course of how to teach English... and I didn't work in the restaurant anymore. But after two months things started to get difficult and I decided to come back to Poland and that was the end of my relationship with London and with the man... And I got a job within three weeks after I went back, that was perfect timing, it was the beginning of the school year... [This year] in July I'm going to England, south of England, to teach English, just like last summer.

The relative easiness with which, in the absence of legal constraints to travel and work abroad, post-2004 Poles have been able to take decisions to migrate, can sometimes also lead to situations where such decisions are made without deep conviction, and then reversed without much regret. Iza, 34, currently a hospital manager, speaks about a migration episode from her family's recent past, when, in the atmosphere of excitement accompanying the initial wave of migration from Poland to the UK, she and her husband – together with their son – intended to move to Cambridgeshire:

M: So you were planning to emigrate?

I: Yes. [The plan was] that Jarek would go away, find a job, prepare the ground for our arrival, find a flat, and in a few months... It was February, we were planning to go away in May. Our friends were there, they were going to help us. But it turned out that work wasn't available. There was no work which he would like to do. He came back a month later.

M: So what kind of work did he want to do?

I: First of all, he wanted to find work in line with his qualifications. He found something in a restaurant, temporarily, and he wanted to move to a more permanent, office-based work, but it was obvious that he had to learn to speak the language. So

even when he returned, the final decision that we wouldn't go away hadn't been taken because he wanted to learn the language. But he found a job in Poland... And for me it was very stressful, the whole idea that we would have to move. Our son was five years old then, so thinking that he would be moved, so drastically, taken away from his friends here, put to a school or kindergarten there, to a different environment... Jarek liked England as such: the way of living, the whole system. We went there a year ago and I also think it's alright there. But only if you have normal work and don't live – as many of our acquaintances do – on the basis that the wife is here, the husband is there, living in a rush... And the conditions here have changed for us. First of all, I have a job. Jarek has a job, we have two children, we have amazing help from my parents and from Jarek's mum. This is invaluable help. Because over there we would have had to manage everything ourselves.

For Iza then, the decision whether to migrate and when to undertake employment was one taken in a collectivist context (Jackson et al., 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002) which in her case included herself, her husband and son, as well as her and her husband's parents. Her story offers an example of how the career choices of individuals are related to the support they are able to receive from their families (Pearson and Bieschke, 2001; Schultheiss, 2006). Similarly to Iza's situation, for many, organising professional and private lives in Poland has in the past few years become less demanding. Others, thanks to the opportunities to undertake legal employment abroad, have been able to find more stable existence outside the country. For example, Krystyna, a 50 year old with many years of work experience as a tailor, moved to London in 2004. She joined her daughter and son, who had left Poland after their 'A' levels, in 2000 and 2001, respectively, and her husband, who had moved to London in 2002. Coming to the UK has given Krystyna the opportunity to take on the traditional role of a housewife – she currently looks after the house in which she and her husband live, and is closely involved in the lives of her children:

At the beginning I didn't want to live here, I was attracted back home. Wojtek was working. I wasn't working anymore... I was simply afraid. I didn't know how to use the bus, the tube. Right now it's nothing but back then, I couldn't imagine leaving the house on my own... I'd never learned [English]. You know, even now I speak it poorly... I'm not afraid to move around, to sort something out, to go shopping or somewhere, this isn't a problem at the moment... You know, if I had the conditions in Poland which would allow me to do it, I'd like to go back. But for now, I have it very good here... Everything comes down to money. You know, really. Everything. If I could earn, have the money I have here – although I'm not saying that it's amazing luxury or anything like this – but here it's possible to live normally. Over there, one always had to try and sort things out. To have something. I'm talking about myself. I'm not talking about the people in Poland because some, you know, have loads. And we are simple, working class people. And I can see that simple, working class people can live here while working, because I never tried to avoid work.

The people Krystyna refers to are commonly labelled as the 'winners' of transition – those who, as a result of the economic polarisation of the Polish society which took place post-

1989, have been able to increase their earnings and attain more prosperous livelihoods than if they had emigrated, even if they had the chance to work in line with their qualifications. In contrast to Krystyna and her family, for Jerzy, a 42-year old self-employed dentist, the option to emigrate did not seem attractive in comparison with his present standard of living in Poland, as he explained in his story about how he was approached by the NHS when the organisation targeted Polish healthcare professionals, offering them work in the UK:

The NHS wanted to recruit me, to move to England and to work there. For a while I was considering it and decided to find out how much I could earn as a dentist over there. And it turned out that they were paying really poorly. It would be around £100,000 per year. No way! For this money, to move with the whole family? And think about the house prices over there! How could I provide for my wife and children? I would be worse off than I'm here so I wasn't even thinking about it anymore.

Jerzy's example shows how macro-level structural changes can shape an individual's decisions not only to migrate and change one's initial career path, but actually also to remain on it regardless of legal migration options, since the new conditions may have created more favourable – compared to socialist and early post-socialist past – livelihood prospects for people in certain occupations. This has increasingly been the case with professionals in Poland. First, due to the rise in pay levels and the strengthening of the zloty compared to western currencies, it has become economically much less viable to earn one's income abroad. Second, with the emergence of the new middle class in Poland, individuals have changed their expectations about the social status and lifestyles they wish to enjoy, and hence are less willing to uproot themselves and their families, and adopt the vulnerable position of a migrant worker. In different ways then, the stories of both Krystyna and Jerzy point to the link between broader economic and social changes and the career choices of individuals (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1996; Duffy and Dik, 2009).

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have explored the links between the historical and contemporary waves of migration, with an emphasis on examining in a broader historical context the connections between migration and changes in social structure, culture and economy. In particular, we have chosen the example of Poland in order to contribute to the literature on post-socialism by problematising the disjuncture between pre- and post-1989 experience of migration. Our work shows that contrary to the prevailing literature, alongside the disjunctures of 1989 and 2004 there were also profound continuities. Migration - primarily rural to urban, but also between and beyond socialist nations – was engrained within socialist Poland, and was manifested through a range of factors including the ongoing importance of rural family for urban workers, the two-tier economy and opportunities (albeit restricted) to work in non-socialist countries. The 1980s and 1990s in particular were a time of transition, some aspects

of capitalism seeping into Poland prior 1989, and the legacy of socialism continuing long after then.

Through locating the experience of migration in the context of an individual's life we are able to open up some of the complexities thrown up by (post) socialism, in particular the impact of macro-level factors at the micro-level. Our research suggests that individuals do not necessarily view internal moves as less significant than international ones. Histories of migration are integral to people's lives and manifest themselves in images, conversations, contacts and the everyday, regardless of when, or even if, they migrate. As well as constituting part of the experience of living in socialist Poland, migration during the pre-1989 period could often underpin later migration under the conditions of post-socialism.

Being interested in the ways in which migration has influenced the working lives trajectories of our research participants, we have focussed on exploring their lives primarily as workers. In doing so, we have sought to add to extant literature on career choice and development, especially through concentrating empirically on individuals from diverse social backgrounds, and through discussing how external and internal factors have impacted their career trajectories both in Poland and outside the country.

If career is seen as a series of occupations – both paid and unpaid – an individual holds throughout her or his life (Sears, 1982), then the periods spent abroad – even seasonally – need to be seen as part of an individual's overall career. In the case of our research participants, different types of factors have emerged as important in deciding upon career development: from macro-level influences such as differences in currency values and economic shortages which motivated individuals in the 1980s to go abroad short-term and seek to earn additional income to supplement their regular employment-based income; to factors very closely related to one's personal circumstances, such as taking the decision to undertake employment abroad in order to cope with personal tragedy. Hence, we emphasise a non-reductionist approach in exploring career development choices, in order to move away from economics-based conceptualisations of individuals as driven by utility maximising objectives, or from simplistic assumptions about individuals being unconstrained in their career choices and aiming to achieve upwards occupational mobility.

Our research indicates that the context of decision making about migration has changed. Alongside macro-level changes which governed people's opportunities to migrate, the meanings given to migration have shifted. While for virtually all those to whom we spoke who had migrated, the role of excitement and being somewhere different had a place in their decisions, in the past the opportunity to earn more money was central to decisions to move. However, post-1989 social mobility/status seem to have emerged as important factors in decision making. At the same time, evidence suggests that currently migration decisions are taken more lightly. While implications of these decisions are wide ranging on a personal level, informants had often equated ease of movement in a legal and physical sense with ease of social movement and career progression. Stories from Karolina and others in fact revealed the long term career losses which could result from lightly made migration decisions, and that return – from a social perspective at least – was not always easy. A lack of a need to clarify

one's position as a migrant, while giving individuals greater freedom and flexibility, can also translate into ongoing personal and career uncertainty. Conceptually this re-emphasises the importance of seeing migration as part of an ongoing story rather than a single event, and methodologically supports the use of oral history as a means of capturing something of the complex, contingent and ongoing relationship between migration and career choices in a post-socialist world.

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