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Post-Socialist Mobility Cultures

Abstract: The concept of migration culture is sometimes used to suggest that migration became normalised in particular sending locations. It is helpful however to explore the cultural context of migration more thoroughly, investigating norms and beliefs about how to 'do' migration. I analyse why cultures change, and how this links to broader changes in society. In some respects post-2014 Ukrainian migration to Poland and, for example, Polish migration pre-2004 are strikingly similar, for example regarding informal networks, and migration to finance children's higher education. To some extent Ukrainian migration can be labelled 'post-socialist.' I argue however that it is also shaped by the specific 21st century context, such as enhanced opportunities for communication between migrants and potential migrants on social media and in receiving countries, as well as Ukrainians' encounters in Poland with Polish return migrants. Hence Ukrainian mobility discourses and practices have to be studied transnationally, not just locally.

Keywords: Post-socialism, migration culture, livelihood strategies, Ukraine, Russia, Poland

Introduction

This article develops the concept of 'mobility cultures' and uses it to understand similarities between migration from different countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after the fall of communism. Since the 1990s, migration has been a popular livelihood strategy, particularly in some geographical locations. These sending locations help shape migration patterns, since potential migrants possess specific understandings about how migration should be done. However, although the term 'migration culture' is normally used to understand sending locations, it is hard to draw a rigid line between 'sending' and 'receiving' when researching the cultural context of contemporary European mobility.

The article first discusses the concepts of post-socialism and migration/mobility culture. It then introduces the underpinning empirical research and problematises the traditional association of 'migration culture' exclusively with sending towns and villages. The article continues by considering, as case studies, two features of post-socialist mobility cultures: one a goal, the other a means of migration. Many 'post-socalist' migrants aimed to earn money for their children's higher education, and many preferred to use informal networks to migrate, instead of formal agencies and institutions. To a large extent such habits persist. I argue, however, that although it made sense to describe such phenomena as post-socialist in the 1990s, it is not so helpful today, when the mobility context is different, including many more options for legal migration; family migration and settlement; and communication between migrants and potential migrants on social media and in receiving

countries. By focusing on mobility 'culture,' I am not trying to suggest that migrants' behaviour is irrational and divorced from practical considerations. On the contrary, their adherence to local migration norms often illustrates their pragmatism when adopting the locally available migration 'toolkit' (Morawska 2001).

Post-socialism

The term 'post-socialist' suffers from ambiguity.[1] It can refer to a global condition (Fraser 1997) but more often describes CEE. Here, it refers to legacies of two separate periods: communist party rule and/or the 1990s transformation. It can highlight rupture—drawing attention to how social reality 'post' differs from the past—but more commonly emphasises continuities. 'Socialist' in 'post-socialist' usually denotes the particular system of Soviet-type state socialism, but also hints at a more universal political ideology.

Today, the term seems somewhat *passé*. According to Müller (2019: 536–7), it was coined as a vague label for 1990s CEE. It tried to encompass similarities between countries in transformation, without falling into the trap of transitology and overstating neoliberal success. By the 21st century, the communist period was more remote and societies in CEE seemed more similar to those elsewhere in Europe. Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008) published an article asking 'Do we still need post-socialism'? and Müller (2019) answered by titling his own article 'Goodbye, Postsocialism!' Müller (2019: 539) refers to the 'disappearing object,' writing that 'socialism is no longer the prime reference point for people in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but rather one among many, including neoliberalism, nationalism, consumption, Europeanisation and globalization.'

My article uses the label 'post-socialist' to describe livelihood strategies which became commonplace in CEE in the 1990s (Morawska 2001; Polese and Rodgers 2011; Rakowski 2016). These livelihoods displayed both rupture and continuity across the 1989–91 watershed. On the one hand, the 1990s constituted a new economic and welfare state environment, characterised by growing economic inequality across the region (Bandelj and Mahutga 2010). De-industrialisation in particular reduced livelihood options for many manual workers, for example in small towns dominated by a single factory. Many people needed to develop new strategies to make ends meet. On the other hand, these strategies often drew heavily on habits of informality and networking which characterised the communist-era economy of shortage (Polese and Rodgers 2011: 613; Wedel 1986).

To some extent these strategies were specific to the period up to about 2004. For example, new market economies were characterised by a shortage of reliable and affordable credit, and it made sense to migrate to save money to buy or build a house. More recently, however, in countries like Poland mortgages have become more available. Nonetheless, one has to be careful not to assume the uniqueness of 'post-socialism,' since informal relations and practices are clearly a global phenomenon (Ledeneva 2018), and de-industrialisation is also widespread. Ethnosurveys conducted by the University of Warsaw Centre of Migration

[1] 'Post-socialism' is a term more used by anthropologists and sociologists, 'post-communism' by political scientists. 'Post-communism' is more precise, since rule by communist parties with a monopoly of power was the defining feature of the Soviet and Soviet-type systems.

Research in the 1990s drew on methodology designed to study Mexican migration to the USA, discovering many parallels (Kaczmarczyk and Massey 2019). Hence the adjective ‘post-socialist’ often refers to features not unique to CEE.

Differences within CEE are also significant. For example, as late as the final decade of communism, in the 1980s, migration within the USSR was still largely state-organised (White 2007), whereas international migration as an informal, individual/family project was already widespread in Poland and Yugoslavia (Stola 2010). In EU candidate and Neighbourhood countries, aspects of transformation are still on-going and the label ‘post-socialist’ appears to be more obviously relevant to places such as Ukraine which are still, for example, struggling with the legacy of corruption. My Ukrainian interviewees in Poland frequently commented on their sense that Ukraine was lagging behind. Oleksy,[2] for example, commented in 2021 that ‘for example in Poland you can get a mortgage on a flat and pay it off with no problems but in Ukraine if you take out a mortgage your children will still be trying to pay it off [after you die].’

However, there is no straightforward transition away from socialism, and today it may be more appropriate to use other labels to describe informal migration strategies from post-Soviet countries. The intensity of international migration from Ukraine since 2014, in particular, was prompted by the outbreak of war in the Donbass and its economic consequences, as well as pull factors from CEE EU member states, notably Poland with its labour market vacancies and simplified immigration procedures.

It is not helpful to adopt a typology of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of transformation. These are terms which, as Nowicka-Franczak (2021: 330) observes, are often ‘discursive concepts used to polarise the dispute’ about the success or otherwise of the transformation. However, livelihood strategies reflect social differentiation. By the 21st century, especially its second decade, many middle-class people, particularly in countries which joined the EU in 2004–7, no longer needed to have two jobs or engage in other types of informal practice. However, poorer sections of society continued for longer to rely on informal, post-socialist style strategies, even if these have sometimes shifted in form. For example, Rakowski (2016: xiv) describes a shift from bootleg mining to EU mobility in Lower Silesia once Poland acceded to the EU.

Mobility/Migration Cultures

Although livelihood strategies are shaped by objective realities, such as availability or otherwise of mortgages, they also reflect attitudes and opinions, such as suspiciousness of creditors and a belief that debt should be avoided. The concept of ‘migration culture’ or ‘culture of migration’ helps researchers understand the cultural contexts of societies from which migrants originate. Conventionally, it is used to refer to sending (not receiving) countries, usually to small sending communities: see for example Elrick (2008) on Poland and Horváth (2008) on Romania. Elsewhere (White 2017) I have defined migration culture as sending community norms and beliefs about who should migrate, how, where and why. Similarly, Morawska (2001) presents migration culture as a ‘toolkit’ for sending communities.

[2] All interviewees’ names are pseudonyms.

Migration culture can be studied through discourse as well as practices. For example, in White (2017) I discuss sayings common in 2008–9 in two small Polish towns with high volumes of migration, Sanok and Grajewo. These included: 'You must go abroad to [be with] somebody, not into the dark'; 'some situations force you to migrate'; and 'you might as well give it [migration] a try.' Migration cultures are complex, as these apparently contradictory sayings illustrate. A culture of experimenting with migration was encouraged both by opportunities provided by extensive social networks, and the fear that round the corner lurked a situation (such as debt or unemployment) which could 'force' you to migrate. Life, in such narratives, was hard, but migration was easy.

A more common use of the term 'culture of migration' refers to the expectation that people will migrate from particular locations (Kandel and Massey 2002; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al. 2021; Van Mol et al. 2018). This second meaning is narrower than the first. In fact, it is a subset of the broader concept of the migration toolkit. In places with considerable out-migration, accepting migration as a normal and even 'easy' livelihood strategy—and socialising children to believe this—is just one aspect of how local people regard migration. This type of usage, for example in the recent volume edited by Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al. (2021), is often premised on a reified view of culture as a factor pre-determining migration. By contrast, Morawska (2001) and White (2017), while recognising that local norms and expectations can be fairly binding (for example in discouraging mothers of young children from migrating alone), are more alert to the agency of migrants in selecting from and moulding the cultural repertoire, and the potential for cultural change as a result of migrants' experiences abroad.

Sanok and Grajewo already had long histories of migration, particularly to the USA, and this partly explained their mobility cultures, particularly the assumptions that the migrant needed to be sponsored by a family member abroad ('migration to be with somebody'), and that migration was a long-term sacrifice by one person for the good of other family members. However, as European destinations opened up in the 1990s, and especially after Polish citizens acquired EU mobility rights in 2004, the culture modified. In White (2017) I demonstrate how the Polish small-town culture of circular solo parent migration—characterised by Okólski (2012) as 'incomplete'—changed to one of migration for settlement by parents with their children. My opinion poll in small-town and rural Podkarpacie in 2008 suggested extensive support for family migration, perhaps surprisingly, given that it contributes to the depopulation which causes concern nationally.

Elrick (2008) contrasts a Polish village with a similarly long tradition of migration with one in Świętokrzyskie region, where international migration was a new livelihood strategy after 2004. This begs the question of how communities without a long 'culture of migration' in the sense of a history of intensive migration acquire their new migration toolkit. Part of the answer to this question must be connected to how norms relevant to internal migration, as in Świętokrzyskie, morph into a culture of international migration. In the parallel Ukrainian case, circular migration from East Ukraine to Russia, which some of my interviewees seemed to consider 'not really abroad,' redirected to Poland after the outbreak of war in 2014. In general, internal and international migration are more similar than different (King and Skeldon 2010) and in this article 'migration' will be understood to refer to either or both.

One aspect of post-socialist 'migration' cultures has been the existence of much temporary and circular mobility, as for example typified migration from Poland and Romania before EU accession (Mădroane 2016: 232; Okólski 2012) and still chacterises Ukrainian migration to Poland and the Baltic states. Hence 'mobility'—as often in migration research today—is perhaps a more useful word than migration, which can imply long-term, unidirectional movement. Since mobility is a term often associated with EU freedom of movement, it is particularly apt for EU migrants. Ukrainians in Poland also in some senses adhere to a shared European 'mobility culture.' Although many are in Poland without residence rights, the fact that it is straightforward to come for short-term visa-free visits or on temporary work permits, together with the existence of social media, dynamic migration networks and many bus routes between Poland and Ukraine, seems to induce (in my interviewees) a sense that mobility is accessible.

Ukrainians I interviewed in 2019 and 2021–22 used the same turns of phrase as Poles I interviewed shortly after 2004 (White 2017). The Ukrainians talked about 'trying out' their luck in Poland and made claims like 'It's simply easy to come, because of the documentation' or 'Lots of Ukrainians are coming to Poland. They come because at any moment you can return, get on the bus and return. That's why there's a wave of Ukrainians in Poland' (White 2020: 234–6). King et al. (2018), referring to the attitudes and practices of young EU citizens, use the phrase 'easy transnationalism,' and this seemed applicable to many Ukrainians. It did not imply that it was all the same to them whether they migrated to Poland or stayed in Ukraine. Often the latter was not considered an option. My interviewees did not use quite the same language as residents of Grajewo and Sanok, ever conscious of the hypothetical 'situation which forces you to migrate.' However, a sense of having exhausted options in Ukraine often appeared in the interviews. Mihajlo, from a city in central Ukraine, claimed in 2019, for instance, that in Ukraine 'people feel herded into a long black tunnel with no exit.'

Methodology

The empirical material in this article draws on my interviews for several research projects, none focusing exclusively on migration cultures. I studied Russian livelihood strategies and internal migration (1999–2005); Polish international migration (2006–2022); and migration from Ukraine and other countries to three cities of around 100,000 population in Poland (2019–22).[3] I interviewed both migrants and non-migrants, and also conducted informal conversations with local people in sending locations in Poland and Russia as well as, to a lesser extent, receiving locations in Russia, Poland and the UK. Altogether I interviewed 238 Russians in Russia; 261 Poles, mostly in Poland, but also in the UK; and 70 Ukrainians in Poland.[4] I also collected written questionnaires from 207 Russians in 2004–5 and commissioned an opinion poll of 1101 Poles in Podkarpacie in 2008. I found interviewees through personal networks and social media, and thereafter by snowball sampling; I conducted the semi-structured interviews in Polish and Russian. Interviewees possessed a range of socio-demographic characteristics; the majority did not originate from the biggest cities in their

[3] For details about methodology, see White (2007: 890–91; 2018: 135; 2020: 33–4).

[4] Figures correct on 30.04.22.

countries of origin. One project focused entirely on Polish mothers, but the others included both men and women, as well as non-parents. The Ukrainian interviews were conducted before the Russian invasion of February 2022; the participants were labour, family and student migrants, although three were also refugees from areas affected by war in 2014–21.

In all my research I applied a livelihood strategy approach (Ellis 2000), trying to find out why interviewees adopted one strategy rather than another. For example, I encouraged them to discuss the pros and cons of migrating internally as opposed to internationally, or borrowing money vis-à-vis earning it abroad. Whereas Morawska (2001) refers to 'coping strategies,' and other authors use the term 'survival strategies,' 'livelihood strategies' is a broader concept which also embraces strategies to accumulate wealth (Pickup and White 2003). Despite the gloomy ring of 'post-socialism,' even in the 1990s, not everyone was concentrating on mere 'survival.' As already discussed, motives based on compulsion and opportunity are often hard to disentangle.

The livelihood strategy approach was developed to understand the complexity of many households' resources. Although wealthier people often have simple strategies of working in one job and borrowing from formal financial institutions in case of need, it is impossible to understand ordinary post-socialist livelihoods without also enquiring into second jobs, non-monetary resources, etc. Finally, livelihood strategies need to be culturally appropriate, as they are influenced by the behaviour of neighbours and friends. Hence my interviews also enquire about local practices, asking for example for stories of acquaintances who migrated or returned. Qualitative interviews are ideal for such research, although I also commissioned one survey (in rural and small-town Podkarpacie in 2008) which used the phraseology I had heard in my in-depth interviews to test out more widespread opinions about female and family migration.

As someone who has been studying social change in the region since the 1980s, I may be over-ready to see lines of continuity, hence I try particularly hard to stay alert to the existence of other causal factors. A more problematic aspect of my research is that, with the exception of my many years of participant observation among Polish migrants in the UK, my research is not based on long periods in the field—never more than a month at a time in specific locations in Poland or Russia. While these visits have given me sufficient material to draw some conclusions about local migration cultures, nonetheless longer periods of immersion in the field would be desirable. It was a particular weakness of my Ukrainian research—for a project which focuses on Poland as a new 'country of immigration' — that I could not spend time in the sending locations in Ukraine from which my interviewees originated.[5]

Local, National and Transnational Mobility Cultures

The 1990s system transformation in Russia, Ukraine and Poland intensified geographical inequalities. These took the form of inequalities between regions, and between larger and small locations. I studied places in different regions, and of different population sizes, from Moscow and Warsaw to very small towns. My current project focuses on three middling cities in Poland: Płock, Kalisz and Piła. Fieldwork in specific sending communities remains

[5] I did however spend two weeks travelling around West Ukraine in 2018.

relevant to migration research. This is where neighbours or workmates meet or families sit round the kitchen table and have casual conversations about migration, shaping their migration strategies.

Local media such as newspapers might provide material for analysing local migration cultures. My attempts to back up my research with stories about migration from local media have however always failed. My searches showed that local newspapers in Pavlovsk, Voronezh region, in 2003–4, and in Grajewo, Sanok and Suwałki in the years after 2004, barely mentioned migration. One Polish librarian suggested to me that this was because migration was so much a part of everyday life as to seem uninteresting to local journalists. My more recent on-line searches in Polish fieldwork locations revealed a similar shortage of material, at least until the 2022 arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

On the other hand, as is well-documented, national media do influence attitudes towards migration, and this suggests the need to consider whether there exists such a phenomenon as a national mobility culture. Garapich writes about Poland as a country where migration is 'surrounded by myths, symbols, cultural codes and stereotyped framings' (Garapich 2014: 284). In his view, there exists a deep-rooted Polish migration culture, distinguishing between labour and political migration, and according higher prestige to the latter. However, often Polish journalism on migration seems not to be particularly 'Polish,' in fact resembling reportage in other countries: for example, creating a sense of crisis around Romanian and Polish children whose parents work abroad (Mădroane 2016; Urbańska 2015; Walczak 2014). Migration is often presented as a 'problem' in both sending and receiving countries, and discussed in normative terms (White and Grabowska 2018). This contrasts with pragmatic and non-judgmental attitudes towards migration which I observe among migrants and in sending localities from which migrants originate; even the migration of mothers with young children, for example, can be condoned if they are lone parents (White 2017: 96–7).

Migration culture is also transnational, since potential migrants in sending locations converse with actual migrants abroad. This was true already in the early 20th century when Thomas and Znaniecki wrote their classic *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Communication channels today are so active that many migrants spend much of their time living in transnational social space, with ideas circulating between sending and receiving countries, as discussed in particular in scholarly literature on social remitting (White and Grabowska 2019). Moreover, within social media potential migrants pick up information from strangers; they are not confined to conversing with neighbours and friends. My interviewee Ivan, from a city in central Ukraine, observed the increasing importance of the Internet:

> There are lots of Ukrainians here in Poland, so [in home city] we don't particularly talk about Poland. You know, when I used to go home, when very few Ukrainians migrated, then people were really interested. What's it like, how is it in Poland. And now there are heaps of Ukrainians in Poland, so everyone knows about everyone else and when you come home they don't even bother to ask. So, you came home. So what. It's good you're back. No special questions. Well, they might ask 'How was your job? How much did you earn?' But actually people already know for themselves. There are lots of Youtube videos, they show everything. About prices, living conditions, etc.

Hence, contrary to assumptions about 'cultures of migration,' understood as socialisation into migration in places from where many people migrate (Kandel and Massey 2002), the more intense the migration flow, the less relevant the local-level migration culture seems to have become.

Moreover, migrants who return to their places of origin, to live or on visits, have picked up migration tips from other migrants while they were away, especially if they lived and worked alongside migrants in the receiving country. It is commonly assumed that these are diasporas of co-nationals. However, in some settings such as London, fellow-migrants are just as likely to be migrants from other countries (Moroşanu 2013, writing about Romanians). Poland today is full of practised migrants: Polish returnees. Some returnees hardly mingle with foreigners, but others, such as factory workers, constantly encounter Ukrainians in particular. In such settings, as revealed by my research in Płock, Kalisz and Piła, exchanging experiences about migration is part of everyday life. Hence attitudes towards mobility encountered by Ukrainians in Poland include attitudes of Poles with experience of working in a range of countries further West.

Why Migrate? Higher Education as a Goal

Post-socialist mobility can only be understood within the wider context of social change, as discussed in mainstream sociological and anthropological research, often without reference to migration. Higher education serves as a case study of an area of change which has also created a specific strand of post-socialist migration. The 1990s were characterised by the emergence of private higher education and an increasing number of university places. In turn, this promoted more widespread aspirations for higher education among working-class and small-town school-leavers and their parents (Cherednichenko 2005: 115, 117; Flyurinskaya and Roshchina 2005: 79; Gwiazda and Roguska 2008: 100). However, higher education, especially as a day student at a prestigious city university, remained hard to access for many, partly because of the expense. Often student children could not earn enough themselves, or obtain loans to finance their education. This was particularly the case if education involved living away from home—particularly likely if students originated from places other than big cities—and/or tuition fees. Hence parents could feel required to adapt their livelihood strategies to help their children succeed in life.

Whereas in some other societies, for example the UK, it would not be expected that parents would migrate to support their children through higher education, my interviews revealed that parental self-sacrifice was often regarded as normal in such situations. Among my sample, both fathers and mothers migrated for this reason. Such attitudes could have pre-1990s roots. For example, Alina, whom I interviewed Grajewo in 2008, mentioned that her father left Grajewo to work in the USA around 1989 because 'My sister was studying in Łomża,[6] and she had to pay more for a bedsit in Łomża than he earned in a month.' Irena, interviewed in Ełk in 2007, mentioned that around 1992 her parents moved to Belgium, and lived there for 15 years, seeing all three children through university in Poland. The practice continued in Grajewo after 2004. The best example among my interviewees was that of

[6] A nearby medium-sized town and former regional capital.

Beata, who in 2009 had children aged 27, 19 and 15. She had worked for years in the USA to see the eldest child through a prestigious university degree in Warsaw, and when interviewed in 2009 was about to set off to earn money for the middle child's studies, planning later to work abroad to support the youngest. Beata commented 'After all, I'm a mother. Well, everyone wants their children to have a better life, don't they? I did what I could.' Equally self-sacrificingly, Sasha, from the small town of Zubstov, whom I interviewed in Moscow in 2005, was working as a welder to support first one daughter then the second through university five-year studies. He was living in dire conditions in a workers' hostel and, as a former white-collar worker, had suffered a drop in social status. In both cases, the other spouse continued to work in the small town and care for the remaining child(ren).

Although it would not have been easy for Beata's and Sasha's children to join them in New York and Moscow and share the burden, this is more feasible within the EU. For example Zenon, a Pole I interviewed in Kalisz in 2021, had also migrated quite recently for the sake of his daughter's education—sometimes working in up to three jobs per day in the UK. Zenon did not however employ a discourse of parental self-sacrifice, or imply that this was normal behaviour in Kalisz, which—as a medium-sized city without a strong tradition of emigration abroad—seems to lack the sharply defined migration culture of Grajewo. Moreover, Zenon's sacrifice had been mitigated by the fact that his daughter had come to work in the UK and be with him during university vacations.

In keeping with the suggestion earlier in this article that 'post-socialist' habits persist in Ukraine, most of the Ukrainians with young adult children whom I interviewed in 2019–22 (had) worked in Poland to support their children's higher education. They presented this strategy as being self-evident. For example, Andrei said bluntly 'My son became a student, so it was necessary.' Oleksandra began her interview:

> I worked in Ukraine for 14 years for a company named X. Since I was divorced, I then had to face the problem of my son's education. Unfortunately my wages couldn't cover the cost of a university education. So I settled my affairs in Ukraine, took my suitcase and went to Poland.

When pressed as to why her son could not finance his own education, she said that as a day student he had no time for paid work. Other parents made similar points, also commenting on the prevalence of corruption at Ukrainian universities. Such migrations were however not just characteristic of small-town migration cultures, as in the Polish and Russian cases of Alina, Beata and Sasha mentioned above. The parents interviewed included people from locations in West Ukraine with strong migration traditions, but also from cities in central, southern and eastern Ukraine, even from Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv. Oleksandra herself was an engineer from Vinnytsa, while Andrei was a mechanic from near Mykolaiv.

Two other aspects of the Ukrainian parents' behaviour distinguished them from their earlier counterparts in Grajewo or Zubtsov. Although most had originally migrated to Poland alone, following the 1990s model of incomplete migration, by the time I interviewed them, 40/70 were living with family members, mitigating the self-sacrifing aspect of their migration strategy. (This was particularly marked among interviewees in 2021–2.) Moreover, some interviewees whose children had not yet started university in Ukraine, and

who had already begun to put down roots in Poland, had begun to toy with the idea that the children could go to university in Poland instead. As discussed in White (2020) and as indicated by other research in Poland (for example Górny et al. 2019), Ukrainians in Poland are increasingly interested in family reunification and settlement.

How to Migrate? Friends, Agencies and Trust

As Morawska (2001) shows with regard to undocumented Polish migrants, the importance attached to informal networks during the 1990s was linked to habits acquired in the communist period. Even in the 20th century, when legal work abroad became more accessible, the habit continued of relying on informal ways of getting things done, in preference to channels such as local employment agencies offering work abroad. Jaźwińska (2001: 124) noted this preference in 1990s Polish small towns while also pointing out that Warsaw residents were more trusting of institutions and organisations to help them migrate.

In line with sociological literature pointing to the growing individualisation of society and reduced importance of family support networks, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, cited by Stockdale 2002: 41) ‘suggest that the strength of social/family ties in the migration process has weakened in modern times.’ It seems intuitive that, as the chaos of the transformation period subsided, small-town CEE migrants would become more trusting of official institutions run by strangers and less dependent on family networks. Small towns might become more like Warsaw in this respect. Simultaneously, the migration culture might change and potential migrants might feel less comfortable about asking friends and family to assist them to migrate abroad. After all, the mere existence of social networks does not necessarily confer social capital: the migration culture also has to sanction their being used for this purpose.

However, Stockdale’s research indicates the continuing importance of migration networks in 1990s rural Scotland, particularly for first-time migrants. This example serves as a warning that in varied socio-economic environments there may remain good reasons why family and friendship networks continue to be important. A preference for migrating to be with family and friends is not unique to CEE societies. If it remains widespread among Poles and Ukrainians (as my 2019–21 interviews suggest) this does suggest a strong line of continuity—the feeling that it is socially acceptable to turn to friends abroad for support, or to for migrants to try to persuade their friends to join them. On the other hand, the use of friends and family to migrate also reflects the fact that many migrants from CEE—though not those working in professional occupations—are fairly open-minded about where they are prepared to work abroad.

Use of informal networks is therefore perhaps hardly surprising. However, the level of suspicion of strangers and readiness to repeat scare stories about agencies and unscrupulous co-nationals are a striking part of some Polish and Ukrainian migration cultures. Post-socialist societies have generally been marked by low trust in strangers, alongside high trust in family and close friends.[7] In my earlier research, I found that even if people in towns like

[7] The 2017–20 World (European) Values Survey data show, for example, that only 24.1% of Polish respondents and 27% Ukrainians agreed that ‘Most people can be trusted.’ Low trust is not however an exclusively CEE

Zubstov, Pavlovsk and Grajewo had no personal experience of using agencies to migrate in the 1990s and early 2000s, scare stories circulated. For example, students from villages in Voronezh region whom I interviewed in 2004–5 reported that local men were afraid to go to work in Moscow after their neighbours had been cheated and exploited. Many Ukrainians use agencies to migrate to contemporary Poland, particularly to destinations outside Warsaw (Górny et al. 2019). Hence it might be assumed that reluctance to use agencies is not a feature of contemporary Ukrainian migration cultures and that they are not 'post-socialist' in this respect. However, many of my interviewees had migrated to be with their friends and family, not through agencies, and in the case of those who used agencies they sometimes had an acquaintance working in the agency or, at the very least, tried to check them out by other means.

Anne: Don't people ever go independently?

Kolya: Sometimes they do, but it's dangerous.

Ihor: You should go in a way that someone else has already checked, to be with people you know.[8]

Some Ukrainians distinguished between trustworthy Polish agents and untrustworthy Ukrainians.

> It depends on which agency. There are agencies in Ukraine which just take your money and that's it. They will forget to process your passport and send you to Poland. So everyone is scared…. If it's a Polish agency, it's OK to use it… Ukrainians are greedy, they want to make a lot of money fast. (Artem)

Some interviewees from new sending locations in Ukraine, lacking social capital to migrate through their own networks, and in some cases after being refused help by people they knew, had trusted to agencies and had bad experiences such as not being met on arrival, or being offered poor-quality work and accommodation. However, they did not make the same mistake twice and their stories added to the body of cautionary tales circulating transnationally between Ukraine and Poland.

> On the other hand, 'it depends on which agency.' Both Polish and Ukrainian interviewees often considered it convenient to make use of agencies in the receiving country, suggesting that their suspicion of agencies was not the result of some kind of blind 'post-socalist' mistrust of any formal institution.

Nowadays, as the quotation above from Ivan about Youtube suggests, advice from friends is not as necessary as it would have been in the 1990s or even ten years ago, considering the wealth of information on the internet, including blacklists of agencies and employers (for example Zarobitchany.org/blacklist) and forum discussions about the pros and cons of particular workplaces. Would-be migrants can have the sense that nowadays almost too much information is available. As Larisa (interviewed in Płock)

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phenomenon. West European levels vary considerably. For example, France, at 26.3% ,was lower than Ukraine, while 73.9% of Danes said that most people could be trusted. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org, accessed 26.11.21.

[8] Kolya and Ihor were friends who wanted to be interviewed together.

observed, 'One person says one thing, another something else. You just have to see for yourself.'

Conclusions: Goodbye, Post-socialism!

Every migrant tells a unique story, and the interviews on which this article is based revealed complex motivations and practices. However, there are also distinct trends. For many people in 1990s CEE, life seemed overwhelmingly expensive, credit from reliable financial institutions was unavailable and the welfare safety net was insubstantial. Hence it was not surprising that people with fewer household and personal resources, from poorer locations, escaped the 'long black tunnel' of local lives and migrated, either to make ends meet or achieve larger ambitions such as purchasing housing or higher education. Migration frequently depended on informal migration networks and was circular in nature. Although migration was often a family livelihood strategy, migrants tended to migrate solo, leaving their families in sending communities.

Nowadays, there are two distinct reasons to bid farewell to 'post-socialism.' Firstly, despite lines of continuity with the past, phenomena can often be best explained with reference to factors other than socialism. For instance, if many Ukrainians are suspicious of the international employment agencies which have mushroomed in recent years, this may link to the communist legacy of low levels of generalised trust in Ukraine, but can also be explained by agencies' often unscrupulous behaviour. Secondly, mobility cultures have been changing. Perhaps most importantly, in the 21st century, family reunification, and plans (sometimes provisional) to settle abroad have become normalised, not just for EU migrants such as Poles, but perhaps more surprisingly also for Ukrainians. The 'incomplete migration' which characterised the 1990s has by no means disappeared, not least because receiving society labour markets still require temporary labour. However, family migration has become more feasible and more popular. In the Ukrainian case, interviews revealed that even when parents had embarked on what could be considered an emblematic 'post-socialist' migration endeavour, financing their children's higher education in Ukraine, this rapidly turned into a desire to bring their children to Poland to receive their higher education there.

This article has mainly considered parallels between Russian (internal) and Polish and Ukrainian (international) migration, with some reference also to Romania. However, mobility cultures in different countries are not simply parallel, but also intersecting. Mobility culture is local, but also transnational. In countries like Poland, many members of the receiving society have their own migration experience and migration wisdom. To some extent therefore ideas and opinions about migration (such as positive views on family reunification abroad) are exchanged between natives and newcomers. This contributes to the creation of a mobility culture which perhaps contains some lingering 'post-socialist' attributes specific to CEE but is overall transnational, European and global.

The narrow interpretation of 'culture of migration' to mean migration tradition and socialisation into migration is helpful in understanding Mexican migration or migration from certain Polish regions such as Podlasie or Podkarpacie. Overall, however, it is more useful to consider 'migration culture' as a toolkit (Morawska 2001), looking at how people

migrate and how they think and talk about what they do. It is also time to look for migration culture among migrants from newer sending locations. All mobility has cultural context, and this culture is shaped in all sending and receiving locations as well as in transnational social space.

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