Mobility, Transnational and Integration Continuums as Components of the Migrant Experience: An Intersectional Polish-Ukrainian Case Study

Anne White*

Qualitative migration researchers today often use one or more of three concepts – mobility, transnationalism and integration – to make sense of the complexities of contemporary migrants' lives. Collectively, researchers identify these as the three fundamental characteristics of migranthood. Being a migrant is about, for example, planning return visits, maintaining (or not maintaining) relations with people in the sending country or being preoccupied with learning to speak the receiving-society majority language. Qualitative interviewing suggests that each migrant is uniquely situated along various mobility, transnational and integration continuums. Migrants have many social identities as well as migranthood and the existence of these other, intersecting, social identities (such as social class, lifestage and gender) helps to determine their location on the continuums: for example, how often they are mobile and how much they can be mobile. The article draws on interviews in Poland with Ukrainians and Polish return migrants to show how (former) migrants conceptualise shared Ukrainian-Polish migranthood along these three continuums.

Keywords: migranthood, Polish migration transition, Ukrainians, transnationalism, integration, intersectionality

* UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), UK. Address for correspondence: anne.white@ucl.ac.uk.

Introduction and theoretical background

This article discusses the issue of what constitutes the common migrant identity of people on the move, regardless of their countries of origin and destination. Specific sending- and receiving-country pairings are often fundamentally important for determining how individuals experience migration and it is essential not to overgeneralise and make unwarranted assumptions about one group of migrants based on information about another group. However, to understand individual experiences of migration it is helpful, based on careful empirical research, to identify similarities as well as differences between migrant experiences.

An interest in understanding commonalities no doubt lies behind a great deal of qualitative migration research – including comparative research – yet there remains a need to probe further into how being a migrant combines with other identities. This article suggests some ideas about how to do this, and is thus partly methodological in focus. The first part approaches the question on a theoretical level, referring to the phenomena of mobility, transnationalism and integration as key components of what I call 'migranthood'. Qualitative researchers tend to investigate the mobility, transnationalism and integration of specific nationalities; for example, the transnational practices and return intentions of Senegalese or Ukrainian migrants. No doubt often unintentionally, they seem to privilege nationality/ethnicity as a kind of independent variable or master identity. Scholars such as Anthias (2012) have argued convincingly against over-ethnicising. It would be better to adjust our perspective and see nationality/ethnicity as one of a bundle of identities, one which is often significant but not necessarily fundamental to a person's decision to settle or return, and their experience of being a migrant. Conversely, it is always useful to determine where a migrant is located on mobility, transnational and integration 'continuums'. This is the essence of being a migrant. Nationality/ethnicity can play a role in determining such locations, but so do other social identities such as gender or age.

The first part of the article explores this thought in more detail, with illustrations from my own research. Since it is always good to check abstract ideas against evidence about what actual migrants think, do and say, the second part of the article digs further into my research findings to discuss how research participants talked about what it meant to be migrant, in terms of mobility, transnationalism and integration. Of course they usually did so without using those terms. This section is based on my research in Poland in 2019–2022 with Polish return migrants and Ukrainians. In the course of the interviews, many participants compared Polish and Ukrainian migration. As their accounts of their own lives demonstrated, Polish and Ukrainian migration does indeed share many common features, so there were numerous parallels interviewees could have drawn. However, interviewees chose to highlight some similarities rather than others. This is discussed – with reference to mobility, transnationalism and integration – in the final section of the article.

A refugee, an international student and a seasonal fruitpicker are different types of migrant. Yet they share some things in common – more than simply the fact that they moved from Place A to Place B for a certain minimum time period, as in dictionary definitions of migration. Migranthood refers not just to a past action of moving geographically; it is also an ongoing social identity. Like other identities, it is double-sided, consisting of both the self-identity of individual migrants and those identities ascribed to them by others (Pierik 2004). Social identities evolve over time and are affected not just by an individual's personal experiences but also by political and economic developments; for recent Polish and Ukrainian migrants, these include processes such as Brexit, or Russia's 2022 war in Ukraine.

There are several reasons to try to distil the essence of migranthood, or 'migrantness', to use the term preferred by some scholars (for example, Mas Giralt 2020). Firstly, thinking about what constitutes migranthood helps make sense of the complexity of migration trends in the contemporary world. Secondly, it helps qualitative researchers understand individual interviewees 'in the round', without resorting to typologies. By isolating migranthood as a type of social identity, one can use an intersectional approach to understand how

it combines with other identities to lead to different trajectories and outcomes for different migrating individuals. Too often, the concepts of 'migrant' and 'ethnic' are muddled together but – as illustrated by the fact that internal migration often lacks an ethnic component – migranthood is a separate analytical category. As mentioned above, depending on the context, there are many other potentially relevant identities which intersect with migranthood – i.e. which help to determine where an individual will lie on the various mobility, transnational and integration continuums. These identities include social class, age and lifestage, gender and citizenship, as well as whether someone is regarded as 'Eastern' or 'Western' European or from the global South.

There exist many such identities, since migrant populations are frequently socio-demographically diverse. As predictable from network theory, migration becomes less selective over time, as more children and poorer and/or older people decide to migrate. This process can happen over just a few years in the case of countries such as Poland or Romania after they acceded to the EU. Ukrainian labour, family and educational migration to Poland in the years immediately preceding 2022 presents a similar picture of diversification (Górny, Kołodziejczyk, Madej and Kaczmarczyk 2019). Migration becomes regarded as a relatively risk-free livelihood strategy, partly because 21st-century social networks work efficiently and living abroad can be combined with maintaining active connections with sending countries (White 2016). Hence some migrants have a sense of 'easy transnationalism' (King, Lulle, Parutis and Saar 2018). Qualitative and quantitative research demonstrates the multicausality of this migration by many types of people within Europe (King and Okólski 2019: 20).

It might be objected that EU citizens who move in the EU are not suitable topics for an article about migranthood, since they are not really migrants. It is convenient for the EU to distinguish between mobile EU citizens and third-country 'migrants', but this is not just a matter of convenience, since the label 'mobile' is often apt. Many EU migrants, especially professionals, students and lifestyle migrants from Western Europe, move easily and frequently. Moreover, the EU's approach that being mobile precludes being labelled a 'migrant' does have a basis in popular assumptions. These particular migrants are so privileged in various respects that they are often not regarded as migrants, either by others or even by themselves. Some studies focus on their high degree of agency (Koikkalainen 2013). However, much research shows that they do feel their migranthood, however 'lightly', for example when they experience obstacles adapting to life in another country (Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2019). In other words, they are still migrants, even if migrants 'light', in the words of a Swedish professional migrant quoted by Wallinder (2019: 42). Moreover, migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) – even those who are similar in most respects to their West European or Nordic counterparts and who could also qualify as 'migrants light' – find it particularly hard to avoid being ascribed the migrant label (Bulat 2019). In the UK since the Brexit referendum even West Europeans have begun to have this experience (Mas Giralt 2020). It therefore seems artificial to exclude EU citizens from an analysis of migranthood and this article uses the term 'migrant' to cover all people who cross administrative boundaries. It has a particular focus on Europe.

The empirical study

Although the first part of the article considers migranthood theoretically and methodologically, I illustrate some points with examples from my recent research among migrants in Poland – both Polish return migrants and people from other countries. This article focuses particularly on the Ukrainians in my sample. One of the project's research questions concerned whether and, if so, how, Poles' own migration experience (both knowledge and emotions) coloured their views of migration to Poland and how this, in turn, influenced the experiences of non-Poles living there and their thoughts about whether to settle in Poland. The second, more empirical part of the article looks at migranthood 'from below', considering some informants' thoughts about

their shared migrant identities regarding mobility, transnationalism and integration. Of course, I am not arguing that Poles' own migration experience is the only factor shaping their attitudes to foreigners arriving in Poland.

Before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in 2022, Poland had already become a major receiving country, thanks to recent labour, family and educational migration from Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union. Although most Ukrainians were temporary migrants (over one million in 2018) they also displayed an increasing tendency to settle in Poland (Górny *et al*. 2019). The 2021 Polish census showed an increased number of Ukrainians living permanently in Poland (Statistics Poland 2022).

In order to understand the return or settlement intentions of Ukrainians and other foreigners, I compared the experiences and opinions of people living in specific places: three medium-sized cities each with a population of around 100,000. These were Płock (interviews carried out in 2019), Kalisz (2021) and Piła (2022). One aspect of Poland's migration transition is that migrants fanned out and began to settle beyond the largest cities (Górny et al 2019). Medium-sized and smaller cities were therefore also beginning to adapt to their presence. The aim was not to discover some 'average' Poland, but simply to understand different local factors which led to different experiences for migrants. For example, the fact that all three cities were regarded by Ukrainians and Poles alike as good places to bring up children helps explain the tendency towards Ukrainian family reunification in precisely such cities. The availability of factory work in the cities brought Ukrainians into contact with working-class Polish circular and return migrants. Of my 124 interviewees, 70 were Ukrainians, reflecting the fact that Ukrainians constituted by far the largest group of foreigners resident in Poland even before the 2022 refugees' arrival.[1] The 37 Poles in my sample possessed different socio-demographic characteristics and had a variety of integration experiences abroad; the returnees had been back in Poland for different lengths of time and a handful were circular migrants whom I interviewed during their temporary returns to Poland. The research received ethics permission from University College London Research Ethics Committee. I analysed the transcripts thematically.

My interviewees knew that I was writing a book provisionally titled *Poland as a Country of 'Immigration' and 'Emigration'*, so it was natural that some came to the interview having thought about how the two identities interconnected. However, I did not ask directly for their views on interconnections and the interviews began with the interviewees' own migration stories. Some spontaneously dropped comments about shared migranthood into these narratives, a phenomenon also noted by other Polish migration researchers (for example, Mayblin et al 2016: 68). In many cases, however, the interviewees became engrossed in recounting their personal experiences and there seemed a danger that the conversation might never touch on interconnections. To nudge them into reflection, I would take advantage of a natural pause to observe (to Ukrainian participants) that 'Poles also go abroad to work', 'Do you know any Poles who worked abroad?' or, to Poles, 'There are more foreigners in Poland nowadays'. If they did not have much to say in response to these prompts I would not press the topic.

Polish opinion polls show that most Poles do not object to foreigners coming to work in Poland (Duszczyk 2021; White, Grabowska, Kaczmarczyk and Slany 2018: 38). Moreover, surveys suggest that, with the exception of the far right, most Poles are reasonably well-disposed towards Ukrainians (Omyła-Rudzka 2022), as demonstrated by the solidarity expressed by Poles towards Ukrainians after the 2022 Russian invasion. Nonetheless, in everyday life, Ukrainians in Poland can feel that, despite assumptions on both sides about cultural proximity, they are often not fully accepted and are 'neither strangers nor the same' (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Brzozowska 2017).

Studies of how far empathy is present in the attitudes of traditional sending societies towards new migrant populations present a mixed picture. Glynn (2011) argues that, when Ireland and Italy became countries with net immigration, the Irish displayed more empathy towards new arrivals than did the Italians. He suggests that this was because, in Ireland, more parallels had been drawn publicly between Irish migrants and new migrants

whereas, in Italy, a more patronising and less empathetic approach prevailed. Feischmidt and Zakariás (2020) suggest that Hungarians who went as refugees to Germany during the Cold War were more likely to empathise with refugees from other countries during the 2015 'migration crisis', whereas the solidarity shown by more-recent Hungarian migrants was more a statement of opposition to Orbán's regime. In my own research, I was not seeking out instances of empathy as such; rather than uncovering positive emotions towards foreigners, I was interested in whether Poles could see connections between their own and others' migration, and were able to see the world partly from the others' perspective.

Mobility, transnationalism and integration as key components of migranthood

Mobility and transnationalism are among the concepts most often used by contemporary migration researchers. Since the mobility and transnational turns in migration scholarship (Botterill 2011; Faist 2013; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2001), qualitative researchers seem to agree that the terms are relevant to the lives of many migrants. They therefore help us understand what makes a migrant a migrant: the characteristics all migrants share. Nonetheless, scholars also agree that some migrants are more mobile and transnational than others. In other words, they are located at different places on mobility and transnational continuums. This understanding underpins some well-known recent typologies of Central and East European migrants (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007; Engbersen, Grabowska-Lusinska, Leerkes, Snel and Burgers 2013). However, since mobility and transnationalism are broad terms, it is helpful to consider sub-sets within each concept and think of migrants as being located on numerous types of mobility and transnational continuums. They can be less/more geographically mobile, less/more frequently mobile, less/more prone to make transnational comparisons, have weaker/stronger transnational social relations, engage in fewer/more transnational practices and possess weaker/stronger transnational identities. The continuums could also be conceptualised as trajectories, on which migrants move both forward and backwards over time.

The multitude of potential continuums makes it impossible to construct neat typologies. In addition, I am not suggesting that one should try to measure exactly where research participants are located on each of the continuums. Nonetheless, for me as a qualitative researcher, thinking about these continuums and trajectories is a useful exercise, serving a checklist for understanding individual cases and interpreting specific in-depth interviews. This can be illustrated with the case of Tomasz, who had returned to Poland from working in a Nordic country, and Yuliya, a Ukrainian teaching assistant who had decided to settle in Poland with her husband and child. Tomasz commented:

> *I quickly realised that living abroad for a longer period wasn't for me. And deciding* [to return to Poland] *was the best decision of my life. I'd happily go back for two or three days to the little town where I was in* [country name] *to show my fiancée where I worked, what I did in the forest. Although I know that she'd just say 'Oh, a forest. OK. We have forests in Poland too'. Because there was nothing special there.*

Tomasz' migration behaviour – his return decision – can be largely explained by his limited geographical mobility and consistently strong transnational ties. The two years he spent working abroad, in a single location, were his only migration experience, and as a very young person. Since he did not enjoy it, he drew the conclusion that migration was not for him, and returned to Poland permanently. He felt alienated from the middle-aged, hard-drinking, long-term Polish migrants alongside whom he worked. His family and friends had remained in Poland, and these transnational relations – intensified by frequent visits home – were much stronger than any ties in the destination country, although Tomasz also complained that it was impossible to build a long-distance romantic relationship under the circumstances. His mobility and transnational practices

were also intense: he often flew back to Poland for visits. Moreover, he lived and worked with Poles and spoke Polish. He displayed no sense of having acquired any transnational identity, in the sense of dual identification with both receiving and sending countries, and was not attached to where he lived abroad. It is difficult to understand his decision to return to Poland – which remained always his only 'home' – without taking all these factors into account.

One aspect of migranthood is that migrants are people who can draw comparisons between the different places in which they have lived. They are wiser than stayers (in the sense that they have knowledge based on experience) because they can invoke transnational points of comparison. This is not to say that they are always objective; their particular experiences in migration as well as different aspects of their identities help to shape their comparisons. Although not all scholars of transnational practices include drawing comparisons as a transnational practice, social remittances researchers (for example Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Levitt 2001) have analysed exactly how migrants see the world through this comparative, transnational lens. Yuliya, a teaching assistant, was a textbook case of migrant conversion to receiving-country norms:

> *I found out that* [in Poland] *it's not allowed, for example at a parents' evening the teacher will never discuss your child with someone else or in their presence. Only with you separately. And no one else has the right to know. But in Ukraine it's still the case that, at parents' evenings, the teacher sits down with all the parents in the class and she can complain that some child is being naughty and everyone hears it. Now, I find that totally uncivilised.*

Unlike Tomasz, for whom the foreign country was 'nothing special', Yuliya was fast adopting a transnational Polish-Ukrainian identity, which contributed to her desire to settle. She had travelled in Poland and wanted to travel more. Although she maintained transnational ties with Ukraine, rather than tugging her back, these sustained relationships seemed to help her feel more comfortable in Poland. She even continued to study Polish with a teacher based in her home town. As in the case of Tomasz, Yuliya's perspectives on returning or settling can be explained with reference to different aspects of her mobility and transnationalism.

However, it is also useful to apply a third concept, integration. Yuliya's conversion to Polish pedagogical ethics can be seen as an aspect of her integration into Polish society, as parent and teacher. Integration is the third of the triad of concepts without which it is hard to understand migrant experiences. The term refers to migrants becoming full members of the receiving society, something which many migrants themselves would conceptualise as 'settling in'. Although it has been critiqued by a number of scholars, the concept of integration is a helpful analytical tool as long as it is sufficiently precisely defined and if it is understood to be a process involving both the receiving society and the migrants themselves. Ager and Strang's framework of 10 'domains of integration' (2008: 170)[2] provides a basis for understanding each migrant's intersecting integration journeys through various domains / along various continuums: rights and citizenship; language and cultural knowledge; safety and stability; social bridges, bonds and links; employment, education, housing and health. Ager and Strang also highlight the importance for migrants of feeling 'accepted'. Yuliya enjoyed friendly relations with Polish colleagues and neighbours in the city, and her determination to settle in Poland was based on a level of integration which gave her excellent insights into Polish society, underpinned by a tendency to draw transnational comparisons in Poland's favour. By contrast, Tomasz's decision to return, based on his isolation and loneliness in the Scandinavian forest, cannot be understood without reference to his poor integration in various domains: his weak social ties in the receiving country, poor living conditions and difficult, dangerous and dirty job, as well as his impression that local people looked down their noses at Poles.

The different continuums coexist and mutually influence each other in complex ways: as a number of scholars have observed, it is not the case that, for example, there is a simple zero-sum relationship 'more

transnationalism = less integration' (Carling and Pettersen 2014; Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006). Of course, much depends on how integration is defined. One aspect of integration which is essential to understand is that migrants integrate into different social locations within the receiving country. Fox and Mogilnicka (2019) touch on this with their concept of 'pathological integration', referring to the process whereby migrants who live in environments abroad where they mix with racists pick up racist attitudes themselves. In other words, Polish return migrants who have integrated into such settings in the receiving society may be predisposed to ignore commonalities between themselves and foreigners in Poland. A number of recent studies (e.g. Gawlewicz 2015; Nowicka and Krzyżowski 2017; Rzepnikowska 2019; White 2018) have investigated Polish migrants' reactions to racial diversity abroad and the reasons why some migrants become (more) racist while others are more open to difference. It is clear that exactly where migrants integrate plays an important role, particularly the levels of equality, non-discrimination and trust specific to certain workplaces, institutions and localities. My Polish interviewee, Jan, a musician, was an example of someone who had become more open as a result of his social contacts abroad. He had lived in the UK at a time of 'continuous news coverage about terrorist attacks' but 'never encountered anything like that in everyday life'. His directly opposite experiences – including a Muslim becoming his closest friend – led him to question the framing of Muslims as terrorists. As discussed below, the majority of my Ukrainian interviewees worked in factories (typical Ukrainian workplaces outside the biggest cities) and these specific social environments created a special kind of integration into a Polish working-class world where temporary migration was a taken-for-granted livelihood strategy.

To conclude this section on the triad of concepts: when defining migranthood as a social identity, it is helpful to understand migrants as people to whom – even if they do not use the terms – mobility, transnationalism and integration are of central importance. This includes their capacity to progress to a satisfactory point along each trajectory. One has to ask, for example, how much integration is sufficient in a certain domain for a migrant to 'operate confidently' in the receiving society (Ager and Strang 2004). Often the researcher needs to investigate not just the migrant's actual level of mobility, etc., but also his or her ability to be sufficiently geographically/frequently mobile (Kaufman, Bergman and Joye 2014), form strong transnational social relations, make transnational comparisons, engage in transnational practices, form transnational identities and so forth.

This begs the question of what conditions the migrants' capacities and hence their location on various continuums. This is where their other intersecting identities need taking into account. Intersectionality is a way of looking at phenomena, such as migrants and migration, based on the understanding that people have bundles of different 'intersecting' identities. Without this level of detail, it is hard to understand migrants' behaviour (Bastia 2014). For example, Jan's identity as a musician open to meeting other musicians of whatever race and background, Yuliya's as a parent and university graduate or Tomasz's youthful inexperience and sense of alienation from his middle-aged co-workers help explain how they reacted to situations they encountered and how this shaped their mobility decisions, transnationalism and integration. However, the term intersectionality is often used not only to identify combinations of different identities but also to understand the benefits and disadvantages which these combinations confer (McCall 2005), particularly the extent to which individuals possess agency. In the context of my article, agency refers to migrants' capacity to be mobile, lead transnational lives and integrate successfully on multiple dimensions.

Since the discussion thus far has been about continuums or journeys, it is relevant to discuss their endpoints. After a migrant has lived in the new country for several years, memories of the act of migrating may lose some significance and, in their everyday lives, the erstwhile 'migrants' may be much more focused on their new identities as residents, particularly if they integrate in all of Ager and Strang's domains, becoming citizens and feeling accepted as new members of the receiving society. Such outcomes are particularly likely for 'immigrants light' who have integration headstarts – privileges such as EU citizenship or whiteness. Losing

their migranthood also depends on their becoming less like a migrant in the sense that they are less mobile and transnational than previously. When someone loses most of their transnational ties and no longer travels to their country of origin, they personally may no longer feel like a migrant, particularly if they were not a forced migrant.

However, the former migrant is not the only one to have opinions about their migranthood. A migrant may cease to self-identify as such, even without using the word, in the sense that they no longer think of themselves consciously as being mobile, transnational and integrating (again, probably without using those concepts). Other people, both members of the majority population and co-nationals, may disagree. They have their own understandings of migranthood, often based on stereotypes and assumptions about migranthood as a collective identity, and frequently racialised. They may see someone as a migrant long after the individual ceases to feel his/her migranthood; indeed, as the literature on 'second-generation migrants' shows, the children of migrants can find it impossible to escape the label (Beaman 2017), a plight also experienced by West European migrants in UK post-Brexit referendum (Mas Giralt 2020).

Members of the receiving society ascribe identities to migrants in contradictory ways. When members of receiving societies highlight and exaggerate otherness, this links to deep-rooted suspicions about non-settled people (Anderson 2013) and to snobbish assumptions that mobile people are poorly educated labour migrants (Bulat 2019). Assumptions that poverty and low levels of education are components of migranthood also link to the stereotypes about 'East European backwardness' held not only by Western Europeans about all of CEE but also by Central Europeans about Ukrainians and Russians. Ethnic hierarchisation is a widespread habit among members of receiving societies (Ford 2011). It can also characterise sending countries, as evidenced by regular Polish opinion polls on attitudes towards different nationalities, dating back to 1993, long before Poland became a receiving country (Omyła-Rudzka 2022). Qualitative studies by, for example, Andrejuk (2017), Jaskulowski (2019) and Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr (2017) explore the complexities of evolving ethnic hierarchy construction in Poland. However, locals can also underestimate otherness. This attitude lies behind assumptions that an EU professional person, student or lifestyle migrant working in another EU country will have no problems integrating; therefore, no integration provision is made for them (Collett 2013). It also guides assumptions that shared racial identity is a recipe for integration success. Poles, for example, often that assume Ukrainians in Poland will 'integrate' because the two nationalities are supposedly 'culturally close'.

Finally, relevant actors include not just the migrant and the receiving population but also the migrant's co-nationals. Identities are co-constructed by co-nationals in both societies – for example, a Lithuanian living in the UK may have to reckon with opinions regarding Lithuanian migrants both in Lithuania itself and among Lithuanians living in the UK. However, a hallmark of EU migrants – as is also true of Ukrainian migrants in Poland – is that they tend to see their migration as an individual or family project. In normal circumstances (i.e. before Putin's invasion of Ukraine) they often seem to lack a sense of collective responsibility towards their sending towns and villages. Hence the transnational aspect of their migranthood is fundamentally different from that of many migrants on other continents – as described, for example, by Levitt (2001) in *The Transnational Villagers*. Assumptions that migrants necessarily belong to a (singular) diaspora or community abroad, which could assert social control over their behaviour, are usually fallacious. Migrants can be selective about their associates – particularly when there exist large and socially heterogenous populations of co-nationals in the receiving country – and sometimes engage in energetic 'othering' of their co-nationals (Garapich 2016).

Shared Ukrainian and Polish migranthood as viewed by (former) migrants

This section adopts a bottom-up perspective, discussing how the participants in my research project talked comparatively about Ukrainian and Polish migration. Perhaps partly because they knew my project was about migration in general, not just Ukrainian migration, the Poles rarely talked about supposed national characteristics of Ukrainians, except to observe that Ukrainian and Polish were cognate languages and that it was comparatively straightforward for Ukrainians to understand and learn to speak Polish. On the other hand, both groups did refer to certain types of mobility, transnationalism and integration. Comments about mobility tended to be neutral; observations concerning transnational ties and integration were more emotionally charged. It should be noted that the opinions of three groups are discussed in this section: my Ukrainian and Polish interviewees, but also the Ukrainians' Polish acquaintances who had worked abroad and/or had family and friends in foreign countries. Some knew a diverse collection of people – for example, because they were married to Poles or were friendly with parents at their child's school or worked in beauty and hairdressing salons. In the latter case, their clients included Polish migrants who were settled abroad but were visiting their city of origin during the holidays. Ukrainian factory workers' networks were mainly Ukrainian, but they also worked alongside Polish returnees and circular migrants.

Polish and Ukrainian interviewees, of all ages and backgrounds, shared a view of a world in motion. Wage differentials in different countries were presented as the main drivers of migration and migration was therefore a fact of life – mobility was completely normalised. Among the Ukrainians, for example, Klara remarked 'It's normal. You can earn more there [in Western Europe]. Poles don't like it here in Poland so they go there. It's better there. And we don't like it in Ukraine so we come here'. Emma reflected 'They [Poles] go to Germany, or to other cities…. If he thinks he needs to go because the money he gets here isn't enough, and he goes abroad, I think he's doing the right thing. Because he is just the same as we are'. Poles made similar observations. Anita, for instance, referring to the demand for seasonal agricultural labour, observed that 'If someone, for example, grows tomatoes or apples, people will come from Ukraine, like we went from Poland to England. In Poland they earn three times what they could in Ukraine. It's exactly the same principle.'

Although most interviewees – especially poorer people for whom migration was a necessary livelihood strategy – referred to such migrations as ever-present and ongoing, several Polish interviewees, who had participated in the post-2004 wave of migration of young, well-educated city people to the UK and Ireland, referred to waves and situated their comparisons historically. For example, Mateusz commented (in a neutral tone) about Ukrainians:

> *They're having a hard time at the moment, because their economy is in trouble as a result of the war, and they are going through what we experienced 12–15 years ago. They are at that stage. They graduate from university but there is nowhere for them to work in their own country.*

On the other hand, the belief that it is 'natural' for people to migrate from poorer to richer countries suggests an economic hierarchy, Western Europe–Poland–Ukraine, which is reinforced by orientalising assumptions and can prompt Poles to be condescending towards Ukrainians. This was noted by Tomasz:

> *I don't know if they can spot it, but we look at them a bit differently, because they come here to work. We complain about how bad things are here that we need to go abroad to work. And if someone comes from another country to work in Poland, that country must be really, really bad.*

Another common theme concerned transnational ties, especially maintaining relationships with loved ones in the sending country, and feelings of missing home. Ukrainian interviewees claimed that Poles returned from abroad because of the strength of their family feelings. They also often knew Poles who currently had family members abroad. Hence they were able to commiserate together. Tamara reported:

> *One Polish woman I know has children who went to England and stayed. They went to work and stayed. She's here and her children are there. So this is the conversation:*
> *'How are you?'*
> *'But how are you? Your own mother stayed in Ukraine. Do you feel miserable?'*
> *I say, 'Yes, I am miserable'.*
> *She says 'I can't bear it. I miss my grandchildren so badly'...*
> [I say] *'Every day I think about my mother, I talk to her every day, do you do the same? Don't be sad, it's OK. They have their own life there'.*

Other interviewees also picked up on the theme of migrants' transnational communications. Krystyna, a Polish circular migrant, complained about other Polish people who expressed surprise that refugees from countries like Syria and Iraq trying to cross the Belarusian border had mobile phones, and who assumed that Ukrainians, too, were technologically backward. She pointed out that, when she went to work in Germany, she always took her phone and laptop and that these were essential for all migrants to keep connected with people back in their origin countries.

On the other hand, it seemed from some of the Ukrainian interviews that Polish return migrants, recollecting how they had missed home while they were abroad, could be distinctly insensitive. They seemed to feel that they had reached the end of their life in mobility and this could lead to a tendency to emphasise that home was best, as reported by Tamara.

> *My circle of acquaintances is... at work, and from walking my dog, it's lots of Poles. They know I'm from Ukraine, they hear my accent, and they say things like 'I was in Germany, I worked there for two years' or 'I went to pick blueberries in Holland' or 'I did this and that'. They say 'Tamara, there's no place like home'. I say 'Yes'.*

In the interview, Tamara said the word 'Yes' in a doubting tone, suggesting that she did not agree with her interlocutors. Her Polish acquaintances' generalising verdict on migration – that the best place for a migrant was at home – was tactless, given that the Ukrainians they knew in Poland were not 'at home' in the sense of being in their country of origin. They were located on various mobility trajectories: in some cases, hoping eventually but not yet able to return to Ukraine; in others, halfway to Western Europe; and, in many cases, trying to build a new 'home' in Poland. Three of my interviewees – including Tamara – were from war zones (even before the 2022 invasion), so it was impossible to return.

With regard to integration, the comparisons made by interviewees tended to refer to migrants' drudgery – leaving them little time for integration, language learning or their reception by the receiving society. Anzhela, who complained about her own bad experiences of working conditions and gender discrimination in her Polish factory, also commented on her Polish co-workers:

> *I've not heard them say anything good* [about their lives abroad]. *They complain that they had to work a huge amount. I hear comments like 'You came to Poland, and you work. When we went abroad, we worked 12 hours a day. We lived in really bad conditions'. And they sort of say 'Now it's your turn'. That's*

what I sometimes hear. Because, when you go away, you leave your family and try to work flat out. Well, how can they say good things? That they worked non-stop? That's usually how it is. I've yet to hear that someone went abroad and had a good time. They go and work hard. So that they can come back to Poland and be with their families.

It would not be surprising to encounter more negativity about migration among Poles who had worked long hours abroad without much opportunity to enjoy life in the foreign country; Ukrainian interviewees like Anzhela, with her own limited options, could appreciate this point of view. On the other hand, Anzhela's own lowly position in the factory also meant that she was more likely to associate with such negative returnees. By contrast, Ostap, a Ukrainian man from the same factory with a higher-status job, working alongside Polish men on an equal basis, reported on their experiences in the same positive terms as his own. 'Some [colleagues] worked abroad for five, some for ten years but then they came back. [They say] it was interesting being abroad – their work, their new friends'.

In my interviews with migrants over the years, the aspect of the integration process most often mentioned – sometimes referred to as 'fundamental' – was language acquisition. Several Ukrainians – often having dwelled at length on their own attempts to improve their Polish language – mentioned that Poles of their acquaintance had not learned receiving-country languages. It seems that sometimes this experience led to Poles expecting Ukrainians not to be able to speak Polish. Tamara, for example, reported how a Polish contact, a former seasonal worker, assumed that being a migrant implied not feeling at home because of not understanding the local language. 'A woman was telling me [in Polish] about how she went to pick blueberries. "Tamara, I understand how hard it is for you. You don't understand the language". "But I do understand!" "Home is home. There's no place like home"'.

Many Polish interviewees were conscious of anti-migrant sentiments and, in some cases, pointed out that these were not just their own experiences but could be encountered by migrants in different countries. Sometimes they referred to actual discrimination. Jolanta, for example, a Polish seasonal migrant, described how her friend in the Netherlands

was on the street where she lived… and someone told her to cross to the other side because she was a Pole. They said 'You should be over there'. Well, what do you think of that, you do find unpleasant types, don't you? In Poland various stuff happens as well. [Slightly lowering her voice] *They don't like Turks. Lots of* [bad] *things happen. My view is that you have to understand why a person came. Like Ukrainians, Belarusians, they come to us because they can earn more money.*

However, other interviewees described a milder experience. They remembered migration as a state of feeling conspicuous, guessing at the vibes around them and worrying about possible unstated hostility emanating from local people. Janusz had been a manual worker in Ireland:

Janusz: When I happen to notice [people speaking Ukrainian] *in the shops then I always think about how I was in Ireland and used to do my shopping in Aldi. I'd be there, for example, with my friend and we'd be speaking Polish but I'd be conscious of how people standing behind me in the queue were feeling.*
Anne: How do they feel?
Janusz: Oh, I don't know. Like 'Oh, they're Ukrainians, they've come here to work'. 'Oh. Poles. They've come here to work'.

The interviews therefore demonstrated that – in certain respects – both Poles and Ukrainians were able to see connections between themselves and the other group. However, as the above quotations also illustrate, in some cases the Poles apparently overgeneralised and imagined similarities which were not actually present. In some cases, they could appear to be unsympathetic or tactless. As one would expect, both from evidence about other receiving societies and from research on the (in)tolerance displayed by Poles when they themselves were living abroad, as discussed above, some Polish return migrants find it harder than others to see connections between themselves and migrants from other countries. The quotations above suggest that less sympathetic attitudes might particularly characterise some Poles who had not engaged very much with the receiving country while they were abroad and had less meaningful contact with locals.

However, several Ukrainian interviewees expressed the view that the capacity to see connections depended on the individual. Nikolai, a Ukrainian builder, commented that 'not every Pole will admit that, abroad, he's exactly the same as we are here'. Melaniya, who worked in an office alongside several Polish returnees, remarked:

You'd suppose that Poles who'd worked in different countries, like England or Germany, or Norway, would understand other migrants better. But actually, it depends on the person. There are people whose experiences remain just their own experiences and they don't see parallels with migrants who are here in Poland... The fact that people migrate to Poland from different countries is seen in an abstract way, it's compartmentalised, so they still think they are superior to the immigrants... On the other hand, there are people who say 'We understand you, we were in the same situation ourselves'.

Conclusion

To read about and conduct research on migration is to be constantly struck by parallels between the experiences of people across the globe, regardless of their national identity and countries of origin and destination. At the same time, of course, the deeper the researcher probes, the more they appreciate both the significance of those inequalities which usually characterise sending- and receiving-country relationships and the uniqueness of each migrant's story. This article has suggested an approach towards understanding some common aspects of migranthood while eschewing over-generalisation.

I have argued that there is a good reason why transnationalism, mobility and integration are concepts widely used by migration researchers, since they are relevant to the lives of almost all migrants and therefore can be said to constitute essential features of contemporary migranthood. Typologies of migrants which explicitly or implicitly plot respondents on transnationalism–integration–mobility matrices are therefore helpful for generalising about populations of migrants. However, the contribution of this article is to suggest a more finely tuned approach which can help to make sense of the different experiences and worldviews of interviewees in small-scale qualitative research. Firstly, one has to take into account the migrants' capacities as well as their achievements to date. Secondly, it is crucial to acknowledge that migrants have many other identities in addition to their migrant ones. Only by considering these intersecting identities can one understand how each migrant arrived at particular mobility decisions, possesses certain transnational capabilities, is integrated to different extents in different domains and so forth.[3] Of course, countries of origin and identification with particular regions of the world as well as the surrounding often fast changing historical circumstances are important parts of this identity mix.

The article also considered some examples of Ukrainian and Polish migrants' own views about commonalities between migrants of different nationalities. Their observations could be grouped under the headings of mobility, transnationalism and integration: the idea of a world in motion where it was normal to be a migrant;

the difficulties of maintaining transnational relationships and managing homesickness; and certain aspects of (non)integration. Depending on each migrant's personal experiences and various social positionings and identities, they felt differently about what constituted typical integration experiences: whether migrants had to work non-stop or were able to spend time getting to know the new country and its people, and whether they were accepted by local residents. Occasionally, interviewees would link integration to transnational practices or mobility. A number of Ukrainians stressed how much they wanted to improve their Polish language, because language was fundamental if you wanted to settle in a country. Conversely, several asserted that their Polish acquaintances had ceased to be mobile and returned permanently to Poland because of the supreme importance they ascribed to family ties.

Regarding the wider question of how Poles' own migration experience affects the experiences of migrants coming from other countries to Poland: many of the interviewees' observations were quite detached and neutral in tone, so it would not be appropriate to assume the existence of empathy. Comments on the economic drivers of migration as a fact of life were based on a pragmatic, non-judgmental attitude towards labour migration. However, Poles can understand the transnational experiences of Ukrainian migrants: they know what it means to live straddling two countries. In this regard, some Poles (depending on their particular identities and past experiences) do demonstrate empathy. In particular, empathy can characterise people whose lives are affected by the migration of close family members. On the other hand, it seems that some Polish returnees, for whom their own migration was an episode now firmly in the past, overgeneralised on the basis of their previously intensely transnational lives, combined with limited integration abroad. They did so in ways which could assume too much similarity between themselves and their Ukrainian acquaintances: for example, tactlessly expressing the conviction that 'there's no place like home' or assuming that Ukrainians did not speak Polish. Some Polish return migrants in my sample demonstrated empathy when they reported feeling themselves to be the object of 'othering' abroad; sometimes they seemed able to imagine that Ukrainians might feel similarly in Poland. Even if many Polish interviewees had not personally experienced discrimination, a feeling of being conspicuous and an alertness to the possibility of encountering micro-aggression were viewed as common migrant experiences.

Notes

1. My non-Polish or Ukrainian interviewees were Armenian, Australian, Bangladeshi, Belarusian, Italian, Kazakh, Nigerian, Russian, Taiwanese, Turkish and Uruguayan.
2. Recently refined and extended by Ndofor-Tah *et al*. (2019).
3. For the sake of simplicity, this article has not considered Bourdieu's (1986) distinction between different types of capital. This is another way of looking at intersectionality adopted by a number of migration scholars.

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ORCID ID

Anne White https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4431-6707

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