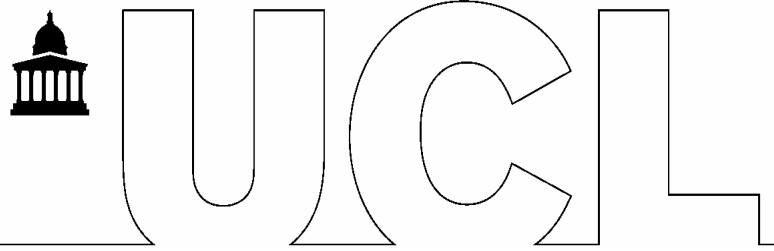


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**Construction of Home**  
**by Polish and Lithuanian Migrants in the UK**

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# **CONSTRUCTION OF HOME**

## **BY POLISH AND LITHUANIAN MIGRANTS IN THE UK**

### **ABSTRACT**

Researchers across the social sciences and humanities have sought to understand the nature of people's affiliation with a particular place, to understand the emotional and symbolic ties that bind people to a place and make them feel at home. The concept of home becomes especially complex when analysed in the light of migration. In this context Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) invent a pair of concepts: 'homing of diaspora' and 'diasporising of home'. These two phrases express the essence of diasporic existence: on one hand, 'home' and especially nostalgia for home left behind is infused into the very notion of diaspora; on the other hand, diasporas take their 'home' with them when they travel and reconstruct 'home' in the new environment. This article analyses how these processes of home creation take place among the new Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK, based on interviews conducted with migrant workers for the research project 'Changing Status, Changing Lives?' carried out by the University of Oxford.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Some critics argue that only through displacement one comes to feel a real sense of belonging. As Kateb puts it, in order to realize where your 'home' is it is necessary to become to some degree estranged and alienated from it (in Rapport and Dawson 1998, 9). In the context of migration the word 'home' is often used to describe migrants' society of origin, even in those cases when they clearly have made a home in their country of settlement. Mobile people develop an attachment to a specific place which they call home and which provides them with identity (Olwig 1997, 35). In this way, despite their deterritorialization through migration, migrants still have a place where they 'touch down' (Olwig 1997, 23).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Researchers across the social sciences and humanities have sought to understand the nature of people's affiliation with a particular place, to understand the emotional and symbolic ties that bind people to a place and make them feel at home (Proshansky et al. 1983; Rapoport 1982; Shumaker & Taylor 1983). In his research on community and neighbourhood attachment Sampson (1988) indicates that attachment to a particular place (home) tends to increase with age, irrespective of length of residence. Other researchers (Guest & Lee 1983; Hunter 1974; Goudy 1982; Hummon 1992) show that place

attachment becomes stronger with time of residence in a particular place. This is so because we are what Terkenli calls 'creatures of habit who [with time] appropriate place and context as home' (Terkenli 1995, 325).

The concept of home is especially complex in the context of migration. Migration involves crossing many boundaries: between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known and the unknown, the homeland and 'the away-from-home land' (Westin in Runblom 2000, 38). In result, as Cohen notes, it is possible to feel at home in one place but simultaneously experience social exclusion (Cohen 1997). This phenomenon is characteristic of migrants and diasporas whose identity is based on attachment to more than one place. In this context Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) invent a pair of concepts: 'homing of diaspora' and 'diasporising of home'. These two short phrases express the essence of diasporic existence: on one hand, 'home' and especially nostalgia for home left behind is infused into the very notion of diaspora; on the other hand, diasporas take their 'home' with them when they travel and reconstruct 'home' in the new environment. The following article is intended to analyse how these processes take place among the new Polish and Lithuanian migrant communities in the UK.

Before I pass onto the empirical analysis I would like to briefly introduce several key concepts in the discussion on home in migration. I will divide these concepts into two groups according to whether they belong to public or private dimension of home. Although there is no doubt that home can be both public and private, this division, as Eric Hobsbawm (1991) notes, inevitably contributes to ambiguity or even contradiction within the same concept of home. Home is primarily private, but in a wider sense, home is primarily public, a collective definition, and as such a social construction. Public interpretation of home discussed here includes associations with social status and the ways of acquiring it, as for example through acquiring education or buying property. Private interpretation of home includes the notions of rootedness and relatedness.

First of all, migrants may claim status as individuals and as members of families, communities and other collectivities (Turner in Goldring 1998, 172). Thus one's status may depend on personal accomplishments, education, occupation, or wealth; family reputation, connections and resources; and the status groups of which one is a member. Definitions of social status vary from one country to another and thus migrants can experience social mobility when moving from their country of origin to the destination country due to different elements according to which social status is measured in these countries. Sometimes it is enough to be rich to enjoy high social status, in other instances it is

necessary to be educated. Studies show that in a society where education is the accepted ladder for social mobility, one might expect that amount and kind of education would be positively related to territorial movement (Day & Landis 1945, 200). For instance, poorly educated youth must often remain at home because of lack of funds or lack of knowledge of opportunities elsewhere (Day & Landis 1945, 207). Highly-educated people, on the other hand, have access to more information about potential destinations and more resources to carry out a move and are better positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities in the receiving country (stronger pull factors). Many professionals go to richer countries after completing their studies at home, but others who complete their studies abroad often fail to go back to their country of origin. It is estimated that more than 70 % foreign-born PhDs remain in the US and take the citizenship (Stalker 2000, 109). Education becomes migrants' window to high status occupation which in turn contributes to successful creation of home in the immigration country.

In other circumstances, migrants' status may depend on acquiring various goods, building a home, investing in property etc. For example, owning a house is regarded as the main element of the American dream, a reward, even a right possessed by those who follow the economic rules (Blum & Kingston 1984, 159). Homeownership in turn is related to factors such as economic and life cycle status, a length of community residence that in turn may be associated with social attachments (Blum & Kingston 1984, 162). Similarly, homeownership is a foundation for future financial asset building and wealth accumulation (Ethnic, 2). Increased ownership in communities is found to encourage greater resident participation and to enhance neighbourhood stability. Like investment in the host country's language and in the host country's specific skills, a residential investment by an immigrant family, shows their commitment to a particular community and is a sign of the beginning of their integration into the host culture and society (Ethnic, 2). Acquiring property in the country of origin, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a sign of creating a new myth of return.

The decision to invest in property raises several important issues. First of all, one has to decide which area of the city one wants or can afford to have a house in. In cities like London, certain national groups of immigrants tend to occupy certain parts of the city, which may determine their position within the host society. Therefore one has to make up their minds whether a house in the immigrant area is a good investment. On the other hand, spending practices offer migrants the possibility of social mobility within their local (national) community. If one lives among co-nationals,

the news about one's standards of living is more likely to reach the homeland, which may also result in the migrants' upward mobility in their home communities.

However, a sense of home does not just depend on socio-economic well-being associated with social status. As Nikos Papastergiadis puts it, 'The ideal home is not just a house which offers shelter... Apart from this physical protection and market value, a home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded' (in Al-Ali & Koser 2002, 7). Home also includes attachment to transportable cultural and personal values and ideas. According to many scientists and writers, one's home is where one in the world 'most truly belongs', that is where a person is rooted (Matthews 2002, Gordon, 192). Rootedness describes a state of mind or being in which a person's whole life and pursuits are centred around a broadly defined home. The idea of rootedness is important in understanding how home contexts expand spatially as a person's physical distance from home increases. People who are rooted in space, society and time may find their home in their immediate working and living environment because they have no knowledge of 'nonhome' (Terkenli 1995, 329). This form of rootedness is defined by Yi-Fu (1980) as long habitation in one place and as 'a state of being made possible by an incuriosity toward the world at large and an intensivity toward the flow of time' (Yi-Fu 1980, 4). However, migration offers a different understanding of rootedness. To illustrate this, Clifford (1992,1997), Gilroy (1993) or Hall (1996) use homophone roots/routes to describe 2 different negotiations of cultural identity. While, roots refer to visions of common origin, homogeneous tradition and bounded culture, routes imply forms of diffusion, intercultural movement and migration. Both concepts are related, for, according to Hall, stories on fixed origins co-exist with stories of discontinuity, and both can be related to the impact of globalization (in Al-Ali & Koser 2002, 25).

Migrants' rootedness in a particular place is often the result of presence of their family there. The word family in old Chinese means 'people in house' and stress the connection between home and family (Terkenli 1995, 326). The first home is the mother, later a city or a neighbourhood become home for people living in them. While house contains the meaning of a residential landscape (Rapoport 1982), home is related to feelings, and types of relationship (Sopher 1979), relaxation, comfort, familiarity (Rybczynski 1988) (Terkenli 1995, 327). In the case of migrants, even friends or people they live with can become their family and home. Although separated from homelands by vast geographical distances, nowadays migrants increasingly find themselves able to cross borders thanks to modern technologies of transport and communication. These technologies help to maintain

relationship with their country of origin and their roots. According to Simone Weil, as more and more people identify themselves according to origins, as if in an attempt at ‘deterritorialization’, their return home may be interpreted as some form of re-territorialization: a bond between people and territory (in Runblom 2000, 96).

Nevertheless, with time ties with the immigration country become stronger and ties with the country of origin begin to weaken. A successful creation of home in the new environment reduces migrants’ nostalgia for home as well as their chances to return. It is interesting to note that the English word ‘nostalgia’ is rooted in the ancient Greek word ‘nostos’ meaning ‘return home’ (Terkenli 1995, 328). Unfortunately, one can only return to the spatial location of home, not to its temporal location. Therefore home in the minds of migrants is often something that no longer relates to space and time, but to their origins which become the basis of their identity. In the world of intermixing of cultures, traditions, beliefs, philosophies, religions, styles and people, our origins (or roots) act as a saving mechanism. In order to secure our unique identity, we go back to our origins. As Caren Kaplan (1996), a feminist scholar, puts it, our origins cling to us and make our identities, even when our place of origin is no more there. Therefore place and space are important here, just like myths, even though we realize that myths are myths.

## **MAIN QUESTIONS**

In this paper I address the relationship between migration and home. In doing so I focus on two main questions ‘What does home mean to Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK?’ and ‘What makes them feel at home at one place and not another?’ The places in question here are Poland, Lithuania and the UK. In analyzing what meanings are attached to the concept of home by these migrants, I argue that their construction of home depends on an interplay of a number of personal, economic, political and cultural factors.

## **DATA**

The data for this paper come from the research project ‘Changing Status, Changing Lives? The Socio-Economic Impact of EU Accession on Low Wage Migrant Labour in the UK’ carried out by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. This paper is based on in-depth (semi-structured) interviews conducted between April 2004 and January 2005 with 26 Polish migrants and 20 Lithuanian migrants in the UK working in 4 sectors: construction, hospitality, agriculture and au-pairs (see Table 1 below).

*Table 1: Respondents by sector of occupation*

	Polish	Lithuanian
construction	8	7
hospitality	8	3
agriculture	7	6
Au-pairs	3	4

*Table 2. Respondents by age*

	Polish	Lithuanian
Aged 18-29	20	16
Aged 30-42	6	4
Total:	26	20

*Table 3: Respondents by gender*

	Polish	Lithuanian
Men	17	11
Women	9	9

The age of the respondents is between from 18 to 42 (see Table 2 above) . The maximum length of stay in the UK is 6 years. The analysis focuses on the migrants' responses to the question 'Do you feel at home in the UK?' To support my argument I also included other questions such as 'Why did you come to the UK?' or 'Do you plan to stay in the UK?' In order to explore why notions of home vary, I considered migrants' characteristics (time spent in the UK, with/out partners, education, work at home and in the UK); migrants' age, and their reasons for leaving the home country. In addition, I let myself include my own insights about Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK, based on the fact that I am one of them, being born in Poland, educated in Lithuania, and currently residing in the UK.

## FINDINGS

### SOCIAL STATUS

One of the main characteristics of migrants that I wanted to look at with regard to the main question of this article was the variations in social status caused by migration. In an open-society vertical mobility, that is change in status, is related to spatial movement. In most cases, when migrants leave their countries of origin and start work in another country, they experience a decline in their social status. For example, if they enjoyed a relatively high social status being highly skilled workers in their home country, having come to the UK they very often take on jobs in hospitality, construction or au-pair sectors. My expectation here was that the decline in status would result in negative feelings towards the country of residence, while similar or higher status would help the migrants create a new home abroad.

In fact, all the sectors considered in the interviews represented lower status. These were jobs in agriculture, hospitality, construction and au-pair sector. An initial expectation here would be that migrants who feel a rapid change in status should be those who prior to coming here worked in high positions and/or were university graduates. One reason for migrating for both Poles and Lithuanians younger than 30 was that they had just finished studies and were not sure what they had to do with themselves next. Thus they decided to go abroad. Some of the respondents had started university and then took a gap year to go abroad and earn money in order to be able to pay their fees. Most of these students studied agriculture and came to the UK farms via student exchange programmes. They did not feel any major change in their status because first of all they had not worked in their countries of origin at all and their stay in the UK was very much temporary and goal oriented, the goal being earning money for further studies. Being university graduates, on the other hand, migrants were conscious of the fact that their status in the UK was much lower than it should be considering their education. To illustrate this I will cite one 30-year-old Polish woman, a university graduate who worked in the UK as a waitress:

A: ...In Poland I never did this kind of work. Because in Poland I would be an intellectual worker and here I'm a physical worker in some sense. So first of all I had to change my attitude. Second, when working I noticed that I count more on experience than on knowledge. Once I had a greater respect for knowledge and was a more intellectual person. It's a result of the hours I work of course and lack of time for developing my intellectual skills let's say... (iw45pol01)



It is interesting to note that this young woman admitted that she had to change in order to adapt to life in the UK. She had to change her attitude to herself and to the job that she was doing because in Poland she considered herself an intellectual and so could not imagine herself working in a restaurant. In order to come to terms with these status discrepancies she had to distance herself from the kind of person she was in Poland and take on a new role of a waitress in London. Blumer (1969), a sociologist researching the area of social roles, views human society as consisting of acting units and acting people. According to him, all activity in society springs from such acting units which are to be viewed as taking on the role of others, using interpretation, and considering meaning in action (Blumer 1969, 186-7). Similarly, migrants take on new roles when they arrive in the destination country and distance themselves from their pre-migratory 'self'.

Very often migrants are aware of the negative effect of migration on their status but they still choose to migrate to a country where they would initially work in low-waged jobs but where they believe they will eventually increase their status (Stalker 2000, 24-25). With education or experience they hope to get better-paid jobs and be able to afford high-standard lives as do local people. This was the case with one 27-year-old Polish male construction worker who graduated from the university in Poland with a diploma in economics and came here:

A: First I came here as a student together with my friend. I noticed then that I can earn money here quite easily and much better money than in Poland. So I went back to Poland to finish my studies and came to the UK again. I chose UK because I knew English and because it was easy to get legalized here, to start a business. I didn't want to work illegally. Before that I worked in Norway and in France, so I thought that things would be similar here in the UK. But it's actually better here than anywhere else, in terms of money. (iw18)

In the beginning this young man worked in London as a construction worker but he had a bigger plan which kept him going. As soon as he had enough capital he set up his own construction company and invited his friends from Poland to come and work for him in London. So they did and this is how the man turned from an average labourer to an employer. He did not do any more physical work but did organizational job with clients. His business was growing and expanding and soon he could afford his own house. In the future as he said he would move into property business: he would buy, renovate and sell houses. This would prove the theory that highly-educated people have access to more information about potential destinations and are better positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities in the receiving country (stronger pull factors) (Day & Landis 1945, 207). And so this Polish migrant did

not have the reason not to feel at home in the UK because he felt that his social status was equal to that of the local British people.

In this context it is useful to refer to the theory of relative deprivation by W. G. Runciman (1966). Relative deprivation is a sense of inequality resulting from a comparison with some reference group. The choice of this group is crucial. This theory would explain why the deprived or oppressed often accept their conditions, for if their reference groups are equally oppressed and poor, there is little sense of deprivation. Similarly, it is important whether migrants compare themselves against their co-nationals living in the immigration country, their co-nationals in the home country or the host society. Most often migrants would like to live in the way that members of the host society do and therefore they feel deprived living in a rented accommodation and doing low-paid jobs. Thus migrants from new accession countries can feel deprived if they compare themselves against members of the English society. On the other hand, they can view themselves as being quite well off if, for example, their comparison group consists of migrants from beyond the EU or from African countries. Or they may live in the community where the standards of living are similar to all members which makes them accept their position. If their reference group is the community in the home country, they may like showing their superiority to them by doing things that non-migrants cannot afford, that is demonstrating their buying practices.

Another interesting finding is that the way people feel about their social status (and so about the place) is related to their expectations. Among the Lithuanian migrants, there were 5 teachers who came to the UK as au-pairs. They liked living in London, even though their status here clearly decreased. But it must be added that au-pairs like agricultural workers knew about the jobs that they were going to do in the UK before coming here. Thus they did not have higher expectations than those stated in their contracts. Researchers of migration often use value –expectancy framework to analyse motives for migration (De Jong & Fawcett 1981). According to Pedraza, men are usually motivated by employment and expected financial profit, while women move to create or to reunite with their families (Pedraza 1991). If their expectations are met, they feel good about the immigration country.

The earlier mentioned Lithuanian au-pairs felt at home in the UK because their expectations in relation to migration were related to learning English, traveling and getting experience. And they did not relate their journey to the UK to their status in any way. Even after 1 May 2004 when they were

able to leave the host families and were free to find another job, some of them didn't do this, as for example this 27-year-old Lithuanian female au-pair:

A: I came as an au pair and my plan was not to make any changes until this autumn. I knew what I came for, what I am doing, and I didn't think of any changes. I have several friends with whom I came here (they are also au pairs). They started looking for new jobs after 1 May and they had quite a lot of anxiety. Whereas I didn't have any plans to change my occupation, so I lived without major disturbances. (iw06lit05)

Expectations about the life that one is going to find in the destinations country are not always grounded and may be even completely different from the actual living conditions elsewhere. This may cause a great number of people with valuable human capital to make the journey. For example, among the Lithuanian migrants there was a former web designer who came to the UK to work as a waitress because she was bored with routine in Lithuania. But soon after coming here she noticed that everything was not the way she had expected and so she started feeling homesick. She left the UK never to come back, as she said, because in Lithuania she was a different person: she had her circle of friends, she had her boyfriend and a well-established professional life. In the UK she was deprived of all of these things. She expected life to be easier in the UK from what she had heard from her friends and aunt, but found that in order to earn money here one has to sacrifice a lot, including human relations and dignity. This was not the life that she would choose to live.

Migrants' expectations are important because they determine the way that they view their position in society. For example one Lithuanian migrant was a student in his country but took a gap year to come to the UK and earn money for further studies. He expected to accomplish his mission during 6 months and go back to Lithuania. Unfortunately, he had no luck with job searching in London and did not manage to earn what he planned because he had only temporary jobs which lasted for maximum 7 days and for many days he did not have any job at all. He also had to stay in the UK much longer than he expected and go back to Lithuania with less money than he initially planned. Thus it is not surprising that his feelings about the UK were negative. In terms of status, having no job is definitely much worse in some cases than having a low-paid low-skilled job.

But in the same way migration can also be related to increasing one's social status if a person was unemployed in his country of origin and managed to find a job and a source of income in the immigration country. Among the respondents there were quite a few people who either lost their job in Poland or Lithuania or whose business collapsed and so they felt a great pressure of finding another source of income, especially if they had dependents. For example, there was one Lithuanian man who

could not find a job in Lithuania among other things because he did not have any training, but after coming to the UK he became a construction worker. In this way he increased his status twice: not only did he get a job but he also got a profession.

In brief, most migrants who declared feeling at home in the UK were construction workers. Most of them had similar jobs in their own country but worked for little money. Here, although they still worked hard, they earned decent amount of money, which made them feel good about the place, and increased their status because they could afford more. This is true regardless of how much time they spent in the UK: wealth helped them to reach social standards. Another group of migrants who felt good in the immigration country were au-pairs. As they admitted, they came to the UK because they were bored with what they had back home and looked for an interesting way to spend a couple of years of their lives. They might have had a poorly paid job or a well paid job but decided to leave everything and try something new. In addition to allowing them to escape routine, travelling also provided them with a possibility to learn English and get experience which, as some of them noted, could open them new doors to a better career prospects in their home country. It is necessary to add that these women were younger than 30 years old. This shows the capacity of young people to take sudden decisions not worrying about risk if the life that they lead at home does not satisfy their aspirations.

### **HOMEOWNERSHIP**

In previous section I have discussed status in relation to education and occupation. But status (and so attachment to a place) may also depend on acquiring certain material things, like for example buying a house. The property issue was brought forward by male migrants from both Poland and Lithuania. The respondents confessed that they were prevented from feeling at home in the UK by enormously high prices of houses. They doubted if they would ever be able to afford their own house. Rented accommodation, on the other hand, reminded them that they were here only temporarily. This point of view was made clear by one 26-year-old Polish woman working in hospitality:

**Q: Do you feel at home in this country?**

A: No.

**Q: why?**

A: ... Even though I feel good here but I don't feel at home. This feeling is difficult to describe, a sense of feeling at home. Maybe if I lived in a smaller town... It's difficult to feel at home in

London. This place is different from all other places. There are many people, many cultures in here and they all intermingle. Maybe if I lived in the countryside, had my own tree, my own house, my own well, my own stone, maybe then I would feel at home there in some 6 months, but not here. Even more so because we live in rented accommodation, so we live temporarily, we don't get rooted. (iw35pol01)

Rented accommodation is seen here as disturbing the process of getting emotionally attached to the place of residence. Therefore migrants aim to buy their own flat or house whenever possible.

Some of them decide to buy property in their country of origin. Nowadays migrants often take mortgages in their countries of origin on the basis of declaring their income in the UK. This investment in their homeland provides migrants with a certain level of security in case their plans of establishing themselves in the immigration country go wrong and they will decide to go back. This would suggest that migrants who take mortgages in the home country plan to return one day. In any case buying property is a good way of investing in their own country, which demonstrates what Cohen calls 'a collective commitment to one's country of origin' (Cohen 1997, 106). Contribution to the maintenance and restoration as well as idealization of the real or imaginative ancestral home is one of the common features of diasporas (Cohen 1997, 106). Other migrants want to buy property in the immigration country if they can afford it. The drawback is that if one decides to buy his/her own accommodation here in the UK, one may come to feel under certain pressure to settle down here, and in most cases migrants have not made up their minds about this yet. As most of them said, if the economic situation in their homeland improved, they would pack up and go to live and work there. On the other hand, because buying a home requires a relationship with a bank, homeownership proves a certain level of adaptation of the family into the host country's financial system and so into the host country in general.

In brief, homeownership is, as the interviews suggest, a very important element of creating 'home'. It is interesting to note that property figured in the answers of male migrants. This would support Roger Andersson's theory that men and women have different references to homeland: men refer more to physical objects and women more to persons (a study from Northern Sweden by Roger Andersson in Runblom 2000,12).

## ROOTEDNESS

However, socio-economic well-being does not guarantee the feeling of being at home as home also has a symbolic meaning. It is also a private space related to cultural values and ideas. This was mentioned by one 30-year-old Polish waitress:

A: ...the language is a big barrier [to feeling at home in the UK] too because we will be foreigners till the end of our lives because we will never be able to get rid of our accent. Or our cultural awareness. Because we have different meanings, we celebrate different festivals. Of course we adapt in some way or another, that is we give up some of the customs. This is related for example to our work, when we have to work during Easter for example, and we are not able to celebrate our festivals...

**Q: Would you like to settle here?**

A: No

**Q: Why?**

A: Because I'm emotionally tied to my family and people who are in Poland. ...Because I simply have roots... (iw45pol01)

This woman makes it clear that it is her different cultural background and different native language that prevents her from feeling at home in the UK. All these values make her rooted in Poland. This and similar answers received from the respondents would contradict the idea often found in literature that migrants have no roots, they live between the country of origin which they have lost and the country of immigration into which they cannot completely integrate (Chambers 1994). My respondents had a strong sense of roots even though in some cases they admitted that they created a new home in the immigration country.

## FAMILY

The feeling of being rooted in one particular place is often the result of the presence of family there. As one 28-year-old Polish male construction worker explained:

**Q: Do you feel more or less "at home" in the UK?**

A: I will never feel here like at home. My home is my wife. (iw41pol)

Many male and female respondents expressed similar opinions that their home is wherever their family is, unlike those migrants who did not have any family left in their country of origin and so

were able to feel 'at home everywhere' as one male Lithuanian respondent noted. This brings up the issue of whether migrants' parents are still alive.

Thanks to modern technologies of transport and communication migrants are able to keep transnational ties with their family in the country of origin. The same means allow migrants to send remittances home and in this way demonstrate commitment to their family and home. Frequent remittances may indicate a close association and identification with the home community, as well as a higher probability of return (Papademetriou and DiMarzio 1986). It is interesting to note that a substantial proportion of those sending money claim to be sending it not for their family but for their own return home.

But remittances and other forms of transnational contacts often stop when migrants bring their families to the immigration country because then they stop orienting themselves towards the country of origin and start constructing a new home in the country of residence. Similarly, if single migrants come to the UK and meet their partners here, their determination to return home becomes weaker and they start planning their new home abroad. As one 20-year-old Polish female au-pair said:

**Q: Do you feel here like at home?**

A: I feel good here, I like the atmosphere here and general conditions, I have friends here, I have a close male friend and this probably also makes me want to be here, holds me here. (iw07pol05)

This and other examples show that migration often expands the concept of family to include significant others such as friends, partners and people one lives with, who, in the absence of one's real family members, have considerable influence upon an individual's life and well-being.

## NOSTALGIA

However, if family members (especially spouses and children) are left in the country of origin, longing for these people often results in unbearable homesickness which makes migrants go back. This feeling was mentioned by one 48-year-old Lithuanian male construction worker who explained his plans to return home:

**Q: Would you like to stay here permanently?**

A: No way. I feel homesick. I miss Lithuanian people. You cannot take your native people with you. Local people are different. Lithuanians still have spiritual values. While here people's key value seems to be money. (iw08lit)

Human spirituality according to this migrant worker could be found only in Lithuania because in the UK everybody was concerned only about material well-being. This example also shows that, according to Cox, it is not just place that makes ‘our’ country different from ‘theirs’; we tend to differentiate ourselves from others in the ways that are flattering to us (Cox 2002,174). Therefore we miss our people and our home which were so much familiar to us. As for example one 25-year-old Polish male construction worker, a former IT specialist remarked:

**Q: Do you feel at home in the UK?**

A: Never. I see all this through a completely different light you know. Sometimes there are moments in my life here that everything seems to be normal here, you know? That these streets are normal... but in reality I think I see everything here in a strange way. I don’t think about things around me – all of them look grey to me. I have fun here, have a good time but I can’t say that this is my playground. You know, in Poland in my own native town I know every pavement, every street. In general, the whole town, every centimeter of the town is close to me. And here? Here it’s simply ok: there are streets, zebras, pavements, some building, shop, but all these things are not dear to my heart. (iw44pol03)

This is the case of which Rapport and Dawson write that sometimes home can be recognized in an abstract ideal, a longing for a nostalgic past or a utopian future (Rapport and Dawson in Al-Ali & Koser 2002, 7 ). This Otherness experienced by migrants in the immigration country weakens the foundations of their identity and so they look for the ways to restore their true self. One of the ways to achieve this is to return to one’s origins and life in which one once participated.

It is also interesting to mention that nostalgia for home does not figure in the answers of members of national minorities. Among the Lithuanian respondents there were 2 representatives of the Russian national minority in Lithuania. Although one of them was 25, the other one 38 year-old man, both of them came here with the intention to stay here for good. Both of them were construction workers. The older 39-year-old migrant believed that ‘one’s fatherland is where one feels good’:

**Q: Do you feel more or less “at home” in the UK?**

A: I feel very well. The homeland is where you feel well. The world became so small that it doesn’t matter where you live. The national borders are losing their importance. I don’t know why Lithuanians like to complain – they come here, get good money but nevertheless criticize the country.

**Q: Would you like to stay here for good?**

A: Yes, we will try to get the citizenship. (iw58lit)

The younger Lithuanian Russian migrant also wanted to settle down in the UK. He left his studies in Lithuania in order to come here and was happy being able to lead a relatively comfortable life. His



only complaint was that he could not find work as a jeweller. But being optimistic, he hoped that with time this would change. It might be that in order to escape the role of a Russian in Lithuania members of the Russian minority group like the two men quoted above may decide to migrate to another, more diverse and 'tolerant' country, like the UK. Hence, it might be easier for these individuals to create a home in the multicultural society of London where they successfully blend with other ethnic groups and do not feel 'different' or 'estranged'.

### THE EU ACCESSION

Finally, I would like to comment on how the EU accession influenced public and private aspects of making home by Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK. The major change the EU accession brought into the lives of Polish and Lithuanian migrants was their possibility to move freely between the UK and their country of origin. Before May 2004 they were afraid to leave this country because there was always a probability of not being allowed to come back. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, 'if locked from outside, if getting out is a distant prospect or not a feasible prospect at all, the home turns into jail' (in Matthews 2002, 194). This limitation was experienced by many friends and relatives of the migrants and in order to avoid similar experience, many of the respondents stayed in the UK and did not cross the border until they became EU citizens. Once the border was opened, a considerable number of migrants went to visit their families and friends in their home countries in summer 2004. As one 25-year-old Polish waitress put it, only after 1 May 2004 she started to feel good in the UK and considered staying here because at that time it was already her own free choice:

**Q: Do you feel more or less "at home" in the UK?**

A: definitely, it is related to the fact that I don't feel anymore like I have to be here, but it is my choice. Before [the EU accession] I was afraid to leave the country in case they wouldn't let me back in. also I feel more confident at work, because I know that if I don't like something I can always change my job without any problems. Also I can visit Poland whenever I want to. (Olka)

This freedom of choice provided the woman with a psychological relief that let her see life in the UK from a new perspective. As Terkenli argues, when the world becomes increasingly interconnected and interdependent, concepts of home increasingly 'shed their spatial character to become contingent on flows of information, exchange of ideas, long-distance connections, and proliferation of lifestyles' (Terkenli 1995, 324).

It was not only long-distance travelling but also existence inside the UK that raised fear among the migrants before Poland and Lithuania entered the EU. The migrants admitted that even the view of

a policeman on a street petrified them because it reminded them of the danger of being deported, as one 39-year-old Polish male hospitality worker put it:

A: I feel much better now [after the EU accession]. Before, when we saw the police, it made us anxious, whereas now we feel confident. Having legal status made all the change. (02)

After 1 May this danger disappeared because Poles and Lithuanians were allowed to work in the UK without restrictions. They felt that they had the right to live and work here as EU citizens. As EU citizens they also increased their status in the UK and were provided with an opportunity to look for better jobs which could not be accessed by them previously. All of these factors had a positive effect on the migrants' lives in the UK. Even though they admitted that they were still seen here as cheap labour, they felt better living here after than before the accession. Finally, their dreams of getting a better job, of setting their own company or entering a university in the UK could become true. It is a fact that the EU accession increased the number of those wishing to go abroad. Many of the respondents admitted having helped or encouraged their friends and family to come to the UK. The question remains however how many of those who leave will ever go back to their countries of origin. Most of the respondents admitted that they would like to go back to their country of origin. Most of the migrants interviewed here claimed that they planned to return home eventually. The only worrying thing here is that they did not know when that would happen. A typical answer would be this given by 25-year-old Polish waitress:

**Q: Would you like to stay here permanently?**

A: No! I am planning to stay up until I save enough money to be able to go back (iw44pol01)

However, it has to be said that a declaration of not planning or wishing to stay and the actual view on the issue may not coincide. I am suspicious about the credibility of the responses because in my opinion the migrants would run a risk of presenting themselves as betraying their homeland if they declared their plans as not returning there. This, of course, they would like to avoid.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

I hope that this analysis of the meaning of home among Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK contributes to the general discussion on how a sense of home is constructed within the migration process. The insights provided by this analysis suggest a number of lessons for our understanding of the migrant home.

First of all, this study contributes to the literature that challenges the placelessness of modern migrants. The Polish and Lithuanian migrants whose responses were analysed here reported their affiliation with the home country or in a few cases with the host country. It is usually homeland which, in Westwood and Phizacklea's words, offers people 'a cartography of belonging' (Westwood and Phizacklea 2000, 29). Only a couple of the respondents reported not being able to feel home anywhere because of having no family left. This study thus confirms the existence of place identity.

Another myth that the presented findings undermine is that migrants do not plan to go back home. Most of the respondents admitted having plans to go back to their country of origin but were less specific about the date when this takes place. Some of them mentioned that this day will come when the financial situation of their country will improve, others explained that they will have some time off from routine and their usual responsibilities at home and will turn back.

At the same time, the research shows that the concept of home may have many different meanings. The literature in the field mainly mentions emotional aspects of home. This study points out that home has also a public dimension related to such important notions as social status and property. In the same way the research confirms that male and female perception of home differs: in most cases men associate home with public dimension, especially property, while women stress family and emotional attachment.

Education also matters when creating home. Highly educated people relate the feeling at home with a relevant social status which is reached by getting an appropriate job. Less educated people do not focus on status but on financial side of the movement. As long as they get decent money which provides for their family, most of them are content.

Material profit is confirmed as being important for older migrants who either have families to support or have some investment plans. Younger people often take decision to migrate out of curiosity to visit other countries, try different life styles and get experience which will be useful when they come back.

The group of migrants feeling most at home in the UK were construction workers who were among those earning best money. Another group of people who were happy with the life in the UK were au-pairs who came here to learn English and try life in another country.

At the same time, the findings show that time of residence in the country does not have a decisive influence upon one's feeling at home. Other factors such social status, family or living conditions matter more than years spent abroad. What does mean a lot in this case, however, is the fact of the EU accession which has helped the migrants to feel European and has given them the right to be in the UK as well as use all the advantages of life here that native residents do.

Despite these interesting insights, my data do not allow me to answer a number of interesting questions. First of all, I relied on only a few migrant characteristics to explore their affiliation with home, while there might be that construction of home depends also on other characteristics which were not identified here. Second, the sample is too small to make hypothesis and generalize about all Polish and Lithuanian migrants in general. Third, the sample included only people working in low-wage sectors, while it would be interesting to see whether businessmen, doctors and other professionals construct a sense of home in a similar way. And finally, my data does not allow comparisons between migrants and non-migrants with respect to their meaning of home.

This research also raises important questions for future research on the construction of home. Construction of home can be explored on different levels: from homes through neighbourhoods, communities, regions and countries. For example, it would be interesting to compare the process of constructing home in Eastern and Western Europe. I also believe that including a wider age range would be useful, since then one could compare how young and old generations of migrants differ in terms of place affiliation. Therefore it would be particularly important to have systematic studies that assess patterns of home construction across the full life course of the migrants.

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