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Transnational mobility and family planning  
decisions. A case study of skilled Polish  
migrant women



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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the tension between the transnational mobility of skilled women migrants and their rootedness in place when it comes to childrearing. On the basis of my research on skilled Polish migrants in the United Kingdom, I investigate if and how family planning decisions influence their international migration trajectories. The paper suggests ways in which to improve existing migration and labor market policies in order to encourage migrant women's labor market participation. It also fills in the gap in migration literature concerning the interaction between the productive and reproductive spheres.

My findings suggest that the comparative advantages and disadvantages of having children in Poland versus in the UK are important factors influencing the mobility of skilled migrant women.. A primary consideration pulling these women back to Poland is the availability of childcare help from the family. The UK, on the other hand, is an attractive location because of the child-friendly provisions offered by most employers. Emotional attachment to home and family tends to tip the scales towards returning to Poland. The reproductive choices made by skilled migrant women, frequently on the basis of emotional and not 'rational' calculations, are directly linked to the free movement of people in the European Union Market to.

## Author

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**Jola** says that her decision to migrate was spontaneous. In 2005 she and her husband bought two flight tickets and moved to the UK. She explains that the timing of their departure was important: “It was the moment when you don’t yet have children, don’t have an apartment, don’t have a mortgage, so this is the moment when you can leave and do something”. Jola studied marketing in Poland and was determined to find a job in her profession. She managed, and now works as an executive marketing coordinator in a publishing company. She is planning to return to Poland within a year or two because she misses her family and the feeling of stability. She and her husband are planning to have a baby, and she believes that her mother’s help would be essential.

**Magda** migrated for the sake of her husband’s job in 2006. In Poland she worked for three years in marketing, and she felt that her company would ‘squeeze her like a lemon’. She says she believed that she had to work those three years, “to sacrifice”, as she put it, in order to find a better job afterwards. As it happened, she found a good job immediately after moving to London. She became a planner for a big corporation. She appreciates her employer because he provides excellent benefits for mothers. Magda is worried, however, that pregnancy and child-rearing will be too difficult for her in London. She wants to have the support of her mother or her mother-in-law. She is thinking about bringing her parents to London, or moving back to Warsaw.

**Alicja** decided to go to London to learn English. She left in 2003 on an au-pair visa. In Poland she had graduated from University with a degree in banking and finance, and had a well-paid job at a bank and could afford an apartment. She had to overcome significant family resistance towards her migration as an unskilled au-pair. Once in London, she completed a course in general English and in business English. She found a job at a bank and was quickly promoted from an entry-level administrative position to Clients’ Officer in the Compliance Department. Her British employer is paying for her further education in the compliance field. Alicja is thinking about going back home in two years. She says she is thinking of having children, which is more important for her than her career. She does not want to raise the children in London, which she considers a ‘spoilt city’.

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These three women made a brave decision to break with their lives in Poland and to start again in a new country. They were determined to find employment commensurate of their education, and they succeeded. They all have a fulfilling professional life in London. Yet their stories reveal that, while they are satisfied with their careers, they believe that having a baby and a stable family life requires, at least temporarily, a return to Poland. The women described in this paper graduated in Poland, they sometimes worked there for a few years, and subsequently went to the UK to acquire skills in a foreign context. After having spent a few years abroad, their plan is to go

back to Poland to raise their children in a family-oriented environment with the help of their parents. Their decision to return is, however, not necessarily permanent. The women do not exclude the possibility of migrating to the UK again, or of moving elsewhere in the world.

The aim of this paper is to explore the link between the transnational mobility of skilled women migrants and their childrearing plans. The women in these vignettes are representatives of a successful global elite. They frequently travel between Poland and the UK and take advantages of market opportunities in both countries. One woman that I spoke to had a permanent managerial job in London, and flew to Poland every second weekend to complete her studies there. Yet, mobility across national borders becomes difficult when one has to take care of a baby. According to these women, childrearing requires the stable, secure environment that most of them expect only to find in Poland. Most of them are willing to return to Poland for a couple of years of childrearing, and then either stay there, return to England, or migrate elsewhere. This trend is reflective of wider tendencies in Polish migration, i.e. the readiness to cross borders frequently and maintain transnational lives (Burrell 2008, White and Ryan 2008, Ryan, Sales and Rilki 2009). From the economic perspective, this period of childrearing in Poland could be critical for Polish authorities' efforts to encourage these female migrants to stay in Poland. If the Polish labor market presented them with good employment opportunities and benefits, the women would be more likely to settle there. Unfortunately, as I will show below, the British labor market is still more attractive than the one in Poland.

This paper investigates if and how family planning decisions are linked with economic considerations in influencing the international migration trajectories of skilled women. This paper is directly addressing two areas that would benefit from more academic inquiry. First, this study is looking into migrants' family-planning strategies, as opposed to investigating families where children are already present. The migration literature has recognized that the presence of children in the household influences who migrates, where to, and for how long. For example, in 'astronaut families' (Zhou 1998, Waters 2002, Ho 2002, Chiang 2008), the mothers accompany their children who pursue education abroad while the fathers remain in the countries of origin to keep their jobs there. Other accounts speak about "transnational motherhood" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) or "global chains of care" (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003), where migrant mothers, drawn to feminized jobs abroad, leave their children behind in the care of relatives. In the context of Polish migration, White (2009) analyzed the migration of entire families from small towns in



Poland. Yet there are few accounts of the complex interactions between the plans for migration and those for having children, although this issue has become increasingly important in the European context. The emigration of young couples causes concern among officials in many countries struggling with population decline. France, Sweden and Poland, among others, have adopted pro-natalist policies, intended to encourage younger couples to have more children (Grant et al 2010). This study demonstrates how migration and family planning decisions are intertwined, and can serve to improve and streamline existing policies to effectively encourage young people to stay in a country and establish a family there.

Second, this study illustrates the transformative and politically relevant role of emotion in everyday life. The results show that many skilled migrant women choose to return to Poland to give birth although provisions for working mothers are significantly worse there than in the UK. They explain their decisions in terms of their emotional ties to their families and their homeland. In literature on geographies of emotion and affect a conflict has emerged between the perception of emotion as intensely personal and subjective (and thus less relevant), and the need to for politically engaged research (Anderson and Smith 2001, Thrift 2004, McCormick 2007). The disjunction, as many have argued, is based on an artificial classification of emotion as “private” (Ettinger 2004, Thien 2005, Tolia-Kelly 2006, Sharp 2008). Emotions have enormous power to transform social and political structures. For example Bosco (2007) shows that activism in Argentina is a form of emotional labor that helps build networks of resistance to political dominance. This study joins this stream of research in emphasizing the role of emotion in directing international migration.

A focus on skilled migrant woman is important because their numbers are on the rise (Ouaked 2002). In particular, the free movement of labor within the European Union has resulted in more and more women crossing international borders in search of professional jobs. Numerous authors have bemoaned the lack of academic research on skilled women and the reproductive sphere of life (Willis et al 2002, Willis & Yeoh 2000, 2002, Kofman 2000, Raghuram 2004, Kofman and Raghuram 2006). While a lot of literature has since been produced on gender and skilled migration (Hardill 2004, Iredale 2004, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Riano & Baghdadi 2007, Liversage 2009, Meares 2010), the inquiry into the interplay between childrearing and the career moves of skilled migrant mothers is not yet complete.

## Production, Reproduction and Skilled Migrant Women

The masculine conceptualization of the transnational migrant has been criticized frequently (Pratt and Yeoh 2003). Stereotypes of the hyper-mobile adventurer, the elite entrepreneur or the transnational citizen project an idealization of masculinity. In contrast, migrant women are frequently portrayed as victims of transnationalism: domestic workers, sex workers and underpaid healthcare workers who are forced by economic conditions to seek employment abroad, embodying the triumph of global capitalist forces over local attachments. Skilled migrant women, employed in international companies and reaping the benefits of a free market economy, are often omitted from the discourse (Raghuram 2000, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Nagar 2002, Kofman 2000).

Professional migrant women have considerably greater freedom of movement, more economic power, education and experience than their unskilled counterparts. These resources allow them to use transnational mobility to their advantage. Yet their lives are also grounded in the realities of living abroad, gendered workplaces, family obligations and childbearing expectations. Studies on professional migration emphasize the productive, rather than reproductive sphere (Willis et al 2002, Willis and Yeoh 2005, Kofman and Raghuram 2006). The social and family lives of migrant professionals have been little studied until recently (but see Kennedy 2004, Ley 2004, Favell 2008 ). The lack of research on the reproductive sphere obscures our understanding of migration theory, the free market economy of Europe, and population dynamics in both sending and receiving countries. The continuous movement of skilled migrant families across national borders is enabled by the willingness of women to temporarily withdraw from the paid labor market and raise a family. Failing to include women's involvement in the reproductive sphere in the analysis leads to a partial understanding of the European 'open market' economy and large scale demographic changes.

European countries are struggling to maintain positive or steady-state population growth. For many young families, the decision of whether and when to have children is influenced by their international mobility. The links between migration and family planning have been explored in the research on population movement within countries (Sandell 1977, Mincer 1978, Cadwallader 1992). More research is needed on how the economic aspects of international migration are linked to childrearing plans. My research indicates that, despite career opportunities available in the UK, most Polish families tend to return to Poland to have children. Some of them, how-

ever, declare a willingness to move to a third country, like Spain, France or Germany, where the quality of life is better than it is in Poland or the UK. They prefer to settle and raise a family in a place with nicer weather and good local amenities. This trend indicates that the population of the new accession states (A8) may join their western counterparts in choosing to migrate for reasons of comfort and climate, rather than for purely economic reasons.

What makes the European Union example interesting is the promise of the freedom of movement. EU citizens can choose to move in search of better “climate and comfort” because they do not face legal restrictions with regard to their movement. A large part of the literature on family migration focuses on the role of state regulations and interventions. For example Ho (2009) shows how the Singaporean state encourages the maintenance of migrant families and family ties. Migrants from Singapore are expected to ensure that their children become citizens since dual citizenship is not accepted by the state. Host countries also affect the forms of transnational families. For example, restrictions placed on Filipina domestic workers in Canada prevent them from bringing in dependent children until they themselves have obtained Canadian citizenship (Pratt 2004). In both examples, the state is able to grant or withdraw privileges that influence the residence of the family. In the EU example, the state has to rely on a system of incentives to influence human mobility.

In the following sections, I will demonstrate how skilled Polish migrant women think about having children and how their plans and expectations are linked to their liminal position between Poland and Great Britain. I will also examine the role of local incentives to encourage/discourage mobility.

## Methods

This research was conducted in the United Kingdom and in Poland in 2007. It is based on 60 semi-structured interviews with migrants and returnees to Poland. For the purpose of this article, only interviews with skilled migrant women are analyzed (30 interviews). The respondents were approached through the use of the snowball method, as well as through the internet network of Polish professionals abroad. Contacts were first obtained through my participation in Polish immigrant community events in London. This participant observation allowed me to verify that the respondents were indeed the appropriate target population for the interviews,

i.e. skilled young professionals. Most of the interviews in Poland were conducted by my research assistant and utilized her local knowledge and contacts. This qualitative study is not intended to represent general trends in Polish migration to the UK. Rather, it illustrates the importance of particular motivations for migration, which are related to life-course events.

## Findings: Migration and Childrearing Plans

The interviews conducted confirm the long-established fact that migration decisions are often influenced by life-course stage and personal events. Factors such as the age of household members, migrants' marital status, the birth of children, entry into the labor force, and retirement, etc. determine people's motivations to move, domestically and internationally. In their study of domestic migration in the US, Chen and Rosenthal (2008) show that young migrants are motivated by economic opportunities, while older migrants tend to look at the place-specific amenities of particular places (see also Clark and Onaka 1983, Clark et al 1994). On the international level, Massey (1987) shows that Mexican households with a large number of dependents, i.e. relatively young households, are likely to send a male worker to the United States. Ley and Kobayashi (2005) argue that the circular movement of migrants between Hong-Kong and Canada is determined by the age of the children in the family and by the retirement of migrants.

These studies primarily rely on data established *post facto*, i.e. on migrants' accounts of their move after it has taken place. In this study, I focus on the planning of migratory moves and use qualitative material to highlight the factors relevant to the planning process. In particular, I show how childrearing plans affect migrants' decisions to leave Poland and to return.

The issue of having vs. not having children first arose when women considered moving out of Poland. For many of them, the decision to migrate stemmed from the desire to defy rigid social norms that require women to have children soon after marriage. One of my respondents, Zofia, explained how she decided to leave Poland:

So I was with my ex boyfriend, we graduated at the same time and we decided to come for, let's say, two years to earn money for an apartment and then come back to Poland. And other than that, I simply wanted to go, because I was driven. I did not want to immediately go to work in an office, and talk to these 50 years old ladies about "when are you getting married?," "when are you having children?" (A9)

Zofia was convinced that staying in Poland would result in her having a boring office job, and a boring, settled existence. She told me she did not want stability at that point in her life; she was 23 when she decided to migrate. She was convinced that if she stayed in Poland, she would get a dead-end job and her personal development would be stalled. She was also obviously afraid to be pressured into establishing a family and having children. At the time of the interview she was working in a bank in Manchester and trying to get into a university for a two-year graduate degree. She was very happy with her career.

Another woman, Magda, complained about her family pressuring her to have children:

“It’s terrible. We are now seven years after our wedding. I’m 27 years old. The Polish standard (for having children) is nine months after the wedding. Before we left there was this pressure from grandmothers and mothers. I believe that you either decide to have a baby very early, in order to have time for yourself later, or the other way round. I feel I still have at least ten years to go”. (MM8)

Both Magda and her husband had lived in London for five years and had established successful careers there. They bought a nice apartment, spent vacations in exotic places, and dreamed about a trip around the world. Moving out of Poland allowed Magda to escape her family’s expectations about childrearing and follow her professional development path.

The migration literature abounds in examples of women escaping conservative social norms. For example, in their book on migration from the Dominican Republic, Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) show that for many women migration is a means of escape from the economic dominance of their husbands. In most cases, such migration decisions are interpreted as the victory of agency over structure, and the decision to leave is interpreted as the woman’s conscious move towards empowerment. In the Polish case, the key dimensions in deciding to migrate were the stage of the life-cycle and individual career progress. The women moved early in their careers, or directly after graduation, because they considered it the only point in life when migration is actually possible. Krysia explained the timing of her move:

It is not that I wanted to change my job. I simply wanted to do something with my life. . . . You are at such a moment. . . . And it was this moment when you don’t have children yet, you don’t have an apartment, you don’t have a mortgage – this is the moment when you can leave and do something. (AA1)

Krysia and her husband both had good jobs in Poland. She had worked in the marketing department of a publishing house for two and a half years. She was young enough in her career that the move to the United Kingdom did not disrupt any potential career options for her. Furthermore, she felt free from any kind of obligations like children or a mortgage. That's why, as she says, it was a good moment to leave.

Iwona bought her flight ticket to London on the day of her graduation. She finished her studies in Administration and Political Science and decided to emigrate. She believes her decision to move prevented her from following the standard Polish life course: studies, job, marriage, children. When describing her friends in Warsaw she says:

“(if I had stayed in Poland) I would be working in administration 99%. My friends in Poland have a good life standard, they don't starve, they are not in poverty, they have the American life-style, the mortgage. It does not scare me, I will probably do that too. They work, they have children. It's the life-stage, (if I had stayed in Poland) I would probably be at a similar stage.” (MM16)

In this example Iwona's power and agency manifests itself in her choice to postpone a particular stage in life, which, according to her, involves having children and a mortgage. She believes that if she had not migrated she would find herself in that stage. Her migration was timed in such a way that she was able to explore other options before tying herself to home and family. Iwona does not want to avoid this kind of attachment eternally – it does not scare her, as she explains. She just wants to have the option to enjoy life first. She likes her life in London, and the ability to travel. Since settling in London, she has visited France, Morocco, Switzerland, Istanbul, Barcelona and Berlin; something she would not have been able to accomplish had she stayed in Poland and had children.

For many of these migrant women, having children means a reduction in mobility. In their accounts, childrearing is linked with being in one place (most likely Poland), having to work, and paying off the mortgage. Women like Iwona do not want to avoid this situation completely. They just want to postpone it for a couple of years while working abroad. Frequently, they are planning to go back to Poland and have children there. Return migration is therefore much influenced by childrearing plans. Krysia responded to my question about having children as follows:

We were thinking about it... It would be great, but I will not manage it on my own.... It would be nice to have your mother by your side, who will tell you what to do when the baby is crying, right?



And later she added:

I would like to go back already, really, because it is... Here you can have fun, but later go back to normal life. Have a normal family and everything.

(AA1)

Presented this way, for Krysia her time in London is the moment to have fun and enjoy life before going back to the “normal life” and a “normal family” in Poland<sup>1</sup>. The availability of help from her mother also seems to be an essential element in decision-making. Magda expressed similar sentiments:

If I were to get pregnant, it would be very hard for me alone, this is the minus. It is very beautiful and nice to be here as a couple, but when the need for help arises, then there is nobody, because nobody is able to sacrifice their time for you. You have to rely on yourself. My mother or Marek’s mother probably would be very happy to help us, but that would mean that either they would have to come here, or we would have to leave for some time.

(AA4)

Magda and Marek have not decided what to do should they have children. Magda does not want to go back home, but at the same time she also thinks that it is unrealistic to expect the grandmothers to come to the UK. Her mother does not speak English and would not feel comfortable caring for children in a foreign country. Magda also says that she does not want to impose on her mother-in-law’s independence. It is possible, therefore, that Magda and Marek will leave and stay in Poland at least until their children reach the daycare age, and then they will return to England.

For some women, going to Poland to have children is not dictated by the pragmatic considerations of childcare. For many it signifies a return to ‘normal’ life. While life in London is considered a step up on the career path, these migrants see their ultimate goal as having a family in Poland. Alicja, who is single, describes her migration plans as follows:

I’m thinking about staying two more years. We will see how it goes with my job... I want to learn as much as I can, and if I get such an offer like the one I had three months ago (for a job in Poland), then I’m going straight back to Poland... I am not a person concentrated on doing business, money, money and more money. I am a woman, I am thinking about having children. Let the men (make money). (MM6)

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1 For a mother’s “quest for normalcy” in England see Lopez Rodriguez 2010, Rabikowska 2010.

Alicja considers motherhood as an essential part of her identity as a woman. Like many others, she has internalized Polish norms about motherhood. She goes as far as to present career and money-making as being a masculine activity. A return to Poland is associated with having children and a focus on the family. At the same time, she is making good use of her time in London. She has been promoted several times in her career, and is still expecting to stay for two more years to ‘learn as much as she can’ about banking.

The stories of these Polish women confirm that childbearing and childrearing are crucial to the making of migration plans. From the timing of the move from Poland through career-making in London to the eventual return, the planning of international mobility is enmeshed in reproductive choices. These findings confirm the feminist argument that the productive and reproductive spheres are inextricably connected. The process of making migration decisions depends on women’s individual agency, but it is also controlled by wider norms of behavior and social support systems. It is acceptable for Polish women to leave Poland soon after graduation, when they do not have established careers or childcare obligations. The time they spend abroad is often perceived as a time to ‘have fun’ and to hone one’s professional skills. The eventual return to Poland is a result, on the one hand, of the very pragmatic need for childcare, and, on the other hand, of the perception of Poland as being the appropriate place for childrearing.

Life-course progress influences both the productive and reproductive choices of women. It should be born in mind, however, that all the decisions, including migration decisions, are made in the context of particular places. Pratt and Hanson (1993:30) write: “Lives are lived through time; they are also lived in place and through space”. Although the timing of particular decisions is important, it is also important to consider the local conditions that influence them. The following section focuses on the two environments relevant for Polish migrants’ decision-making – Poland and the UK.

## Findings: Childrearing, Migration and Local Incentives

Places offer the structural context in which decisions are made. This section investigates how migrant women describe the childrearing options in their country of origin and in the UK, and how they link the situation in those countries to their



migration decisions. I considered migrants as being *emplaced*, i.e. influenced by the physical location of their activities. The evaluation of the local place is always conducted simultaneously with the evaluation of the foreign location. The migrant situation breeds such comparisons. I have not had a single conversation with a female or male migrant, where comparisons between Poland and the UK were not drawn. All aspects of life are dissected in an attempt to understand the differences. Migrants compare everything from people's behaviors and attitudes through to job descriptions and salaries, to the price of grocery items in the two countries. Through comparison they validate or invalidate their choices about migration and make future plans.

Important issues for skilled migrant women are the advantages and disadvantages of having children in Poland and the UK. As discussed above, a primary factor pulling them back to Poland is the availability of childcare help from parents and grandparents. There are, however, other factors that they take into consideration, the most important of which is the availability of childcare benefits. In the case of skilled women, the benefits that they are interested in are not the welfare checks offered by the government to mothers, but the provisions offered by their jobs. Employment policies in the UK are generally considered more child-friendly than in Poland. Kryisia describes her company as being very accommodating to future mothers:

My company currently has this program that when you have a baby you can work at home for two days (a week). You can leave work earlier, you can come to work later. And it does not influence your salary. You have a hundred percent of your salary, completely. They share the cost of daycare, or a babysitter, whatever you prefer. (AA1)

This very advantageous situation is contrasted with Kryisia's situation in Poland where she was not entitled to any benefits. Her Polish company did not want to sign a permanent contract with her, leaving her with only short-term contracts. As a result, she could not obtain insurance through her employers and was not entitled to maternity benefits. She was also unable to get a loan for a house. "In this respect, it is for sure better (in the UK)", she claims.

The difference can be explained partly because of the legal differences between the two countries. In the UK, women are entitled to benefits (statutory maternity pay) for 39 weeks after giving birth, while in Poland they receive maternity pay only for 20 weeks. Kryisia also provides an example of her sister in Poland, who had serious problems finding a job after having a baby:

K: My sister, who had a baby... was looking for a job for two years...

A: Is it because she had a baby?

K: Yes. Everything was OK, she was being invited to the second-stage interviews... Right... And then the questions: ... "How are you with time flexibility?" My sister says she is completely flexible, but she has to be there at five pm, because at five she is picking up her kid from the kindergarten. So they say "You are not flexible". My sister says "Yes, I am" and they say "No, no, no." (AA1)

Krysia's sister faces the typical charge brought by employers against female employees, the supposed lack of flexibility and 24/7 availability. More often than men, women have to coordinate childcare arrangements and job requirements, and frequently childcare needs take precedence over career choices. Hanson and Pratt (1995) show that women in Worcester (MA) looked for jobs in close proximity of their place of residence, in order to be able to pick up their children from school and be available for emergencies. Polish employers seem to expect round-the-clock availability from their employees, regardless of their family situation.

In the UK, the law requires employers to be flexible. While paternity leave has been available in the UK since 2003, it was not available in Poland at the time of research and was only introduced in 2010. Alina, a university teacher, explained the situation to me as follows:

(here) everybody has the same entitlements. De facto, you have nine months paid by your insurance premiums, the National Insurance, you pay it through the insurance premiums. Men also have a two-week maternity leave. Then some people have 'flexi time', you can start your work between 8 and 10 am, this is advantageous, you can choose who takes the kids to school, and leave earlier to pick them up. In Poland in some companies it is also like that, but these are foreign companies. My brother works for Siemens, he can come in at 10 am. My father works in a state company, if he came in at 8.05 am he would be late. (MM12)

Krysia's observation is interesting. While foreign companies operating in Poland have adopted more women-friendly standards of flexibility, state-owned businesses and agencies maintain their conservative arrangements. The Polish State, in general, does not promote policies that would enhance women's situation in the labor market. One recently introduced measure, aimed to remedy the demographic decline, is the so-called 'becikowe', or "cradle money". It represents a small sum of money – about \$280 – provided by the state to the family after the birth of a baby. The aim of this incentive is to encourage Polish women to have more children. Most parents, however, realize that this amount is insufficient as a means of helping with the economic

and practical difficulties of raising a child. One of my interviewees, Alina, believes that not only is it insufficient, but is also representative of the general lack of respect for mothers:

The question of women's status in Poland is not appreciated. Recently they started to worry about the demographic decline, that Polish women don't want to give birth. But there is no incentive. It can't be a one-time help, for show, such a token. The atmosphere is important, how you see the role of a mother, what the woman's salary will be, if she is going to have retirement benefits, or unemployment benefits. (It is about) how you treat this period of maternity. (MM12)

As my interviewees do not have the experience of childrearing in Poland, they frequently rely on accounts from their friends and relatives. Krysia talked about her sister, Alina about her brother. Dorota also mentioned her sister's problems: "my sister was on maternity leave, and she almost got fired because of that. She had problems" (MM7). Yet, despite these negative portrayals of the Polish labor market situation, migrant women still intend to have children in Poland. As discussed in the previous section, return is the preferred option for the majority of respondents. One reason is the practical availability of childcare through grandparents. The other reason, I argue, is the imaginary construction of Poland as a place that is appropriate for raising kids. Poland is traditional, slow paced, safe, and also promotes conservative values. These constructions of place seem to have more appeal for women than the experience-based negative accounts of women's labor market situation.

One of the issues that make Poland more appealing than England is the importance of traditional family values. Barbara, a human resources administrator in one of the major London hotels, told me that she does not like the transitory character of life in England:

Even relationships here are temporary, the people don't pay attention to each other and to the values... I still miss the values in which I was brought up. I would be afraid to raise children here, even if I was with an English man I would like us to live in Poland. The values – family, friends – The human being is not an object. (MM10)

Barbara believes that family values are lost in England. She appreciates many things about Poland: the respect shown to older people, obligations towards parents and relatives, and the time spent together as a family.

People have time to share with others, for family and friends... And what an advantage for the children, the grandparents have time to answer children's questions... I like this provincial character of Poland. Probably in 10 years it is going to look different, I hope

I can still catch this traditional lifestyle. Here it no longer exists. Parents are waiting for the children to grow up... waiting for the children to move out, the grandparents are somewhere, but nobody even heard about them (MM10)

Attachment to family and friends was very important when considering return. For Krysia, just like for Barbara, missing her parents was one of the main factors pulling her back:

This is our idea – to go back home as soon as possible. Because we want to go back to our family as soon as possible. (In Poland) you have an apartment, you have a home, you have an apartment where nobody is knocking on your door... and your own bathroom and kitchen; you have friends, you can go visit your mum for a while. Here you live like in a students' house: everything is in motion, the people are changing, because they are coming and going, and you don't have this nest that would be yours, and just yours. And this is something I miss most. I miss stability. (AA1)

For Krysia, residing in Poland represents stability both in the sense of having her own apartment and her place in the world, but also in the sense of having family support. She misses the possibility of dropping by at her mother's place whenever she feels like it. The role of emotional attachments and affective imaginations of places has just recently started to be explored in migration research. Conradson and McKay (2007) argue that emotion is a central aspect of international mobility. Gray (2008) believes that there is an explicit connection between movement and attachment. Aranda (2007) confirms these findings and shows that, for professional Puerto Rican migrants, family was an important factor motivating return migration. She conceptualizes the process of migration decision making through the notion of 'emotional embeddedness', i.e. the affect towards one's surroundings and a sense of belonging in a place. Polish migrants seem to be embedded emotionally in their home-places in Poland, where place signifies not only a physical location, but also the social relationships and emotional ties. Their images of localities in Poland are shaped by their migration experiences, and are frequently idealized. For example, London would often be presented as a "corrupt city" while places in Poland exuded security and childhood sentiment. Natasza, who works in a large shipping company in London, expressed her emotional attachment to her home-city in Poland as follows:

I loved it. I miss the sea. I have good memories of the city, it was nice. I love it, I miss it, maybe I will go back there sometimes. It is first of all the city of my childhood. I don't intend to return yet, for at least a year. But my family is there, so I can't imagine another place to go back to. (MM11)

For Natasza, the love of the city and the love for her family blend together to form a dream place of return. She describes London, on the other hand, as a ‘violent city’. She is dreaming of having a family and a little cottage in the countryside. Such experiences of places are typical for migration. Svasek (2010) writes that “it should be acknowledged that certain emotional processes are caused by migration-specific issues. These processes do not take place in the isolated minds/bodies of the migrants, but arise in the interaction of individuals with their human and non human surroundings” (2010: 3). Missing home, a typical migrant experience, results for many migrant women in the decision to return, despite of their ‘objective’ knowledge of the disadvantages of women’s labor market situation in Poland.

Asia, a student, does not exactly fit the “skilled migrant” category. She migrated with her boyfriend during her studies in Poland, and was employed in house-keeping and laundry in a small English city. She was the one, however, who explained best her decision to return:

A lot of people could not understand why I came back from England to Poland when I was pregnant, that I didn’t stay there, because it is better there. I came back for other reasons: I simply wanted to be with my family and I did not want to be alone, although their social benefits there (UK) are much better than here (Poland). (C2)

Women’s emotional craving for Poland leads them to return there for child-rearing. It should be emphasized, however, that some of them indicated the possibility of onward migration. Krysia wants to have a baby in Poland, but her husband, has been trying to convince her to move to the United States. Although she is not in favor of living in the US, she does not exclude the possibility of going elsewhere:

We thought about moving somewhere else (than the US). But we don’t know yet. I would like to go to the Czech Republic, or somewhere around there. Yes, I don’t know what else we will think of. Maybe we will go to Poland for some time, stay there, buy an apartment, rent it out later and travel somewhere else. I don’t know (A1)

Similarly, Natasza wants to return to Poland eventually, but she does not exclude the possibility of migrating somewhere else, where the quality of life is better than in London. She thought about moving to a place with a better climate, possibly to the Mediterranean region. My findings indicate that skilled migrant women give in to the emotional pull towards Poland and intend to go there for childbirth. Onward migration, however, remains an option. It is more likely to become a reality if the Polish government fails to create conditions that encourage mothers’ participation in the labor market. Going back to work will not only allow women to continue with

their fulfilling careers, it will also give them the economic means to increase their quality of life in Poland.

## Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the childrearing plans and migration plans of skilled migrant women are closely intertwined. In contrast to the majority of the literature, I focused on the family-planning stage rather than the adaptation of migratory trajectories to already present children. Polish women decide to migrate early in their careers, or right after university graduation, in order to postpone childrearing decisions and to experience the excitement of living abroad. They plan to return to Poland after a couple of years abroad in order to raise children in a secure family environment. This study shows that the few months after graduation, when young people feel most insecure about their job prospects and most uncertain about their personal relationships, are critical for making the decision to migrate. Rather than trying to entice emigrants to return, Polish policies should target newly graduating cohorts and provide them with incentives to stay.

Another indication that incentives to attract returnees are not critically important is the finding that migrant women – and their husbands – are planning to return to Poland anyway. They are attracted by the availability of help from grandparents, but also by the emotional attachment to their families, to their cities and to what they consider “Polish values”. This finding reiterates the social and political importance of the seemingly personal and private construct of “emotion”. Here the emotional ties appear stronger than the rational elaboration of the costs and benefits of return. A critical policy issue emerges from this phenomenon: how to ensure that women are able to re-enter the labor market after giving birth. In cases where grandparents’ help is unavailable, the Polish system of maternity benefits does not adequately encourage the return to work. Leaving skilled migrant women out of the labor force, leads to a significant loss of foreign-learned skills and experiences.

Furthermore, if the labor market in Poland remains unfriendly towards working mothers, return migrations may prove to be temporary. The women I interviewed often spoke about returning to Poland for a couple of years and then embarking on further migratory voyages. One migration experience significantly increases the probability of further migration – and a lot of skilled women feel empowered by

their professional success to look for satisfying jobs in various European and non-European countries.

The findings of this study reiterate the feminist argument concerning the necessity to look at both the productive and reproductive spheres in order to understand economic and demographic processes. The free movement of people in the European Union market is directly linked to the reproductive choices made by skilled migrant women. The discriminatory practices of local labor markets, combined with localized social norms, lead to particular migration trajectories and family-planning decisions. These decisions are not made in an emotional vacuum. Rather, emotion and personal attachments are critical for understanding both the decision to have children and the decision to move.



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