

*Migration - Ethnicity - Nation:
Studies in Culture, Society
and Politics*

Edited by Dorota Praszalowicz

Izabela Grabowska

**Movers and Stayers:
Social Mobility, Migration
and Skills**

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To friends from the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw

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This book was a lengthy adventure. It started in 2010 with the idea of studying the careers of just Polish post-accession migrants. Then, due to the richness of data collected since the mid-1990s by the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw, it became a much wider project about migrants and stayers in the period of system transformation in Poland. The majority of the data was re-coded to obtain information about the labour market sequences of migrants and stayers. This would not have been possible without Iwona Trepczynska and Magdalena Tomasiak: thank you to both of you.

Then we said to each other that we needed some 'flesh and blood' life stories how the social mobility actually happened among movers. Therefore my special thanks go to those movers who generously gave their time to be interviewed and shared their work and life stories with us. I believe that I gave their stories the respect and understanding that they fully deserve.

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Foreword

Movers and Stayers is an unusual work of migration scholarship. To a non-specialist it might seem obvious that, if we want to understand the migrant experience, migrants' lives should be compared to those of non-migrants, but migration scholars tend to forget the 'stayers'. Preoccupied with migrants and migration, they fail to provide context in the form of careful analysis of the sending society. By contrast, Grabowska compares the career paths and social mobility of Polish migrants with people who have always stayed in Poland. In addressing the important question of how social and geographical mobility intertwine – utilising an impressive array of data – she makes a valuable contribution to our understanding both of the impact of migration on (return) migrants, and of the wider society to which they return.

This is an exceptionally wide-ranging and erudite book, which should be of great interest to migration researchers, sociologists working outside migration, labour market economists and many others. It is a uniquely thorough study of the labour market mobility of recent Polish return migrants – a topic on which very little is known. However, it is also far more. Grabowska addresses big questions: How does agency relate to structure, in general and in migration? What is a career, and whose careers are really 'boundaryless'? Why do some people migrate, while others stay at home? What distinguishes returnees from people who have never migrated? Can we find more satisfactory migrant typologies than hitherto – what really makes Migrant A different from Migrant B? How can one create a coherent account of individual migrants' experiences in both sending and receiving countries? Can quantitative data (collected on the premise that reality exists objectively and that migration can be explained with theory) be combined with qualitative techniques, which 'explain' migration as the construct of individual migrants? And how (if at all) are 21st century migrants different from their predecessors?

Grabowska argues (following Margaret Archer) that reflexivity is the key to understanding how agency sits within structure (as she puts it, agency @ structure), and why some people are more mobile than others. What does distinguish migrants from stayers, the sedentary population which hitherto has been almost ignored by migration researchers? Why do some people experience upward occupational mobility and/or make a success of migration, where others fail? Clearly greater success and mobility depend on the possession of certain kinds of capital, but, as Grabowska shows, it would be too simple to reduce this to economic and social capital. In fact many stayers have the different types of capital which could create an opportunity structure for migration, and Polish migrants are fairly

representative of Polish society in general. There must clearly be an additional, psychological dimension. Are stayers less competent and resourceful (Fomina and Frelak 2008), less confident (White and Ryan 2008) or perhaps less reflexive? Drawing on her own biographical interviews with Polish return migrants, Grabowska demonstrates that it is a capacity for reflexivity – the individual migrants' ability to think clearly creatively about themselves in the situations in which migration throws them – which distinguishes the more from the less successful. Following on from this (in a fascinating chapter on skills, which is new for the English-language, 2016 edition, and draws on a range of recent research) Grabowska argues that 'non-formal *learning-by-observing*, *by-communicating* and *by-doing* abroad' always takes place during migration, even if some return migrants make better use of these skills than others.

Professor Anne White, University College London

Introduction: Making the way through the world on the move

It is connected to whether you are flexible and you want to go for a change or not, this is the factor differentiating people who decide to go abroad from those who remain sedentary, recounted Lucjan, a 33 year old machine construction engineer from Cracow. He left Poland after graduation where he could not find a decent job and, in fact, his first serious job was by chance in the UK. Lucjan, like many other young Poles after 2004 EU enlargement, went to work abroad without earlier planning, *just like that*. His first job, getting his foot into the British labour market, was in a sausage factory. After his initial anchoring and getting a sense of some of the 'rules of the game' of the UK low-skilled work space, he started searching for new jobs but still below the level of his formal skills obtained at the technical university in Poland. But this time he made a plan and went to a recruitment agency where he received job advice and offers. He even decided on internal migration within the UK to undertake still rather manual jobs in a logistics company. He worked with commitment and very effectively, building his reputation in British workplaces. Supervisors quickly recognised his work efficiency and he felt that his work was getting appreciated. Even though, he insisted that his UK jobs were only for the money, he managed to build up self-confidence, some awareness of the world around him, linguistic skills. On returning to Poland he started applying a systematic strategy for job searching transferred from the UK. He was able to communicate and deal effectively with clients of a double glazing company in Cracow and also was finally able to use some of his technical skills.

Migration was not a part of my work plan. My work life is here, in this city. Simply I needed the money to have a better life here in Poland. Passions won't feed you. (...) But I learned to be in an international environment and I got to know some German, reported 31 year old Olgierd, a local government administrator from a small town in the Opolskie Region in Poland, the son of a seasonal migrant father to Germany, working in Poland as a salesman, and with a mother who was a history teacher. He graduated from a political sciences program at the local higher education institution in Opole. The jobs he performed in local public institutions matched his formal skills. His first seasonal migration was during his studies. He worked in Germany and Austria many times during summer holidays on paid or unpaid annual leave from his institutions. He was happy about his work life, only the wages were too low, and this was what pushed him to continue his circular migration.

I postponed university in Poland and went to work in Ireland. It was meant to be short. But I got jobs in Ireland and so gave up Polish university. (...) After a while, I started university in Ireland, a branch of a Polish one because otherwise it would be too difficult. It went bust. So I did not graduate. (...) It was difficult to find new job with the financial crisis in Ireland (...) I came back to Poland [to a small town] with my partner who had two sons there. You need to have a degree here to work, even as a shop assistant. Maybe we will start our own business...a tattoo parlour... I have never done that before, narrated Daria, a 25 year old women from a small town in south-western Poland, who stayed in Ireland for seven years. She left Poland immediately after EU enlargement in May 2004. She was the daughter of an accountant and a builder. After her return to Poland she remained unemployed and undertook various courses offered by the local labour office. The most recent one was connected to interior design.

I have a feeling that I have never utilised things from my education for myself. I started working in Ireland in the most basic position in the grocery department of a supermarket. I did my job well. I got recognised by managers. Organisation of work, commitment, brought me to higher positions within retailing. In the end I become a floating manager between many stores in the company. But what is my career? Just selling, lamented Lucja, a 33 year old philosopher from Radom, a medium sized town in central Poland. She spent six years in Ireland, climbing systematically, linearly up the ladder of occupational positions in the Irish retail sector, achieving one of the highest positions there. She came back because she felt symptoms of a glass ceiling syndrome and at her last job she was robbed by a group of local thieves. On return she wanted to take up some jobs where she could use her formal educational skills but had no clue what to do. She considered further education, connected to self-development. She undertook a job in a big clothing store as a manager and started transferring skills she learned abroad.

I did not want to be like my friends who stayed in Poland. (...) They went for jobs in retailing and after few years they were burnt out. (...) Cleaning toilets in [UK] pubs I realised how difficult these dirty, routine jobs are. I respect now all people who are able to do that. I did my best. I was patient. There I started thinking that I need to do something with myself, to educate myself further, reflected Pola, a 33 year old sociologist and film specialist from Warsaw, daughter of highly educated parents. After conducting a series of manual routine jobs in the UK, she saved some money and applied for a scholarship connected to her hobby- film promotion, and not an initial education in social sciences. After the programme she had internships at British film institutions. She decided to return to Poland despite a window of opportunity in the British labour market because she felt that she had obtained skills which were in shortage in Poland and her work could make a difference.

I went abroad to work. I knew that we needed to leave my home town. Small, no opportunities. We came to Radom [a medium sized town in Poland]. I did not want to go to Warsaw. Too big. Everybody predicted that I wouldn't find any job in Radom. I saw what was the biggest local factory. I went to the dairy. (...) I got a job immediately, recounted Cyryl, a 40 year old machine operator from a small mountain town in Poland. Cyryl always worked in manual, routine jobs. He was always well organised and had a life plan to extend his opportunities. But not too much because otherwise he would not be able to deal with it. Metropolises were always too much for him both to work in and to live. He had a particular skill 'at dealing very well with the boredom of manual, routine jobs'. He was attentive to his work content and tasks and always wanted to see the sense of his work for the entire company. His migratory movements were gradual. When a recruitment company came to his mountain town, he did not want to be like the other peers people who initially were interested in going to work abroad but then withdrew from the recruitment procedure out of fear of the unknown. His first trip to Ireland to work was undertaken without his family. During his second visit his wife accompanied him temporarily. Their son was taken care by his grandmother for some time. After returning from Ireland he decided to make an internal move in Poland with the whole family to make his life plan complete which meant a stable job and decent living conditions. When asked about going to work abroad again, he replied *I am open now. I am not scared at all. I know what it is. If I had to, I would go of course.*

(...) I think that when you try to reach a goal, all failures contribute to your strength; so all my experiences – where I started, or where I was just before going on this internship abroad – all this brought me where I am now, reflected 27 year old Maria from a small town near Warsaw, a daughter of a local hair dresser and plumber. She always knew that she needed to work hard in order to achieve something in life. Because it was difficult to get a job as a young person without experience she decided to build hers up by embarking on her future career by internships. She developed her own gradual strategy. First she started at a local labour office in her home town. She thought then that a job in a public institution is everything that one could dream of in the labour market. Then she worked in a call centre where she learned how to communicate with clients. She was able to use this skill at a later stage in her career. Then she applied for an internship at an orchard land register. In the meantime she started studying international relations at one of the higher education institutions in Poland. She took advantage of her student position and went for a Socrates/Erasmus programme to Portugal. After Erasmus she worked there as a waitress and she learned how to deal with international, multi-cultural clients. Through the internship with the land register institution she got interested in real estate consulting and management. She knew

that the way to get employed in such institutions is very difficult. She wanted to get in *via* an internship. She sent tailor-made emails to and Human Recourses departments of important real estate companies in Warsaw. Once she got into one, she took advantage of her student and intern position and went for a vocational Erasmus exchange to Belgium where she learnt how to introduce a new system which was just about to be applied on her return to Poland and also how to deal with clients – she made use of her earlier experience at the call centre and as a waitress in Portugal. After return she got a job there.

The accounts of the work histories of Lucjan, Olgierd, Daria, Lucja, Pola and Maria are like many others of migrating Poles after European Union (EU) enlargement in May 2004. They show that migration brings ambiguous meanings to work lives of people and with migratory experience people can somehow pave their way through the world on the move.

The Polish migratory case can be instructive in observing the impact of migration on people's work lives, given the spectacular increase in labour mobility within the European Economic Area (EEA) after EU Enlargement in May 2004. Poles, and especially well-educated Poles, are the most prominent migrant group in EEA countries. The number of Poles staying abroad temporarily increased from around 1 million in 2004 to over 2.3 million in 2007 (6.6 per cent of the total population). Since then the stock has decreased slightly, mostly due to the economic crisis, but still remains high at 2 million people (Census 2011; Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015). The geography of Polish migration has changed as a result of EU enlargement. Germany, for decades a top destination country, lost its dominant position (25 per cent of flow in 2008), with countries of the British Isles experiencing a spectacular inflow from Poland: the stock of Polish migrants in the UK grew from 24,000 in 2002 to 700,000 in 2008 (CSO 2012). The majority, 90 per cent, of post-accession migrants went to work abroad. The post-accession migration from Poland was highly selective (Grabowska-Lusinska and Okolski 2009; Kaczmarczyk and Okolski 2008). Post-accession migrants were relatively younger than those from the pre-accession period and much better educated, with almost 20 per cent of persons holding university degrees (Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015).

Again coming back to Lucjan, Olgierd, Daria, Lucja, Pola and Maria – the testimonials of post-accession migration stream from Poland- they have specific features in common which distinguish them from their sedentary peers. They are movers. However, they make their way through the world on the move in different ways. Why?

The interplay of the two approaches highlighted in the title of this Introduction, which are from Archer's (2007) *Making our Way through the World* and from the common phrase of *world on the move* featured in the title of famous BBC

programme, reflect the approach of this monograph. If there is a 'world on the move', there also needs to be a 'sedentary world'. Social research often focus on those who move, like Lucjan, Olgierd, Daria, Lucja, Pola and Maria but we know very little about those of their peers who decided to stay put in villages, small towns and cities. Who are they in relation to each other? How do they behave in the labour market when compared to those who experienced migration in their working lives? Does migratory experience matter in a work life at all? What is the impact of different migratory patterns on careers? What can people get out of migration besides money? How does migration impact on their social mobility throughout their work sequences? If people work abroad in unskilled jobs, does it mean that, apart from money, they have nothing out of this experience?

In order to answer the above research questions, this book assumes that migration is not only a strategy to get higher incomes and to better a financial budget. It is also a part of a social mobility process through which migrants make their way through the world. Of course the movers do not act homogeneously. Firstly, they experience different patterns of social mobility during migration and on return, also when compared to stayers. Secondly, the conventional indicators of social mobility: up, down, stable do not show the whole picture of changes and dynamics of work sequences where migration forms a part. Thirdly, while looking at quantitative data about work sequences of movers and stayers, we can't capture a subjective sense of migration to people. Fourthly, there is an emerging relationship between social mobility, migration and skills. Migration is not an automatic gateway to social mobility but can be a 'twist' to further biographic work of individuals.

The monograph rests on the interplay of structure and agency. The ambition of this book is to engage with the theoretical debates on the relationships between structure and agency with an empirical analysis of migrants' work sequences in relation to the sedentary population and the role of components of agency and modes of reflexivity in social mobility patterning. The central theme of this book is the mutual penetration of structure, individual agency and reflexivity in the occupational lives of people. The way individuals act depends on their opportunity structure, both constraining and enabling their labour market possibilities. Individuals do not react to or act upon the opportunity structure in a uniform way. It depends, to a great extent, on the components of agency they exercise (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and modes of reflexivity they are able to develop (Archer 2007). The book recalls the findings of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) that agency is not 'a flat' concept. It has three layers: (i) routine acts; (ii) innovative strategies; (iii) evaluation of actions. This goes very well in line with Archer's (2007) modes of reflexivity which shape different patterns of social mobility of individuals: (i) communicative reflexivity – 'internal

conversations require completion and conformation by others before resulting in courses of action'; (ii) fractured reflexivity – internal conversations bring 'distress and disorientation rather than lead to purposeful courses of action'; (iii) meta-reflexivity – brings a critical look at the context and self in it and (iv) autonomous reflexivity – 'sustains self-contained internal conversations, leading directly to actions' (Archer 2007: 93).

To sum up, the goals of the book, *Movers and Stayers: Social Mobility, Migration and Skills*, are fourfold: (i) to clarify the relationships between structure and agency using empirically available information about movers and stayers in social structure and qualitative testimonials of migrants' occupational biographies; (ii) to document the differences and similarities between patterns of social mobility and trends in work sequences between movers and stayers; (iii) to explain the role of migration in social mobility patterning of individuals' pathways; (iv) to uncover emerging relations between social mobility, migration and skills.

The monograph is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the book's theoretical foundation, defining the conceptual and theoretical framework of the approach followed. It describes the relationships between structure and agency both on a more general sociological level as well as their specific applications to migration studies. The chapter allows us to do research on the work sequences of migrants and stayers in post-transformation Poland and shows that occupational paths can be a fruitful empirical scene for the application of theoretical models on the structure-agency nexus.

Chapter 2 focuses on the methodology of research on occupational paths within the opportunity structure-agency paradigm. It clarifies the specificity of migration data, mainly the difficulty of generating datasets connected to both movers and stayers, their analysis and interpretation. The chapter details the main sources of data – both primary and secondary – used in this book. In this part, a methodological tool known in sociology as *Adaptive Theory* (AT, Layder 1998) is used which helps to explain methodological procedures used in this monograph in order to research, analyse and interpret migrants' work sequences and the significance of migration throughout its courses. The chapter also dwells on the analytical viewpoint of the book; i.e. the perspective from the sending country and why it is valid for migrants' work sequence analysis.

Chapter 3 is concerned with contemporary Polish migrants' forms of spatial and social mobility as comparing to stayers. In the section on spatial mobility, forms of migration from Poland are discussed and the main socio-demographic features of migrants are presented, including a typology of post-accession migrants. The section demonstrates that contemporary labour market mobility needs to be treated in a multidimensional perspective, by taking into account

shifts between socio-occupational categories, as well as any shifts between labour market statuses: employment, unemployment, inactivity. The chapter aims to bring in conventional indicators showing occupational progression, degradation or stability due to migration episodes, by capturing punctual moments of time in work histories: first job-current job or last job before migration-first job after migration. This chapter relies on an analysis of quantitative data.

Chapter 4 analyses detailed migrants' work sequences in comparison to sedentary persons. The analysis of careers is a detailed version of social mobility analysis aiming to capture the trends in a work sequence, not only selected points. At the beginning a general conceptual and interpretative framework of the notion of career is presented and historical and contemporary conditions of career formations are discussed with special reference to the circumstances of Poland's political, economic and social transformation after the collapse of communism. A typology of movers' and stayers' careers is offered and differences and similarities between them analysed. This chapter also includes an analysis of those who underwent an 'occupational initiation' in the foreign labour market, through taking a first job abroad and then returning to the Polish labour market.

Chapter 5 constitutes the interpretative core of this book. It takes a qualitative view on the role of migration in the process of social mobility of individuals. It particularly brings in the missing glue between structure and agency, which, according to Archer (2007), is the concept of *reflexivity*. Therefore the chapter asks, following Archer (2007), what is the role of reflexivity in the current patterning of social mobility in the migratory context and how modes of reflexivity impact patterns of social mobility.

The central idea of Chapter 6 is that much can be learned about social mobility and migration by observing their connections with skills. Aside from aspects such as age, gender, educational attainment, moves between socio-occupational categories and classes, social mobility is also contingent on skills obtained through the formal job training and the outcomes of non-formal *learning-by-observing*, *by-communicating* and *by-doing* abroad even if it does not bring any immediate and spectacular upward or downward transitions in social structure. Therefore, skills and especially their tacit forms should also be taken into consideration when assessing the emerging connections between migration and social mobility.

The epilogue concludes the book and tries to answer the research questions found throughout the course of this book.

Migrants make an active change in their occupational lives and accomplish something concrete simply through their migrational act. It does not mean that stayers do not make any efforts in their career projects; however, to accomplish their plans they use other tools. Migration in this perspective is a kind of

empirically perceptible 'litmus test' of occupational effort which distinguishes mobile individuals from those who stay put. Migration can also be a tangible proof of not simply state border control liberalization but of the opening up of new occupational development possibilities which elude conventional indicators of social mobility. Whether this potentiality turns into reality is to a great extent down to the individual.