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Migration as opportunity? A case study of Polish women: migrants in the UK and returnees in Poland.

Abstract

Migration from the new European Union (EU) Member States to the United Kingdom (UK) has been identified as one of the most significant social phenomena of recent times. Accession 8 (A8) migration to the UK has been studied extensively particularly post 2004. However, gender and gender roles, in particular in relation to A8 migration, remain an under-researched area. Although gendered studies of migration are now gaining recognition, there is limited literature in relation to Polish women. Moreover, there is now much evidence to support the view that migrant women constitute a large proportion of international migrants. In fact, when considering migration within the European context, migrant women already outnumber their male counterparts.

Drawing on a review of secondary literature and preliminary findings from new fieldwork research undertaken in Poland and the UK, this paper explores how Polish migrant women negotiate their lives in regard to work and welfare responsibilities when exercising their rights as EU citizens. As the consequence of feminisation of migration and experiences of new social settings, migrant women often re-evaluate their current arrangements. It is argued that migrant women should be seen as active decision makers and that migration can be considered as an opportunity to bring about change in relation to gender roles. It is concluded that migration presents an opportunity to re-evaluate gender norms.

Keywords: gender roles, migrant women, Poland, UK, welfare.

Introduction

This paper presents a review of literature relevant to Polish migration and gender. The first section focuses on theories of migration which are particularly useful in explaining recent migration flows. The following section outlines A8 migration to the UK. Then the concept of gendered migration is explained. A section on methodology provides an explanation of the chosen philosophical framework, methods of data collection and sample composition. After that the idea of migration as an opportunity is introduced. The paper is concluded with some emerging themes from early analysis.

The classic theories of migration may have become redundant in light of contemporary international migratory movements (Morokvasic, 2004). It could be asserted that there is no single consistent theory of international migration but rather a group of theories developed independently from each other (Massey, *et al.*, 1993) and their usefulness is contingent on what is being studied. Arguably, classic migration theories do not adequately account for the experiences of women. Gendered theories of migration build on these earlier theories adding a new dimension to understanding migration (cf. Ryan & Webster, 2008). The majority of classic migration theories recognise and focus on economic imperatives as the predominant reasons for migratory decisions. It could, however, be that in the 'age of migration' (Castles & Miller, 2003) people decide to migrate out of curiosity or simply because they can (cf. Kindler *et al.*, 2010; Scullion & Pemberton, 2010).

Within migration studies a number of theories are relevant in explaining more recent migratory movements. As this paper focuses on Polish migration post 2004 and gender, some classical theories may be applicable. Neoclassical economic theory, explains the movement of people from low to high income countries as affected by push (e.g. unemployment in the country of origin) and pull factors (e.g. better wages and employment conditions in the destination country) (Castles & Miller, 2009). Dual (or segmented) labour market theory, considers that migration is caused by constant structural demand for both high and low-skilled workers. This theory is particularly useful in providing an explanation for migratory movements when international wage differentials decline (e.g. Polish Złoty PLN against British Pound Sterling GDP in 2004: 1GDP = 7PLN; 2008: 1GDP = 4PLN; 2013: 1GDP = 5PLN). Thus, even though the Polish zloty has strengthened against the pound, the demand for workers remains (Cox,

2008). The new economics of labour migration approach considers migration decisions as made not by individual social actors but whole families, or even local communities. It stresses the fact that migration cannot be understood solely in economic terms and highlights family and other types of migration (Castles & Miller, 2009).

A more interdisciplinary approach is provided by migration systems theory. Here, migration is seen as a result of previously developed and maintained links between sending and receiving countries (e.g. past colonisation, political influence or pre-existing trade and/or cultural ties between nations). Advocates of this theory claim that the international movement of people can be explained by the interconnectedness of macro and microstructures (ibid.) (e.g. the connections between a nation-state and individual citizens; e.g. Zimbabwean nationals and the UK). A more recent approach which is particularly relevant to this study – the theory of transnationalism and transnational communities, argues that the rapid development of transport and communication technologies (e.g. the Internet, inexpensive air travel), enables migrants to maintain links between their home and host countries. In these circumstances, temporary and/or circular mobility becomes easy to pursue and may be very beneficial to migrants (Ryan, *et al.*, 2009).

When considering migration theories, it is important to distinguish economically motivated and forced migratory movements (Castles & Miller, 2009). The former is the focus of this research project and refers to those who decide to migrate to improve their economic situation. Whilst it is recognised that simplistic differences between forced and voluntary migration may not be able to account for current migration patterns, the ‘migration-asylum nexus’ provides an explanation to this (Castles & Van Hear, 2005). The ‘migration-asylum nexus’ highlights the current difficulties in separating forced and economic migration. It indicates similarities between the causes of both types of migration and argues that the boundaries between the two have become blurred (ibid.). It is noteworthy that the abovementioned theories do not account for actors’ ‘agency’, they focus very much on the rational decision making thus do not illuminate people’s lived experiences of migration which is an important part of this research.

It can be argued that in the last two decades, immigrant communities and as a result, the characteristics of diversity in Britain have changed considerably (Vertovec, 2007). Since the 1990s, there has been a rise in net immigration recorded with a greater variety of countries of origin. As a consequence, there have been new immigration laws designed (e.g. the Asylum and Immigration Acts of 1993, 1996, 1999, Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, the

Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009). There has been a rapid increase of different immigration statuses and migration channels. For labour migrants, the UK remained an attractive destination for most of this time due to the relatively low unemployment rate, labour shortages and generally high economic performance. There has been increasing multilingualism, religious diversity and a vast variety of different categories of immigrants (i.e. migrant workers, international students, family joiners, asylum seekers, etc.), where the type of migratory movement determines their legal status and what comes with it, their eligibility to make use of public services and resources which then impacts on their likelihood to stay or re-emigrate. Noteworthy is the fact that “over the past thirty years, more females than males migrated to the UK” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1040).

A8 Migration to the UK

Accession 8ⁱ (A8) migration to the UK has been studied extensively, particularly since 2004 and the European Union expansion (cf. Scullion & Pemberton, 2010; Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2008; Drinkwater, Eade & Garapich, 2006). In fact, migration from these new EU member states to the UK has been named one of the most significant social phenomena of recent times (Pollard, Latorre & Sriskandarajah, 2008)ⁱⁱ. There have been a number of studies focusing on migrant workers from the new A8 countries (cf. Cook, Dwyer & Waite, 2012, 2011; Scullion & Morris, 2010a, 2010b). In recent years, there has also been much press coverage on A8 immigration to the UK (cf. Bakalar, 2013; Pidd, 2011; Harris, 2011; Gentleman, 2011; Ramesh, 2010).

However, gender and gender roles, in particular in relation to A8 migration and CEE welfare states, remain an under-researched area (Pascall & Kwak, 2005, p. 12, 16, 31). For the purpose of this paper, gender is seen as something subjected to the expectations from the surrounding social structure (e.g. culture, tradition, religion, society) in respect of behaviour, certain qualities or lack thereof that are associated with that particular gender (Cooke, 2011, p. 26).

“Gender denotes an unequal and largely hierarchical division between women and men, which is embedded in social practices and institutions. (...) Gender is embodied and lived

through everyday interactions and, although it is characterised by the endurance of inequalities such as patriarchy, it is also subject to change and is a fluid concept, which can be negotiated and transformed as well as reinstated” (Woodward, 2011, p. 4).

Gendered migration

Arguably, migration is gendered (cf. Caritas, 2011; Ryan & Webster, 2008; Kofman, 2004; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Although women play a crucial role in contemporary migrations, previously they have been “sociologically invisible, although numerically and socially present” (Morokvasic, 1983, p. 13). The presence of women has been finally acknowledged when they entered waged labour market (ibid.). For many migrant women the change from unpaid work in the home to paid work in the labour market came about through migration (Phizacklea, 1983). The assumptions of a male breadwinner family model and traditional gender roles have dominated classic migration theories (Ackers, 1998). Until the 1970s, most research and publications on international migration focused only on male migrants (Zlotnik, 2003). Female migrants began to appear in the literature from mid 1970s, whereas previously they were portrayed as “followers, dependants, unproductive persons, isolated, illiterate and ignorant” (Morokvasic, 1983, p. 16). Other studies consider women to be active decision makers (Kindler, *et al.*, 2010). It can be asserted that paid work in the developed world offered to migrant women from less developed countries is one way for them to escape the oppressive patriarchal traditions in their homeland (Morokvasic, 1983). However, the labour migration literature fails to recognise whether the dominant economic model of migration – male breadwinning and profit-maximising – evident in academic literature, is founded on empirical evidence or is simply a convenient ideological construct. Hence, additional studies on migrant women and their strategies of negotiating gender norms in respect of paid employment and unpaid informal familial care work are needed.

It can be asserted that migrant women who are EU nationals migrating between different EU countries are an “under-researched group in their own right” (Ackers, 1998, p. 1). “It is not the absence of women, however, but their invisibility in the research that is at issue here ...” (ibid., p. 139). Recent studies agree that female migration was previously dictated by purely economic

reasons; now however, women migrate out of curiosity and interest in other cultures and foreign languages, for instance (Kindler *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) argue that the existing literature considers migrant women to be incorporated in an ill-defined category of women, despite the fact that their migratory experiences are very much affected by their individual circumstances (e.g. their ethnicity, country of origin, religion, culture, tradition, etc.).

According to some previous studies, migrant women, in contrast to men, are often overrepresented in the low-paid and low-skilled occupations (cf. Castles & Miller, 2009; Pateman, 1989). However, more recent studies on A8 migration question this view (cf. Kindler, *et al.*, 2010; Scullion, Morris & Steele, 2009; Scullion, Morris, 2009) and certain evidence suggests that Polish women who have migrated to the UK post 2004 have higher levels of educational qualifications than their male counterparts (Scullion, Morris & Steele, 2009; CBOS, 2006). Moreover, Castles and Miller (2009) suggest that we can now observe a ‘feminisation of migration’. The UN (UN-INSTRAW, 2007) rejects this view as misleading, as it suggests a sudden large overall increase in the number of female migrants whereas there have long been a significant proportion of women among migrants. Zlotnik (2003) however, notes the increase is nonetheless substantial: in the 1960s women constituted 47 per cent of all international migrants; by 1990 that number had increased to 48 per cent and in 2000 to almost 49 per cent. Nevertheless, when taking Europe into account, in 1990 female migrants constituted almost 52 per cent of all migrants and by 2000 the figure had reached 52.4 per cent (Zlotnik, 2003).

Despite this, women are seen as the carriers of tradition rather than change (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Engle (2004) indicates that the contrast between women’s migrations in the 19th and 21st centuries lies in the reasoning of their travels. She writes, “in fact, gender (i.e. perceived roles, responsibilities and obligations – or the lack thereof) may be the single most important factor influencing the decision to migrate” (*ibid.*, p. 6) and that,

“Women have always migrated; but, whereas in the past their movement was often more directly related to family reunification or depended on a male migrant, today they are moving as primary migrants in their own right” (Engle, 2004, p. 17).

Methods

An abductive research strategy was employed. This strategy was chosen as the researcher is interested in social actors' meanings and interpretations of reality. This strategy allows movement from the social actors' interpretations (i.e. Polish migrant women's) to more scientific understandings of the social world (i.e. academic theorists). It was chosen over the inductive and deductive strategies as it requires the researcher to step into the research participants' world and "discover their constructions of reality" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 10). This research strategy is particularly well suited to the chosen philosophical framework (i.e. idealist ontology, epistemology of constructionism; Blaikie, 2007).

This qualitative study explores gendered experiences of Polish migrant women in relation to work (paid versus unpaid) and welfare (formal versus informal). This approach is suitable for examining gender roles and migrant women and particularly relevant because migration has, for a long time, been androcentric, with women essentially being invisible (Morokvasic, 2004; Phizacklea, 1983; Oakley, 1981). Therefore, feminist researchers argue that their research has to be based on women's experiences and that "the cultural background of the researcher is part of the evidence" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 166). This is important in the light of the fact that the researcher is also a Polish migrant woman who, in 2008, decided to make the UK her home. Feminist scholars recognise that women cannot be treated as research objects and that subjectivity is not necessarily unscientific or unwanted (Stanley & Wise, 1990). The project has been underpinned by the view that knowledge in social sciences has a male bias and balance is needed (Finch, 1991). A broad definition of feminism was adopted: feminism is "a position with the political aim of challenging discrimination against women and/or promoting greater equality between the sexes" (Hoggart, 2012, p.136).

Qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews were the chosen research tools. Each interview, on average, lasted 45 minutes. Firstly, interviews in the North West of England were conducted. This part of England was chosen as the area with the second highest population density in England (ONS, 2011). What is more, this area was chosen due to the established links with the migrant community. This was followed by interviews in Poland. The empirical research

focused on the migratory movements of women moving between Poland and the UK and the way in which these movements may shape their perception of gender roles.

Strategic purposive sampling was adopted (Mason, 2002). Snowballing was also used to identify suitable individuals who fit the selection criteria to be included in the sample (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). Snowball sampling proved to be particularly useful for accessing Poland based participants. The sample consists of two groups of Polish migrant women: migrants who at the time of the interview were based in the UK (16 interviews); and returneesⁱⁱⁱ who were based in Poland as they migrated to the UK post 2004 but have subsequently relocated back to Poland (16 interviews). The sample consists of a wide range of individuals who are between 20 and 57 years of age and have been (in case of migrants) or were (returnees) in the UK for a period of between six months and nine years.

Thematic analysis of the data generated in the fieldwork will be conducted. This type of analysis is particularly well suited as it is an interpretive process. Arguably, it is the most attainable type of analysis, therefore especially useful for early career researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An N-Vivo software package will be used to aid data management.

Migration as opportunity

Having recently completed fieldwork (Oct 2012 – Feb 2013) and conducted 32 in-depth interviews with Polish migrant women, the researcher would like to share some preliminary findings in regard to the impact of the migratory process on gendered lives of migrant women. The following sections reflect initial results that emerge from the data in respect of the impact of the migratory process. Firstly, the idea of migration as an opportunity is outlined. Then to illustrate how this may come about, women's views of assumed gendered responsibilities in Poland are contrasted with their perceptions of gender norms in the UK.

Arguably, the process (or processes; Ackers & Gill, 2008) of migration gives women the opportunity to question and potentially re-define their gender roles. Migration can be viewed as an opportunity to re-evaluate women's gendered responsibilities in respect of work and welfare. Through migration, women are exposed to different social settings with often different gendered responsibilities. They can then compare and contrast how gender roles have played out in the UK in comparison to Poland. This could provide an opportunity to question their current arrangements and perhaps over time change expectations in respect of gendered division of labour. Within the sample it is evident that migration has made women realise that gender roles are less rigid in the UK which can have a positive impact. In the UK, gendered responsibilities do not seem to be as cemented in place as they are in Poland. Therefore, through migration to the UK, Polish migrant women often start to re-evaluate their gender roles.

What women were taught in their home country matters greatly; as they observed their mothers and grandmothers then they often duplicate the same roles. Some respondents admit that travelling has taught them a lot. Being able to observe how others arrange their lives makes women think of theirs. Knowing that 'things could be done differently' often makes women consider changing their current arrangements. Kornelia for instance, seems to recognise major differences in gender roles between the two countries. She appears to realise the value of being exposed to another culture. It is seen almost as an eye-opening experience and a learning opportunity.

I came across my friends' opinions in Poland, friends of course who have never been abroad either travelling or working and have never come across other cultures, and opinions like if you don't cook a fresh pork chop on that day then you're not a real woman ... (Kornelia, UK based, 37)

Certain respondents admit to manipulating the roles they are expected to take on. Ksenia, for instance, argues with her British partner who expects her to share responsibilities equally. Ksenia does not seem to be interested in sharing all of the tasks. However, she admits that she would like to take care of the children herself when they come. The women in this study seem to be

socialised into mostly traditional attitudes towards their responsibilities but they appear to actively engage with what they are offered. This means they can choose from both Polish and British traditions and lifestyles as they deem appropriate.

In my relationship sometimes there are exactly those discussions about roles, my partner [who is British] is very very very for equal rights ... I think that's the influence of his family because it's a completely different type of family in which he grew up, the mother was the father, she made the money, the roles were reversed ... because women here [UK] have had professional success for a long time now; that's the British image which goes a little against mine, but I think it's a little egotistical on my part because I know that I try to manipulate the roles and when something appears not convenient for me then I try to explain that women shouldn't assemble furniture for example ... (Ksenia, UK based, 32)

Arguably, migration opens up a different way of seeing the world. Migration gives a certain amount of freedom in respect of gender roles as the available options become greater. Anna for instance, recognises changes which are in her opinion, the consequence of people's migrations that make them become more open to other cultures and lifestyles.

Because people have started travelling, there are more opportunities, that's what it's about... I think it's about that yes, Jesus, back then [2004] Poles started to fly in planes to wherever, yeah ... it's great and that's why I think that we started to basically open up abroad, to go places, to travel, to see that it can be different and then you bring it back here [to Poland] basically it seems to me. (Anna, Poland based, 31)

Some migrant women explained that even though they consider themselves to be the weaker sex and are in favour of a more traditional division of responsibilities, they had to adopt some

changes as a consequence of the kind of paid work they do in the UK. This suggests that women's gendered responsibilities can also be transferred with them to the UK but often need to undergo re-evaluation adequate to the new situation.

He [boyfriend] sometimes argues with me because I'm a woman so I should clean more but it's that we came here to work, we both work in the same place [factory], do the same work [on a production line] ... But we more or less share the work at home, if anything he does more than me ... it's like that here, in England, in Poland it was different, he did manly things like renovating something and I did the cooking and cleaning but now because we work in the same company, he has to support me more and do more at home, besides when I carry sacks of potatoes and he packs cheese which happens a lot, then it's not fair and he has to help me at home, right? (Ewa. UK based, 25)

Migration proves to be an opportunity to implement changes in the light of adjustments post migratory experience or simply as a result of what women observe and prefer. It demonstrates a chance to experience new social and cultural setting and gain an understanding of the new location and its mechanisms. This can have a positive impact on women's gender ideology.

Women's perceptions of gender roles in Poland

Many interviewees perceive the division of responsibilities to be relatively traditional in Poland. It seems as though the respondents think that household tasks are almost entirely taken care of by women. However, a number of the women interviewed pointed out that this is currently undergoing change. Wiktoria for instance, described her very traditional arrangements back in Poland but explained that in her opinion, it has been undergoing change in the light of

women's greater engagement in paid work which has often been facilitated through migration. Wiktoría's views reflect the pressure put on women to 'have it all'.

I'd come home from work and I'd have to look after the house [laughs] and the child and everything, mostly it is like that, so really they [men] do very few of those jobs, very few I think because they think that they work [in the paid labour market] so they only have to sit around, come home and lie down and don't give a crap about anything, that's the truth. That's true, but women have to do it all... (Wiktoría, UK based, 48)

Barbara was positively surprised with what she experienced in the UK. Having had rather negative experiences in Poland and having moved to the UK to join her husband after selling all they had in order to afford the flight fares, she was astonished by the way she has been treated in the UK. She emphasised the importance of what people observe at home and explained that the movement to the UK impacted positively on her life.

Finally after all these years I'm starting to open my eyes and I say, "Why did I go through all that? Why so many tears? Why does my back hurt? Why did I have a stroke? So what if he [the husband] had a job?" Sorry but he's also got 2 hands, 2 feet and a head, but as I say people mature throughout their whole lives I think [laughs] ... but there's also a lot of influence on our behaviour from stereotypes we pick up at home, from the past, things our mothers or grandmothers or great-grandmothers taught us and then we go backwards, there are stereotypes passed down from generation to generation ... (Barbara, UK based, 37)

Kornelia explained that she always questioned the traditional domestic arrangements in Poland. She was not in favour of this clear delegation of different tasks between men and women

with women doing the lion's share of housework. When Kornelia contrasted Poland with the UK, it was clear that she preferred the British arrangements.

I never understood when I was young, why the roles are so separate and that my dad could put his feet up, sit there and watch telly and my mum would basically work all night and do everything at home, I never understood it when the whole family would come round and my granddad and my dad would sit there and drink vodka and my mum and grandma basically, from morning 'til night, would take care of the cleaning, the cooking, getting lots of things ready for Christmas when they [the men] only had to light the fire, I didn't understand it, I rebelled against it ...(Kornelia, UK based, 37)

Anna, on the other hand, described Poland as a particularly conservative country, where religion and what comes with it – the church and the family have a major influence on people's lives. In her opinion, because those two institutions: the church and the family are highly valued, the majority of people follow the traditional division of responsibilities. Anna also pointed to the pressure to start a family at young age which can disadvantage women in their career attainment.

Religion still has a lot of influence [referring to Poland] honestly the church has a hell of a lot to say in the country and makes a hell of a lot out of it. Also family is really important there, it seems to me that in the UK family relationships are such that kids grow up, they go and do what they want and if their folks want to visit them they have to call first to see if they're even home and in Poland it's different, it seems to me that there are a lot of very tight relationships between the close and wider family, that girls still get married very young, right after university or even when they're still at uni, it's sick, and mum chooses their wedding dress and mum is more involved in their lives than their husbands, it seems to me that we're really conservative, family and church yeah... (Anna, Poland based, 31)

Many respondents show evidence of being socialised into being ‘the guards’ of cleanliness, food and the children. Lena for example, was taught traditional gender roles at home but now shares responsibilities with her Polish partner and notices little things she does that remind her of her mother (e.g. being unable to relax when the flat is untidy). Perhaps this confirms the fact that, throughout their lives, women actively engage with the roles they have been assigned. Another interviewee, Ola noticed that women are encouraged to go on maternity leave very early in Poland. This may affect them negatively when competing with men in the paid labour market. She observed positive differences in the UK in this respect.

In Poland it’s normal to leave work as soon as you’re pregnant, that’s how it was for me, the doctor wanted me to leave right away basically ... I know that in the UK it isn’t like that, I know women who worked almost until the end, two weeks before labour they went on maternity leave... and [in Poland] as soon as they’re pregnant they leave ... I think that in that sense women in England are less discriminated against than in Poland, that’s what it seems to me. (Ola, Poland based, 29)

Women’s perceptions of gender roles in the UK

A number of respondents pointed to the positive differences between Poland and the UK in respect of gender roles. Kinga, quoted below, was taught traditional roles at home; however, she talked with jealousy about some British women’s lives. Kinga clearly sees domestic work (i.e. washing, cleaning, cooking) as traditionally women’s responsibilities in Poland. It is evident that Kinga perceives the UK to be more equal in respect of the division of gendered roles in regard to paid work and unpaid care between partners in a relationship.

I think it's good that women can drive busses here in England, they are not discriminated as much, it's not like in Poland that a woman won't be able to handle things, like a woman behind the wheel, is terrible right? And here [UK] women drive those buses and it's no surprise you know. ... I really think a lot of Brits, which is strange for me, here, I see a lot of young guys with prams, pushing those prams around so that women can have a break at home, the guy takes the kid out for a walk and that's a real shock for me, 'cos I've got a Polish husband myself and I don't remember him ever taking our kid in the pram and just going to the park for example, the majority of roles, in terms of Polish culture, are done by me – washing, cleaning, cooking, even when I had a job I'd go to work [paid work] then I'd come home and do the house work and then there's the kids, and my husband ... everything is really down to me and here relationships seem to be more equal it seems to me. (Kinga, UK based, 25)

It appears that some respondents think that British men are more helpful and supportive when compared to Polish men (e.g. Kinga) whereas British women are viewed as less hardworking when compared to Polish women (e.g. Kornelia). This as a result may help to facilitate more equal division of responsibilities. Making comparisons can sensitise women and make them realise that what they were taught is not necessarily the only or the best way forward.

I see here in England that it's different, there aren't those roles, 'cos I've spoken to English people at work, I asked them about different things, one's got a girlfriend, the other's married and I'd ask: "so what do you do at home?" "Well, when I come home from work I cook dinner", and I'd always blink and say: "you cook dinner?" "Every day?" "Yeah, every day because I get home earlier and she only gets home from work at say 6, so I cook everyday 'cos dinner's got to be made right?", the same with a lot of different chores, like cleaning or whatever ... that they made cakes and cooked, and they weren't at all embarrassed, they didn't say that they thought it was unmanly or whatever ... err those are I guess big differences between British men and Polish men. (Kornelia, UK based, 37)

Although many of the migrant women interviewed recognise that gender divisions operate in the UK too, gender roles are perceived as less rigid in the UK compared to Poland. As the interviewees explained, in the UK they cannot be distinguished as easily and domestic tasks are not as clearly divided between partners as they are in Poland. In Poland it is expected of women that they do the care and domestic work, whereas in the UK it seems that it all depends on partners achieving a balance and agreement in respect of their shared responsibilities.

There is patriarchy here [UK] but women are more cunning, which doesn't mean it doesn't affect their femininity in some way, they are aggressive [women in the UK], I hate this aggression in women here but it's [gender roles] here all more blurred than in Poland for sure. (Oliwia, UK based, 37)

Respondents are rather clear about the differences they observed between Poland and the UK. Ariela noticed more equality in the UK when compared to Poland. She talked about less pressure on women who are expected to take care 'of everything' in Poland. A number of respondents claimed that British women are more relaxed, they do not take on too many tasks, do less at home. Women in the UK are seen to have either careers or tidy houses; at least this is how many interviewees see British women's lives.

I think that this migration has had a big impact because people have gone back and look at things differently, just the fact that they travel... there's definitely a difference between English and Polish women because a woman in England doesn't have the same pressure on her to take care of everything, to sort everything out, she either has a career or she takes care of the house but in Poland it's still like that, there is the tradition that a woman looks after the house that she washes and cleans err, and on top of that she works. (Ariela, Poland based, 26)

Discussion

Migratory process, which may include one (or more) international movement, settlement (for shorter or longer period of time) and everyday life in the host country, may have a variety of effects on women's gendered lives. Within the sample which consists of two groups of migrant women based in two different countries, Poland and the UK, it is clear that women's gendered perceptions in relation to work and welfare are often subject to re-evaluation. Migration presents an opportunity to do that, it gives women the occasion to examine their existing situation. In the light of what women experience and observe in the receiving country, they may be empowered to change their views and challenge their current arrangements. It can be asserted that migration opens up a different way of perceiving the world.

The majority of the women interviewed seem to favour a partnership over a more traditional division of responsibilities but their understanding of a partnership seems to be somewhat distorted by what they observed and were taught in their home country. The majority of respondents come from quite traditional families where the man is the main breadwinner and the woman the caregiver and it seems as though a partnership for them means any relationship that is different from this norm. In this view, a partnership does not suggest sharing work equally but having some (more or less) assistance with domestic and care work at home. It appears that as women observed different norms, different lifestyles that the members of the host population have, they are now more likely to question their present arrangements. They appear to become somewhat empowered to challenge the status quo. Moreover, through the process of being interviewed and questioned about the division of domestic responsibilities, women are forced to think about this particular issue. As a result, they may reconsider their current situation and their expectations may change.

The preliminary findings demonstrate that the migratory process, which, in this case, included migratory moves between Poland and the UK, being exposed to a multicultural setting whereby an individual resides and often works thus comes in contact with new social norms in a Western setting, often carries the potential to alter people's current life arrangements. In the light

of what migrants observe in the host country, they often actively redefine or renegotiate their gendered responsibilities. Other people's (e.g. the host population) arrangements often become a point of reference against which migrant women's experiences are measured. Being exposed to the above enables them to question their existing life patterns, which then may undergo change if they seem to be more advantageous to those in question.

It can be asserted that migration is "an ageless human strategy to improve life" (Borkert, *et al.*, 2006). Kosack (1976) posed the question "the move to Western Europe – a step towards emancipation?" Arguably, "migration is in direct opposition to their [women's, particularly single women's] gender roles as caregivers and kin keepers in their families and communities" (Aranda, 2003, p. 624), hence it has the potential to free them from their present responsibilities as primary care givers and home makers. Therefore, migration may prove to open up opportunities to bring about change. The reader, however, should bear in mind that those are preliminary results as comprehensive analysis is yet to be conducted. Despite this, the research aim of filling a gap in the existing literature on gender roles and Polish migrant women has been achieved to some extent.

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Endnotes:

ⁱ The term Accession 8 (A8) countries refers to the eight former Eastern Bloc states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that joined the European Union on the 1st May 2004.

ⁱⁱ That is not to say that Polish migration to the UK is a new phenomenon. Polish pilots fought in the Battle of Britain during the Second World War (cf. Olson & Cloud, 2004) and previous waves of Polish migration to the UK followed in the aftermath of the Second World War (cf. Davies, 1984).

ⁱⁱⁱ However, in this paper return migrants are not dealt with separately.