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### Hidden injuries of migration: structures of feeling among Polish migrants in the UK

Theme 2. Inclusion and Exclusion

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#### Abstract

The study uses the concept of 'structures of feeling' to make sense of the data from semi-structured interviews with 35 Polish migrant workers in the UK. To begin with, the article unpacks the values and ethics conveyed in interviewees' narratives and, drawing on a relevant literature, situates them within a transformation of Poland that can be best described with an adjective 'neoliberal'. It argues that it is through this ethic and, specifically, its relation to the actual experience of life in the place of departure and a place of destination that people come to develop contrasting structures of feeling in relation to the two countries. These structures of feeling are characterised by, first of all, dual-idealisation which is a term used to describe the interpretation of the former place in negative terms as not living up to the ideal of a modern, liberal political economy and a positive idealisation of the latter in this respect. Secondly, these structures of feeling are underlined with unacknowledged feelings of shame hanging above the stories of successful work and life abroad. The article also argues that these 'hidden injuries' influence migration decisions. Consequently, the study contributes to the literature on migration from CEE

by showing how neoliberalism in this region may be intricately linked with migration in ways not envisaged by previous research.

Keywords: migrant workers, neoliberalism, Polish migration, structures of feeling

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## 1. Introduction

Migration from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has attracted substantial scholarly attention since the 2004 EU enlargement. The accounts of this migration have largely drawn upon perspectives and approaches well-established in migration theory but also offered a more nuanced theorisation specific to this particular migration. First of all, from the structural perspective, labour market institutions in the sending and receiving countries have been seen as the main engine behind CEE migration. For example, McCollum and Findlay (2015) argue that migration from CEE has been driven by the needs for extension and reproduction of flexible labour markets in the UK. On the other hand, taking the sending country's perspective, Woolfson and Sommers (2008) see this migration as a flight of workers from the deregulated and flexible labour markets of low road neoliberalism in CEE towards more regulated Western model of embedded neoliberalism. Secondly, subject-centred perspectives focused more on exploring individual motivations for migration though they simultaneously tried to account for the role of social and cultural contexts in shaping them. For example, in identifying the discourses of normality in justifications for work and life abroad given by Polish migrants in the UK, Gałasińska

and Kozłowska (2009) show that this migration has been driven not only by the pursuit of jobs that give higher incomes but also certain cultural values and norms, in particular aspirations towards an affluent life that is mediated with socially valued notion of moderation.

The present article takes a similar approach: that is, the one that is subject-centred but, at the same time, considers the social context in which individual experiences and decisions are shaped. By drawing upon a long-established in the social theory concept of structures of feeling, which draws attention to a tension between ethics and an actual experiences of life, it shows how political-economies of Poland and the UK are experienced and actively interpreted by migrant workers through the prism that can be best thought of as neoliberal ethics of which three types are identified. In this way, the article contributes also to the first type of literature identified in the previous paragraph. Specifically, it responds to the call made by Ciupijus (2011) for connecting labour migration from CEE with the effects of neoliberal reforms in these countries. It shows that focusing on the phenomenon identified by the concept of structures of feeling sheds a new light on Polish migration to the UK and accounts for it in a way that is different from explanations offered in previous studies. To make this argument, the two concepts central in the present article need to be unpacked: neoliberalism and structures of feeling. This is attended to in the two sections below.

### 1.1. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a contested concept which stems from the fact that it has been promiscuously applied to describe many things; as put by Clarke (2008), the omnipresence of neoliberalism has made it omnipotent (Clarke, 2008). Acknowledging this, some clarification on the application of this term in the present article is necessary. In general terms, neoliberalism is understood as a theory of political and economic practices that advocate strong property rights, free markets, free trade, and minimal interventionism (Harvey, 2005). Characteristic of neoliberalism are policies of privatisation, deregulation (including in the sphere of the labour market), and welfare

retrenchment. This theory has found its application in policies in many Western European countries following the period of post-war led monopoly capitalism (O'Connor, 2010). However, as remarked by Murrell (1996: 31), it was the experience of CEE countries that 'was the most dramatic episode of economic liberalisation in economic history'. Having a relatively more coordinated economy and higher welfare expenditure than some of the other CEE countries, in particular the Baltic states, Poland was described by some not as a neoliberal but, rather, as an 'embedded neoliberal' political economy (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). Nonetheless, this does not invalidate the claim that neoliberal policies have been far-reaching in this country, especially when it is compared not with the rest of CEE but with Western European states. For example, social expenditure in Poland measured as a percentage of GDP is now lower than even that of the UK – the country that is commonly seen as the neoliberal pioneer in Western Europe (OECD 2016). Labour market is also highly deregulated with perhaps Spain being the only EU country with a higher incidence of atypical employment (Trappman 2011). Considering this, it makes sense to speak of neoliberalism in relation to Poland, especially that Bohle (2004) herself generalized that the EU has exported to CEE a more market-radical variant of neoliberalism than the types found in Western Europe.

In addition to this, literature argues also that accompanying such policies, neoliberalism has also brought a 'new ethic of the active, choosing, responsible, autonomous individual obliged to be free, and to live life as if it were an outcome of free choice' (Miller and Rose, 2008: 18). In line with this, literature on CEE transformation to neoliberalism has documented the 'proselytizing of a rhetoric of responsibility, self-help and choice' and manufacturing of a new ideal of a good citizen that is self-authoring, enterprising, pro-active in securing his or her economic well-being and, as such, juxtaposed against 'passive individuals coddled by the paternalism of socialism' (Makovicky, 2014: 2). Particularly illustrative of these normative transformations is the study by Dunn (2004) of the formerly state-owned enterprise that after the collapse of state-socialism in

Poland was acquired by a US-based corporation. Through her exploration of new management techniques introduced by the private owner, the author unpacks fundamental transformations in a conception of what it means to be a person that accompanied Polish journey to capitalism. Specifically, she documents the construction of an ideal of a privatised individual or asocial monad who acts like a scaled-down version of a corporation. Although, in line with study by Dunn (2004), it is acknowledged that the neoliberal ethics have amalgamated with different elements of ethics of the communist period, generating country-specific subjective dimensions of neoliberalism, the present article focuses specifically on illustrating the relevance of the three types of neoliberal ethics for migration from Poland to the UK. Before these are discussed, the next section unpacks the concept of structures of feeling that served as an analytical tool for unpacking the aforementioned relevance of neoliberal ethics.

### 1.2. Structures of feeling: bringing the concept into migration studies.

The concept of structures of feeling originates from cultural and literary studies of Raymond Williams who compared it to the concept of social character, explaining that the latter deals with public ideals whereas the former 'has to deal not only with the public ideals but with their omissions and consequences, as lived' (Williams, 1961: 63). Social character as a valued system of behaviour and attitudes is taught, formally and informally, structure of feeling is the 'actual experience through which social character is lived' (Williams, 1961: 47). In other words, whereas social character is about the ethic and normative ideals of a society, structure of feeling is about the actual experience of this ethic. As he explained, it is 'a particular community of experience hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some way passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour' (Williams, 1961: 48).

Williams (1961) used an example of the 1840s' Britain to illustrate this concept, saying that, on the one hand, literary works in that period reproduced a certain social character which, among

many other things, encompassed ethics according to which success follows individual effort and hard work, wealth is the mark of respect, and thrift is an important virtue. This was the ethic of liberal, laissez-faire capitalism but many of these characteristics, not surprisingly, can be easily recognised in the current context of neoliberal capitalism. However, Williams (1961: 82) elaborates that:

‘The confident assertions of the social character (...) had to contend, if only unconsciously, with a practical world in which things were not so simple. The confidence of this fiction is often only superficial. What comes through with great force is a pervasive atmosphere of instability and debt (...) debt and ruin haunt this apparently confident world.’

In resonance with this, in *The Long Revolution* Williams (1977) defines structures of feeling as ‘meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs as well as their interaction with systematic beliefs (...) not feelings against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought’ (Williams, 1977: 132).

While Williams developed his concept solely in relation to literary work, he proposed that it is simply one of its ‘articulate records’. We can identify structures of feeling described implicitly in, for example, Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) seminal study on working-class pupils and workers. Their structures of feeling can be described as an atmosphere of chronic sense of low self-esteem that is haunting the ethic and ideals of American society at that time. A more explicit application of the concept can be seen in the study by Strangleman (2012) who looked into the narratives of older male workers in the railway industry in the UK arguing that it would be foolish to dismiss their feelings as ‘private troubles which statistics do not recognise’ or ‘as simple nostalgia’, and suggests ‘that these narratives can be understood as valuable organic critiques of industrial and social change emergent from work culture’ (Strangleman, 2012: 411-423).

Likewise, the present articles looks at migrants' narratives and feelings not as personal troubles but, instead, as valuable critiques of a political-economy in their country of departure and neoliberalism more generally. Drawing upon previous literature on this concept, including Williams' original formulation of it, structures of feeling can be best thought of as a process of experiencing certain places that occurs at the meeting point of ethics and the experience of life. An integral part of this process consists of interpretations that people develop to make sense of their experience that not always goes hand in hand with the ethics. These interpretations, as shall be seen, offer valuable critiques of neoliberalism. Before this is illustrated, the next section briefly discusses research methods used in the present study.

## 2. Research methods

The article is part of a larger research project that included also Ukrainian migrant workers in Poland. It draws on data from semi-structured interviews with 18 respondents in Belfast and 17 in Edinburgh. There were significant differences in what Evans et al. (1996) referred to as local structures of feeling in these two places. Specifically, certain aspects of the neoliberal ethics identified in this article seemed to go uneasily with the experience of work and life in the sectarian labour market and divided communities of Northern Ireland. However, while acknowledging the relevance of the local structures of feeling (Evans et al. 1996) for migration experience and decisions, the present articles focuses on structures of feeling conveyed in relation to Poland and the UK more generally.

The initial number of respondents was drafted from personal contacts and then snowballing technique was used to access more interviewees. Acknowledging the limitations of these techniques, they allowed to collect a sample varied in terms of respondents' social, economic and educational background as well as employment experiences and trajectories prior and after

arriving in the UK. Twenty-two interviewees were women and thirteen men, most of them in their late twenties and mid-thirties with one person aged 52. All interviewees had lived in the UK for at least five years uninterrupted prior to the interview. All but three participants were interviewed twice: one main interview in 2013 and the follow-up interview the year after (i.e. 2014). Therefore, the data used here consists of 67 semi-structured interviews in total.

All of them were transcribed and coded line-by-line. Gradually, following certain codes and deciding which of them were more relevant moved the analysis towards another phase of coding in which most significant and recurring codes were selected and grouped into categories and subcategories: that is, the three neoliberal ethics. Coding also showed that these ethics were linked with certain experiences such as feelings of shame and failure or the opposite to them feelings of achievement, pride, and success that were distinctively related to the sending and receiving country. This led to the interest with the concept of structures of feeling which was used in further data analysis. Structures of feeling should be seen as a sensitising concept (Blumer 1969) which makes us aware of certain processes and mechanisms that are irreducible to a set of testable variables. Williams developed this concept from the literary work as sources of data. Subsequently, Evans et al. (1996) and Strangleman (2012, 2015) refined it in the process of using it to understand their own data. The present thesis drew upon these studies but, following Blumer's (1969: 43 – 45) argument that the meaning of concepts is to be developed or discovered in the course of research, specifically through the study of empirical data that uncovers its different elements and aspects, the concept of structures of feeling was refined. Specifically, it was conceptualised here as a process; a process that seems to be of relevance in migration experiences and decisions.

### 3. Research findings

In what follows, the article reports on the empirical findings of the research. This discussion is divided into three separate sections, each on them focusing on different ways in which neoliberal ethics and structures of feeling associated with them manifested themselves in migrants' narratives.

#### 3.1. Structures of feeling of a freely choosing consumer-citizen

Previous literature saw the model of an active and free consumer-citizen as being an integral part of a neoliberal ethic (see Barnett 2010: 3). In line with this, Dunn (2004: 127), writing on the reshaping of personhood under the new capitalism in post-socialist Poland, argued that:

‘purchasers in the Polish market are being transformed from either “hunters” seeking products through znajomości or the passive recipients of goods from the state into active consumers with preferences and choices’.

However, it is argued in the present section that in the eyes of at least some migrants from Poland, the material reality of life in this country has not caught up with this new ethic and that this clash between the two can be related to migration decisions. For example, the sense of a lack of a consumer choice is vivid in the anecdote given by Mariusz:

I’m a typical child of the EU accession. I left Poland just before 2004, stayed three months in Brussels and three months in Amsterdam. I went back to Poland exactly at the moment when it entered the EU. After three months I realised I can’t find myself there. This atmosphere in the country... it wasn’t for me. Actually, I left Poland for a few years as a child and I lived in the US for some time. These were the times when in Poland you could buy a chewing gum only in Pewex<sup>1</sup>. It wasn’t a normal, colourful world. Later I adjusted

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<sup>1</sup> A chain of shops in the state-socialist Poland where foreign goods could be obtained for payments in the US dollars.

to it but when I went abroad again it came back to me that Poland is not yet as cool place as it might had seemed.

(Mariusz, 31 years old)

Above are the words with which Mariusz began his interview following the first question about the reasons for coming to work in the UK. He started by saying that his experience of working in Western Europe created, upon his return to Poland, a discord with the atmosphere in his home country which he found as no longer suitable to him. In trying to describe what was wrong with this new sense of Poland, he goes back in time by drawing on his memory of a travel to the US as a child. Even though he talks about the times of a still state-socialist Poland and a lack of basic consumer products at that time, such as chewing gums, he explains through this retrospective anecdote how he still feels about his country of origin. Specifically, he says that going to work in Western Europe brought back these memories of Poland as a place that is still not 'cool' enough. Interestingly, Mariusz uses exactly the same anecdote in the concluding remarks of his interview when asked whether he plans to return to Poland in the future:

I will give you a silly metaphor. First was my visit to the USA when on the first day I asked my uncle to buy me a chewing gum. We went to a supermarket, he took me to the chewing gum section and I totally grew stupid. I think my brain was not ready for these kind of stimuli. I didn't know what to do. In one second I got a choice of chewing gums in front of me that I've never seen during my entire life. After 15 minutes my uncle simply put the random gum in my hand and we left. Since that moment I knew it was the place I wanted to be. That I have to try all of these chewing gums in my life.

(Mariusz, 31 years old)

The two quotes above indicate that consumption aspirations are important motives to go as well as to stay abroad. They may influence migrants' decisions also by generating a sense of belonging that makes them less likely to return to their home country:

Interviewer: 'You said that you don't plan to leave. Do you feel attached to this place?'

'Well, I feel attached... Cause one got used to here, right? That there's a better standard of life. When I compare myself to my family in Poland. I feel sorry for them. I can afford to get an Iphone – maybe it's a silly example – but in Poland an average person cannot afford to buy an Iphone unless they spend their monthly wage. So there are kind of stupid, mundane things.'

(Daria, 28 years old)

Interviewer: 'So you said that you consider Scotland as your home?'

Irena: We have something that holds us here. Here we have something that we achieved ourselves. Because in Poland we have completely nothing. Besides family ((laughter)) we have nothing so....

Interviewee: What you have achieved?

Irena: a house, a car.

Tadeusz: These are materialistic things

Irena: Materialistic.'

(Irena and Tadeusz, 31 and 34 years old)

Although at a face value such narratives indicate migration that Kazimierska et al. (2011) described as driven by a materialistic value orientation and the pursuit of standards of living measured by the ability to consume everyday goods, another interpretation can be offered, too. Specifically, the assumedly materialistic orientation can also be read as a reflection of a much more fundamental yearning for inclusion and for citizenship in the sense that Anderson (2013) talks about: that is, a sense of worth and honour. As explained by Ray (2014: 123): ‘if the self in contemporary societies is a “consuming self”, then commodity performance is likely to be crucial to maintaining a sense of self-worth’. Therefore, if commodity performance is not available to the desired extent, people are likely to experience diminished sense of worth. This, in turn, is one of the cognates of a sense of shame (Scheff, 2000). Drawing on the sociological theory of shame, this emotion indicates a threatened or a broken bond between an individual and a group (Scheff, 2000) and can be seen as a unique barometer of social integration (Czykwin 2012). In turn, displays of consumption can be seen as a technique of suppressing feelings of shame and, thus, seeking inclusion in a society where materialistic and consumptionist values prevail (Ray, 2014: 123). However, for many migrants, such technique was arguably very limited in Poland due to either low income or, alternatively, unstable employment:

‘At first I used to be employed directly by the company but later it was through some ridiculous agency who renewed my contract every two weeks. It was just funny. So even when you want to buy a mobile phone in Poland, they check your income but if you have two weeks long contract you can’t buy anything. We were a young couple, living with a mother. What can you buy? Nothing.’

(Tadeusz, 34 years old)

Furthermore, since the deregulated labour market with insecure and low-paid jobs, that Tadeusz and many other migrants interviewed for this study fell a victim off, is arguably an effect of

neoliberal policies pushed with much force in Poland, we can argue that the material conditions created by neoliberalism clash with the ethic that has proselytised with it, at least in the lives of workers in such employment circumstances. From this perspective, structures of feeling in relation to Poland that are characterised by experiences of shame and negative interpretation of a country of origin which emerged from migrants' narratives bring out fundamental tensions within neoliberalism. The next section another instance of such tensions.

### 3.2. Structures of feeling of the independent adult-citizen

Apart from consumerism, other themes recurring in narratives on belonging and settling in the UK were the notions of independence and self-sufficiency. This can be illustrated with the case of Monika, in particular the following quote from her interview:

Interviewer: 'When did you decide that you were going to stay in Scotland?

Monika: Probably when I worked in \*\*\* because it was a permanent job. (...) So I felt... confident. (...). I felt that I was coping well. I could earn a living together with my partner and we were self-sufficient. (...) we felt that we stood up on our feet. (...) That we are now responsible for ourselves. That we are not dependent on our parents but that we work for ourselves. It depends on us whether we have money to pay bills and so on. So we felt stronger. And it probably also was the reason why we decided to settle here. I mean, to treat this place more like a home even though there was no such a permanent place at that time yet.'

(Monika, 28 years old)

While for Tadeusz the stable and sufficiently remunerated employment was a pathway to his consumerist aspirations (see previous section), Monika subjectively linked these two with aspirations towards an independent and self-sufficient life. Considering the average age of interviewees, such orientations towards economic independence could be seen in simple terms

as reflecting their desires of transitioning to adulthood. However, adulthood is not a neutral notion but a normative image and a social expectation that derives from classical liberal thought which emphasised independence, self-maintenance, self-governance, self-sovereignty, and self-discipline of a liberal adult-citizen (Sennett 2003). Therefore, it can be read as a politicized ideal of personhood with a certain ideological charge. Arguably, this ideal was re-enacted under neoliberalism as seen in the proliferation of discourses that shame dependence on welfare state which came to be increasingly portrayed as having a corrupting effect on self-discipline, self-governance and self-sovereignty. Neoliberal discourses operate on what Sennett (2003) calls an 'infantilisation thesis' which asserts that welfare state makes adult men continue to suckle mother's breast. Pejorative notions of the nanny-state are an illustration of this rhetoric. The spread of welfare-to-work programmes which aim at moving individuals out of passive dependence on public support is written into these discourses.

In light of these discourses, 'in the public realm dependence appears shameful' (Sennett, 2003: 101). Drawing on literature on the transformation of Polish society, shame of dependence in this former state-socialist country could be additionally intertwined with the notion of a civilisationally incompetent *homo sovieticus* (Sztompka 1993) who has a habitus of the discredited socialist system characterised by a lack of individual responsibility, helplessness and passivity (Buchowski, 2006). From this perspective, drawing once again on the sociology of shame, migrant narratives that on the surface appear as indicating a materialistic value orientation (Kazimierska et al., 2011) could be also seen as emerging from a more fundamental desire to belong by avoiding this negative emotion and social exclusion that it indicates. In turn, structure of feeling in relation to Poland that comes across from these narratives could be best described as the omissions of a highly inspirational ethic of self-governance and independence that is haunted by shame and fears of 'exclusion through failure' (Anderson, 2013). This, once again, indicates the tension between neoliberal ethic and its lived experience.

As argued in the previous section, the structures of feeling in a form of shame can influence migrants' decisions regarding settlement and return, which the case of Monika also illustrates:

'If we returned they would treat you more as a loser than a person who was brave enough to pack her suitcase and go. (...) You would be perceived more as a loser. So I said that I won't go back to work as a cashier in McDonalds for peanuts. People [in Poland] are already 30 years old but sometimes they still live with parents and they are practically so tied up that they can't leave home because their income. Despite the fact that they work in their field and are graduates, and they do PhDs or they already finished PhD, they are still tied up.'

(Monika, 28 years old)

The fault line of Monika's narrative is the contrast between being individually responsible, self-sufficient, and free in the UK versus being tied-up, helpless and constrained in Poland. In Sennett's (2003) terms, it is a contrast between the social characters of a liberal adult-citizen and infantilised, dependent social loser. By going abroad, she became able to present herself as a proactive, brave subject who proves the qualities that Buchowski (2006) and Sztompka (1993) associated with normative ideals in post-socialist Poland such as individual responsibility, learned resoluteness, and innovative adaptation. This ethic was encapsulated in Monika's description of migration as simply 'packing up a suitcase' and being 'brave' in one of the quotes above.

Importantly, work in the UK allowed migrants to reach the ideal of an independent adult-citizen not only by portraying themselves as independent from their parents but also from the state, which can be seen in the recurring emphases across interviews through which what people perceived as an economic success had been presented as entirely self-made. This can be illustrated with a quote from Marek that is just one of many others that were fashioned in a similar way:

You see, what I don't like about this country are foreigners Poles also. There are a lot of immigrants who come here and take everything that this country gives them. I don't like that it is so easy to get social benefits, housing subsidy and so on. There are so many migrants who abuse it. I had to work to achieve everything by myself. I worked my ass off, refusing myself many pleasures. But there are a lot of Polish people who just take everything that the state gives them.

(Marek, 35 years old)

Being so eager to differentiate themselves from 'benefit scroungers', migrants enact the role of guardians of a good citizenship that rests on liberal values, which is something that previous literature has already talked about (Anderson 2013: 6). However, while they can portray themselves as independent subjects in the UK, narratives as those exemplified in this section show how the ethic of independent adult-citizen clashes with the experience of life in Poland where these migrants felt 'infantilised'. Their predicaments were low wages and insecure employment and as far as these circumstances are at least partly an outcome of neoliberal policies, the structures of feeling of shame identified in this section indicate also a tension between neoliberal ethic and the material circumstances that neoliberalism creates. This tension may seem to be an exclusive experience of those who suffer from a lack of economic independence in Poland and, therefore, be absent among the more affluent or skilled migrants. However, as the next section will illustrate, the interviewees with more advantageous economic situation in Poland also exhibited an ethic cognate to that discussed above and it came into tension with their experience of life in Poland, too. Similarly, it was associated with dual-idealizations of a country of departure and destination.

### 3.3. The entrepreneurial ethic and its structures of feeling

It is often posited that entrepreneurial ethic is a part and parcel of neoliberalism (Marttila 2013; Bröckling 2015). But what is meant by the entrepreneurial ethic? Neoliberal discourses have extended the meaning of an entrepreneur from the economic agent who undertakes a new, risky business initiative to a role model of social subjectivity that should be exercised in every aspect of one's life, including crafting, changing, adapting and improving one's biography, the self, working life, and relationships with family (Marttila 2013; Bröckling 2015). Hence, apart from a business entrepreneur, neoliberalism champions a role model of an entrepreneur of self who exercises initiative and risk in relation to his or her own life. The ideal of a self-entrepreneur appeared in the narratives presented in the previous section in which people manifested themselves as self-made wo-/men who actively crafted their individual biographies through migration. However, the entrepreneurial ethic radiates most strongly from interviews with those who did not experience economic constraints to self-making in their home country but, nevertheless, embarked on a risky journey aimed at reshaping their biographies, selves, working lives, and relationships with significant others. Grzegorz, a 39 year old employee of a professional services company, offers the most elaborate illustration of how this ethic can influence migration decisions. He distances himself from the figure of a desperate migrant driven abroad by necessity. Instead of this, he presents himself as an entrepreneur 'with a different motivation and with a different wallet' who comes here out of choice, stays open-minded to opportunities, and has some money to invest:

I should also say that I came here with the purpose of working only in my profession. I absolutely didn't allow a thought of working outside of my profession even if only for a short time. I could afford it and I thought that in case things don't work, I can come back to Poland and start looking for some new ideas. Many people come here with the mind-set that they have to find some job no matter what. They plan to live with many other

people in a small flat for a year or two before they can afford to rent something on their own. I came here with a different motivation and with a different wallet.

(Grzegorz, 39 years old)

Moreover, it was his experience as an entrepreneur in Poland that was one of the reasons why he decided to seek work abroad:

Grzegorz: I was very open minded at the beginning and didn't say that it has to be here [UK]. But I was sure of one thing: I didn't want to come back to Poland for some time. Because of one simple reason: I was severely tired, bored and discouraged with Poland really.

Interviewer: Why was it so?

Grzegorz: Two reasons only. One is problems with executing invoices to be paid when you run a company in Poland. My firm offered intellectual services and in this case a customer pays after the service is delivered. There're no means of executing your payments in Poland. The second problem is the administrative apparatus. If you run a company in Poland, the very moment you register it your name is written down on the list of potential thieves of state's budget with some invisible pen. During the 5 years of running the company, I had a tax investigation twice. Of course it wasn't exactly like from the movie Closed Circuit but the general approach and a way of dealing with the case resembled it. Here [UK] my contacts with tax office were, I would say, really a pleasure if we want to make a comparison.

(Grzegorz, 39 years old)

In the quote above, Grzegorz gives an account of institutional climate in Poland that, according to him, stifles the expression of his entrepreneurial spirit. Illustrative is his reference to Closed

Circuit which is a Polish film made in 2013 that tells a story of the three entrepreneurs who have been unjustly accused of criminal activities. The film is a critique of the too powerful and distrustful state apparatus that treats entrepreneurs as potential criminals. Such interpretation of the Polish state can be subjectively linked with the state communist system that was also characterised by the powerful apparatus and where private enterprising was very limited. In contrast to this stands the experience of the business-friendly attitude of British officials.

Further in his narrative, he portrays the UK as an ideal model of state which through its limited welfare policies facilitates the entrepreneurial individual efforts without having corrupting effects on non-entrepreneurial individuals:

I'm not a benefit scrounger by birth by which I mean that I don't go to the country where benefits are most generous, for example Scandinavia. However, the state interventionism in crisis situations, for example when the market collapses, is optimal. It doesn't corrupt people in a way that they would say "why should I go to work if I can live on the same level without a job". I think it's very well balanced here [UK]

(Grzegorz, 39 years old)

Even though one might see the quote above as going somewhat against migrants' criticism of welfare policies which were mentioned in the previous section, Grzegorz' position on the issue of welfare is in fact not much different from them. First of all, he also emphasises that he is not a benefit tourist himself. He also clearly advocates the limited character of state interventionism ('state interventionism in crisis situations') and sees the UK, not Scandinavian countries known for more generous welfare provisions, as a model example. Moreover, in another excerpt he added that still more can be done to limit the abuse of the state through welfare:

I'm afraid that you can just come to the UK, register as unemployed get an unemployment benefit right away after coming. At least that's how it used to be. I know

such people. But, of course, even the perfect system will always have some flaws. They are working on it to stop such abuse and, in my opinion, it is good.

(Grzegorz, 39 years old)

In this way, his narrative is written into a discourse of a minimal state that plays a role facilitative to the market (commodification) rather than the one being concerned with social rights and social security. On a more general level, stories like that of Grzegorz can be seen as indicating a clash between an entrepreneurial ethic that goes with neoliberalism and the actual experience of this ethic in Poland. This clash creates dual-idealizations of Poland and the UK and accompanying them feelings about these two countries that are perhaps best captured in yet another very graphic metaphor made by Grzegorz:

Poland is like an alcoholic mother to me. I love her because she gave birth to me. She always wanted the best for me but she's been drinking. Drinking a lot. Sometimes in this boozed-up rampage she totally loses recognition of who is who. On top of this, she lives with a pimp who beats her regularly. Abuses her and so on. (...) So now there is a question: what should I do? I am not able to be next to her cause she doesn't even want to me be there. (...) On the other hand, Belfast is: a distant, distant aunt who loves me as much as she can and is completely predictable (...) So I would say that if I was to honestly, without being influenced by emotions but just consider everything with a paper and a calculator and say, which one of these mothers – in inverted comas – gave me more, I would say that, well, the aunt.

All in all, in Grzegorz' narrative Poland emerges as a a state which stifles individuals' 'neoliberal potential' (Deneva, 2013: 60), and which has a highly hierarchical and inefficient labour market with ill-functioning labour market policies. In a way, he reinterprets Poland as not having made a full transition to the neoliberal economy. Perhaps this is the experience of the low-road

neoliberalism that Woolfson and Sommers (2008) see as characteristic of CEE countries. This type of neoliberalism, like an alcoholic mother, does not offer recognition and care. In contrast, the UK is idealised as a neoliberal heaven with a well-balanced, efficiency enhancing state that creates a perfect environment for entrepreneurial subjects, and as an aunt that offers complete predictability and recognition. It is this latter place that Grzegorz conceives as his emotional home and decides to settle in, which, once again, points to a potential relationship between structures of feeling and migration decisions.

#### 4. Hidden injuries of CEE migration

The analysis of empirical data in the previous sections indicated that lying behind migration to the UK may be the structures of feeling that migrants develop in relation to Poland. These structures of feeling are characterised by a sense of shame and its cognate feelings. These 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb 1972) were linked with ideals or aspirations bred by the three ethics that have arguably proselytised with the arrival of neoliberalism to Poland but, in practice, were experienced as beyond reach, at least for the interviewees in this study. These underlying feelings of shame resonate with studies which suggest that nowadays citizens' 'worth, value, and inclusion, are accordingly determined by contractual success or failures in relationship to utility' (Sommers, 2008: 41) and that 'people who are defined as lacking in "neoliberal potential" (...) might be treated as less worthy citizens' (Deneva, 2013: 60).

Arguably, this affective element of the structures of feeling may be a mechanism of self-management that drives migration as well as reproduces neoliberalism in both sending and receiving country. Previous literature has already identified a role of shame as a tool of self-control, be it within workplaces (Sennett, 1980) or a society at large (Elias, 1978). In the present study, we could observe the disciplining power of shame influencing choices and actions of

migrants with regard to migration, return and settlement. The disciplining role of shame exerted on these migrants can be illustrated by comparing it with Williams's (1961) argument about structures of feeling reflected in the British literary works in the 1840s – the time of the early liberal capitalism when mercantilism was superseded with free-trade and laissez-faire orientation, and the ethic of self-help took dominance. In the literary works of this period, 'characters whose destinies could not be worked out within the system as given were simply put on the boat, a simpler way of resolving the conflict between ethic and experience than any radical questioning of the ethic' (Williams, 1961: 83). The black sheep were rendered invisible from the storyline by being transferred to the Empire (i.e. British colonies) though they might have returned later with miraculously acquired fortunes. In this way migration to Empire was an escape-route: 'the weak of every kind could be transferred to it, to make a new life' (Williams, 1961: 83). This made liberal capitalism viable in at least four ways: firstly, it reaffirmed its ethic because 'going out to the new lands could be seen as self-help and enterprise of the purest kinds'; secondly, this method was consistent with the belief 'that there could be no general solution to the social problems of the time; there could be only individual solutions'; thirdly, it was a perfect solution to working-class problems; fourthly, there was a need for labourers in the Empire (Williams, 1961: 83-84).

In a similar fashion, migration to Western Europe appears as a solution to the conflict between ethics and the actual experience of neoliberal capitalism in Poland. On the one hand, neoliberal capitalism champions an ideal of an independent, self-sufficient, entrepreneurial adult citizen-consumer but its actual policies as they unfolded in Poland undermine the prerequisites necessary to realise this ideal such as sufficient income, employment security, and a present rather than an absent state. Perhaps these are the problems more characteristic of a low-road neoliberalism in CEE and elsewhere outside of Western Europe that, arguably, still retained more regulated labour markets and more extensive welfare provisions. Nevertheless, this still illustrates a more fundamental tension within neoliberalism regardless of a country.

Characters whose life trajectories revealed this mismatch between neoliberal ethics and actual experience of life in Poland disappear from the storyline of a sending country: i.e. they migrate. They reappear every now and again during their visits to family and acquaintances in Poland to whom money they acquired abroad through their self-enterprising efforts may indeed seem like a miracle as in 1840s literature that Williams (1961) wrote about. In this way, the ethic of self-help and individual initiative leading to success remains unquestioned. The West becomes like the literary technique of Empire: it needs labourers but it also provides a solution to problems in Poland thus making the ethics of neoliberalism viable and tempts them with individual rather general solutions to systemic problems. But, as if this symbiosis was already not efficient enough, the orientation of these migrants reinforces a neoliberal ethic in the Empire as they become guardians of it as seen in, for example, their attacks on welfare provisions for supposedly undeserving individuals.

Structures of feeling of shame may play a role of an invisible oil making this *perpetuum mobile* run more smoothly in that, in line with Scheff's proposition, as well as with insights from studies of Sennet and Cobb's (1972), and Willis' (1977), the unacknowledged shame channels the focus on individual strategies of suppressing it and away from collective engagement in governance that could challenge the systemic circumstances that caused such hidden injuries in the first place.

## 5. Conclusions

To conclude, the article presented the contrasting ways in which migrant workers experience and reinterpret political-economies of Poland and the UK. The latter country was experienced as more in line with interviewees' aspirations, values and orientations that, drawing upon relevant literature, were conceptually perceived as driven by the three ethics linked to neoliberalism. In general, the UK was interpreted as a modern country suitable for proactive, entrepreneurial

subjects and consumers whereas Poland was experienced and interpreted as having inadequate labour market and other institutions that infantilise these adults and stifle their consumerist aspirations and entrepreneurial potential.

Of course, in the data collected for this study there are also narratives which run counter to such dual-idealizations of Poland and the UK. Moreover, it is not proposed here that migrants interviewed for this study unequivocally internalised the three neoliberal ethics. To the contrary, some data suggested that these three ethics were at times challenged or at least put into question. However, such narratives have relevance on their own and discussing them deserves a separate piece. Instead, as forecasted in the introduction, the present article focused on illustrating how neoliberalism may play a role in migration from Poland to the UK. Responding to this, it was indicated that structures of feeling that emerged from the clash of the neoliberal ethics and an actual experience of life were associated with feelings of shame as well as negative interpretations of the country of origin. These feelings and interpretations appeared to have shaped migration decisions of the subjects of this study.

Moreover, as foreshadowed in the introduction, these structures of feeling also provide a valuable critique of neoliberalism. Referring to a liberal, laissez-faire capitalism of the 1840s Williams (1961: 82) said that its confident assertions and discourse had to contend, if only unconsciously, with a practical world where things were not so simple and that this confident world was haunted with a pervasive atmosphere of instability and debt (see part 2.2. for the full quote of the present article). In parallel with this, the narratives of migrant workers in this study reveal the omissions of the confident world of neoliberal capitalism in Poland and its self-made men; the neoliberal capitalism that took a perhaps more laissez-faire form in Poland than in the still more regulated labour markets in the West as the data on welfare expenditure or on employment that was mentioned previously in this article indicates.

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