

# The Gender-Related Lifestyle Changes and Choices of Female White-Collar Migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia in Poland

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*This article looks at the mobility of highly skilled female migrants from the perspective of the post-socialist semi-peripheral countries in Eastern Europe. It analyses chosen aspects of the biographical experiences of highly skilled women from three post-USSR republics bordering the European Union – namely Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – in Poland, a post-socialist country itself but also an EU member-state. The empirical analysis focuses on their lifestyle changes and choices, made through the experience of living in a new, though quite familiar Polish culture, which is both more emancipated (Western) while, at the same time, pertaining to some of the familiar (Eastern) patterns. Due to this liminal nature of the host country, the adaptation process of migrants is easier and comes at a lower biographical cost. In the analysis, I explore two notions: the gender roles renegotiation and the changes in the women's approach towards the external manifestations of femininity, which I contrast with their reflections of the changes undergone. As for the gender role renegotiation, three main approaches were described varying by the degree to which the old, familiar patterns are maintained. In terms of the external notions of femininity, while taking care of one's looks is still an observable element of the migrants' identity, they do take advantage of the wider spectrum of options available in the host society, and try to blend in with the casual big-city crowd. The article was written on the basis of empirical material in the form of twenty in-depth, unstructured interviews, which were confronted with the selected subject literature.*

*Keywords: female migrants; Ukrainians; Belarusians; Russians; Poland; gender roles*

## Introduction

Among the numerous factors which determine a person's identity and social position in the modern world is the increasing sense of importance attached to one's choice of lifestyle – attitude to clothing, diet, relaxation, spending free time and bodily practices – which, in turn, accounts for a person's social standing (Giddens 2012). This is obviously strictly linked both to the individual's economic resources and ability to participate in a consumer society and to other dispositions such as cultural capital – understood here as a set of subconsciously acquired competences (Bourdieu 1985) or to the gender roles in a given society which influence one's lifestyle practices. Bearing in mind that identity is a processual construct subject to redefinition and change (Strauss 1959), when a person migrates abroad the repertoire of the seemingly 'natural' choices changes. In most cases, finding oneself in a new environment, even if it seems culturally close, entails the need to reinvent the thus-far-obvious ways of being. In the migratory context, the new experiences and models of 'doing work', 'doing life' and 'doing gender' influence migrants' self-perception and require more 'biographical work (...) to be done in order to integrate one's experiences into more or less coherent wholeness' (Kaźmierska 2003, para. 11). What is more, 'migration is usually accompanied by a loss of status – with the exception of a few privileged migration groups – which involves an entrance into the new function systems on a much lower level than that reached in the country of origin' (Breckner 2007: 142). Qualitative research into migration which adopts the biographical perspective has, in a more or less detailed way, explored such notions, starting with the monumental work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–1920). Yet it should be stressed that, in general, research into highly skilled migrants – the privileged elite of migrants – more often concentrates on the quantitative aspect, either on enumerating them (Blitz 2010; Docquier, Lowell and Marfouk 2009; Kofman 2000, 2012; Salt 1992) or on researching those professional groups which are numerous enough to be statistically significant or whose mass migrations trigger other social problems<sup>1</sup> in their sending countries – e.g. nurses (Brush and Sochalski 2007) – while not looking so much at the micro-level of their subjective experiences.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there are no such analyses, yet the publications which explore the motivations, experiences and trajectories of highly skilled migrants tend to focus on intra-EU migrants and do not consider the gender dimension as a factor differentiating their experiences (Kaźmierska, Piotrowski and Waniek 2012; Piekut 2013; Ryan and Mulholland 2014), even if female migrants tend to outnumber male migrants in most developed countries (Dumont, Martin and Spielvogel 2007).

The aim of this paper is to look at chosen aspects of highly skilled migrants' biographical experiences from a different perspective. The focus of my research is female migrants from three post-USSR republics bordering the European Union – namely Ukraine, Belarus and Russia – in Poland, a post-socialist country itself but also an EU member-state (and, for a long time, a major 'exporter' of labour migrants to EU markets). I analyse their experiences from a micro-level perspective, thus departing from a straightforward statistical analysis. I look at the mobility of highly skilled women from the perspective of the post-socialist semi-peripheral countries in the new Eastern Europe, which began to form with the fall of the old regimes. In this article I discuss how the experience of migrating to Poland influences the gender-related choices and transformations of highly skilled female migrants<sup>3</sup> from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, to acknowledge their perceptions of the changes undergone.

Such an analysis is particularly interesting in the context of Poland due to its specificity as a host country. In the first decades of the systemic transformation there was a rapid and steady growth in the number of foreigners coming to Poland consisting largely of the citizens of the former USSR republics, who the Poles would collectively call 'Ruski' (a slightly derogatory version of the word 'Russian'). They would come to Poland on tourist visas and take up employment in the grey area of the economy such as petty trade at bazaars, seasonal agriculture work, construction work, transport, service sector. With time, however, the profile of the migrants began to diversify. Since 2010, Poland has become the most popular migration destination especially

for Ukrainians amongst all the EU countries. Moreover, it is the only EU country where, since 2014, one can observe a dynamic increase in the number of Ukrainians, the prognosis being that the numbers will continue to be appreciable (OSW 2017: 43). What is more, their occupational profiles are more diverse than those in other popular destination countries such as Italy, Spain or Portugal (OSW 2017: 40). Finally, a large proportion of them are women – who are increasingly deciding to settle, therefore becoming both present and future citizens. The number of Belarusians who are interested in going to Poland is also growing rapidly (Żarnasiek 2018). Russians are the least numerous of these three nations, but large enough to be statistically noticeable.

The paper is divided as follows: first, I outline the theoretical background against which I analyse the empirical material and explore the criteria for defining a highly skilled migrant. Secondly, I present the research framework, describe the methodology and the characteristics of my research participants. Then I put under scrutiny the changes in practices and perceptions of the interviewees resulting from the redefined gender models. Finally, I explore the transformation of the notion of femininity through the migrants' attitudes to clothing and appearance.

### **Highly skilled migrants – an overview of theories and definitions**

The migration of the well-educated or highly skilled is not a modern phenomenon but has been taking place on a large scale since the twentieth century. Blitz (2010: 3293) offers a three-phase typology of highly skilled flows:

- spontaneous and personal movements motivated primarily by negative push factors;
- state-sponsored recruitment campaigns; and
- a global phase identified by the growth of transnationalism and regionalisation and the development of a global migration market.

The traditional approach to the study of migration stemmed from nineteenth- and twentieth-century assumptions that a migrant was someone poor and uneducated who left their country in search of better economic conditions. This micro-level motivation was thoroughly researched within the neoclassical or the new economics of migration theories and Blitz's first type of migrant (as set out above) would pass unnoticed in the analyses carried out within such paradigms. The second type of migrant would be put under scrutiny within the dual market theory (Piore 1979), which shifted the focus on the demand for immigrant labour in industrialised societies (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1993), ignoring the level of qualification of migrants as long as they were fit to perform the expected jobs (even if a certain proportion of them were, in fact, highly skilled). This would also trigger the process of de-skilling, when migrants would take up the expected niche jobs even when these were below their level of qualification. The final type of migrant is a post-1980s phenomenon and would be researched within transnational and mobility theories or a number of intersecting approaches and disciplines, as migration becomes not an exception but the norm and mobility is the embodiment of the post-modern condition – 'a desirable act rather than an economic means to an end' (King 2002: 95).

Since the 1960s, the notion of migrants' skills and so-called 'brain drain' started to attract the interest of scholars (Kofman 2000; Koser and Salt 1997; Rhode 1993). Yet still there seems to be no consent as to what constitutes a highly skilled migrant, as they do not form a homogenous group. Blitz (2010: 3305) notes that:

*Skilled migrants may include managers, professionals, engineers, scientists, teachers, and bureaucrats, as well as many other occupations. They tend to be differentiated from unskilled or production workers, such as tradespeople, clerks, sales clerks, industrial workers, and farm hands by virtue of their high levels of education and relatively scarce skill sets.*

Therefore, the criterion the most commonly assumed to be the distinctive feature of such migrants is having a tertiary educational qualification or its equivalent. However, this has been criticised as somewhat of an overstatement, both because education does not always equal a high degree of expertise (which can also be acquired through the course of work experience) and because education systems vary worldwide, as does the relative value of the diplomas. Moreover, migrants do tend to take up employment below their status when they either cannot get their qualifications officially recognised or the less-qualified work is better paid than their primary job in the home country. Hence, an alternative criterion of distinguishing a highly skilled migrant could be the ‘occupational entry’ benchmark. Blitz (2010: 3306) also points out that a definite feature of white-collar expats is their scarcity in comparison to other migrants or to the demand for their services and, as such, they are often on the margins of statistical surveys. From the receiving country’s perspective, these are the desired foreigners, who benefit the local labour market according to pre-defined and country-specific economic criteria. As such, they are not perceived as problematic and, hence, are socially invisible.

For the purpose of this article I consider a female white-collar migrant to be a woman with post-secondary education holding an academic degree, who also possesses extensive professional experience, allowing her to take up employment on the primary labour market upon arrival in the host country in a job relevant to her qualifications, in sectors that are not commonly associated with the ‘migrant niche’ (e.g. care work, domestic service or the service sector).<sup>4</sup>

### **Research context**

I decided to focus on females from three post-Soviet-bloc countries since, as far as non-EU citizens are concerned, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians constitute the most numerous groups of migrants/foreigners in Poland, a significant proportion of whom are women. In Poland, according to data from the 2011 National Census, Ukrainians were the most numerous group and constituted 24 per cent of foreigners (of whom 70 per cent were women), Russians accounted for 7.5 per cent (of whom 69 per cent were women) and Belarusians, 7 per cent (of whom 66 per cent were women). However, it is impossible to provide the exact number of (highly skilled) migrants, as the statistics compiled by various institutions will only partially reflect the migrant stocks depending on the type of data collected. Permanent migration is registered (number of issued residence permits) but is much less sizeable than temporary and circulation migration, which is recorded by various offices depending on their function (e.g. issuing visas, work permits and employment declarations or registering border crossings). According to the information provided by the Office for Foreigners on foreigners with valid residence permits, the four largest groups, as of 2016, were: Ukrainians (84 000), Germans (23 000), Belarusians (11 000) and Russians (10 000). The largest (almost threefold) increase between 2013 and 2016 concerns Ukrainian citizens, who make up 36 per cent of all registered foreigners. If we take a look at the gender proportions within the residence permits issued in more recent years (2016–2018), we can see that they are more balanced (see Table 1). In the case of Ukrainians, the higher number of men applying for temporary residence permits could be explained by the escalation of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Permanent residence permits issued, 2016–2018**

	2016			2017			2018		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Ukraine	47.0%	53.0%	5 920	49.6%	50.4%	7 866	50.2%	49.8%	7 712
Belarus	41.5%	58.5%	1 628	43.6%	56.4%	3 835	43.4%	56.6%	4 597
Russia	55.7%	44.3%	327	56.3%	43.7%	451	55.5%	44.5%	508
All nationalities	4 118	5 024	9 042	6 229	7 075	13 304	6 709	7 701	14 410

Source: Author's own analysis based on reports issued by the Office for Foreigners.

**Table 2. Temporary residence permits issued, 2016–2018**

	2016			2017			2018		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Ukraine	38.5%	61.5%	57 253	39.0%	61.0%	70 268	41.0%	59.0%	80 231
Belarus	51.0%	49.0%	1 800	42.0%	58.0%	2 257	41.7%	58.3%	3 234
Russia	56.0%	44.0%	2 189	53.4%	46.6%	2 150	54.5%	45.5%	2 394
All nationalities	32 624	53 992	86 616	38 895	64 320	103 215	44 866	69 189	114 055

Source: Author's own analysis based on reports issued by the Office for Foreigners.

For over a decade the Polish authorities have also been implementing certain measures to facilitate the influx of migrants from the East such as *Karta Polaka* (literally meaning Pole's Card, also translated as Polish Card or Polish Charter)<sup>5</sup> or various scholarship programmes for students.<sup>6</sup> Foreign graduates of Polish universities would intuitively be classified as highly skilled but, since the diploma grants them open access to the labour market, cancelling the requirement for a work permit, they blend in the aggregate statistics regarding visas or residence permits. Nevertheless, the Polish National Bank estimates say that, in 2017, there were about one million foreign workers in Poland, 87 per cent of whom were Ukrainians (Chmielewska, Dobroczyk and Panuciak 2018: 7). This is a significant figure when contrasted with the general statistics for the Polish labour market for 2017 – 15 720 000 professionally active people aged 15–64, with the employment-to-population ratio being 59.6 per cent for women and 73.5 per cent for men, and the 6.6 per cent unemployment rate, positioning Poland among the seven EU countries with the lowest levels of joblessness (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy 2018: 16).

Another reason for concentrating on women from the three chosen countries is the specific socio-political background to the entrepreneurship of female migrants from the former USSR republics. Most research on female migrants from the post-Soviet bloc to the EU has been done on Ukrainians, who constitute the largest and therefore the most visible group (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016), yet little attention has thus far been paid to the study of other post-Soviet immigrants (both male and female) as they are statistically less significant. Concerning Ukrainians, if the analyses adopt a gendered perspective, there is little focus on the other-than-the-family context (Fedyuk 2016).

As I am interested in the gender-related experiences and lifestyle transformations of female white-collar migrants within the Eastern European context, it is essential to shed some light on the specificity of the region which is being discussed in this paper. In terms of the gender norms available to women in Eastern Europe, there are a number of similarities between Poland and its eastern neighbours. However, there are also certain less-obvious differences and, since I focus on how migrating to Poland has influenced lifestyles choices through gender-role renegotiation, it is worth describing first what the predominant patterns in the host society have been.

In an analysis of the gender roles and standards propagated by a widely read and opinion-forming periodical *Kobieta i Życie* (*Woman and Life*), published from 1946 to 2002 and raising three generations of Poles, Zofia

Sokół (2012) distinguished eight models<sup>7</sup> promoted in different epochs, which reflected both the current political ideology and the grassroots social changes taking place over the decades. First was the idealised and heroic *Polish Mother* – a patient, caring, and loving martyr either mourning the loss of or waiting for the return of her man/children, gradually moving on to the *forerunner of socialist work* – both actively engaged in the rebuilding of the war-torn country. Needless to say, since the late 1940s the Soviet Union became the main point of reference for all areas of social and political life – domestic work was considered irrelevant, as it did not serve the building of a socialist country. In the late 1950s, rising unemployment shifted the emphasis from the cult of work to the role of women as mothers, wives and housewives and established a new merged model of a woman – *the working mother*. However, the economic pressures which made women undertake professional activities did not translate into new gender norms but, rather, strengthened the traditional patterns based on caring, sacrifice and heroism. The hardships of everyday life led to the creation of a specific kind of heroic matriarchy in the (post)communist countries of Eastern Europe, where the woman assumed the irreplaceable role of the household and family manager, taking pride in her multitasking skills and achievements (Titkow 2007: 63–65).

The 1960s saw a gradual rise in advocating partnership and propagating a greater involvement of men in household duties, especially childcare. The feminist tendency continued into the 1970s, raising issues of unequal status and pay which, in the 1980s, evolved into the model of a *politically engaged woman* who takes an active part in shaping her reality within the gently patriarchal social structure. The systemic transformation of the 1990s saw an interesting flourishing of the available gender roles which, on the one hand, was a modern, entrepreneurial *businesswoman* and, on the other, a reborn *traditional housewife*.<sup>8</sup> The models imposed by the popular press were, to some extent, market-oriented – the ‘new woman’ was supposed to encompass a wide range of irreconcilable features, on the one hand being independent and entrepreneurial, taking care of both her external looks and her intellectual development and, on the other, being home- and family-oriented. However, another aspect of the 1990s in terms of gender roles was that, firstly, in a country which had to face a profound political transformation on many levels, economic issues had a clear priority over the problems of gender equality. In a situation of high unemployment, women were encouraged to return to the traditional role of housewife. Secondly, the Catholic Church, which had played a crucial role in supporting the anti-communist opposition, was not eager to step down from its privileged social position. Yet a major turn took place around 2004 as, on Poland joining the EU, there were various information campaigns and training courses for women on women’s rights, the position of women in the EU, how the situation of Polish women would change after accession and what the EU has to offer women (Fuszara 2005: 1066).

The liberal values which the EU advocated – such as individualism, gender equality and human rights – resulted in a moral panic of the Catholic hierarchs and conservative right-wing politicians’ resistance (Graff 2016; Graff and Korolczuk 2017, 2018). On the macro level, the foreign-sounding term ‘gender’ was consciously misinterpreted and put on a par with demoralisation, perversion, abortion, non-normative sexuality, promiscuity and the colonising ‘ideology’ of the morally corrupted West and was the enemy of ‘healthy’ Polish, traditional family values and religiosity. This led to the intensive anti-gender discourse campaign of 2012–2014, launched and run by the self-proclaimed defenders of the only ‘morally just order’ and the victory of the right-wing conservative parties in the national elections of 2015 (Graff 2016; Graff and Korolczuk 2017). However, it would seem too easy and tempting to discuss gender issues by juxtaposing the influence of the Catholic Church in its sanctioning of the conservative *status quo* with liberal, secular, Western European values (Siara 2013: 106–107), which is clear when one looks at the micro level. In recent decades, the position of the Church among Poles has undergone a massive decline. As written in *Tygodnik Powszechny*<sup>9</sup>:

*More and more people stop identifying themselves with the Church. The Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church recently recorded the highest fall in church attendance in the last few years. In 2016, this number decreased compared to 2015 by over 3 per cent and is 36.7 per cent – the lowest in the post-war history of Poland (Wiśniewski 2018).*

Additionally, the results of an opinion-polling institute regarding the Social Evaluation of Honesty and Professional Consciousness show that the current assessment of priests and clergymen is the worst since 1997, when the research was first conducted (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2016). In another poll regarding Occupational Prestige, priests are at the bottom of the ranking, having dropped by 13 percentage points and classifying among the professions which lost the most in relation to the period before the systemic transformation (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2013). Besides, a person considering him- or herself to be religious does not exclude him or her from having an egalitarian approach to life or feminist views (Siara 2013).

Therefore, the often-quoted Polish Catholicism is increasingly a cultural legacy and not a governor of souls, even when, on the political-discourse level, it is still strongly defending its bastion. This discrepancy was clearly seen in 2016, when the government was to vote on a total ban on abortion (the abortion law already being one of the strictest in Europe) which was met with a massive outrage amongst the women (and men) who organised the ‘Black Strike’ – also referred to as ‘Black Friday’. This first mass mobilisation of Polish women in defence of their rights was country-wide and not only a big-city phenomenon. Some 100 000 women (and men) protested in 118 Polish cities and more than 50 places abroad, forcing the government to reject the proposal (Chmielewska, Druciarek and Przybysz 2017). Statistics from the 2011 National Census are also ruthless when it comes to the family – almost a quarter of all the families in Poland were single-parent ones and 89 per cent of those constituted single mothers – and such models are socially accepted, which goes against the ideals promoted by the conservative circles.

Therefore, despite the bad press that the concept of gender has been getting since 2012, research shows that the majority of Poles declare that they are generally in favour of the equality of men and women (women outnumbering men); those who strongly oppose it are from the so-called ‘enclaves of patriarchy’:

*An average Polish supporter of ‘traditional’ gender order is at least 55 years old, lives in the countryside or in a small city, has elementary or basic vocational education and regularly participates in religious practices (even more often than once a week). Right-wing political views favour traditional attitudes towards gender equality (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2017: 5).*

Considering everything said above, Poland – in relation to its eastern neighbours – has made steady economic progress within the 25 years of the systemic transformation, especially after joining the EU in 2004, and benefited far more from visa-free travel and the influence of Western gender models and norms. Even if the officially promoted discourses are against ‘gender ideology’, this does not translate into a mass following of the neo-conservative order. The spectrum of the available roles has been quite wide and will also depend on social class, religiosity, education and the place of living – whether this be the capital city or a small town in a less-developed rural area.

Looking east of Poland, the gender models which Soviet ideology offered were based on the delusive emancipation of women through their full-time incorporation into the workforce, alongside the exhaustive household and maternal duties perceived to be ‘naturally feminine’, which were not shared by the prototypical Soviet men (Ashwin 2002; Bureychak 2012; Kis 2012). The hypocrisy of such standards lay in the double burden of the women, with men fulfilling their role outside of the home only.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s, the respective former republics and their people experienced uncertainty and endured the hardships of the transformation period to a different degree. While Belarus embarked on its own, somewhat distinct, transformation path which resulted in a quite stable economic situation (Dobrinsky, Adarov, Bornukova, Havlik, Hunya, Kruk and Pindyuk 2016), Ukraine and Russia saw a sudden economic downturn which resulted in the large-scale deterioration of the quality of life (Round and Williams 2010). The women in Ukraine who, during the economic hardships of the transformation, sought various survival strategies and undertook the burden of pro-active endeavours to provide financially for their families, were often described as ‘feminists despite themselves’ or ‘pragmatic feminists’ (Kis 2012). Yet they did not identify themselves as feminists in the Western meaning, as ‘feminism’ would evoke negative or mocking associations and be considered a disreputable attribute for a woman (Rubchak 2012). In Belarus, where gendered research is neither frequent nor popular, society is mostly patriarchal and there are strong gender stereotypes related to the life and roles of women and men in family and society (Burova and Yanchuk 2014). As for Russia, Round and Williams (2010: 184) refer to the World Bank estimates and assert that the ‘male life expectancy fell dramatically, from 61 in the late 1980s to 58 in 1993’, which was ‘the fastest fall recorded in the global north outside of wartime’, and concede that ‘20 years later, this figure has little improved’. Therefore, the Russian women for long have been ‘breadwinners by default’ (Kiblitckaya 2000) and do not perceive being only a housewife as a satisfactory option (Ashwin 2002).

## Methodology

Scholars argue that ‘the economic bias’ of most research on migration renders women invisible, as there is still a male-hegemonic approach (at least in symbolic terms) towards the ‘world of skills’, which is analysed through male-dominated and knowledge-based sectors of the economy such as finance, science and technology (Iredale 2005; Kofman 2000). These are the prestigious sectors which

*are seen as the driving force of globalization, productivity and wealth creation. (...) The presence of migrant women is not analytically linked to the world of production or to skills but connected with social, welfare and integration. Thus they are omitted from the discussion of women as economic actors of migration and situated in the realm of a largely unchanging symbolic gender order (Kofman 2012: 73).*

For the reasons mentioned above, I put under scrutiny those who, thus far, have received little, if any, attention in the migration literature.

The analytical part of this article is based on my research sample – I have chosen 20<sup>10</sup> (out of 39) in-depth, unstructured interviews with biographical elements, which I conducted between February 2015 and September 2016 with women who, at the time of the interview, had been living in Poland for between 1 and 18 years.<sup>11</sup> Of the 20 interviews, 2 were with Russians, 3 with Belarusians and 15 with Ukrainians but, as I do not conduct quantitative research, the sample is not intended to be representative. Nevertheless, the proportions translate into the differences in the number of migrants from given countries in Poland, where the Ukrainians prevail. All of the interviewees came to Poland as (young) adults, having completed some part of their tertiary education in their home country (except one interviewee who came to Poland after finishing secondary school and did her whole studies at a Polish university). The interviewees’ home-country university diplomas ranged from a Bachelor’s to Master’s degree, with a few having a PhD, yet at some point most of my interviewees continued their education in Poland – for example doing post-graduate studies which would equip them with additional qualifications needed at work. However, what is of paramount importance is that, from the onset of their stay in Poland, they all took up employment relevant to their education and/or expertise and have had no



experience of working in the secondary ‘migrant’ segment – 9 women work in private companies or multi-national corporations (in finance, banking, research, advertising, sales, logistics etc.), 4 are engaged in non-government institutions (they have created a niche, where they use their high qualifications, – for example a lawyer – and work in intermediate positions among the Polish and migrant communities), 3 work for the Polish public sector or in science/teaching, 2 for the mass media, 1 is a sworn translator running her own business and 1 is a doctor. Of the interviewees, 15 live in the Warsaw area, 4 in Kraków and 1 in Gdańsk. As for the language of the interviews, only 2 out of the 20 had to be conducted in English (as the two interlocutors’ knowledge of Polish was basic) but the majority of the others, some of whom had no or barely detectable traces of a foreign accent, spoke fluent Polish.

**Table 3. Civil and family status of the interviewees**

Nationality	R U	R U	B Y	B Y	B Y	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	
Status																				
With children	1		1	2							2						1			
Childless		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Single/divorced		✓		✓	✓		✓			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			
In an informal relationship with a Pole						✓		✓	✓										✓	
In an informal relationship with a compatriot												✓								
In an informal relationship with a foreigner													✓							✓
Married to a Pole	✓																	✓		
Married to a compatriot			✓								✓									

Notes: RU = Russian; BY = Belarusian; UA = Ukrainian. Source: Author’s own analysis of the interviews.

I conduct the analysis being interested in the bottom-up experiences of the migrants. I therefore asked my interviewees to tell me a spontaneous story of their life and their experiences. When the narrative part was over, it was followed by a few precise questions in order to deepen the topic and render it interesting from the researcher’s perspective. Such free narration gave me insight into the social world of expatriates from the East and the processuality of their professional experience.

In the analysis, I depart from the dyadic analytical approach ‘country of emigration/immigration’ for three reasons. Firstly, there are strong arguments for the abandonment of ‘methodological nationalism’, which limits the scope of research to the boundaries of a country. This is particularly relevant as 14 of my interviewees have Polish roots (12 Ukrainians, 1 Belarusian and 1 Russian) and the other six are connected in other ways to Poland – e.g. by coming from areas with historical ties with Poland like Ivano-Frankivsk<sup>12</sup> Grodno or the Brest district.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, even if the interviewees themselves did not have Polish roots, they were to some extent familiar with the Polish language and culture, even if in a very passive way. Secondly, clinging on to very ‘pure’ national categories in the analytical process is somewhat pointless, especially in view of the fact that, during Soviet times, there were massive forced internal migrations of people (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016). These

were connected with centrally managed workplace coercion and quite a few of my interviewees, despite having, for example, Belarusian citizenship, in fact reported having Russian and Ukrainian roots. The final reason why I abandon the strict national division is because, for almost seven decades, the three countries had been united into one socialist state where, due to the centrally managed ideology, politics and economy, the imposed gender models and many aspects of the lifestyle regime were similar. Therefore, despite certain differences, the women I talked to shared the post-socialist legacy of the country/countries of origin.

### **Gender roles re-examined**

The majority of the women to whom I talked were born in the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s; even if they were born at the turn of the political systems, they were raised by parents who were socialised into the Soviet reality and grew up in the post-Soviet social and cultural milieu, where the more-Western models were only starting to unfold. Migration westwards, to Poland, opened up new opportunities and space for redefining the roles and norms to which the women had been socialised.

The strong Soviet gender model legacy is reflected in the words of Tamara, a 34-year-old Russian who came to Poland with her Russian husband and who, for six years, experienced this regime abroad:

*In our countries, it seems to me that it is derived from the tradition of the Soviet Union times, when everyone had to work and there was no possibility for a woman not to return to work, so for us it is absolutely natural that we work, and at the same time I take care of the children, and what is more I still have to look good, take care of myself, take care of the house, take care of my husband. It seems that this is terribly difficult to juggle, but for us it is more natural, so when here [in Poland] women start to complain that it is so hard or vice versa that they are sitting at home, that they do not have a job, that the husband is not nice to them, or other things, it always surprises me a bit, because I do not know what they are on about. This is a normal course of things that we do this and this and that.*

What might sound like the definition of a superwoman – the merger of the Soviet ideal of a ‘heroine of labour’ with the feminine house goddess – is a cultural legacy and norm which becomes reinterpreted due to the experience of migration. Tamara, the breadwinner of her family, recalls that, at one point, she was so busy and tired that she hired a housekeeper and a nanny to help her out in performing some of the expected duties. This is also interesting, as it is often the migrant woman who relieves the host-society woman of her gendered household and care obligations and not *vice versa*. After a few years of being stuck in this work-family-appearance-household-husband treadmill, without the active support of her spouse, nor his willingness to reinterpret the gender roles in the relationship and family, Tamara takes the decision to divorce her husband. This is possible because she is financially independent and, through her exposure to the wider range of gender norms offered by the country of migration, ‘the man’ ceases to be the focal point in her life. She mentioned that, in Poland, everything takes so long, that at first the couple dates for two years, starts living together and only then gets engaged and married while, in Russia, everything is fast and, within two years, it is possible to already have divorced twice. However, then she reflects that it might actually be better to do it ‘the Polish way’, as people have the possibility to get to know each other; in this way the relationships are more lasting and the choices more considered. Therefore, while she is willing to retain certain familiar gender patterns, at the same time she is renegotiating the borders of her individual space and sacrifice, looking for a male partner, not a burden.

A similar course of redefining the gender roles can be observed in the case of Ulyana, a 42-year-old Belarusian who, at the time of the interview, had lived in Poland for 17 years. Migrating had been her husband’s

decision and she had followed his plan. However, he never settled and she was left in Poland on her own, with children, before finally divorcing her husband seven years later. Finding herself thrown in at the deep end, she was forced by circumstances to assume and develop agency in order to provide for herself and her children. Somewhat to her surprise, she landed a good job and pursued a successful career in teaching, which relieved her of financial concerns and strengthened her independence in making decisions. As she compares Belarus to Poland now, she says that they are worlds apart. In Belarus, women do work a lot but enjoy a lower status than men. She says that no woman of her age would take out a mortgage and buy a detached house all by herself. She also very quickly became annoyed by the way in which she is treated back in Belarus and recalls one particular situation:

*After a few years spent here in Poland I came to Belarus and I wanted, I had to change the tyres, and my ex-husband arranged my meeting with a friend of his, in Minsk, and the treatment of a woman is quite a different thing there. (...) It just struck me that (...) I was treated like air by those guys, who just shook their hands. (...) I went there by myself to have the tyres changed, and it was like 'Woman, what are you doing here! Only men do such things!' So such exclusion of women, (...) this division into female and male functions is still... (...) Women simply have fewer opportunities for self-fulfilment, (...) there are women who run companies and thriving businesses, big ones, but such daily matters, I think it is much harder for women to break through in Belarus than here.*

She interprets this situation as an observable difference between the gender norms in Belarus and finds herself accustomed to being treated with greater respect to her 'agency' in Poland. She does admit, however, that what to do after the divorce was a big dilemma – whether to go back to Belarus, where she has family and support, or to stay. However, having seven years of hard proof that she can manage well on her own with two children, she decided to stay. She recalls that, after Poland joined the EU, she was offered a marriage of convenience by a colleague at work, who could not stand seeing how she struggled with administrative issues, but she firmly refused, explaining that taking shortcuts was not the way to handle her matters. Being independent and self-reliant has become, for her, a value in itself, not just a necessary role enforced on her by her difficult situation.<sup>14</sup>

A different example of a woman in the process of renegotiating her gender position is Darya, a 32-year-old Belarusian who has lived in Poland for four years. She, like Ulyana, came to Poland following her husband who, having Polish roots, feels emotionally tied to Poland. In Darya's case it is interesting how her approach to the available gender patterns fluctuates while she tries to find her way in the new society. As she is a graduate of the Medical Academy, she felt it would be a pity to waste her skills and hence undertook the daunting challenge of nostrifying her diploma. The process took 1.5 years; however, she was not discouraged by initial failures and persevered with her ambition to become a fully recognised professional and be able to continue working in her profession. Despite her success, she seems to be intimidated by the acknowledgement of her own agency:

*My husband's family is mixed, Polish-Belarusian, always, I'm a little bit, very ambitious, I am so very, if one can say that about oneself, so progressive and having worked five years I understood that I have a ceiling. Then it happened that my husband, (...) his company received contracts with clients also from Poland, and I understood that I would not like, I am not the kind of wife who will sit and wait. And so I thought that (...) I might try, because to follow my husband to Poland, just to live there with the child and not to work, for me it was a pity to waste my studies, because I had already been doing my specialisation (...) and it would be a shame to sit at home or to work as a so-called cleaner.*

She uses specific adverbs and expressions deemphasising the nouns in expressions like ‘a little bit/very ambitious, progressive/if one can say that’, as if she felt using too strong words could perhaps mean stepping out of the gender line. She describes her successes on the labour market, stressing that it was her husband who had sent her CV around. While she characterises herself as open, flexible, cosmopolitan and determined, sends her daughter to an international school and declares the wish to go further west, where she believes the healthcare and education system are better, she still maintains the husband-centric perspective on life:

*I would like to go somewhere west, but I have a husband who loves Poland so much (...) because here is buried his grandfather, grandparents, grandmothers lived (...) and I as his wife, I agree with him on everything I teach our child, now it will be British School, Polish, I read books, fairy tales. (...) And because of this, where my husband will be, there it will be better for me too.*

A similar discrepancy between the hierarchies of values resonates in the interview with Nastya, a 32-year-old Ukrainian who came to Poland as a single adult and pursued a career in international corporations. Having Polish roots and living in Poland long enough, she holds Polish citizenship and declares that, while her home is Poland, where she feels good and comfortable and is planning to purchase property, she does not reject the possibility of migrating further westwards. She invests in self-development, makes professional plans for a good job and her own business on the side but, at the same time, when asked about her future plans, stresses that:

*Maybe in some company, even where I'm working now, there are different possibilities to go to Madrid to work, or to another country, but for me the family is important. If my boyfriend wants to go, then yes, but if not, then no. (...) In fact, I am a woman who will follow her husband. But if he does not want to, then Poland as it is, is OK.*

What is interesting is that she is not married nor even engaged but, nevertheless, projects a neo-conservative gender life model on her potential future choices.

Nastya points to another change in the gender perspective, which is observable among other interviewees as well – namely the adjournment of plans for settling down and procreation. Like many of my interviewees, she says that, in the East, people mature faster for a number of reasons. Firstly, everyday life is more stressful and more difficult. Secondly, people can graduate from university as young as 21, therefore they also start working earlier. Thirdly, they do not have as many opportunities to travel abroad or to lead a more self-oriented consumerist lifestyle where their own pleasure comes first; often, as a normative consequence, they set up families faster. Most of my interviewees, who were over 30 years old, said that, in their age group, everyone has a family and children and living differently is considered to be somewhat abnormal:

*This is an interesting topic, yes, this was one such benefit too [of moving to Poland], because there is social pressure [in Ukraine]. If a guy met you, and you are 32 and you were never married or divorced, it means that there is something wrong with you. (...) If you are going to parties, in Ukraine, you are 32 years old, then surely there is something wrong with you.*

A similar stigma attached to marrying late and the social pressure to settle down well before one's 30s is reported to be well-rooted in Belarus, while migration stretches the age limits and results in the adaptation of more Western patterns, with women, in particular, questioning the existing *status quo* (Bobova 2016).

The opening up of new possibilities for realising one's dreams and aspirations (considered to deviate from the way of life in one's motherland) which are precipitated by migration, generates jealousy and condemnation back in the home country. Anastasiya, a 27-year-old from Ukraine, recalls one conversation with her former classmates:

*We are organising [a class reunion], 10 years now since we finished school (...) I ask what the plan is, because I would like to, I have to come, take some days off or something. Somehow there were such unpleasant jokes because, in my class, probably only three people have no family, and everyone else already has families. And it was such a joke: 'If I were you I would not even ask when we're having this meeting'. I say 'What?!' And he says: 'Well, what can you boast about? Family? Children? Unless you print your photos from Brazil'. Because I just got back from a holiday in Brazil.*

For her Ukrainian male friend, Anastasiya's single, childless life at the age of 27 seems to be less meaningful but might, at the same time, provoke resentment that, being so young, she can afford to do so much, hence the belittling comments. This might also stem from the fact that Ukraine (just like many other European countries) is suffering from a demographic crisis (Romaniuk and Gladun 2015). Therefore, Anastasiya's successful migratory experience and achievements might be perceived negatively, as she not only secures herself a better life abroad but also 'betrays' her country, contributing twofold to the demographic decline by emigrating and by not having children.

Another Ukrainian, Marina (30), living in Poland for 12 years, perceives the gender role renegotiation as an incurable disease. Since her arrival, she has been in a few relationships with men of different nationalities: German, Polish and the former USSR (though not Ukrainian). Drawing from her practical experience and observations, she concludes that, with few exceptions, men from the East are culturally conditioned to being treated as the centre of the universe (due to their mothers' and girlfriends' conduct) but, once you are aware of these imposed disproportions, you can fight with them in your head, as it is also degrading for a modern man to be treated this way:

*I sometimes catch myself that even though I had been working for 10–15 hours, I had been doing something, and it is already late, and I would like to go to sleep, but beforehand I have to make dinner, really. I think that this is also such a humiliating treatment for a man, a man is treated as a disabled person, who is not able to fix his own meal, I don't know, is unable to clean up and put away his own things. I fight with it, but as I say, sometimes I catch myself having some strange, culturally inscribed ideas for life, that a man is most important.*

One way in which migration can help to create more gender-balanced proportions to a woman's lifestyle is the extensive contact with a wider range of patterns and the experience of everyday life with non-compatriots, resulting in greater freedom to choose how to live one's life. Marina says that, after all the years spent in Poland, she does not let herself get drawn into such conversations and, when she hears that Ukrainian women are good at cleaning, cooking, etc., she replies that this is not a genetic feature that one is born with.

On the other hand, while the range of patterns broadens, at the same time certain aspects are gone in the gender negotiation process. The price of 'emancipation' through migration means that certain desirable ways of 'doing gender' get lost with the kilometres travelled. One interviewee said, for example, that what she really missed in Poland was the courteous gesture of men who would offer a woman their hand when she was getting off the bus.

As other research findings suggest, men undergo cultural transformation in a different way (Bobova 2016) and are less willing than women to redefine the gender-role paradigms. I have observed signs of such notions during some casual conversations with Ukrainian males; however, my research sample and the scope of this article do not allow for a comparative study of women and men.

### **The external notions of femininity**

Another strongly gendered aspect which I would like to analyse is the change in the approach towards one's own appearance and dress code through the experience of migration. This aspect emerged particularly in the interviews with the Ukrainian migrants, hence I will focus on their sample.

For Ukrainian women, taking care of one's looks is reported to originate first and foremost as a rejection of the 'asexual (and simultaneously patriarchal) Soviet culture [which] considered [women] only as "working mothers"' (Zhurzhenko 2001: 31). As Ukrainian scholars assert, having rejected Soviet ideals of the 'Super Woman', Ukrainians were faced with the delusive choice of new canons of femininity (Kis 2005; Zhurzhenko 2001). Oksana Kis (2005) argues that one of these would be the *Berehynia* – the revived myth of the matriarchal goddess-protector of the family, the home and the nation and another would be the 'Barbie' the embodiment of the Western model of a woman propelled by the free-market ideology and the culture of mass consumption. As Kis observes, the 'Barbie embodies the perfect achievement of heterosexual femininity' (2005: 122) where the bodily, aesthetic and sexual features of a woman play a crucial role. 'Both models, Berehynia and Barbie, presume that the only path towards women's self-fulfilment is to be satellites orbiting men' (2005: 129). Tatiana Zhurzhenko claims that the post-Soviet 'apparent diversity' of the new female identities 'is in effect reduced to two models and two poles of this spectrum: businesswoman and housewife' (2001: 39). They are both the byproducts of the free-market ideology with its mass media and mass consumption (which most Ukrainians, in fact, cannot take part in), one in which the housewife fulfils the traditional roles of the mother and wife, and the businesswoman is the female entrepreneur undertaking the burden of work in the new capitalist order.

This Ukrainian feminine habitus<sup>15</sup> (encompassing the various elements described above in different proportions) becomes transformed through the experience of migration to Poland, where the ultra-feminine regimes cease to play a crucial survival strategy role. As a result, the women experience a certain relaxation of the normative, social expectations and discover new available models which, to a different degree, they incorporate into their lifestyles.

One issue which has reappeared in some of my interviews is the notion of high-heeled shoes and the concept of the 'appropriate' dress code, as Nastya (32) from Ukraine illustrates:

*Yes, it's such a misunderstanding sometimes, you come to work just like me today, they ask: 'Huh? Are you going on a date today?' 'Oh, why on a date? It's just how I am, I got dressed, high heels for myself'. Now smaller heels, at the beginning they were always high, it was so strange for everyone.*

Nastya also points out that, in Ukraine, women take care more of their external looks and interprets this as a result of greater competition for male attraction. Other women impose very strict, moral categories on the clothes they wear – for example, two girls told me that they sent back their high-heeled winter boots to Ukraine because they felt that wearing them in Poland made them look like prostitutes. Now they say they even appreciate the fact that they can wear elegant, though comfortable and flat shoes to work, and generally dress in a more casual way in jeans and sweaters without any feeling of inappropriateness.

Those women who try to merge Ukrainian standards with the Polish context are sometimes frustrated when they are treated as ‘a pretty Ukrainian’, states 31-year-old Oksana:

*It was so ambiguous. I have no problem with... I am very aware that I look good and I take care of it, but it annoys me when someone is trying very hard to behave in this way (...) especially men. This is not just a matter of men; women are also reminding me about it, or heaven forbid if you are to some degree their competition or you might be competition, then it is a horror, but it is probably normal among women, at least in Ukraine it also functions like this, it's just simpler. However, when men said such things, it hurt more, although there is still much less of it in Poland than in Ukraine.*

However, an interest in taking care of one's appearance can only partly be explained by the ‘Barbie’ habitus. As Ukrainian scholars often stress, ever since the fall of the USSR the Ukrainian people have been stuck between the old patterns and the new, Western, models of consumption, while having very limited possibilities to participate actively in the realisation of their assumptions (Abbott and Sapsford 2006; Zhurzhenko 2001). As one of my interviewees, Ksenija, aged 32, recalled in a casual conversation, when one of the major economic crises hit Ukraine in 1998 she was a young teenager and, despite both of her parents working, they found themselves to be degraded to the ‘working poor’, and there was not enough money in the household to even buy food. She had only one set of ‘fancy’ clothes (a white polo-neck sweater and a pink, second-hand jacket) which she had to wear to all the social events important in a 14-year-old's life, like birthdays or school parties. As a result, when she migrated she was finally ‘promoted’ financially to the consumer class and gained access to a wide range of affordable options. She said she felt ‘shopping-hungry’ and needed to satiate this with various purchases in order to regain a sense of dignity and have the feeling of belonging to the majority group.

Another observed way of ‘doing femininity’ is through a total redefinition of Ukrainian identity(ies). Polina, aged 40, usually wears trousers and casual tops, comfortable flat shoes and very little make-up. She also has two tattoos and a big motorbike which impresses Polish men, who usually compliment her saying that it's beautiful to see a woman riding such a big motorbike. When she goes back to visit her parents, she hears from people that she looks different – meaning not like ‘one of us’, which could be interpreted as a sign that she has developed her own style, free from the dominant gender models she was used to and feels comfortable ‘being herself’.

The examples quoted above are not to say that Polish women neglect their appearance or deny their womanhood, yet they seem to have a culturally wider spectrum of available ways of ‘doing femininity’ – apart from the ultra-feminine attributes like high heels and long hair, it is common to wear flat shoes and casual clothes, to have tattoos and short hair and still feel and be perceived as a woman. Therefore, the Polish model is more emancipated (Western) while, at the same time, pertaining to some of the familiar (Eastern) notions and does not require the migrants to completely reject their acquired, domestic patterns which, in turn, seems to facilitate the transformation of notions of external femininity among Ukrainians.

## Conclusions

Changing the country of residence, especially when outside the ‘national’ migration networks, is an undertaking in which people's experiences of the everyday will vary depending on many factors – age, gender, type of work, civil status or the structure of opportunity. Women and men experience migration in different ways and so will be the influence of migration on gender norms. Just as with Polish migrants in the UK and Ireland, one study can point to the emancipating effect for females of relocating westward (Siara 2013), whereas another

will highlight the maintaining of the *status quo* when migration is undertaken for the sake of the family's interest and not of individual benefits (Muszel 2013). The effect also depends on socio-educational factors – the woman's education and the place of origin (big city, town or village).

The aim of this article is to give voice to highly skilled female migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia – instead of just limiting them to being statistical figures, even if they do not speak with one voice – and to take a look at how their individual, gender-related lifestyle choices and transformations are affected through the experience of migration to Poland. In terms of gender-role renegotiation, I have observed the following approaches:

- retaining certain familiar ways of 'doing' gender, with the simultaneous redefinition of personal borders and the scope of female/male roles;
- the fluctuating approach – leading a modern, professionally successful lifestyle, while pertaining to traditional values of 'following her man' on declarative level; and
- abandoning the male-centric perspective on life and developing independence and self-reliance.

In terms of the external notions of femininity, while the majority of my interviewees claim (and manifest) that taking care of one's looks is still important, they do take advantage of the wider spectrum of options and enjoy getting rid of the stiff corset of the ultra-feminine dress code and blending in with the casual big-city crowd.

I do not claim that such processes are reserved for either women from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia or for highly skilled females (see the research on Mexican, Dominican, Iranian or Filipina migrants quoted earlier: Darvishpour 1999, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parreñas 2001, Pessar 1995) and, as the research methodology is qualitative, I do not present my findings as representative of the discussed cases. However, unlike in the case of, for example, the migration of nurses, where gender inequality is one of the push factors (Jones, Bifulco and Gabe 2009: 289), for my Eastern interviewees it was the migration experience that often made them see the greater levels of inequality back home.

What is particular in the sample researched is the socio-historic context. The three chosen countries share a common denominator of the historical legacy with the gender/work/lifestyle models imposed by the Soviet ideology; and Poland, as the country of immigration, had also been subjected to this ideology for well over three decades. However, with the systemic change in the late 1980s and the country's 2004 EU accession, Poland symbolically disconnected with its socialist past. For these reasons, Poland as a country of immigration is both familiar and foreign; however, Polish gender models are easier to assume, because the differences are not as extreme as they are in countries with greater gender equality, which makes the adaptation process easier. The Polish big-city gender and lifestyle models are, on the one hand, more emancipated and thus more attractive, more Western while, at the same time, they pertain to some of the familiar Eastern 'socialist' notions and do not require migrants to abandon the patterns acquired in the course of socialisation in the home countries. This way, the biographical work which needs to be done in order to integrate their experiences into a coherent new identity is easier and comes at a lower cost, not only for the migrants but also for the host country.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A large body of literature devoted to the problems triggered by the mass migration of women concerns the case of transnational motherhood and its impact on the children left behind (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2001; Tolstokorova 2010; Urbańska 2015). However, even if some of the women considered by these studies are skilled, in the quoted works they are analysed from the perspective of the work undertaken (usually in the domestic and care sectors) – which is not classified as highly skilled and is, instead, associated with deskilling and the migrant niche.



<sup>2</sup> An interesting counterexample is Walton-Roberts' (2019) article on the experiences of male nurses from India.

<sup>3</sup> Men also undergo gendered changes in the process of migration, both as individuals and in family relationships, although their experiences will be different, and the limits of this paper do not allow for a comparative analysis. However, in most cases, when people migrate from more-patriarchal to more-liberal societies and cultures, it often has an emancipating effect – especially for women when it triggers their greater economic independence and, consequently, decisiveness – whereas men lose their thus-far-dominant status (Darvishpour 1999, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Lutz 2010; Pessar 1995). On the other hand, research on Indian male-nurse migration has shown that, despite entering a heavily feminised profession, males actually benefit more professionally because the requirements for their emotional involvement in work are lower than for women and the discrimination they experience is less violent (Walton-Roberts 2019: 23).

<sup>4</sup> Another important category of skilled migrant which should be noted is the spouse of a Polish national (Górny and Kępińska 2004), although she does not have to be professionally active. However, in my research sample I do not have such cases.

<sup>5</sup> It is a document (from 2007 which came into force in March 2008) which originally could have been granted to a person from the former USSR republics (and as of 2019 can be granted to any national, including a stateless person) who submits a written declaration of belonging to the Polish nation (and meets other conditions specified by the Act on *Karta Polaka*, Journal of Laws 2019, item 1095). This is not equal to obtaining Polish citizenship but does put the individual in a privileged position by, for example, allowing him or her to obtain a national visa entitling them to multiple crossings of the Polish border and to apply for permanent residence/citizenship (both free of charge); above all, it grants them open and equal access to the labour market.

<sup>6</sup> According to the statistics published by the Polish Central Statistical Office (2016: 448), over the decade 2006–2016 the number of foreign students in Poland rose by 5.7 times and currently amounts to 57 119 undergraduates, 53.5 per cent of whom are Ukrainian (women constituting 55 per cent). The second-largest group are Belarusians, who make up 8 per cent of the total number (of whom 59.5 per cent are women). This has resulted in the coining of the term 'the Ukrainisation' of Polish higher education. Russian students account for only 1 per cent of the foreign undergraduates, although this group is also female-dominated (women account for 64 per cent).

<sup>7</sup> The eight models and time periods are:

- the heroic post-war *Polish Mother* 1945–1948;
- the *forerunner of socialist work* 1949–1955;
- the *home woman – mother, wife, housekeeper* 1956–1960/61;
- the *woman – working mother* 1962–1974;
- the *feminist woman* 1975–1989;
- the *politically active woman* 1989–1992;
- the *successful woman – businesswoman* 1998–2000; and
- the *traditional woman* 2001–2002 (Sokół 2012: 15–16).

<sup>8</sup> It was argued that socialism, through women's large-scale inclusion in the labour market, had destroyed the traditional Polish family by outsourcing childcare to state institutions; with the end of that system, the housewife model (with the woman as the guardian of the home and her husband's supporter) could finally be restored (Łaciak 1995: 237–238).

<sup>9</sup> The Kraków-based *Tygodnik Powszechny*, founded in 1945, presents an open ecumenical view of Polish Catholicism, bringing together the values of liberalism with the principles of faith.

<sup>10</sup> I have selected those interviews that were richest in the empirical content which is the focus of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> As my target researchees do not constitute a group in the sociological sense and are not necessarily strongly embedded in intra-ethnic networks (since they work outside the migrant chains), I had to seek interviewees in a number of ways. First, I contacted my personal acquaintances and contacts recommended by my friends, or I wrote directly to the women I knew from the media. Next, I sought contacts on various social media fora for expats and in some migrant-related institutions – e.g. NGOs; the remaining interviewees were contacted through snowballing.

<sup>12</sup> Ivano-Frankivsk had been under Polish rule a few centuries ago, then became part of Galicia, one of the crown lands of the Austrian Empire which also covered the south-east regions of Poland until 1918. In the interwar period 1919-1939 it used to be part of Poland again and was called Stanisławów.

<sup>13</sup> Grodno and Brest are areas with strong historical ties with Poland which, until 1945, were within the Polish borderland territory.


<sup>14</sup> It happened at a time before legal provisions facilitating long-term residence and employment were introduced, when a marriage of convenience was a more common strategy for dealing with legal hassles (Górny and Kępińska 2004).

<sup>15</sup> I understand ‘habitus’ after Bourdieu’s theory as ‘a set of dispositions (including ways of thinking and acting) acquired, mostly subconsciously, by the members of specific groups and social classes as a result of being in the same objective conditions’ (Giddens 2012: 1074).

### Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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