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Working Paper

Being together or apart? Social networks and notions of belonging among recent Polish migrants in the Netherlands

CMR Working Papers, No. 40/98

Provided in Cooperation with:

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Suggested Citation: Toruńczyk-Ruiz, Sabina (2008) : Being together or apart? Social networks and notions of belonging among recent Polish migrants in the Netherlands, CMR Working Papers, No. 40/98, University of Warsaw, Centre of Migration Research (CMR), Warsaw

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CMR Working Papers

Formerly ISS WORKING PAPERS, seria: PRACE MIGRACYJNE

No. 40/98

**Being together or apart?
Social networks and notions of
belonging among recent
Polish migrants in the Netherlands**

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Abstract

This paper is based on an anthropological study carried out in the Netherlands among recent Polish migrants. The aim of the research was to outline how the Poles experience their stay in the Netherlands and how they develop social networks and notions of belonging.

The gathered data show a complex picture of migrant networks: on the one hand Polish networks within small groups of friends and family do play an important role, but on the other – those networks do not tend to connect together and hence do not create a local community among the newcomers. Poles from outside the circle of closest persons are often treated with distance and even distrust, which allows to conclude that a community based on ethnic ties does not emerge. Meanwhile, Polish migrants in the Netherlands seem to establish a fairly small number of contacts with the host residents and tend to distance themselves from the Dutch as well as other migrant groups. While appreciating their stay in the Netherlands, they also miss many elements of the Polish culture, are proud of qualities that they view as Polish and often see Poland as their final destination, which shows strong ambiguity in the way the migrants view themselves and their own ethnic group.

Streszczenie

Praca jest oparta na wynikach badania etnograficznego przeprowadzonego wśród współczesnych polskich imigrantów w Holandii. Badanie dotyczyło doświadczeń związanych z pobytem w Holandii, w szczególności tworzenia sieci migranckich oraz poczucia przynależności.

Zebrany materiał wskazuje na dosyć złożony obraz sieci migranckich: z jednej strony widoczna jest silna rola polskich sieci społecznych w obrębie wąskich grup znajomych i rodziny, z drugiej zaś – sieci te nie łączą się i nie tworzą lokalnej wspólnoty wśród nowoprzyjezdnych. Polacy spoza najbliższego grona traktowani są z dystansem i nawet nieufnością, co pozwala stwierdzić, że wspólnota oparta na więzach etnicznych nie rodzi się. Zarazem jednak polscy migranci nawiązują ograniczoną liczbę kontaktów z gospodarzami i wykazują tendencję do dystansowania się zarówno od Holendrów jak i innych grup migranckich. Pomimo doceniania wielu aspektów pobytu w Holandii, widoczna jest wśród badanych tęsknota za wieloma polskimi elementami oraz poczucie dumy z wartości postrzeganych jako polskie, co wskazuje na wieloznaczny sposób postrzegania siebie i swej grupy etnicznej.

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that the arrival of Polish migrants has caused tumult within the Dutch society. Most Dutch residents are familiar with the headlines revealing the excitement and concerns of the hosts as to unfair competition or possible problems with integration of the newcomers. The sentiments of the Dutch are then rather known, but much less obvious and scarcely heard of in the Netherlands is how the Polish migrants themselves feel about being there, how they experience their stay in the Netherlands, being perceived as outsiders or living away from home.

Not only in the Netherlands, but in all Europe the Polish migrant has recently become a synonym for the newcomer from Central and Eastern European countries. This seems to be reasonable, as Poland, housing some 38 million inhabitants, is by far the largest of the new EU members and the overall number of Polish migrants in Europe has been estimated at 2 million people (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007a). Therefore, the Poles constitute the largest group among the new migrants (Cyrus, 2006; Ecorys, 2006). Being a representative example for the East to West mobility and having a long history of emigration, Poland seems to be a particularly interesting case to study (Triandafyllidou, 2006).

Although the Netherlands was never among the major destinations for Polish emigrants, since Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004, the Dutch state has recorded a growing number of Poles, mainly illegal and seasonal employees. The opening of the Dutch labour market in May 2007 began to attract an even greater number of newcomers. Poles now comprise over 80% of the immigrants from Central and Eastern European countries in the Netherlands, which makes them the largest group after the Dutch returning migrants (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). It appears that it is not only the Poles living in Poland who are arriving, but also those who had already worked abroad, such as in the UK or Germany (Brzostek, 2007).

Being of European origin and mostly Catholic, the new migration flows from Poland seem to resemble earlier migration waves from Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, rather than those from Morocco, Turkey, Suriname and Antilles. It should also be noted that socio-cultural characteristics of the new migration wave show greater similarities with the "old EU" residents than the non-Western inhabitants, especially as regards the education level (Ecorys, 2006), but also religious and social background. Nevertheless, the Dutch TV and press are bombing with information concerning difficulties with recent Polish migrants: Poles move in to cheap city districts, live in dangerous housing conditions, and are loud at night (Pawlicki,

2007). The mass arrival of Poles seems to be a concern to the native Dutch, who have recently shown a less positive attitude towards immigrants (Oudenhoven, Ward and Masgoret, 2006). By many autochthones newcomers are perceived as intruders who take scarce jobs and pose a threat to social cohesion and the welfare system. Stereotypes about Polish workers regarding their diligence, sticking together in groups, cheap housing and separating from the Dutch society, can be well illustrated by the lyrics of the song from the Dutch carnival of 2008, titled “A van full of Poles” (Een Busje vol met Polen)¹:

“A van full of Poles
A van, a van
Go, go, go!
In the morning, in the evening, late at night
A van drives through our street, a van full of Poles
Look at them driving, where are they coming from?
Where are they hiding?
On the land, in construction, they don’t make such a fuss.
They’re coming together
For a few bucks and a can of beer,
They come to help, that’s why they are here
One spots them everywhere, they are a border case
Yet, they are my idols
Wherever I see them I give them a wave
A van full of Poles
They have hired a house in our neighbourhood
Cosy together
And in the evening, when the job is done
They turn their polka music loudly on.”

Concerns about massive flows from Poland and other new EU members, and their assumed impact on the labour markets and the welfare state had been already expressed by policy makers prior to the enlargement in 2004, leading to the governmental decision to impose a transitional period for several years (Pijpers, 2006). Although the current migrants’ initial goal is often to stay abroad for a limited period of time, the Dutch experience with migrants from Morocco and Turkey who arrived as domestic workers in the 1960s and 1970s and have later settled permanently, has shown that also seasonal and short-term migration should be treated seriously. Anticipating integration problems like those they have experienced with former immigrant groups, the Dutch policy-makers have recently proposed that Polish migrants should attend obligatory language courses (Pszczółkowska, 2007). Although the idea eventually has not come to life, it reflects the Dutch public discourse and

¹The translation of the lyrics comes from the paper by Godfried Engbersen, Erik Snel and Jan de Boom ‘A Van full of Poles’: Liquid Migration from Central and Eastern Europe, presented on April 28, 2008, at the UVA.

general approach towards the Polish case: the mass influx of Poles is starting to be seen as a problem.

Meanwhile, the relevance of the Polish emigration to Western Europe is also to be seen in the Polish media, which show concern for the labour shortage and its possible consequences for the Polish economy. As the number of emigrants with higher education has recently significantly increased, the current outflows are often referred to as a new “brain drain” period in Poland (Kaczmarczyk, 2007). Knowing that the society is “exporting” young and well-educated employees, the Polish government is trying to attract its citizens back home. At the same time, in the Polish society there still exists the myth of “the West” associated with wealth, civilization and prosperity, which seems to attract Poles to seek a better life in Western Europe. Therefore, the Polish media tend to present emigration to the EU countries in “rosy” colours, as an easy solution that will bring fast money in a nice environment. But again, apart from some statistics regarding the size of the flows of the Polish migrants or remittances that they send back home, not much is known about what recent migrants actually find abroad and what experiences or reflections they bring back home.

1.1 Theme of interest and research question

In the Dutch discourse, most emphasis has been put on the Netherlands’ point of view, i.e. how the labour migrants are perceived by the natives, and what the inflows mean to the Dutch economy and social cohesion. Finding it extremely interesting to explore the perspective of the Polish immigrants themselves, I decided to concentrate on the subjective experiences of recent Polish migrants – those that arrived to the Netherlands within the last few years – and the way they make sense of their experiences. The topic is particularly important to me as a Polish citizen, and being in the Netherlands while the migration has been occurring has given me a great opportunity to study it “live”. At the same time, the paper may constitute a contribution to both the Dutch and Polish public debate on recent Polish migration – providing more balanced insights into the Polish side of the migration-story on the one hand, and bringing a more realistic perspective than the persistent “myth of the glorious West” on the other. Therefore, the following **research question** has been formulated:

- *How do recent Polish migrants experience their stay in the Netherlands, and how do they develop social networks and notions of belonging?*

The following **subquestions** have been addressed to help to answer the main research question:

- *What were the migrants' motives to leave Poland, and what did they hope to find in the Netherlands?*

As a background for my research, I have decided to explore the Polish immigrants' goals and expectations as to their stay in the Netherlands. The fact that the recent migrants are relatively well-educated and motivated to work hard should imply their ability to find quite a well-paid job in Poland. Yet, they prefer to settle in a foreign country and take jobs where the native citizens are reluctant to work: agriculture, construction, factories, cleaning or manufacturing. What makes the Poles leave their homeland and settle abroad then? What do they hope to find there? I assumed that money itself cannot be the only driving force, but the need for personal development, as well as the myth of the West should also play an important role.

- *How and with whom are their social networks being formed and maintained?*

My aim was also to examine with whom and how bonds are developed in the host country, and how this affects the settlement process as well as future plans. Here I decided to look at contacts with the Dutch residents as well as the attitude towards other, non-Polish, immigrants. Although the profile of a Polish migrant matches to a big extent the profile of an average Dutch resident and thus the level of integration into Dutch society can be expected to be high, the migration of most Poles is intended to be only temporary, which would imply a small need to integrate with the hosts (Ecorys, 2006). When analysing the existing networks within the Polish ethnic group, I also chose to explore the process of forming a community among the Polish migrants – whether and how a local community is created, how it functions and what meaning it has to its members.

- *How do the Polish migrants view themselves while being in the Netherlands?*

One of the purposes of the study was to analyse how the identities of migrants are reconstructed and affected by the migration experience, and how the interviewees position themselves towards the host society as well as the homeland. Knowing that the Polish migrants are by the hosts perceived as one homogeneous category – as “outsiders” – and seeing groups of Polish people in the streets of Amsterdam or the Hague, I found it likely that there exists a sort of group identity among the newcomers. I also wanted to see how the Polish migrants perceive their own fellow countrymen and how they react to the image as an ethnic group that they have among the Dutch.

2. Theoretical framework

As a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, migration remains the object of interest to scientists from a variety of fields. Therefore, there is no single definition of a migrant or migration, nor does there exist one theory dealing with this topic (Brettell, 2003; Fihel, Kaczmarczyk, and Okólski, 2006; Okólski, 2004).

Generally speaking, international migration means self-directed movement of individuals from one state to another (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000). Although immigration implies long-term or permanent residence by the immigrants, seasonal labour migration – usually for periods of less than a year – is often also treated as a form of migration. Furthermore, classical migration theories divide motives underlying migration into incentives attracting people away – pull factors – and circumstances in the place of origin encouraging to leave – push factors. Escape from poverty is considered to be a traditional push factor, while the availability of jobs abroad – the related pull factor. In explaining migration processes, researchers have also highlighted the role of social context, household decision-making and many other factors (Okólski, 2004).

Until recently, migration usually meant leaving one nation-state to another, and most often led either to permanent settlement, or to the return to the country of origin after some period. However, as contemporary mobility of people across borders is shaped by the broader context of increasing globalisation, the idea of a person who migrates from one nation-state to another, whether permanently or temporarily, seems to be undermined (Penninx, 2007; Vertovec, 2007a). Cheap and easy travel and new technologies enable the maintenance of strong social, economic and political ties both with the country of origin as well as with fellow members in other countries. Thus, international migration within the EU has become more dynamic and flexible, putting the migrants in “a state of limbo between two societies of reference” (Triandafyllidou, 2006, p. 1). Furthermore, the two contexts are not as distinct as they used to be, since the distance between them is reduced by global flows across borders.

Regardless of the form of migration – short or long-term – most contemporary migrants move in order to improve their livelihood and seek new opportunities. Migration may thus be interpreted in terms of search for human security – whether it is social, economic, political, or other. By migrating people hope to find a “better place” for themselves in the destination country or improve their lives in their own society after returning. At the same time, migration may be also perceived as risk-taking – and thus as insecurity seeking: although mobility is today much easier than it had been before in history, the decision to leave

still involves some risk. Even if financial success is obtained, it is not necessarily reflected in personal terms. As changing the social context is likely to affect one's personal identity as well as notions of belonging, migration may constitute a threat to personal and social identity.

2.1 Social networks

Researchers studying migration often use the concept of social networks (Vertovec, 2002), which refers to the set of social contacts of a group, made through personal relationships including kinship, friendship and community ties as well as economic links. In terms of migration, social networks can be defined as relations connecting migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or countrymen at home (Arango, 2004, p. 28). They include networks based on personal ties, as well as organizational relations – schools, professional associations, agencies, recruiters and other intermediaries.

Since migration is seldom a purely individual enterprise, social networks constitute a crucial element in the whole migration process and are one of the most important explanatory factors of migration (Arango, 2004, p. 28). Networks help people migrate and work in the receiving country, are crucial for exchanging experiences and giving personal support, as well as guiding immigrants into employment. Network connections reduce the costs and risks of mobility, thus increasing the likelihood of international migration. As a result, persons related to the immigrant are more likely to emigrate themselves. Therefore, “migration is a process that both depends on and creates networks” (Vertovec, 2002, p. 3). Moreover, social networks not only facilitate the process of migration, but also help remain ties with the homeland (Brettell, 2003).

It should be noted that the types of migrant networks vary. For instance, they may be focused more towards the country of origin or towards the local context (Vasta, 2004). Furthermore, they are categorized with regards to the kind of the ties they are based on. The type of migrants' networks depends on socio-economic factors such as occupational class, gender or age. For instance, it appears that skilled migrants rely more on networks of colleagues and organizations, while unskilled workers more on kin-based networks (Vertovec, 2002). Networks can also provide long-term support and temporary support, which can occur due to divisions in the wider community (Vasta, 2004). Furthermore, various networks may exist within one community, for example new migrants can form their own networks.

While social networks are usually seen in positive terms – as empowering migrants by providing a flow of information, resources and links – some researchers also stress their

negative function (Vasta, 2004). Namely, they may also be constraining, acting as gatekeepers to the flow or marginalizing various members (ibidem). As a consequence, some weaker individuals may not have the access to available resources.

The role of networks can be also studied from the integration perspective: although the presence of networks provides a sense of security that can facilitate adaptation among the immigrants, it may also block the integration process in the host society. Research on undocumented Polish immigrants in Belgium, for instance, has shown that Poles tend to form a “Polish world” and separate from the natives. The Poles in Brussels lived in the same district, spent their free time with one another, did shopping together, and attended Polish masses (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2001). Interestingly however, according to the study, they rarely cooperated or helped each other, but rather tended to compete (ibidem).

2.2 Identity and notions of belonging

Migration affects many aspects of the self, and requires reconstruction of both personal and social identities (Kosic, 2006), the concept of which is central in anthropology and social sciences in general. Eriksen, for instance, defines identity as “being the same as oneself as well as being different” (2002, p. 60), which stresses both the uniqueness of the individual as well as the opposition to “others”. Identity can be thus based on anything that distinguishes the individual (group) from others in a particular context.

The individual’s self-concept based on perceived group membership is called social identity, whereas personal identity is expressed in perceiving oneself as a unique individual and identifying with personal goals and values (Grzelak and Jarymowicz, 2000). According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), different social contexts may trigger a person to think, feel or act on the basis of a different “level of self” – personal, family, national or other. Being exposed to a new cultural context, migrants need to redefine their place in the host society and their position with respect to other social groups. Some identities may relate to membership in the host culture, whereas others refer to homelands values. As people belong to various groups and social categories, they chose the ones they identify themselves with. One may feel bonds with persons who are familiar – family, friends, or other social group – but also with social categories consisting of persons that are personally not known to the subject (e.g. “us Poles”, “us Catholics”). Social identity is expressed by perceiving a common membership to a particular social category, and sharing an emotional engagement in participating in the group with other members. Moreover, it can be formed

with no relation to a particular group membership, being based on a category to which one would like to belong, or an abstract group defined by sharing certain values.

As people generally try to think positively of themselves and of the groups from which they derive their social identity, group membership creates in-group categorization in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As a result, people tend to unconsciously overestimate the differences between the in-group and the out-groups, which can lead to the creation of social distance and mutual hostility. This, in turn, may facilitate the forming of prejudice and group conflict.

It is important to note that the impact of social groups on the way people perceive themselves and others is strongly dependent on the broader social context in which they function. The same group membership may affect identity in different ways, depending on how it compares to other groups in the particular context (Kosic, 2006). Therefore, “the context provides feedback about one’s social position (...) that can provide a sense of security or a sense of threat to self” (ibidem, p. 258). The IAPASIS project², for instance, has shown that most relationships between the Poles and the host citizens often have a degree of social distance resulting from different social status foreigners vs. natives. In response, migrants adopt coping strategies, such as achieving a positive self-concept through favorable comparisons with the host groups (Kosic, 2006).

It may be said that a specific kind of social identity is ethnic identity, which refers a group with a shared culture and history. Eriksen (1994) stresses that ethnicity is not a property of a group, but an “aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum regular interaction. It can thus be also defined as social identity (based on contrast a-vis others) characterized by metaphoric or fictive kinship” (p. 12). Ethnicity is thus constructed by the social context, in which the emigration situation also plays a very important role, particularly due to the larger range of ethnic groups that the migrant is exposed to.

2.3 Community formation

The phenomenon of migration may also involve creating a community in the host society, understood not necessarily as living together in a geographic sense, but rather as “an ethnic

²The project was entitled: ‘Does implementation matter? Informal Administration Practices and Shifting Immigrant Strategies in Four Member States’ (IAPASIS) and took place in the years 2000-2003 in Germany, UK, Greece and Italy. The project reports have been published in: A. Triandafyllidou (ed.)

social network or state of mind common to people spread out over a wide area” (Brettell, 2003, p. 109). A community can be thus viewed as sharing common values, which at the same time distinguishes its members from the “outsiders”. Although the definitions of a sense of community vary, most of them emphasise its symbolically constructed character – the fact that they are imagined and marked by virtual boundaries.

In his analysis of the nation state and nationalism, Anderson (1983) argues that the nation as a whole is a socially constructed community: it is imagined because it is not based on face to face interaction, but a mental affinity held in the minds of the people. He writes: “Members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). As Anderson suggests, the feeling of belonging to a nation is stimulated by a number of media, this way leading to “distant nationalism” and a strong nostalgia for the homeland among the migrants.

The meaning of community in the era of globalization has, among other researchers, remained the subject of interest to Appadurai (1995), who suggests that the “production of locality” is directly affected by diasporic flows and electronic / virtual communities. Therefore, migrants confronted with the question whether or not to adjust to the new society and culture can still create and maintain ties with their original “locality” through virtual communication, this way recreating their locality in the place of settlement (Appadurai, 1995). Appadurai sees the production of locality as contextual, since it is created as opposed to “the other”, and stresses that in the contemporary world – a world of increasing human motion, dominance of electronic media and collapse of nation-state – locality is not given but is constantly reproduced, “it is increasingly a struggle” (Appadurai, 1995, p. 213).

Whether understood in a geographic or in a social network sense, real or virtual, community may provide a source of identity, security, and a sense of acceptance, which is crucial for the migrants in a new society. One of the main symbols of a community are formal community institutions, such as religious or cultural organisations and community centres (Alexander, Edwards and Temple, 2007). “Such institutions testify to the existence of a ‘community’, manifest its most significant features and articulate its needs, often standing as a mediator between ‘the community’ and wider society” (ibidem, p. 791). Formal community services often remain the central part of everyday life, providing not only a cultural, social and religious role, but also offering practical help such as language classes. The most

important of such institutions seems to be the church (Brettell, 2003). The character, size and number of organisations indicate how immigrants see differences between themselves and the host society. Interestingly, immigrant organizations can be both offensive, as a choice to remain separated from the host society, and defensive – as a reaction to exclusion (Shrover and Vermeulen, 2005).

Although the dominant view in the theoretical discourse seems to be that a sense of community based on common origins will naturally emerge, some researchers argue that an ethnic community cannot be simply assumed (see for example Brettell, 2003). By comparing two groups of Portuguese immigrants – in Canada, where a strong Portuguese community did exist, and in France, where it did not – Brettell shows that the formation of a community depends on the state policy as well as structural, ideological and political factors. She also highlights the role of the character of migration: temporary migrants retain a “homeland orientation”, which implies that the community they identify with is in their home country and it is maintained by a long-distance social network (Brettell, 2003). Long-term immigrants, on the other hand, are oriented towards the society they have emigrated to and thus the community they identify with is within the destination place. Similarly to Brettell, I will argue that in some cases the sense of community does not emerge, even though from the external perspective the conditions needed for its formation do exist.

Transnational communities

Many researchers argue that contemporary migrants live in transnational communities, which comprise “dense networks across political borders in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both” (Portes, 1997, p. 812). The concept of transmigrants refers to individuals based in two or more nation-states, of which one is their state of origin, i.e. who maintain ties with their homelands, and are involved in the economic, social, political and religious spheres of the host society as well as their sending communities (Brettell, 2003; Castles, 2003). It is important to note that the term “transmigrant” refers to a person to whom transnational activities are a central part of life, whereas individuals maintaining loose contact with the country of origin are not considered transmigrants

(Brettell, 2003). A transnational community is a group of people engaged in transnational activities. It can develop formal organisation structures, but usually it functions as an informal network (Castles, 2003).

Although early discussion on transnationalism often suggested that maintaining links with the homeland is an alternative to integration, Vertovec points out that transnational involvement does not necessarily occur at the expense of integration with the host society (Vertovec, 2007a). In other words, the more transnational a person is, does not automatically imply the less integrated, and vice versa. To quote Vertovec again: “while migrants continue to feel powerfully bound to homelands and communities elsewhere, they are now more able to maintain and enhance these feelings while at the same time are quite capable of developing a new life, livelihood, social ties and political interests in their places of settlement”. Furthermore, the maintenance of transnational ties is not related to social position: transnational activities occur among migrants with high as well as marginalized social status (Vertovec, 2007a). Interestingly, identifying with the country of origin does not imply maintaining transnational ties, as was evidenced in a study among immigrants in the Netherlands. Although the Moroccans and Antilleans identify strongly with their homeland, they are not engaged in transnational activities, which suggests that these occur for reasons other than transnational identification (Snel et al, 2006 in Vertovec, 2007a). Therefore, it may be said that leading dual lives can imply that current immigrants identify themselves with a community both in their home country as well as in the host society, but also, that they identify with no community at all.

2.4 Social capital

Another useful concept often referred to when analysing the migration process is social capital, which can be broadly defined as network cooperation and support promoted by moral norms and values (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Being connected to someone who has already migrated yields social capital that can be used to migrate oneself. Thus, from the migrant's perspective, social capital means persons who can cooperate with the migrant and thus facilitate the migration process, i.e. help him migrate and then operate in the new environment (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005).

A key component of social capital is social trust: as long as the individual does not trust that other group members will cooperate, he risks making a contribution that does not provide the collective good. Social trust is here understood as a general belief that other

people are trustworthy, it means trusting not only certain persons who are known to the individual, but an overall perception that others are good and will not be harmful. The level of social trust is especially important in new situations and when interacting with strangers – in other words, the less the situation is familiar, the bigger the influence of social trust (Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994).

It is important to note that in the recent research on social capital, a distinction introduced by Putnam has been made between bridging and bonding capital. While the first one connects an individual to a broader society, the second binds the person to his narrow social group (Nannestad, Svendsen and Svendsen, 2008). As Nannestad and colleagues write: “bridging social capital can be identified as network cooperation that transcends group cleavages, while bonding social capital is exclusive and group specific in nature. Both types involve trust, but whereas bridging social capital is based on general trust, i.e. trust in strangers, bonding capital is based on concrete trust, i.e. trust in people you already know.” As a result, social capital has its positive and negative sides from the perspective of the society. The “sunny” side involves the ability to cooperate for the purpose of achieving a collective good, while the “dark” – the harm of the group to the society as a whole (ibidem). While it is commonly assumed that the bridging social capital has positive outcomes, and the bonding one – negative, Nannestad et al (2008) propose three types of social capital: bridging, which by definition is “good”, positive bonding capital (raising the level of bridging social capital), and negative bonding capital (crowding out bridging social capital). Analysing the case of non-Western migrants in Denmark, the authors argue that the poor integration of immigrants can be related to both a low level of bridging social capital in the migrant group and a low level of positive bonding social capital. Their results also demonstrate a positive relationship between the levels of two kinds of social capital, which shows that bonding social capital among the migrant group – understood as ethnic solidarity – is not therefore, as is often assumed, a barrier to the development of bridging of social capital required for integration with the host society (ibidem). Those findings also suggest that the lack of integration with the host society does not necessarily have to be accompanied by strong ties within the immigrant group – in some cases both the bonding social capital as well as the bridging capital are low.

3. Social and geographical context

3.1 Emigration from Poland

Poland is often described as an emigration country, as it has been one of the most important sending countries in Europe since the 19th century (Fihel et al, 2006). The first significant migration outflows from Poland occurred in the mid 19th century for political reasons, after unsuccessful national uprisings against the occupants. Big emigration waves have later taken place in the 20th century, due to both of the World Wars and the Soviet occupation. Economically driven outflows, on the other hand, although started at the turn of the 19th century have gained importance in the 20th century, especially as from the 1980s. As regards the geographic directions of the outflows, the major destinations for Polish migrants have been for decades the United States and Germany (ibidem).

After the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, the legal and institutional framework for Polish emigrants has changed totally. From that time each citizen had the official right to travel abroad and the decision to leave was no longer a decision for life. The destination countries first responded with tightening admission procedures for the Poles, no longer treating them as refugees, however, in exchange for Polish co-operation in the defence of refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, since 1991 Poles can travel to the EU without visa requirement (Cyrus, 2006). Although formal employment was possible only with a work permit, the number of Polish migrants employed formally and especially informally in the EU, significantly increased. Moreover, labour migration has started to be mostly short-term, which made it different from the previous emigration waves (Ecorys, 2006).

Joining the European Union by Poland in May 2004 is often being considered as the beginning of a new wave of Polish emigration. The EU enlargement liberalized migration rules, giving the new EU citizens the right to remain in the European Union up to three months. Three countries, i.e. the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden immediately opened their labour markets to new EU members, while other states imposed transition periods.

Due to gaps in statistics and the circularity of the migration flows, it is difficult to estimate the total number of Poles who have emigrated after Poland's entrance to the EU in May 2004. However, the number of people remaining temporarily outside Polish borders has been assessed at 1,950 000 by the end of 2006, among which 1,600 000 have left to the EU (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007a). Those data do not include seasonal and illegal workers (remaining abroad for less than 4 months), as such are not registered by official statistics.

The main receivers of Polish migrants have been recently the UK, Germany and Ireland (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007a). While Germany has for decades been a traditional destination for Polish migrants, the UK and Ireland are relatively new receiving countries (Fihel et al, 2006). The three top receivers were followed by Italy and the Netherlands (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007a).

It is worthwhile to note that the new emigration wave appears to be quite different from the previous generations of Poles abroad. People are now leaving mainly for economic reasons; furthermore, the new information technology – Internet in particular – and cheaper transportation allows migrants to maintain strong ties with their home country, which results in an “illusion of closeness” with relatives and friends. Furthermore, emigration is currently usually short-term, while the former migration flows were mostly permanent. To compare: short-term Polish migrants, i.e. staying abroad for a period from 2 to 12 months comprised 60% in 2004, 53% in 2003 and 48% in 1995 (Fihel et al, 2006). In addition, most of the current emigrants are young – below 35 years old – and a big number of them has higher education (Ecorys, 2006).

When analysing the Polish migration, it is important to take into account that in the Polish historical discourse a strong distinction has been made between political and economic migrants. This division seems to go far beyond the explanation of individual motives for leaving the homeland – more specifically, political migrants are seen as refugees who had fought for independence, while the latter – as “simple people” searching for a better life abroad (Garapich, 2005). This implies that the act of migrating is interpreted in moral terms, giving the political migrants a higher moral status and perceiving economic motivation as a sign of weakness and egoism. The act of migrating is also considered to be an important element in the national identity construction and as such is a notion present in Polish political thought, religion and literature. The national emigration discourse stresses nostalgic feelings for the homeland and the duty towards the nation. In this understanding, the ethnic group means a moral community, whose members should feel obliged to help one another, especially when they are abroad. Garapich (2006, 2007) argues that this “politicization of the Polish migration” presents emigration as a “rite of passage” in which the individual from having a non-national identity, due to crossing the border and contact with other nationalities, changes into a Pole that has full awareness of own culture and feels it in a different way. Being a Pole implies a set of duties and moral commitments, which are stronger than those regarding “others”. This constitutes a crucial element in the construction of national identity – in Garapich's view, Polish migrants do not passively accept this national discourse as a

guide but verify its accuracy in real life. They try to show that it is not the ethnic ties that matter most on a capitalistic market, and respond to the discourse of an imagined moral community by contesting it and manifesting hostility towards co-ethnics. According to Garapich however, this hostility functions more as a narrative, a “myth”, which is not reflected in reality.

3.2 Immigration in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has had a rich history of immigration for centuries, attracting migrants by its prosperity and high tolerance. Large-scale immigration has taken place since the late 16th century and lasted until the end of the 17th century (Vermeulen and Penninx, 2000). In the second half of the 20th century, the Netherlands has had three immigration waves (Schalk-Soekar, Van de Vijver and Hoogsteder, 2004). The first one was formed by immigrants from the former Dutch colonies, namely: Indonesia, who arrived mainly in the mid 1950s, as well as Surinam and the Dutch Antilles (since the mid 1960s). The second wave was constituted by people recruited to fill vacancies in the Netherlands, namely workers from Southern Europe (Portugal, Greece, Italy and Spain), who arrived in the mid 1950s, as well as from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s. The third wave took place in the 1970s and 1980s, and consisted of political and religious refugees from the former Eastern Block countries, former Yugoslavia, as well as Iran and Iraq (Schalk-Soekar et al, 2004).

As a result of these inflows, the Netherlands has changed from a fairly high level of ethnic homogeneity to a great degree of diversity, which is to be seen especially in the cities. By the 1980s the Netherlands had become a multicultural society. In 2003, taking into account children of immigrants, the population of non-Dutch origin was assessed at 3,1 million – nearly one fifth of the Netherlands’ total population (Vasta, 2007). Among 16 million people living in the Netherlands, 10% were born elsewhere (Oudenhoven et al, 2006). The Turks, Moroccans, Surinamers and Antilleans remain the largest minority groups in the Netherlands, comprising nearly 7% of the Dutch population (Vasta, 2007).

In the 1980s, the Netherlands applied a multiculturalism policy, which meant that minorities were to have the same rights as the Dutch natives, and that they were to have the right to maintain their ethnic culture (Schalk-Soekar et al, 2004). The Dutch multicultural concept was seen in Europe as a model society that accepts people of different origins and religions. However, the policy providing support for minority groups is now often said to have failed. Attitudes of the Dutch towards immigrants have recently become more negative,

and the native residents tend to prefer that the immigrants adjust to the host society instead of preserving their cultural identity (Schalk-Soekar et al, 2004; Oudenhoven et al, 2006). Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have been given significant attention in the Netherlands in the recent years, and have remained the topic of heated political debates. The public debate now also involves migrants from Poland.

3.3 Polish immigration to the Netherlands

Although the discussion concerning Polish immigrants is relatively new in the Netherlands – it started prior to the EU enlargement in 2004 – Polish migrants have been in fact contributing to the Dutch economy for many years (Pijpers, 2006).

In the first half of the 20th century a number of Poles settled to work in the Dutch mining industry, along with Italian, German, and Slovenian migrants. During the 1980's thousands of Poles came to the Netherlands, officially as tourists or to visit their relatives, but they ended up working in horticulture, on the asparagus and strawberry fields, at construction sites and packaging industry (Pijpers, 2006). More important Polish inflows took place in the 1990s, mostly due to immigration of Poles from Silesia (formerly German territory) who thanks to their dual Polish-German citizenship could enjoy free access to the Dutch labour market. In 1998 the possibility to work legally for a limited period of time was given also to those having only a Polish passport (Lewandowska, 2008).

The number of Poles working temporarily in the Netherlands has been growing steadily since 2000. A sharp increase of Polish newcomers was visible very soon after accession – from around 2,000 arriving in 2004 to 5,000 in 2005 (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). In 2004 over 20 thousand work permits were issued to Poles (Pijpers, 2005). As the number of newcomers from the traditional immigration countries – Turkey, Morocco and Suriname – has fallen in the last years, the arrival of Poles has made them the largest coming group among the recent migrants (Statistics Netherlands, 2007).

Currently, after the Netherlands has opened its labour market to the new EU member states, the number of Poles working here is estimated to be around 120 thousand and still increases (Brzostek, 2007). The most important reasons for migrating to the Netherlands are reported to be high earnings and a relatively short distance to Poland, which enables commuting every few weeks. Most workers from Poland currently living in the Netherlands are employed in the services sector, including health care, trade and business services (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). Polish migrants are often willing to work in other than their

own professions, usually in jobs for which they are overqualified, such as agriculture, horticulture, construction working, manufacturing, domestic services, or nursering (Ecorys, 2006; Brzostek, 2007).

In spite of the fears of the policy-makers, the recent emigration seems to be a temporary wave: Poles come to the Netherlands mainly to improve their living standard in Poland, and usually do not intend to settle in the Netherlands permanently. However, the number of persons seeking permanent residence is growing (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). Due to the increasing presence of Poles in the Netherlands, Polish communities are being created in many towns, which have their own shops and restaurants, institutions, such as bus journeys to and from Poland or church services. Those, in turn, also become a strong pull factor for new migrants (Ecorys, 2006).

An important change in the new Polish immigration is the growing proportion of men. Whereas in the late 1990s and the first years of the new millennium, due to a big number of Polish brides marrying Dutch men the majority of immigrants from Poland was constituted by women, currently most immigrants from Poland – as well as Bulgaria and Romania – are men (see Chart 1). As CBS concludes, this shows a shift from family-forming to labour migration (CBS, 29.11.2007).

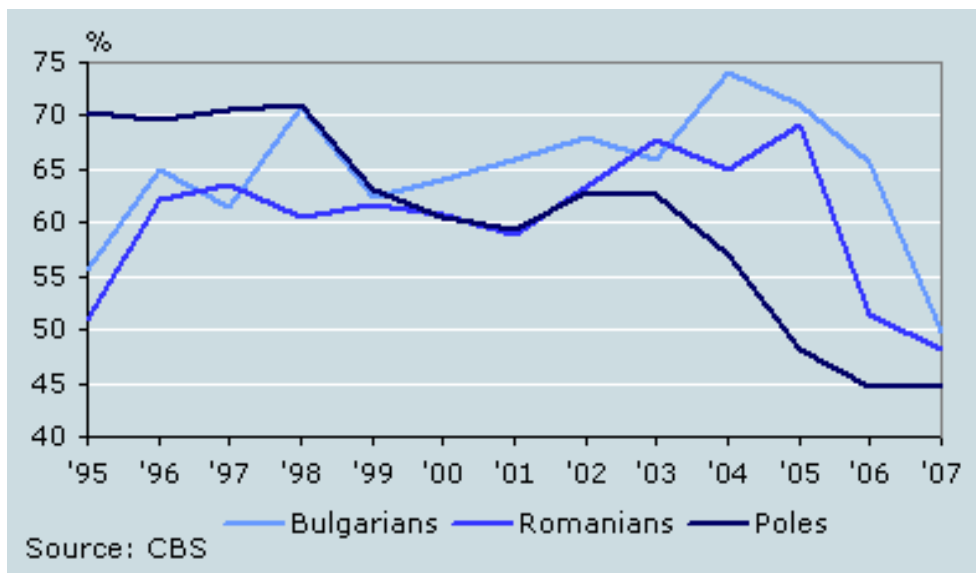


Chart 1. Share of women in immigration from Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, 1995–2007 (retrieved from: www.cbs.nl)

When analysing the phenomenon of Polish emigration to the Netherlands, it also seems worthwhile to be aware of those socio-economic characteristics of the Polish society that make it quite different from the Dutch reality. Although since the fall of communism the Polish economy has been undergoing rapid economic development, the unemployment rate

still remains high – 10,5%, which is currently the second in the EU (Eurostat, 2007) – and the average gross salary is 800 Euro per month (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007b). Moreover, the employment structure differs strongly from European standards, with 16% people working in agriculture and only 55% in the service sector. The latter seems to be strongly related to the fact that for centuries the majority of the Poles have lived in the country side, and unlike the rest of Europe, the bourgeoisie has constituted a relatively small proportion of the Polish population.

Furthermore, formerly being host to many cultures, languages and religions, the outcomes of World War II have made Poland a rather homogeneous society both in terms of ethnicity and religion. Poles and Catholics now make up an overwhelming majority of the Polish population. Over 90% of the Polish citizens declare to be Catholics, and one in two persons are practicing, which makes Poland one of the most religious countries in Europe.

An important characteristic of the Polish society that is often interpreted as one of the consequences of the communistic background is the low level of social trust (Social Diagnosis 2007). According to the panel research Social Diagnosis, only 11% of the Poles state that “one can trust the majority of people”. This percentage has maintained on a similar level for the recent years, and has been recorded to be one of the lowest indicators of social trust in Europe. In terms of level of social trust, among the countries included in the European Social Survey in 2004 Poland was in fact the last (ibidem). Interestingly, the Netherlands has been reported to be one of the most trusting societies, following the Scandinavian countries. Also the tendency to associate in the Polish society has been recorded to be low. Those factors – social trust and willingness to associate – constitute the key components of social capital, which allows to conclude that the level of social capital among the Poles remains rather low (Social Diagnosis, p. 267).

The above listed characteristics: relatively poor economy, rural tradition, ethnic homogeneity, strong religiousness and low social capital – constitute important differences between the Polish and the Dutch culture. The Netherlands, as opposed to Poland, is among the most prosperous countries in the world, reveals a high level of social capital, remains host to various ethnic and religious groups, and last but not least, is one of the most secular societies on the globe. It is important to have those dissimilarities in mind while analyzing the migration experiences of the Polish migrants, as they constitute the frames of reference for the Poland-to the Netherlands migration, and strongly influence the perception of the Dutch reality as well as general feelings related to being abroad.

4. Methodology

The paper is based on an extensive body of literature and on three months of anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Netherlands from January to April 2008. The research consisted of individual interviews, interviews with couples, mini-groups, informal conversations and participant observation.

The interviews and mini-groups included 34 persons altogether. They were conducted at interviewee's homes, at cafés and other public places, as well as interviewee's workplaces. They usually lasted for about an hour (a few lasted for two or even three hours) and were all recorded by a digital voice tracer. All interviews were conducted in Polish and were later transcribed.

Furthermore, throughout my whole fieldwork and in the months preceding it, I have searched for information on Polish migrants in Polish and Dutch daily newspapers and websites; I have read the weeklies designed for Polish migrants in the Netherlands *Niedziela* and *PoPolsku*, as well as internet forums for Polish people (*niedziela.nl*, *polonia.nl*, *gazeta.pl*). Those sources of information were an important supplement to the data I have gathered in my fieldwork, as they have given me an insight into how „the Polish problem” is portrayed by both the Dutch and Polish media, provided numerous information regarding Polish events and places in the Netherlands, as well as have given me a general picture of the Polish community and its concerns.

4.1 Research population

As the aim of the research was to explore personal experiences of recent Polish migrants in the Netherlands, the migrants themselves constituted my research population. I defined recent Polish migrants as persons who arrived to the Netherlands within the last 4 years (after Poland had joined the EU) and not later than 6 months ago. This way I could reach persons having a longer migration experience, as well as those at the beginning of the migration process. I intentionally did not include seasonal migrants, as those persons by definition leave their homeland only for a very short time and as such differ strongly from “traditional migrants”. In order to have a comparison with persons of a longer duration of stay, I conducted a few interviews with migrants who arrived to the Netherlands earlier than 2004 (one person arrived 5 years ago, three participants arrived eight years ago, one person – ten, and one person – twelve years ago) and later than 6 months (one person arrived 1,5 months ago, one person – 3 weeks ago). The average duration of stay was a little less than 3,5 years.

Furthermore, in defining my research population I chose a criterion as to the age, setting it as 20-40 years, as this range is considered to be the mobility age and is reported to be the age of the majority of recent Polish migrants. The youngest respondent was 21 years old, several persons were slightly older than 40 years old. The average age was 30 years.

Within those criteria I tried to cover as wide a range of migrants as possible. I wanted to include persons of both sexes, of different position and family situation in the Netherlands, and of different professional, geographical and social background in Poland. Thus, the family situation, education level, place of origin and occupation of my informants varied strongly, however, certain characteristics of the research population need to be noted, as they draw a general picture of the recent Polish migrants in the Netherlands (detailed characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1).

The majority of my interviewees were men (21 out of 34), which complies with the gender structure of the recent Polish migrants population in the Netherlands. Two thirds of the participants were working in manual jobs, mainly construction (men) and cleaning (women). Furthermore, most of the respondents came from small cities in Poland from outside the central part of Poland. By far the majority had at least secondary education – out of 34 interviewees, 15 had higher education, 13 had secondary, and only 6 had a lower level of education. This corresponds with the Polish data stating that contemporary Polish migrants tend to be well educated. As regards the family situation, thirteen were singles, seven were married, and fourteen were in relationships. Seven persons had children.

As to the locations of the research, I focused on the main Dutch cities, which at the same time are housing the biggest numbers of Polish migrants: Amsterdam and its surroundings, The Hague, and Rotterdam. A few interviews have also taken place in Haarlem and Almere. The city, as opposed to the country site, not only provided easier access to informants, but with its diverse “ethnoscape”, typical especially for Amsterdam, also created very challenging settings for my study. Moreover, it allowed for reaching a variety of respondents in terms of profession, education level, social background and life-style.

Age:	Education:	Gender:	Family situation:
20-25: 5	Higher: 15	Female: 13	In a relationship: 14
26-30: 16	Secondary: 13	Male: 21	Single: 13
31-40: 10	Vocational: 6		Married: 7
41 plus: 3			
Duration of stay in the Netherlands:			
5 years and above: 6			
3-4 years: 9			
1-2 years: 14			
6 months – 1 year: 3			
Less than 6 months: 2			
Locations of interviews:			
Amsterdam and surroundings: 17			
The Hague and surroundings: 9			
Haarlem: 4			
Rotterdam: 2			
Almere: 2			
Geographical background:			
Small towns (up to 50 000 inhabitants): 10			
Medium size cities (50 to 200 000 inhabitants): 17			
Big cities (over 200 000 inhabitants): 7			
Occupation (in the Netherlands)*:			
Construction: 11			
Cleaning: 6			
Agriculture: 5			
Skilled work (analysts, engineer, assistant at the university, PhD students): 9			
Hotels, Restaurants, Catering: 3			
Other: 3 (1 driver, 1 owner of Polish shop, 1 DJ)			
*Some participants had more than one occupation, which is the reason for which the numbers added together give more than the overall number of informants (34).			

Table 1. Characteristics of sample

4.2 Recruitment

Participants were recruited using a wide range of methods: through my own networks, focal points for Polish migrants (Polish Churches, Polish shops, Polish bars) as well as through ordinary public places, internet forums for Polish migrants (niedziela.nl, polonia.nl) and at a later stage the snow-ball technique.

In general, I need to note that access to informants was not as easy as I expected: being myself of Polish origin and knowing that there is a big number of Polish migrants in the Netherlands, I assumed that I would encounter hardly any problems with finding respondents, and that having made a few initial contacts, the snow-ball technique will provide easy access to a number of other persons. However, in the first weeks of my research I had some difficulties with reaching informants, and as I did not want the Polish Church to be the main source of my research population, I had to use a variety of ways in which I tried to access Polish migrants. Nevertheless, I did not experience many refusals: most of the persons I approached agreed to make an appointment for an interview, while only a few persons refused to talk.

4.3 Methods

Interviews

As the aim of my research was to grasp the personal perspectives Polish migrants as regards notions of belonging, identity formation, and general feelings related to being abroad, the basis of my fieldwork were interviews. Altogether, I carried out thirteen individual interviews, five interviews with couples and three mini-groups. All participants fulfilled the same criteria, i.e. the only difference was the method in gathering data.

The interviews explored migration stories, work experience, the role of networks, perception of the Dutch society, attitude towards other fellow countrymen in the Netherlands, maintaining transnational ties and aspirations for the future. Interviews with couples were conducted among married couples (two) as well as non-married couples. With most of the interviewees I met once, however with several persons I have decided to meet an additional time, in order to deepen some issues.

Mini-groups were conducted with three and four participants among members of one household (two groups) and persons working at the same place (one group). They were complementary to the interviews, in that they allowed me to analyse how the migrants' opinions and motives are expressed in the presence of other persons with similar experiences.

Furthermore, the issues discussed during focus groups were more related to general opinions and experiences related to the stay in the Netherlands, while individual interviews concentrated more on personal stories.

All the interviews and mini groups followed a loosely structured scheme around a set of topics. However, the sequence of the questions and their form depended on the flow of the conversation. I tried to shape the interviews into a conversational style instead of structured interviews – if the conversation flowed naturally, I did not interrupt the respondent but let him continue his/her story, otherwise, I asked questions to bring the conversation back on track or deepen some issues.

It is also worthwhile to note that in general the interviewees often treated me as a migrant similar to them – which was helpful one hand as they were more open and friendly, but, on the other hand, it implied some difficulties. For instance, my informants often expressed their thoughts using linguistic short cuts, which I often did not understand and had to ask for wider explanation. This, in turn, was surprising for the interviewees as they assumed that as a Polish person who migrated I would find it obvious. This included mostly opinions about the situation in Poland – when I asked why they did not want to return home, respondents would often reply simply “you as a Pole see yourself what is going on there”.

Most of the interviews with couples and mini-groups took place at the interviewees’ homes, which helped build a friendly atmosphere, as well as allowed me to get a better view of the living conditions and the background of my research group.

Key informants

Apart from interviewing Polish migrants I have also spoken to experts who had a long experience with working with the Polish community, namely: Małgorzata Bos-Karczewska (editor of the portal polonia.nl and head of the organization STEP), Zofia Shroten-Czerniejewicz (head of the organization Scena Polska), Polish priests, the consul at the Polish embassy in the Hague, as well as Polish and Dutch academics who have conducted research on recent Polish migrants in Europe. Those interviews explored recent patterns of migration and settlement, the experiences of recent migrants and the networks they use, as well as the perception of the in-group relations among Polish migrants, thus supplementing official data on Polish migrants as well as providing me with a better picture on the subject.

Participant observation

As mentioned above, due to the topic of my research, the main source of my data was by talking to people, whereas participant observation played a relatively less significant role. Nevertheless, throughout the whole fieldwork I have visited focal points for Polish migrants such as Polish churches (in Amsterdam and the Hague), Polish shops (Amsterdam, the Hague, Rotterdam, Haarlem), and bars (the Hague, Rotterdam, Haaarlem) and also tried to observe as many Polish persons in public places as possible. This way I could not only find informants, but could also get insight into the daily lives of my research population and their activities. As a Polish person speaking the Polish language, I was to some extent perceived as an “insider”, which helped me participate in various activities of my research population and get involved in causal conversations. On the other hand, informal talks and participant observation was relatively difficult due to a small number of places where I could actually meet a group of Polish persons and their general reluctance to talking to Polish “strangers”.

5. Motives for migrating and expectations: seeking stability or instability?

In this chapter I will try to answer the first subquestion, which was: What were the migrants' motives to leave Poland, and what did they hope to find in the Netherlands? Thus I will look at the reasons for migrating and the evolution of initial plans over time. I will also analyse the way the decision to emigrate took place.

Although my informants comprised a very heterogeneous group and cannot be analyzed as one bounded category, there are some important characteristics that in my view are strongly represented by many contemporary Polish migrants in the Netherlands. When I spoke to Monika³, a 24-year-old pretty and polite girl whom I met in the Polish shop in Amsterdam, I had a strong feeling that she revealed many of those characteristics, and thus may comprise a good illustration of a Polish newcomer. This is why I would now like to introduce her at this point, and let her accompany us also in the next chapters⁴.

I have been in the Netherlands for half a year now. At the moment I work in a coffeeshop and I clean private houses. I come from a village in the Southern-East part of Poland. My parents had often travelled abroad to work, so together with my sister we were raised by our grandparents. I finished secondary school and after some time I started studying administration in Rzeszów. But after a month I quit. For no particular reason... Now I would like to study something again.

When I was 22, a friend of mine who had been in the UK for some time, convinced me to join her. I decided to go. I left because they said that abroad it was so cool and that you could make so much easy money in short time. And if you don't give it a try yourself you don't know, right? Besides, it was also a kind of adventure for me. In Poland I had never worked nor lived on my own. Now I went to Poland for Christmas, it's so grey and boring there... So many people have left Poland, that there is nothing to do.

I hadn't made any plans as to how long I would stay abroad and what I would do next. When I was leaving Poland, I did not know any English. I was never taught it in school, instead I learned German. So I learned English in the UK. I first worked in a factory, then in a pub, so I had to talk to people. After eight months I decided to join my sister in the

³The names of all the informants have been changed.

⁴Due to the fact that the interviews were not life stories but were an interaction between the informant and me, it was impossible to describe the story of Monika using exactly her words. Therefore, the story is told in first

Netherlands – we are very close to each other and I had missed her a lot. Now she is back in Poland. It was also a new experience for me, a new country. I knew that English was a second language here, and so I came here. And I have to say I like it here. In the UK I felt lonely, and I didn't like the British, they were so cold and distant. They had a negative attitude towards the Poles (...)

5.1 Motives for migrating

Like Monika, the majority of the migrants I have talked to left Poland in search of better life conditions. Most of my interviewees stated that they had not succeeded in professional terms in the home country: they either had had an unsatisfactory work, or had failed to find a job that would suit their aspirations. A failure in financial terms often resulted in a general belief that Poland had offered them no perspectives for the future and the best solution to get on is to seek better opportunities elsewhere. This view was clearly expressed by Karol, who left Poland four years ago together with his wife:

“At some point we figured that we had nothing to look for there [in Poland]. The company we had, we could live from it, but we were close to going bankrupt, there were days in which it was really good, and there were those in which we didn't earn anything. And so we decided to go for broke, we sold everything we had in Poland, computers, cars, we took the dog and packed our things.” (Karol, 29 years old, Haarlem)⁵

The decision to leave is often enhanced by the fact that many others had left. This leads to a way of thinking: since all the others are leaving, then perhaps I should as well. Especially that those who had emigrated had talked about “the glorious West” and the possibility it gives to earn a fortune. Having heard such stories, the only way to find out if indeed this is so, is to check it oneself. Monika explained:

“I left Poland, because they would say that abroad it's so cool, you can earn so much money, and if you don't leave yourself, you don't check it, you won't know how it is.” (Monika, 24 years old, Amsterdam)⁶

For some persons the experience abroad was also perceived as an opportunity to travel and to see a part of the world. They believed that migrating would allow them to have contact with

person but it is in fact my own summary of what she has told me. Nevertheless, I tried to present the statements that she made as accurately as possible, sometimes using the very phrases that she has.

⁵Original quote: “W pewnym momencie doszliśmy do wniosku, że tam [w Polsce] jednak nie ma co szukać. Ta firma, jakoś z tego żyliśmy, ale na skraju bankructwa, bywały dni, że było naprawdę fajnie, a bywały takie, że nic się nie zarobiło. No i postawiliśmy wszystko na jedną kartę, sprzedaliśmy wszystko co mieliśmy w Polsce, komputery, samochody, wzięliśmy psa, spakowaliśmy się”.

⁶“Z Polski wyjechałam dlatego, że mówiło się, że za granicą tak fajnie, tyle pieniędzy można zarobić, a człowiek jak nie wyjedzie, nie przekona się na własnej skórze, to nie wie”.

another culture, learn foreign languages and experience a different way of life. In some cases it involved moving out from the parental home and thus the chance to live on one's own. Migration is then perceived as a sort of adventure and challenge, which initially is meant to be temporary, often being a break after college or during work, but sometimes also a rest from the family. Financial issues are then of lesser – if any – importance; what matters most is the independence one gains and experiences that are considered in terms of personal development. This view was illustrated for example by Karolina, whom I met through a Polish forum and who left Białystok four years ago just after she finished her studies, initially in search of an adventure. She strongly stressed that she had not left for economic reasons:

“I am definitely not an example of a person that leaves for money, because I had a very easy life and I liked it a lot. I simply finished my studies and I felt free. I have this need to change things often. And I had worked in one place for three years, so I was getting bored. (...) I thought why not travel a bit for a year. So this was the idea for the travel.” (Karolina, 27 years old, Amsterdam)⁷

Among couples, a quite common pattern was that the man would leave Poland first, and his wife / partner would join him after some time. This was either planned already prior to migrating – and in this case aimed at arranging accommodation and work by the man – or was decided upon after some time in fear that the relationship would collapse. It seems then, that it is now the men that more often are the “lead migrants” than the women. This might be due to the fact that most of the jobs carried out by the recent newcomers in the Netherlands are male-jobs, which makes it easier to emigrate for men than for women.

5.2 Why not try as well?

In most cases the decision to leave Poland was made very quickly, sometimes within a day or a few. Among low-skilled migrants the usual pattern was that a relative or friend, who had been already employed in the Netherlands, would inform about a job vacancy that was to be urgently filled. This person would usually arrange not only work but also accommodation and formalities, which facilitated the whole migration process. As such a possibility would be given, it did not take long to take advantage of it. This pattern appears to be especially common among men working in the construction sector and among women doing domestic works. The choice of destination and occupation is thus in most cases not determined by

⁷“Na pewno nie jestem przykładem osoby, która wyjeżdża po zarobki, bo miałam życie bardzo łatwe, bardzo je lubiłam. Tak się złożyło, że po prostu skończyłam studia i poczułam się wolna. Mam taką potrzebę, żeby często zmieniać rzeczy. A pracowałam już w jednej placówce przez 3 lata i zaczęłam się nudzić. (...) Pomyślałam, że dlaczego nie miałabym podróżować trochę przez rok. Więc to był właściwie taki pomysł na wyjazd”.

specific skills or attitude towards the host society, but by the networks one had had before migrating. Therefore, leaving to the Netherlands usually was not a result of a long decision process in which other alternatives would be taken into account, but occurred due to having pre-migration networks there. For the majority of Polish migrants, the departure is then not carefully planned or thought over in advance: people often leave knowing that some help will be provided, but are not aware of what exactly they will be doing or where they would be living. They also do not plan in advance how long they will stay abroad, taking a “wait and see” approach: time will show.

As a consequence, my informants usually stated that before migrating they had had no expectations as to what they would find in the place of destination, apart from that they would have better economic conditions than in Poland. Some of them have admitted that they had thought the whole migrating process would be much easier than it was in reality – having heard from their friends how great it is “in the rich West”, they had expected to find everything waiting for them in the Netherlands, while instead, they often had to overcome difficulties with finding a job or accommodation. For some persons it was the first time to travel abroad – those migrants had had a very vague or no idea about what to expect apart from a better world, in which things would be easier. As the main expectation was to have a higher life standard than in Poland, most of my informants had been open to work and housing conditions, and were prepared for taking anything as long as it provided money. This openness to what the future will bring, was for example expressed by Joanna, who had worked in Poland as a hotel manager, and now works at the hotel reception and as a cleaning lady. She came to Amsterdam around 3 years ago, when her friend had told her that he could arrange the cleaning job for her:

“Somehow I didn't think about how it would be here. This was such a quick decision, that there were no specific expectations... well I didn't expect much, I knew that I would be cleaning from the start, cause what else can you do when you're a Pole coming to another country, either construction or cleaning. (...) I mean I came with no plan to be honest, I wasn't oriented towards staying, but I also was not in 100% for going back to Poland. It was like this: I'll simply see how it will be, either I will stay or I will return. What is to come will come; I was in the middle, neither for nor against.” (Joanna, 28 years old, Amsterdam)⁸

⁸“Jakoś nie zastanawiałam się jak tu będzie. To była też decyzja taka szybka, tak że jakichś specjalnych oczekiwań.. no wiele się nie spodziewałam, wiedziałam, że będę sprzątała na dzień dobry, no bo co można robić będąc Polakiem przyjeżdżając do innego kraju, albo na budowie pracować, albo sprzątanie. (...) To znaczy ja tak przyjechałam bez przekonania prawdę mówiąc, nie byłam nastawiona, że chcę tu zostać, ale też nie byłam w 100% za tym, żeby do tej Polski wracać. To było tak: zobaczymy jak będzie po prostu, albo zostanę, albo wrócę. Tak co ma być to będzie, byłam po środku, ani na nie, ani na tak”.

This acceptance of nearly all conditions in the destination place was often quite striking, considering the fact that those were mostly mature people who in Poland often had completed higher studies and had been employed as high-skilled workers. What appears to be interesting from a psychological point of view, is that whereas in the place of origin many persons – usually educated – had taken only a narrow range of jobs into account, abroad they would accept almost any kind of occupation that would bring money – such as construction or cleaning, of which they would have not even thought of in Poland.

A completely distinct category, as regards migration strategies, is constituted by high-skilled employees who left Poland for work or educational reasons, and reside in the Netherlands only for a certain period of time. Those persons – who comprise a small proportion of the Polish migrants – usually receive a job offer from abroad when they are still in Poland, and have employment and housing arranged already prior to their arrival. In those cases the stay abroad is meant to add valuable work or educational experience, which among other things will improve their career opportunities in Poland. For such persons the planned duration of stay is usually clear, being conditioned by the contract they had received.

What is important is that for the majority of the persons the initial goal was to stay abroad for a limited period of time – either in order to earn a certain amount of money that was to be spent at home, or just to have an adventure of some kind. However, in most cases plans changed over time. Many people came with the intention of staying for a few months but eventually have lived in the Netherlands already for several years. A typical statement regarding the changing of initial plan is as follows:

“I was going to stay a month or two and... Well I didn't think I would stay... for longer. Now when I have this job, it's better.” (Joanna, 28 years old, Amsterdam)⁹

Nevertheless, even those individuals whose migration turned out to be long-term still view it as temporary. The decision to go back is often put away, which on the one hand seems to make things easier, but on the other – results in the fact that the lives of the migrants lack a sense of stability, which will also be seen in the following chapters.

5.3 Conclusion

The main motivation for leaving Poland seems to be the perception that the home country does not provide sufficient economic conditions. Finding a job abroad is thus a means to get on until the situation in the homeland does not change – as a sense of stability is not provided

⁹“Miałam zostać miesiąc czy dwa i... No, nie myślałam, że zostanę... na dłużej. Teraz jak ta robota się trafiła, no to jest lepiej”.

by the country of origin, migrants prefer to chose an individual strategy to escape the society and wait abroad for others to fix the situation, rather than participate in improving it themselves. Some migrants also associate their stay in the Netherlands with self-development or a kind of challenge – in this case the migration experience means gaining independence or acquiring new skills.

Among the low-skilled workers the most common mechanism of mobility is chain migration. Therefore, the choice of the destination and type of occupation is usually determined by the contacts one had before migrating. The significance of social networks is thus already visible at the stage of departure.

Most informants before arriving to the Netherlands had no specific expectations as to what they would find there. As a result of this openness to what the future will bring, in most cases there is no confrontation of expectations and reality – it seems that the migrants accept a wide range of conditions in the host country, not being limited by original plans.

Furthermore, for the majority of the interviewed migrants, the travel abroad was initially viewed as temporary. This state of temporariness is often prolonged, lasting at times for years, and conditions the migrant's engagement in social life in the Netherlands – which will be analysed in the next chapters. Therefore, migration may be interpreted in terms of seeking stability, but finding instability – the stay abroad is often characterised by living from day to day and a lack of future plans.

6. Social networks among Polish migrants

This chapter concerns the role of social networks among Polish migrants in the process of migrating, thus addressing the subquestion: How and with whom are the migrants' social networks being formed and maintained? I will focus on the importance of family and friendship ties among the Poles as well as on the links with the Dutch residents. I will also elaborate on the in-group relations within the Polish group and their attitude towards Poland. I will use concepts such as: social networks, sense of community, social capital, social trust, to try to explain this criticism towards Poland and other fellow countrymen.

(...) When I came to Amsterdam, I first lived with my sister and brother in law. I found my first job through a Polish agency, in the beginning I cleaned rooms in a hotel. I left that job because it was very exhausting. I had only half an hour to clean the room and the bathroom, and I just couldn't make it. Later I worked in a hospital for two months, also cleaning. This wasn't a bad job, but it was so far from the place I lived at that it simply wasn't worth it. At that time I met Krzyś (my current boss), who offered me a job in his cofffeeshop. I took it right away.

In the beginning, I didn't know anyone here apart from my sister, so after work I would just come home and rest. I didn't go out or party. Then after a while two of my friends from the same village came along. This is how I got to know all the Polish people with which I go out now. I also met my boyfriend, also Polish. Other than Polish do not interest me... I am very happy with him. Finally I have met someone. He's been in the Netherlands already for six years and does renovations. We live together now, with another friend, but we want to look for something for just the two of us.

When I worked in the hospital, I used to know some Dutch people, but now we don't have contact any more. At the coffee shop I have a Polish boss and all the girls that work there are also Polish. All my friends are Polish. In the UK there were much more Poles than in the Netherlands, but still there is a very big number of them here. Big enough for me not to feel that I'm actually in a foreign country. But I don't trust the Poles that live here. Where there are Polish people, there is usually some trouble. I am not interested in attending Polish events or bars. The only place of this sort I do visit is the Polish shop, I go there to buy Polish food that I miss and couldn't get otherwise.(...)

6.1 The use of social networks in the Netherlands

As stated earlier, the majority of the informants had pre-existing networks when arriving in the Netherlands. Joining members of family or friends from the same town, who, in turn, had been already a part of a wider circle of Polish migrants, was very common. Many respondents spoke of the support they had received from Polish networks, such as practical help in finding a job and housing, information about the labour market or arranging formalities. For those persons, networks were not only crucial upon arrival and shortly afterwards, but usually have played a significant role throughout the whole stay in the Netherlands, providing a sense of security and making the whole migration process much less difficult. Many of my informants worked, lived, as well as spent their leisure time with compatriots. This is clearly seen in the story of Monika, who had only Polish friends as well as co-employers, but there were other similar examples. It seems therefore, that “ethnic enclaves”, as observed by the Dutch, are indeed an important phenomenon for the new migration wave.

It should be stressed that the tendency to remain in an “ethnic enclave” was especially prominent among low-skilled migrants. Male workers – mostly located in the agriculture or construction sector – were often employed by Polish companies and had Polish co-workers, many of which they had known already from the home country. For those migrants the opportunity to establish international contacts was not provided by the work place, which for the persons with extended networks was usually the main source of acquaintances. Women, on the other hand, predominantly working as cleaning ladies, had Dutch employers, but their contact with the family they were working for was usually quite limited. A common pattern was that the Polish woman would receive the keys to all the houses she was cleaning, and would do her job when the family was not present at home. Although the vast majority of the cleaning women I have spoken to expressed extremely positive opinions about their Dutch employers – regarding not only good treatment and casual politeness, but also assistance in finding accommodation or arranging formalities – in most cases those relations did not change into friendship.

Apart from type of occupation, other crucial factors that prevent many migrants from establishing contacts with non-Poles seem to be small cross-cultural experience and poor language skills, which, using Bourdieu's terminology (1986), can be understood as components of cultural capital. For several persons the stay in the Netherlands was the first experience abroad – for them dealing with non-Poles was quite an unusual situation in which they did not feel quite comfortable. Moreover, among my informants, hardly anyone spoke

Dutch and not even a half spoke English on a level enabling them to communicate in it freely. Limited knowledge of Dutch (and often English) was frequently seen as a barrier in integrating with the host residents and in the possibility to get a better job by the migrants themselves. However, as the stay in the Netherlands is often perceived as temporary, it is not considered worthwhile to over-invest in something that will later not be useful. This attitude was common especially as regards the knowledge of the Dutch language and plans to learn it in the nearest future.

Around one third of my interviewees had no networks when arriving to the Netherlands. Most of those persons had been offered a work contract already before leaving Poland, and worked in a multi-national environment. They have quickly become friends with co-employers and had acquaintances from all over the world. What appears to be interesting is that those migrants usually have had no Polish friends, and were not even aware of how many of their fellow countrymen there are in the Netherlands. Indeed, the difference in the perception of the number of Poles even in the same city was quite astonishing: individuals with pre-existing networks or working in manual jobs that were popular among Polish migrants, felt that they were surrounded by Polish people, whereas skilled workers usually stated that they would hardly ever meet compatriots. This was apparent especially in Amsterdam which hosts less Polish migrants than cities such as the Hague or Rotterdam, and in which the Poles are much more dispersed and less organized in terms of services, events or places of entertainment. The contradicting perception of the size of the Polish group is shown by the statements of Jan, a PhD student, and Monika, both living in Amsterdam:

“By the way, I really don't know if there are many Poles here. Because I heard that there are, but it seems to me that actually there are not many of them.” (Jan, 27 years old, Amsterdam)¹⁰

“There are many [Poles]. Since the Netherlands opened its market, there is more and more. As far as I've heard, there are 300 thousand working legally, and the same number can be working illegally. You don't feel that you are abroad, there are so many Poles, that I can just talk in Polish.” (Monika, 24 years old, Amsterdam)¹¹

At the same time, the Poles – both low-skilled and professionals – appear to have rather poor contact with the host members. Most migrants either had a small circle of Polish friends, or had friends with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, but those rarely included Dutch persons.

¹⁰“Swoją drogą ja naprawdę nie wiem, czy tu jest dużo Polaków. Bo słyszałem, że jest dużo, natomiast zdaje mi się, że wcale ich tak dużo nie ma”.

¹¹“Jest sporo [Polaków]. Odkąd Holandia otworzyła rynek, to jest coraz więcej. Z tego co słyszałam, to jest legalnie około 300 tys. Polaków, a drugie tyle może być nielegalnie. Praktycznie nie odczuwa się, że jest się w obcym kraju, jest tyle Polaków, że po polsku gadam”.

Only three persons said they had close Dutch friends, from which two were girls having Dutch boyfriends. Some migrants simply did not have an opportunity to become friends with host residents, as they haven't worked with them and have lived in a big city such as Amsterdam or the Hague, where everyone would be anonymous. Some persons, in turn, ascribed the fact that they did not develop Dutch contacts to the Dutch way of being, which was frequently considered as polite and friendly on the surface, but in fact very closed, not fully sincere and difficult to establish deeper contact with. This was a view expressed by a wide range of persons, with no significant difference between professionals and manual workers:

“It rarely happens that a Dutch person is warm or open. Most often they do smile, offer a coffee, but... this is a kind of a mask of being nice.” (Karol, 29 years old, Haarlem)¹²

“They are all very politically correct, for example they hardly ever criticize, they won't criticize directly, they're reluctant to criticizing someone. They're not fully sincere.” (Jan, 27 years old, Amsterdam)¹³

In general, the networks of professionals were usually much more varied and included persons with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. However, also those persons rarely had Dutch friends or spoke Dutch – the main difference lay in the fact that they expressed remorse because of this more often than manual workers, feeling that they are losing a chance to get to know the host culture while they are here.

It is also worth noting that while the vast majority of my informants had a small circle of friends which they would trust and spend time with, there were also persons who came without any pre-migration networks or with only one relative, which, in turn, was not part of a bigger network, and have established hardly any friendships after arrival. In spite of having the possibility to get to know compatriots after the Sunday mass or at work, such ties have not emerged, and in effect those informants have felt very lonely abroad. Although this lack of friends occurred only in case of those two couples who had come to the Netherlands together, it shows that developing new ties in the host country appears to be difficult not only when it comes to establishing contacts with the host residents, but also with other migrant groups and – what is most interesting – with compatriots.

¹² „Rzadko się zdarza żeby Holender był taki serdeczny, otwarty. Najczęściej się uśmiechają, proponują kawę, ale to tak... nakładają taką maskę bycia miłym”.

¹³ „Oni są wszyscy dużo bardziej poprawni politycznie, czyli np. prawie nie krytykują, wprost nie skrytykują, są niechętni do krytykowania kogoś. Nie są do końca szczerzy”.

6.2 Expecting a community

In terms of developing social networks two characteristics of the recent Polish migrants need therefore to be drawn. First, a small number of contacts with host residents and a generally poor integration with the Dutch society. Second – and this regards mainly low-skilled workers – remaining in ethnic enclaves. This corresponds to a big extent with the discourse of the Dutch media: Polish migrants are portrayed as sticking together and separating from the host residents. Not only in the Netherlands, but also the UK and other EU countries, Polish newcomers are usually labelled in a simplified way, as one bounded category that shares common characteristics such as willingness to work hard, the focus on earning money as fast as possible, or drinking alcohol. Furthermore, from an external perspective, the Polish community seems to be well organized, establishing Polish shops, Churches, bars and services, as well as magazines, websites, and forums.

Having all this in mind, one could expect that Polish migrants would be forming a community of some kind. The fact that from the Dutch perspective they seem to be one category and are approached as one, should lead to inner cohesion and identity formation within the migrant group. Since the Polish are seen as outsiders, they should feel as one group and define themselves as opposed to the Dutch. Also in the theoretical debate the dominant view is that among immigrants with the same ethnic background a community will naturally emerge, understood either in a geographic sense or in terms of social networks held together by a common state of mind (Brettell, 2003). Using Anderson's terminology, it could be said that migrants, like those co-nationals that reside in the homeland, are members of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) – they should feel a part of one group. Appadurai (1995), in turn, speaks of the recreation of “locality” among migrants with a common origin.

However, the conducted research does not confirm the common assumption that within one migrant group a sense of community naturally emerges, but provides a rather complex portrait of the in-group relations among the Poles. Therefore, like Brettell (2003) who stresses that forming a community is appropriate only in some circumstances and thus cannot be simply assumed, I will also argue that among the Polish migrants a sense of community does not emerge. By relating to Garapich's point of view, I will, in turn, try to show that this is reflected not only in the way the interviewees relate to the notion of community, but also in reality.

6.3 Avoiding Polish strangers

Whereas the crucial role of social networks in the migration process is stressed by most of the theorists, what seems to be more interesting, is that in case of the Poles those networks are strongly hermetic. Their evolution over time is mainly caused by the dynamics of the migrant flows – today someone leaves back home, another day someone new arrives. Apart from adding persons who are “friends of friends”, the established enclaves are seldom extended by new persons – not only Dutch or foreign, but also fellow countrymen. This seems to correspond not only with the general observation that recent Polish migrants are poorly integrated with the Dutch society, but also shows the importance of family and friendship ties as opposed to links based on common ethnicity (see also Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005). The hermetic nature of migrant networks is also reflected in the mechanism of chain mobility characteristic for the majority of low-skilled workers – instead of offering a job to a (unknown) Polish person who is already in the Netherlands, people tend to invite a relative or friend from Poland.

Interestingly, places such as the Polish Church, Polish bars or shops quite rarely constitute points in which new friendships are made. In case of the Polish Church, people usually arrive by car with their family or friends with whom they live. Although churches in cities like Amsterdam, the Hague or Rotterdam gather weekly around 400 persons and after the mass snacks and warm drinks are offered – providing, as it would seem, a perfect opportunity to meet other compatriots – people usually stick in the small groups they had already known before and are seldom interested in forming new contacts. Many people leave directly after the mass, and those who stay to chat and drink coffee do so for about half an hour to forty minutes and then they hurry home. The difficulty in meeting compatriots was not only expressed to a lesser or bigger extent by a number of informants, but was also quite apparent to me when I observed people and tried to approach some of them after the mass. The reaction to my attempt to have a casual conversation in most cases involved distance and some kind of wariness. It was usually after I had explained that I was conducting a research, when people became more willing to talk – otherwise interacting with a complete Polish stranger seemed somewhat awkward to them. There were persons, however, that did form contacts and even friendships through attendance to the Church. Interestingly, this was only the case in The Hague, where the parish has a longer tradition and engages in pilgrims and trips, which give an opportunity to establish closer links. Nevertheless, also those groups of

people that have been created through the Church were rather closed to other participants and showed little interest in extending their network.

Whereas the Polish Church has a neutral or even positive image among the Poles, the Polish bars are perceived in strongly negative terms. When I asked about places in which compatriots could be met, almost all the informants stated that they avoided such places, having heard stories according to which people would get drunk immediately and become involved in fights with each other. Most of the people I talked to have not been to Polish bars themselves, but have based this image on opinions of others. A few persons said they had gone there once and that this was enough:

“Polish bars... I was once in a Polish pub, run by Turks, this was my first and last time. Tragedy. The people that were there, were the margin of society, which persons like me avoid, that is scallies and their fantastic girlfriends having a sun tan from a solarium. (...) Syrena is a place that you don't want to go to, I've never been there, but whatever I heard about it were always bad opinions, that very often there are fights. It is a place for people who want to give vent to the energy that they gathered throughout the day. I'll never go there, not even out of curiosity.” (Kuba, 26 years old, the Hague)¹⁴

In spite of those stories, the Polish pubs I have visited were usually places with a calm atmosphere, nicely arranged and offering Polished dishes; nothing seemed to suggest that they were dangerous or unpleasant. However, they did not gather many people, which was likely to be the consequence of how they are perceived. The “bad bars” myth shows how strong the negative image of own compatriots is among the recent migrants, and how it affects establishing new ties among them, usually leading to avoiding “Polish strangers”.

6.4 A Pole abroad is a wolf to a Pole¹⁵

It appears that in spite of receiving support from Polish relatives and friends in the Netherlands as well as maintaining ties with the homeland, the image of compatriots among the Poles appears to be rather negative. This includes stereotypes enhanced by the Dutch media, but also a perception that a Pole is in general not trustworthy and that one should be careful in contact with co-nationals. The small circle of Polish friends is thus distinguished

¹⁴ „Bary polskie... Byłem kiedyś w klubie polskim, prowadzonym przez Turków, to był mój pierwszy i ostatni raz. Tragedia. Ludzie, którzy tam byli, to taki element, którego osoby takie jak ja unikają, czyli dresiarze i ich fantastyczne partnerki opalone w solarium. (...) Syrena to jest miejsce, do którego nie chcesz iść. Nigdy tam nie byłem, ale cokolwiek słyszałem, to były złe opinie, że bardzo często dochodzi do wymiany fizycznej. To miejsce jest dla osób, które chcą dać upust swojej zgromadzonej energii w ciągu dnia. Nigdy tam nie pójde, nawet z ciekawości.”

from the wider ethnic community, which is approached with a high level of wariness and distrust (see also: Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich, 2006; Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara, 2007). Indeed, the frequency with which my informants spontaneously spoke about lack of ethnic solidarity and cooperation within the Polish group was quite striking and at times even disappointing to me as a Polish person.

Pejorative opinions about compatriots were mainly related to strong competition on the labour market and using unfair methods such as “selling” jobs for a fee or taking up other's places by offering lower wages to the employer. Negative experiences with Poles or simply the widely spread image of a Polish person wanting to deceive his fellow countrymen often led to intentional avoiding and distancing from compatriots. The view that Polish people do not help each other and do not stick together as a wider group, is clearly expressed in the following quotations:

“Very good friends do stick together, but... A Pole does not trust another Pole. Really, you can get so disappointed by Polish people, especially Polish people.” (Monika, 23 years old, Amsterdam)¹⁶

“Generally there is the rule that a Pole will not help another Pole. When he sees a person he sees competition. They don't help, but make it harder; they can really be a pain in the neck. We all treat each other very badly here. A Pole abroad is a wolf to a Pole. (...) Everyone speaks of this, everyone criticizes it, but no-one does anything to change it”. (Darek, 30 years old, Hague)¹⁷

It seems that Polish people not only mean competition to one another, but also comprise a source of shame – the “bad compatriots” are considered the cause of the negative image that is widely spread among the Dutch – the existence of which the Poles are very aware of. Thus, by avoiding being associated with the wider ethnic group, Polish migrants distance themselves from all co-nationals that they are not sure of. This way they no longer feel that they are a part of the same category as those that ruin the image of the Poles.

¹⁵This is my translation of the Polish phrase „Polak Polakowi wilkiem”, which is a paraphrase of the Latin proverb: „homo homini lupus”

¹⁶“Znajomi bardzo dobrzy to się trzymają [razem], ale... (...)Polak Polakowi nie ufa. Naprawdę, można się tak naciąć na Polaków, zwłaszcza na Polaków. “

¹⁷“Generalnie jest tak, że Polak Polakowi nie pomoże. Jak widzi człowieka to widzi w nim konkurencję. Nie pomagają, tylko utrudniają, tutaj jak najbardziej potrafią dokuczyć. Jak jest dwóch budowlańców, to jeden się śmieje z drugiego, że ten nic nie umie itd. Traktujemy się tu wszyscy podług nawzajem. Polak Polakowi wilkiem na obczyźnie. (...) Wszyscy o tym mówią, wszyscy to krytykują, ale nikt nie robi tego, żeby to zmienić. A żeby to zmienić, trzeba zacząć od siebie.”

It must be stressed that the emotional attitude towards other Poles abroad appears to be strongly dependent on the education level and occupation – persons with a lower social status, performing manual jobs, seem to perceive the Poles more negatively. There also seems to be a gender difference, with more men representing criticism of co-ethnics than women. Interestingly, it was usually those immigrants who expressed wariness towards Poles that usually stuck with a small group of Polish friends and have formed relatively most limited contacts with the host members and other nationalities. Contacts with fellow countrymen among those persons were, however, almost always limited to a small and closed circle of persons that one trusted, and often included closest family and friends known back from Poland. Among the professionals, the attitude towards compatriots abroad was rather neutral, which seems to result mainly from the small number of contacts with fellow countrymen. Although being aware of the negative image of a Polish migrant, skilled and educated migrants usually tended to avoid general judgements, feeling that the common view of the Polish migrants is unfair and simplified. However, in spite of not admitting it directly, also those persons often appeared to distance themselves from the rest of the Poles, finding that sticking together with co-nationals would mean a step back in their integration with the host society, and that a big proportion of the Polish newcomers are in fact low-educated and “uncivilized”.

It must be stressed that the wariness towards compatriots among low-skilled workers was not only reflected in avoiding them in the professional field, but also in daily life. Many persons confessed that whenever they would hear Polish people in the street, they would simply walk away in order to prevent any contact. Hiding ones nationality when approached by a compatriot in English was also not unusual. Distancing towards the wider ethnic community often extended to a lack of involvement in Polish formal groups and avoiding places in which one could expect compatriots to be gathered, such as Polish bars or parties. Polish shops, on the other hand, were usually visited in order to buy Polish products or seek practical help by the owner of the shop, rather than to get to know fellow countrymen.

What appeared as quite striking was the strong awareness of the lack of solidarity among the Poles and their belief that this distinguishes them from other migrant groups, especially the Moroccans and Turks. Various interviewees expressed the view that both the Moroccans and Turks would support each other in situations in which the Poles would not. Karol, for instance, when asked whether there is a sense of community among Polish migrants, explained:

“I think that this [community] in general is not rooted in our culture. Because I have seen that a Turkish car broke down, and another Turkish car stopped. And among us it is like “oh, those are our people” [and you pass them]. There is not much of a patriotic tie among the Poles. I think we rather stick in a circle of people we trust, we know, people we have arrived with. (...) I think there is no solidarity, rather on the contrary, a Pole looks at another Pole with envy, who drives what car, they always measure you by their look in the shop, all this is strange. I probably do the same, maybe subconsciously, I don't know, but I think it is like this.” (Karol, 29 years old Haarlem)¹⁸

This example clearly illustrates the common perception that co-nationals should feel they are part of one group and help one another, and at the same time the observation that when it comes to Poles this is not the case. This shows that the migrants are aware of the national discourse stressing the importance of the “moral community” among co-ethnics (Garapich, 2006), but also that in their view this remains a distant ideal that does not occur in reality. Many interviewees expressed regret because of this state of things and admitted that the only way to change it is to begin doing something about it oneself. However, there also exists the belief that since the majority of other compatriots are not cooperating, one will only become one of the few “suckers” that are wasting their effort and will be exploited by others that will thus be better off.

Emotional attitude towards Poland

The strong criticism of compatriots tends to be accompanied by a negative attitude towards Poland. In spite of maintaining intensive contacts with family and friends in Poland, as well as a visible interest in social and political affairs of the homeland and a kind of nostalgia for the place of origin, ethnic identity does not seem to be an important part of defining oneself. Rather, there exists a strong negation of Poland, which at times results in an anti-patriotic attitude.

The negative evaluation of economic conditions and general social situation in Poland has, of course its source in the actual state of facts: wages in Poland are, comparing to the “old” EU members, rather low, and the unemployment rate is still recorded to be relatively

¹⁸ „Wydaje mi się, że to [wspólnota] w ogóle nie jest zakorzenione w naszej kulturze. Bo jednak kilka razy widziałem tak, że zepsuł się turecki samochód i zatrzymał się inny turecki samochód. A u nas jest tak, że „o nasi” [i jedzie się dalej]. Chyba nie ma między Polakami za dużo patriotycznej więzi. Chyba się trzymamy bardziej w gronie ludzi zaufanych, poznanych, z którymi się tu przyjechało. (...) Nie ma chyba takiej solidarności, wręcz raczej chyba odwrotnie, Polak na Polaka bykiem patrzy, kto jakim samochodem jeździ, mierzą Cię zawsze wzrokiem w sklepie, to wszystko jest dziwne. Ja chyba tak samo robię, może podświadomie, nie wiem, ale tak chyba jest”.

high. However, Poland's evident rapid development and the fact that there actually are labour shortages in many sectors in which recent migrants had been employed, did not seem to affect the informants' view. The majority of interviewees did not acknowledge this or even stated that the economic situation is getting worse. This tendency can be explained not only by the well known „Polish complaining”, but also negative personal pre-emigration experiences and a belief about a lack of perspectives and a worthy life in Poland. It seems that those who have left Poland often feel a sort of resentment towards their homeland, considering that it had not treated them well enough while a foreign society has.

„I am not a patriot, I don't consider Poland as my fatherland, because in my view the fatherland is a place which gives you something, not only a place where you were born. Because it gave me nothing, we tried there as well, we had a company, and here we are better off doing renovations and cleaning, than we were back there. So I am not a patriot (...), I am not proud of being a Pole, because I have nothing to be proud of. I had to leave in order to lead a worthy life”. (Karol, 29 years old, Haarlem)¹⁹

This emotional attitude was visible in statements regarding motives for emigrating as well as identity issues, and has, in turn, significant impact on the attitude towards returning – there is a belief that as long as nothing changes in Poland, there is no point in going back.

6.5 Conclusion

The study shows an ambiguous role of the networks among recent Polish migrants. On the one hand they do play a very significant role, constituting a basis for the chain migration mechanism, helping to find a job or accommodation and giving support to the migrants. However, they do not connect into bigger networks and thus do not create a wider community, in which all the members would to some extent identify with themselves and help one another. Rather on the contrary – the Polish migrants often distance themselves from compatriots, avoiding being associated with a group that has a negative image.

In terms of the concept of social capital, it may be said therefore that the networks of the Polish migrants are neither a source of bonding nor bridging capital. While there do exist strong ties with co-ethnics within small groups, the overall trust towards members of own ethnic group remains small. At the same time the existing networks, although do create

¹⁹ „Ja nie jestem patriotą, nie uważam Polski za moją ojczyznę, bo według mnie ojczyzna to jest miejsce, które coś Ci daje, nie tylko jest miejscem gdzie się urodziłeś. Ono mi nic nie dało, tam też się staraliśmy, mieliśmy tą firmę, próbowaliśmy, a tu wychodzimy lepiej z firmy i ze sprzętów niż tam. Więc ja nie jestem patriotą. Nie [jestem dumny z bycia Polakiem], bo nie mam z czego być dumny, musiałem wyjechać żeby godnie żyć.”

economic links with the host members, do not link the individuals to the Dutch society on a social level. Thus, the bridging social capital of the Polish migrants is also weak. The Polish migrants are thus neither integrated with themselves, nor with the host members. Perhaps, as Nannestad and colleagues (2008) argue analysing the case of immigrants in Denmark, what happens is that low bonding capital does not have the chance to “spill over” into bridging social capital.

Findings of researchers in other countries, such as Brussels (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005) or London (Jordan, 2002; Ryan et al, 2007) indicate that the lack of solidarity among recent Polish migrants occurs not only in the Netherlands, but is a more general characteristic of the current migration wave. Also numerous posts of migrants on Internet forums across the world suggest that this is so. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005), analysing the case of the Polish undocumented workers in Brussels, argues that in the 1980s, when the migrant group was small in number and was quite homogeneous in terms of wages and jobs, there existed a high level of in-group cooperation. Helping one another was at that time the best strategy to access the informal labour market. It was later, when the number of Polish newcomers had increased and the Polish community became differentiated, that led to strong competition and a shrinkage of cooperation. Ethnic ties were then replaced by kinship networks.

It seems that this was the case in other countries, including the Netherlands. The smaller number of Poles in the past, and the difficulty in maintaining contact with fellow countrymen abroad made the ability to talk to a Polish immigrant a kind of substitute for ties with Poland. Currently, the possibility to have regular contact with friends and family in Poland both by frequent travels and the use of Internet, as well as easy access to news concerning the homeland, make the distance with the homeland much smaller. This leads to a sense of link with home and thus a weaker nostalgia, which, in turn, reduces the need to establish new friendships with co-nationals in the host country. It also seems that the two realities – in the destination country and back home – are no longer as distinct as they had been when Poland used to be a communist country, and therefore, nowadays uniting together no longer fulfils strategic aims.

An important factor contributing to the low level of solidarity among the Polish migrants is the low level of social trust characterizing the Polish society (Social diagnosis, 2007), which can be partly explained by the communist past and the aggressive capitalism that followed afterwards. Jordan argues that the strategy of individualism and exploitation of weaker co-nationals rewarded in this period, is, in turn, adopted by individualistic market-oriented migrants who find themselves in a strongly competitive environment (Jordan, 2002).

This would imply that the Polish migrants travel abroad with a specific “baggage of attitudes”, which becomes stronger way in the emigration situation.

One concluding remark seems appropriate. The current Polish migrants, although not quite belonging to the modern Western society, do tend to represent some characteristics of the contemporary globalized world described by Bauman as “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000). Instead of citizens, individuals now comprise consumers constantly striving for new goods and who are focused on earning and spending money. This leads to a corrosion of social ties and solidarity and a cult of individualism, which emphasises the individual and his self-realization needs. Thus, people tend to turn to themselves and become less interested in public matters. Being in a constant hurry and having no time for cultivating emotional ties, they are also more lonely and unstable than they had been before. As a consequence, it is the personal aspirations rather than social bonds of solidarity and national identity that are important (Kosic, 2006). Therefore, it might be, that contemporary emigration from Western countries, if it were to take place on a scale like the Polish flows, would show similar characteristics regarding in-group relations – lack of integration both with the host members as well as with co-nationals. To verify this, however, additional research would be needed.

7. Notions of belonging, identity construction and future perspectives

In this chapter I will try to address the last subquestion, namely: How do the Polish migrants view themselves while being in the Netherlands? I will therefore analyse how the Polish migrants position themselves in the Dutch society and how their notions of belonging are reconstructed. I will also discuss how the Polish migrants perceive the host residents as well as their own compatriots. I will finish with describing the future plans of Polish migrants and analysing the factors that influence the decision to go back – both external, such as the economic situation in Poland, as well as personal factors.

(...) I work in the coffeeshop three days a week for 6 hours. I have a contract and I get paid 9 euros per hour, so all together I earn around a 1000 euros per month, just in the coffeeshop. I like my job, it isn't tiring, I have contact with other people, and can practice my English. It's better than cleaning, where you just clean, you don't talk, don't learn anything. But since my boyfriend works during the day, I don't want to sit at home all by myself. I want to do something apart from the coffeeshop. Now I clean only one house per week, but soon I'll have a few more houses. Together with the cleaning it will be around 1500. I wouldn't be able to find such a well-paid job in Poland. Now it's not enough to have secondary education. Do I make any savings? (laugh). Not yet. There is always something I need to buy, so I spend everything I earn.

All in all, I really like it in Amsterdam, much more than in the UK. Abroad is just abroad, you never feel like you are at home. But I really can't complain, I haven't had any bad experiences yet. The Dutch are much more open and kind than the British. They're very tolerant, really. I haven't met a Dutch person who would be rude. I don't speak Dutch or have Dutch friends, but this is not really a big problem, cause at work I use English and with friends I speak Polish. But still I would like to learn Dutch in the future...

How long will I stay here? I don't know... I'll see how things will go. In the long run, I'd like to go back to Poland. Especially if I have children, then I want to raise them in Poland. I would have the support from family and friends. If it weren't for the low wages in Poland, everyone would return home. For now I will probably stay a few more years in Amsterdam. But definitely not forever.

7.1 Image of own ethnic group as reaction to image constructed by others

Strongly related to social networks and the sense of community, discussed in the previous chapter, are concepts such as notions of belonging and identity construction. With whom individuals maintain contacts and whether or not they feel a part of a wider ethnic community affects the way they define themselves. The reconstruction of identity during the stay in the Netherlands seems to be especially interesting in the case of Polish migrants, as from a society that in cultural and religious terms is quite homogeneous they move to a multicultural environment that using Vertovec's (2007a) terminology we could call super-diverse.

As was outlined in the theoretical framework of this paper, identity construction is an on-going process that is constantly negotiated, and constitutes an expression of own perception of self and others. Obviously the way migrants define themselves is, among many things, constituted by the way they are seen by others. It seems therefore that the current stereotypes and myths about the Poles, present in the Dutch society, play an important role. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the dominant view among the host members is that the Polish newcomers constitute a cohesive group sharing common characteristics, such as reliability at work, living in cheap housing conditions, drinking alcohol or seclusion from the Dutch society. What is important is that the Polish migrants are strongly aware of the image they have in the Netherlands – as well as in other countries – and how they react to it.

The way the Poles relate to how they are perceived as a group seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand they appear to be offended by the simplifying image that is widely spread among the host members. Many informants confessed that the stereotype regarding Polish migrants is very unfair and untrue, as it assumes that all the Poles arrive in order to make fast money, work in simple jobs such as construction or cleaning, and know no foreign languages. Some of the migrants, especially the high-educated ones, find this “putting everyone into one category” offensive for those that do not fit into this picture. This was strongly expressed for example by Ewelina, who has finished law studies in Poland and did not migrate for economic reasons but because she fell in love in a man living in the Netherlands:

“What irritates me the most is that there is this stereotype that only those Poles come who are uneducated, and don't know foreign languages. While not all of them [are like this].” (Ewelina, 28 years old, Rotterdam)²⁰

It seems therefore, that on the one hand there is the belief among the migrants, that the widely spread image of the Poles is true for most of them, but that since there are exceptions it is

considered as discriminative. They try to remind that the Polish group is in fact very heterogeneous. Therefore, many Polish migrants, feeling that they are associated with a wider category that is perceived in rather pejorative terms, choose to distance from it, as if wishing to communicate: “I am not part of this”, “I am different”.

What thus seems to be striking is the fact that the Poles themselves enhance the negative image of their own ethnic group, making it even stronger than it originally was expressed among the Dutch. Instead of defending their own ethnic group and trying to present it in a better light, they even undermine it, but with the emphasis that this does not regard them. As argued by Garapich (2006, 2007), to some extent this may constitute a strategy aiming at distancing from the nationalistic discourse, in which ethnic ties are perceived as absolute and carrying certain responsibilities to its group members. However, unlike Garapich who believes that the reluctance towards co-ethnics is only discursive, in my opinion this narrative has its reflection in the reality. As I already argued, the Poles *do* distance themselves from co-ethnics and ethnic ties that would exceed friendship and family links seem to be weak.

7.2 Signs of Polishness

Despite the common criticism towards compatriots and the homeland – outlined in the previous chapter – it is important to note that at the same time signs of “Polishness” are strongly visible among the migrants. Apart from having mostly Polish contacts in the Netherlands, the majority of my informants maintained close ties with family and friends at home, as well as showed strong interest in the political situation of the homeland. They regularly read Polish websites, watched Polish TV, and many of them reported to have voted in the Hague during the parliament elections in October 2007.

An important place where national identity is expressed seems to be the Polish Church. Many of the migrants searched for it almost immediately after arriving. Among the organizations and Polish places it is by far the most important. The Church holds masses in the mother tongue of the migrants, participates in social initiatives such as gathering signatures in the petition against double taxing by the Polish government, as well as remains a place where Polish magazines and leaflets can be found. Still however, comparing to the engagement in masses in Poland, the interest in religiousness in the Netherlands seems to be

²⁰“To mnie najbardziej denerwuje, że jest taki stereotyp, że przyjeżdżają tylko ci Polacy, którzy są niedouczeni, bez znajomości języka. A nie wszyscy są tacy, nie”.

weaker²¹ (see also Garapich, 2007). Although as Brettell and Hollifield (2003) emphasise, in the absence of residential concentration, religious activities may be more prominent markers of identity than they are at home, my research shows that in case of the Polish migrants this is true only for a small number of people. Nevertheless, for those who do attend the church, it seems to play a significant role in maintaining “Polishness”.

Moreover, while many of the Polish migrants tried to distance themselves from being Polish, relating to nationality and ethnicity in defining oneself was also visible. This concerned, for instance, being proud of Polish values such as tradition and importance of family, as well as hospitality or hard working, perceived as “Polish qualities”. Appreciating Polish values was especially apparent when it came to comparing the Polish group to the Dutch, and ranged from pointing out the lack of hospitality or strong avarice among the host members, to the “bad quality” of the Dutch cuisine. In the accounts of the informants Poland was frequently described as a place where people on the surface perhaps do not seem as polite as the Dutch, but eventually are much more sincere and extremely hospitable, inviting even strangers to their homes and offering them all the food they have. According to the majority of the migrants in the end it is much easier to become profound friends with the Poles than with the Dutch, who maybe do help a lost tourist or tend to be kind when serving a customer – which in Poland occurs much less often – but on the other hand appear to the Poles as rather concentrated on themselves and somewhat fake. Highlighting Polish qualities in the context of the perception of host members can be demonstrated, for instance, by the following quotations:

“The Dutch are not as hospitable, open as the Poles. They can help you, but everything is more at a distance. 'You take care of your things yourself'. And it takes time before you make friends with the Dutch.” (Kasia, 37 years old, Amsterdam)²²

“Here people live differently than in Poland. The Dutch are more closed to... there is less family life than in Poland. People live more on their own here, going out each weekend (...). And this for example I don't like.” (Ewelina, 28 years old, Rotterdam)²³

²¹Unfortunately I do not have statistics regarding the number of Poles weekly attending Polish masses in the Netherlands, however, if we take into account that there are 10 Churches in the Netherlands in which weekly masses are held and each of them gathers around 400 persons weekly, we could assume that overall in the Netherlands around 4000 persons attend Polish masses weekly, which – considering the estimated number of Poles in the Netherlands as 100 000, would mean that only 4% of the migrants participate in weekly masses, whereas in Poland the proportion is assessed at more than 40%.

²²“Holendrzy nie są tacy gościnni, otwarci jak Polacy. Mogą Ci pomóc, ale wszystko bardziej na dystans. Ty sobie radź samemu. I to trochę czasu trwa zanim się z Holendrami zaprzyjaźnisz”.

²³“Tutaj ludzie inaczej żyją niż w Polsce, Holendrzy są bardziej zamknięci na... takiego rodzinnego życia jest mniej niż w Polsce. Tutaj tak ludzie sami sobie. Kariera, co weekend wychodzenie gdzieś tam. (...) I to na przykład mi się nie podoba”.

The respondents also tried to present their group in a positive light by comparing themselves to other nationalities. This concerned mainly distinguishing the Poles from the Moroccans and Turks on the basis of traits perceived as universally Polish, such as diligence or whiteness, and led to the belief that the Poles are by the hosts perceived more positively than other newcomers and minorities. Polish migrants, especially those employed in the construction sector, quite often referred to the “bad image” that the Moroccans and Turks had in their opinion as workers, and to the good one that they possess. This downward comparison, usually based on the stereotype of the “diligent Poles” created by the host members, enhanced their collective self-esteem (see also Kopic, 2006):

“[As Poles we are perceived] positively, we are good workers, they prefer to work with us than let's say with the Moroccans or Turks. They consider us as better workers and more communicative.” (Damian, 43 years old, Hague)²⁴

It may be therefore said that the migrants' attitude towards their own ethnicity appears to be ambiguous: on the one hand, it remains a source of shame and disappointment, on the other – Polishness includes elements that evoke warm feelings and the migrants are proud of, even if they express strong criticism of compatriots and their homeland. This was demonstrated also in statements regarding things that the migrants miss. Usually, apart from family and friends, they mentioned Polish food, holiday celebrations and beautiful landscapes. In fact those were issues that some of the migrants elaborated on for a long time and willingly. Polish products – mostly bread, which is very different from the Dutch one, and by the informants was perceived as a Polish speciality – were almost always among the things that were brought to the Netherlands after a journey back home. Many informants also reported visiting the Polish shops that exist in the Netherlands, which due to the interior decoration, Polish assortment, and the Polish language spoken in the shop resembled the homeland. Another characteristic of the homeland that the migrants longed for was the Polish natural landscape, as opposed to the Dutch “organized” space. Whereas in Poland there are mountains, forests, lakes, and an authentic country site, in the Netherlands such “wild”, intact places seem to be missing – everything is touched by civilization. It might be, as Kopic (2006) argues, that this idealising of some of the elements of own culture is, to some extent, a strategy aimed at coping with prejudice towards own group and maintaining the collective self-esteem. However, to say that it only serves strategic purposes would in my view be

²⁴“Pozytywnie [jesteśmy postrzegani jako Polacy], jesteśmy dobrymi pracownikami, wolą z nami pracować niż powiedzmy z Marokanami czy Turkami. Uważają nas za lepszych pracowników i komunikatywnych”.

incorrect: there are simply elements of the Polish culture that the migrants identify with and truly miss, as they cannot be found in the Netherlands.

7.3 Positioning of migrants in relation to the host country

When attempting to make an overall evaluation of the stay in the Netherlands, most of the interviewees expressed positive remarks. They usually confessed that their lives had improved after migrating, and that life in general was much easier in the host country than back in Poland. Various interviewees have spoken of the fact that in the Netherlands they felt more relaxed, as if they were on vacation. This feeling seems to be ascribed not only to better economic conditions they are currently having than they had had in Poland, but also to the lack of house or family responsibilities which they had faced at home, as well as the perceived temporariness of their stay abroad. Until the decision to settle permanently has not been made, there seems to be a justification for having no duties and not making any “serious” steps, such as buying a house, getting married, or having kids. There is a feeling that one is free and can lead his/her life however (s)he wishes to at the moment. When during a mini-group I asked what the informants liked in their stay abroad most, the answers were as follows:

“What I like... In some sense life is easier here than in the home country.” (Michał, 36 years old, Amstelveen)²⁵

“You are more relaxed, there are no... clashes. Everyone around you is nice.” (Agnieszka, 27 years old, Amstelveen)²⁶

“And maybe also the fact that there are no responsibilities like at home. For example in Sława, [I had to] go somewhere, do this and that. In the sense that life is at a bigger ease than in Poland. (...) Not in the sense that at home someone keeps talking to you, your mother in law, or your brother, but that when you cross the border and arrive [here], it is as if everything would vanish away.” (Paweł, 26 years old, Amstelveen)²⁷

Another factor that may constitute the belief that life goes easier in the Netherlands, is the common impression – reported by many of the interviewees – that the Dutch are calm and much less stressed than the Polish people. My informants frequently spoke of how they appreciated the fact that in the Netherlands people smiled and seemed happy much more often

²⁵“Co się podoba... W jakiś sposób łatwiej się żyje niż w kraju”.

²⁶“Jest się bardziej zrelaksowanym. nie ma takich... spięć. wszyscy wokół są mili”.

²⁷“I może też, że nie ma tak obowiązków jak w domu. Np. w Sławie, wyjść, zrobić coś tam. W tym sensie, że jest taki luz większy niż w Polsce. (...) Nie w sensie, że w domu ktoś Ci coś gada, teściowa, że tu brat się kręci, tylko że jak przekraczasz tą granicę i przyjeżdżasz, to wszystko jakby Ci się ulatniało”.

than in Poland, and that this influenced their own daily functioning. It appears that when one is surrounded by relaxed persons, one tends to become such oneself.

The interviewees also listed other advantages of living in the Netherlands, such as being a member of a multi-cultural society, the Dutch tolerance and liberalism, as well as the effective organization visible in workplaces as well as in daily life. Those were traits that they often mentioned as missing in Poland. However, it seems that in spite of being impressed by many “Dutch assets” the interviewed migrants did not aspire to become similar to the host members. They rarely expressed the will to learn the Dutch language, as well as did not seem to acquire customs of the host society. In general, there appears to be a social distance between the Poles and the Dutch, and a strong distinction between “Us” and “them” (albeit not leading to a sense of community among the Polish migrants). Again, the above characteristics may result from the “temporariness” of the stay abroad, but it also seems that the host members do not constitute a source of aspiration for the migrants. Zbyszek, who had lived in the United States for several years before he has come to the Netherlands, compared the relation of the Poles to both host groups:

“Here the Poles do not stick together, but they also distance themselves from the Dutch. It is not like in the US where the Poles are more American than the Americans themselves. [Here they distance themselves] even in small things such as ordering a big beer and laughing at the Dutch that they take small ones. Why this is so... Maybe because Poland is so close, you can go there often while in the US you are condemned to being there and integrating. Besides the US is a superpower, it still impresses people, and the Netherlands much less so.” (Zbyszek, 45 years old, Amsterdam)²⁸

It is also important to note that the construction of an identity in the host country is also defined by the migrants' position as workers. Only a few interviewees – even those with higher education – had jobs that fulfilled their self-realisation needs. Although this was not a topic that came up easily among the informants, some migrants did express the view that they deserved something better than doing renovations or cleaning private houses. They usually perceived it as a temporary solution, before they would find another job. However, for many of the migrants this solution lasted for several years and nothing had implied that it would change in the closest future. The fact that some of the well-educated migrants had jobs of which they would have never thought of in Poland, seems to indicate a high flexibility and

²⁸ „Polacy tutaj nie trzymają się razem. Ale dystansują się też od Holendrów, w przeciwieństwie do Polaków w USA, którzy są bardziej amerykańscy niż sami Amerykanie. Chociażby w takich małych rzeczach jak to, że biorą sobie duże piwo i śmieją się z Holendrów, że ci piją małe – może dlatego, że Polska jest pod bokiem, można do niej często jeździć, a w USA człowiek jest jakby skazany na bycie tam i integrację. Poza tym USA to potęga, imponuje ludziom, a Holandia znacznie mniej”.

adaptability on the one hand, but also some kind of split between identity in the origin and host country (see also Kopic, 2006, p. 251). It appears that migrants frequently define themselves differently when they reside at home and when they are abroad. While in the country of origin the occupation seems to be an important component of the identity, in the host country it appears to be of much weaker significance.

7.4 Here, there, nowhere?

Most persons, when directly asked about the bad sides of living in the Netherlands, could hardly think of anything apart from issues that did not seem very important, such as frequent rain or bad food. Nevertheless, I often had the impression that the people I talked to were not quite happy, even if explicitly they said they were. In describing their stay abroad, they often used vague impressions like “it's not bad”, “I can't complain”, or avoided talking about serious issues such as loneliness or missing family. It appeared that not only in the situation of interacting with me as the researcher, but in general – also to themselves – they frequently denied nostalgia for the homeland or avoided defining themselves as an “immigrant”, since this would imply that they had left Poland for good. Therefore, the migrants try not to position themselves in relation to migrating – for now they are here, but in their view it does not mean that this is what defines them. Rather, they prefer to see themselves as mobile persons responding to economic opportunities, as citizens of Europe in which they can move freely:

“I don't consider myself a migrant, I don't think of myself that way. Maybe because it's only 1000 km from Poland? Or maybe I will never think of myself like this? I prefer not to think about who I am. It brings homesickness and nostalgia. That's why I prefer not to go into it.” (Michał, 36 years old, Amstelveen)²⁹

The migration experience is then often considered as a normal travel, a natural state of things, rather than a serious move or “trauma”. We could perhaps consider the above as signs of transnational migration, as ties with both the country of origin and country of settlement are remained. However, most of the migrants, although appreciating many aspects of living in the Netherlands, did not seem to feel a part of the Dutch society, but rather viewed themselves as foreigners. At the same time, many of them, already leading an organized life abroad and having acquired new habits, feel as guests when being in Poland. They are already used to their new job, home and life-rhythm, which to some extent makes them consider the

²⁹ „Nie czuję się imigrantem, nie myślę tak o sobie. Może dlatego, że tylko 1000 km do Polski? A może nigdy nie będę tak o sobie uważać? Nie zastanawiam się nad tym, kim jestem – myślenie o tym powoduje tęsknotę, przybicie serca. Dlatego wolę się nie zagłębiać”.

Netherlands as their new “base”. In that case, although not identifying with the Dutch society and culture, they sometimes find it difficult to imagine themselves returning to the home country. It seems therefore, that the migrants are somehow in a state of “limbo” between two countries, not belonging to the place of origin anymore, but also not belonging to the host society. Agnieszka, when asked which place she identifies herself more with, told me:

“I don't know, I got used to it [living in the Netherlands]. I get used to everything so quickly, I got used to [being] here as well. I am not sure anymore whether Poland is my place nor here.” (Agnieszka, 27 years old, Amstelveen)³⁰

What seems to distinguish this form of mobility from transnationalism, is the disorientation and at times rejection towards both the host society and the homeland. Many of the informants were quite critical towards Poland but also the Netherlands, which seems to imply that the identities of the migrants tend to be characterized by being lost and not having their “own place” in which they would feel at home and fully secure.

7.5 Future perspectives

The way the migrants define their own position while being abroad to a strong degree determines future plans. Those are however also conditioned by the initial motives for migrating, discussed earlier. When I asked people if and when they were planning to go back, the answer was in most cases simply: “I don't know”. The majority of Polish migrants did not exclude returning to Poland, staying in the Netherlands, nor moving further to another country. The strategy to keep options open and adapt them as life passes is what Garapich calls “intentional unpredictability” (Garapich, 2005, 2007). This uncertainty seems to be related to a general lack of stability and little awareness of own goals and priorities, however, it also serves strategic purposes – it widens the range of possibilities and seems to be well adapted to the contemporary global labour market and intra-European mobility. Interestingly, this unpredictability appears to be common among a variety of persons, regardless of education level or occupation: both skilled and low-skilled workers were uncertain about their future plans. Factors that do seem to influence planning are age and family situation (see also Ryan et al., 2007). Older persons and couples having or planning children have usually chosen their place of settlement.

Only a few persons were rather sure that they would settle in the Netherlands permanently. Those included mainly individuals with a longer duration of stay (such as 8 or

³⁰ „Nie wiem, przyzwyczałam się. Ja do wszystkiego się przyzwyczajam tak szybko, tutaj też już się przyzwyczałam. Już nie jestem ani tam pewna czy to jest moje miejsce ani tutaj”.

10 years), or persons who left Poland for personal reasons with an intention of “starting a new life”. The deliberate plan to stay abroad usually resulted in the decision to learn the Dutch language and the search for a satisfying employment, which would guarantee a higher position on the social ladder.

The majority of the interviewees admitted that in the long run they do see themselves in Poland, but their return would most likely not take place in the nearest future. This view was clearly seen when I asked the interviewees to describe their lives in ten years from now. For the majority of the persons it was very difficult or even impossible to say what they would be doing and where they would see themselves. However, the more common answer was that in ten years they would be living back in Poland, having their own house, family and a job that they would bring satisfaction. This suggests that although the stay abroad has many advantages for the migrants, on a deeper level it seems that it is at home where they identify themselves more with and feel emotionally safer:

“[In 10 years] I can't go that far in the future. Many things can change. I think that I will have kids by that time.

And where would you imagine yourself?

If with kids, then I would prefer to go back to Poland. (...) It's hard to say, many things can happen in 10 years time. For now I will stay here.

And forever?

I don't want to stay here, no.” (Monika, 24 years old, Amsterdam)³¹

At the same time those persons reported that meanwhile they would most likely stay in the Netherlands, and could not explain what would need to happen in order for them to state that time has come to return. Apart from those persons who had a contract for a limited period and were sure that they would be returning afterwards, hardly anyone could give even an estimated date of return – the expected date ranged from “a few months” to “a few years”, but some interviewees also admitted that they had not thought about it and thus could not say.

Some persons explicitly confessed that although in the Netherlands life was much easier, there is more to it than having a well-paid job and a nice house. There were individuals who have made neither friendships with host members nor with co-nationals, and experienced

³¹[za 10 lat] Nie wyobrażam sobie tego. Może się dużo zmienić. Myślę, że będę miała dzieci już do tej pory.

I gdzie byś się sobie wyobrażała?

Jak z dziećmi, to bym wolała wrócić do Polski. (...) Trudno mi powiedzieć, dużo może się zdarzyć w ciągu 10 lat. Na razie będę tutaj.

A na zawsze?

Nie chcę tu, nie”.

strong feelings of loneliness and frustration. Karol, mentioned earlier, after having complained about the situation in Poland confessed sincerely:

“(…) Recently we started thinking about returning to Poland. Though it will be hard to switch back, because here we have something already. My wife does this cleaning, so whatever happens she has some money, I also have work. So it would be hard to leave this but... Life is also important, not only money matters. We can have five cars here, but I don't want to die lonely here. It's nice to go out with friends for a beer in the weekend.” (Karol, 29 years old, Haarlem)³²

It appears however, that the longer one is abroad, the more difficult it is to leave. Migrants admit that after some time, once one has started working and has adjusted to the new place, it is difficult to decide when is the right moment to go back. Life abroad goes on and it often seems somewhat simpler than at home. Future plans are also strongly dependent on the perception of the situation in Poland – currently it appears to be seen as a poor country, which does not offer many opportunities to its citizens. The common attitude among recent migrants is that until nothing changes, there is no point in returning. This underlines the importance of economic conditions in Poland – many persons stated that if they had a chance to improve their situation back home, they would definitely return. The openness of migration plans and their dependence on financial matters therefore often seems to be highly opportunistic and pragmatic – one will choose the place in which currently one is better off. For now, life is easier in the Netherlands, but a careful eye is kept on the Polish labour market: if a visible improvement of economic conditions will be noticed, returning will be seriously taken into account.

There is also the strong belief that returning to Poland would mean a step back. Many persons have not made any savings in the Netherlands and would thus go back “with nothing”, to the same situation they had left, or even worse, since for instance cleaning for several years after having completed higher studies will not create greater chances for finding a suitable job. In such cases migration appears to be a psychological closure, a “trap” – it is considered not worth going back until one has not accomplished something abroad. Coming home without money and to the same status as before would not only be perceived as a kind of a failure by family and friends, but also by the migrant himself. For some individuals who have succeeded in the Netherlands, on the other hand, it seems to be a proof that it is abroad

³²“Zaczął nam ostatnio chodzić powrót do Polski po głowie. Chociaż ciężko będzie się przerwucić, bo jednak tutaj już mamy coś. Żona ma te sprzątanía, co by się nie działo to jakąś kwotę zawsze zarobi, ja też zawsze mam gdzieś do pracy. I trochę ciężko byłoby to zostawić, ale... Ale życie też jest ważne, nie tylko kasa jest ważna w życiu. Bo co z tego że my możemy mieć pięć samochodów, ale ja nie chce tu umrzeć samotnie. Fajnie jest gdzieś wyjść sobie w weekend ze znajomymi na piwo”.

where they can fulfil their self-realization needs and have better future perspectives. As those persons are often oriented towards self-development, family ties or longing for the homeland seem to be of lesser importance. Also by those migrants the date of return is usually postponed, at times leading to a long-term stay.

7.6 Conclusion

The research shows that the migrants' reaction to their negative image is ambiguous – on the one hand they tend to preserve their self-esteem, but on the other, they appear to undermine their own group.

At the same time the identities of many of the migrants are characterised by a notion of being lost both in the host- as well as country of origin. Most of the migrants do not feel a part of the Dutch society, and express ambiguous remarks concerning the host members. Although the Dutch are perceived as friendly, tolerant and liberal, on a deeper level there exists some doubt whether those traits are profound and real. Still, in some way, they often tend to reject Poland as the homeland. One of the results of this “being lost” is the uncertainty of future plans – although the majority of the informants see their stay as temporary, they do not know when they will return to Poland and thus keep all options open.

As was already introduced in the previous chapter, the Polish migrants tend not to identify with each other and the ethnic ties among them seem to be weak. However, this does not mean that they fully distance themselves from being Polish. The fact that the Poles speak Polish, have Polish friends, buy Polish food and tend to favourably distinguish themselves from the host members as well as other migrant groups, being proud of many elements of the Polish culture, shows that “Polishness” still remains present although in a peculiar way. While appreciating many Dutch values, the migrants tend to miss Polish characteristics that in some sense seem to be “warmer” to the heart.

It appears therefore, that in both the way the Polish migrants relate to themselves and the way they relate to the host members, there tend to be certain layers. At first glance there seems to be criticism of co-ethnics and a fairly positive image of the Dutch. But this is just so on the surface: on a deeper level the Poles do have warm feelings for their homeland and co-nationals, which become more apparent when comparing themselves to other groups. At the same time, when we go deeper, the positive remarks concerning the Dutch tend to weaken, being replaced by a sort of disappointment and distance. And although life is much easier abroad, it seems that is not all that counts, which complies with the fact that many of the informants sees Poland as their final destination.

8. Conclusions

In terms of motives for arriving to the Netherlands, for most of the migrants the migration experience is designed to fulfil safety or self-realisation needs. Many of the interviewed Poles, although well educated, for some reasons had not succeeded in the home country and believed that Poland did not provide sufficient perspectives, understood in economic terms as well as a possibility for self-development. Both upon arrival and later during the stay, the migration experience is predominantly seen as a temporary, ordinary travel. The migrants view themselves as mobile persons responding to economic opportunities rather than migrants who have left Poland for good and made a decision to settle abroad. This way of thinking on the one hand makes life easier and results in viewing the stay as a long “vacation” during which one may forget about serious matters and certain responsibilities, but on the other – tends to affect very important aspects of the social lives of the migrants, such as the type of job they seek, the contacts they establish, or their willingness to learn the Dutch language.

As regards social networks, it should be said that the overall picture includes much ambiguity. On the one hand, in spite of developing economic links with the Dutch residents in many cases, the Polish migrants in general tend to be poorly integrated with the hosts. This includes both low-skilled workers as well as professionals working with a multi-national staff, and to a big extent occurs due to the perceived temporariness of the stay in the Netherlands, as well as the image of the Dutch with whom it is not easy to establish deeper friendship.

But the lack of ties with the Dutch does not imply, as is often assumed, that the Poles in general stick to themselves as a wider group. As I have demonstrated, even though social networks within the ethnic group do play an important role in providing practical help, emotional support and in general facilitating the chain migration process, the existing ties do not create a wider network that would provide a sense of community. The Poles often remain in small ethnic enclaves, but those are strongly distinguished from the broader community, which is treated with a high level of distance and at times even distrust. It appears therefore, that although the Poles are perceived as one cohesive category by the Dutch – which should constitute a good condition for creating an imagined division “us – them” among the migrants – group identity and a local community do not appear to emerge. This statement corresponds with that of Brettell's (2003), according to which a sense of community based on common origin is not inevitable, but it is important to note that it even goes further: in case of the Polish migrants not only there seems to be no common identity, but on the contrary, distance

and criticism of own group prevails. Unlike Garapich, I have argued that the negative attitude towards co-ethnics is not only discursive, but is reflected in the reality, for instance in avoiding “Polish strangers”.

But again, to say that the Poles simply have a weak national or ethnic identity would be unjustified, as the migrants tend to view themselves with a big dose of ambiguity. On the one hand they do avoid being associated with a category that in their opinion has a negative image and at times express an emotional rejection of the homeland. In this sense an “imagined community” and distant nationalism as understood by Anderson (1983) do not seem to take place, or, using Appadurai's (1995) terminology, the migrants do not tend to strive to recreate their own “locality” in the new context. But on the other hand, when we look deeper into the accounts of the migrants, we can see that Polishness in fact does remain important to them. As I have tried to show, the Poles tend to be proud of many elements of their own culture, they cherish Polish values, often distance themselves from other nationalities including the hosts, and frequently see Poland as their final destination. It seems therefore, that among the migrants there is a specific way of self-reflection: on the surface it appears to be rather negative, while on a deeper level more positive. As to the perception of the Dutch, in turn, it seems to be the opposite: although at first the hosts are seen as open and friendly, at a later stage they sometimes turn out to be a source of disappointment to the Poles, being rather distant and not fully sincere. Characterized by different layers is also the overall emotional attitude towards the stay in the Netherlands: on the one hand life here tends to be much easier, more calm, and better organized than in Poland, but on the other – in the end it occurs that it is not only the life standard that counts.

In terms of social capital it may be said that the existing networks do, to some extent, “empower” the migrants, having both bonding and bridging potential. However, the levels of both types of social capital remain rather low: the Poles create neither strong ties within own ethnic group nor with the host society. Questions worth addressing are: Are we thus facing a new category of individualistic migrants, who integrate neither with the host residents, nor with their own group? Is the lack of solidarity among the Polish migrants a trait that arises abroad, or is it only the emigration situation that enhances it? And has it been like this also in the past, or are we facing a new phenomenon?

Those are questions that cannot be answered by the findings of my research and an attempt to answer them would require further investigation. As I have already mentioned, findings of other academics who have done research among Polish migrants, as well as data

showing an overall low level of social capital in the Polish society may imply that the Poles travel abroad already having a certain baggage of attitudes – such as distrust towards others and rather small tendency to associate – that are further enhanced by the emigration situation. But perhaps the whole concept of community is in fact no longer adequate for modern migrants travelling within the EU? Maybe the Dutch, for instance, would actually also reveal some similar characteristics if they were to travel abroad in such big numbers as the Polish? In order to answer these questions additional research would be needed, as for now it seems that it is usually the non-Western migrants that are widely studied.

And finally I would like to add one last remark. Although my aim was not to prove anything but rather to bring the “faceless migrant” alive, deep inside I did hope to break down the stereotypical image of the Polish newcomers that is present in the Dutch discourse. And this, in my view, I have to some extent managed to do – I think that my research shows that the Polish migrants are in fact a very diverse group which cannot be treated as one bounded category, they do not just arrive in order to earn fast money and are not “uncivilized” people who get drunk after work and disturb the peace in the neighbourhood. But in order for the stereotypical image to change, perhaps the Poles themselves should be more positive about their co-ethnics as well as themselves.

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