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Socio-Economic Costs of Systemic Transformation in Ukraine in the Lens of the Biographical Experiences of Ukrainian Female Migrants to Poland

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Abstract The aim of this article is to discuss the socio-economic costs of the post 1990 transformation process in Ukraine resulting in the chronic feeling of discontent with one's life, which results in the individuals and whole families' decisions to migrate. I analyse the factors which account for the individuals' subjective perceptions of their life situations and how they manifest themselves in the biographical experiences of the Ukrainian female migrants to Poland after 1989.

Keywords Migration from Ukraine; Poland; Transformation; Quality of Life

The turn of the 1980s and the 1990s was in many ways a turning point in the post-World War II history of Eastern Europe and the mobility of its peoples. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant that its former republics, as well as the allied satellite states such as Poland embarked on new

trajectories of transformation into (non, partly, or fully) democratic societies and free-market economies. Those countries, which had been centrally managed and kept their westward borders shut for decades (Stola 2010; Fedyuk and Kindler 2016), despite the lack of civil liberties and shortages of products on the market provided their citizens with work, social security, welfare, and more or less equal (lack of) opportunities. As of the 1990s, they embarked on the path of systemic changes, which brought about stress and economic uncertainty to the majority of their citizens. The hardships of coping with everyday life forced people to adopt a proactive approach in order to provide for their basic needs, yet the states abandoned them in their struggle for survival. Migrating in search of work that actually paid became one of the viable alternatives.

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Abbott and Wallace (2010) remark that most analyses of the transformation shock(s) from the centrally planned to the free-market economies focus on the quantitative variables, and rarely (if ever) take into account the bottom-up experiences of the people subject to the swinging changes. "In these explanations, the situation of individuals is 'determined' by external and inevitable economic forces: individuals' perceptions are considered irrelevant or at best as offering colourful illustration" (Abbott and Wallace 2010:654). Some newer research suggests, though, that discontent with one's financial situation can be of lesser importance than the overall dissatisfaction with life when it comes to the migratory push factors¹ (Lapshyna and Düvell 2015).

The aim of this article is to look behind the curtain of the financial motivation pushing people across the borders to make ends meet, and to see how the chronic feeling of discontent with one's life, resulting from a variety of socio-economic costs borne throughout the transformation process in Ukraine, propels both individuals and whole families to migration. I will analyse the chosen factors which account for the individuals' subjective perception of their life situation and decision to migrate, and how they manifest themselves in the biographical experiences of the Ukrainian female migrants to Poland after 1991. The paper is divided into the following sections: first, I outline the theoretical

¹ In different migration theories, starting with Everett Lee's (1966) push-pull, the factors influencing the mobility of the people are often described as the push and pull factors, where the push factors are those which motivate or force individuals to migrate (such as unemployment, fewer opportunities, natural disasters, political instability, religious persecution, etc.), and the pull factors are those which attract migrants to the new country (such as job opportunities, higher wages, better living conditions, political/religious freedom, etc.).

background and present the analytical framework within which I analyse the empirical material. Secondly, I explore the socio-economic context of the historical period (1991-2018) that I put under scrutiny.² Then, I describe the methodology of my research and the characteristics of the researched group. Finally, I analyse the socio-economic factors influencing the interviewees' subjective perception of their life situation resulting in their migratory decisions.

Theoretical Background & Framework

There have been many attempts at formulating theories of migration, yet they all fail to offer a comprehensive model that would encompass all the reasons why people decide to leave their country of origin. Traditionally and for a long time, the study of migration was strongly linked to the macro-economic factors such as unemployment and wage differences. It stemmed from the 19th and 20th-century assumptions that a migrant was someone poor and uneducated who left their country in search of better economic conditions (King 2002). This micro-level motivation was thoroughly researched within the neoclassical or the new economics of migration theories. The dual market theory (Piore 1979) shifted the research focus on the demand for the immigrant physical labour force in the industrialised societies and the state-sponsored recruitment campaigns (Massey et al. 1993). Various sociological approaches that tried to grasp and describe the

² The justification for such choice lies in the fact that 1991 was the year when Ukraine gained independence due to the dissolution of the USSR, and 2018 is the year when I conducted the last interview whose findings are considered in the empirical part of this article.

principles of migration came down to the assumption that migration is a kind of anomie, a deviation from the norm, as the vast majority of people, even having the opportunity to migrate, do not do so. Sociological theories postulated that migration is the result of structural tensions and that it is firstly the result of an individual's subjective perception of their situation, and proactive approach to minimise such tensions while achieving greater social balance. Therefore, in theory, each person whose expectations towards the standard of living and the possibility of realising this vision go beyond one's present situation is a potential migrant (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2003:40-44).

Towards the end of the 20th century, in the Western world migration started to become not an exception but the norm, with the notion of mobility as the embodiment of the postmodern condition. "To the traditional economic motivation of labour migration we add other rationales: excitement, experience, leisure, seeing the world. Migration itself becomes a desirable act rather than an economic means to an end" (King 2002:95). Hence, since the 1980s, transnational and mobility theories came to the fore, with a number of intersecting approaches (encompassing a variety of converging disciplines, such as sociology, economy, politics, social psychology, geography, anthropology). Therefore, it would be only rational to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, using the output of different disciplines and theories depending on the aspect of migration under investigation.

In the case of (post) transformation countries, such as Ukraine or Poland, in order to explain and un-

derstand better the nature of the outflow and influx of millions of its citizens to the West, Abbott and Wallace (2010) suggest adopting the interdisciplinary Social Quality approach. It puts the individual (the active subject) in the focal point, who is immersed in "the social," understood as "a dialectical tension between self-realisation and forming of collective identities" (Beck et al. 2001:12). The latter quote Heinz-Herbert Noll and argue that "quality of life" is the new, complex, and multidimensional goal of social development (Beck et al. 2001:9), and so they raise the question: "What constitutes a good life or a good society?" if we assume this to be the pursuit of the post-modern individuals. The proposed theoretical framework encompasses two levels—the individual, with its subjective, perceptions and satisfaction of the social conditions measurable through qualitative methods, and the societal level, with its objective, quantitative indicators. "The essence of social quality is determined in human" praxis (Beck et al. 2001:17) and "it is defined as: 'the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential'" (Beck et al. 2001:25). As Abbott and Wallace (2010) conclude, it is the subjective experience which impacts the individuals' agency and ability to take control over their lives (Beck et al. 2001:655), which in turn determines one's (dis)satisfaction with life. The social space within which the individuals realise their agency revolves within four pillars:

1. economic security (provided by social policies and access to resources such as income, pension, social security, housing and living secu-

urity, health maintenance, food safety, which all allow one to have long-term future perspective),

2. social cohesion (understood as bonds that link the society together realised through collectively accepted values and norms, which manifest themselves through trust in others, in social institutions, solidarity and commitment to the common good, having a sense of identity and collective consciousness, social status, social capital and networks, but also provided by public safety, political and economic cohesion),
3. social inclusion (supported by institutional order and infrastructure resulting in individuals and groups being part of the society; this can be achieved through citizenship, social networks and family structures, employment, access to and support from social policies, a sense of identification with the community),
4. social empowerment (which stands for the individuals' capacity to control their lives and participate actively in society, through seizing democratic opportunities, education, good health) (Beck et al. 2001; Abbott and Wallace 2010).

Therefore, social quality is understood not as material products of a given society, but it is treated as a processual concept in which the individual (quality of life) overlaps and interacts with the collective (quality of society).

The applicability of such framework to the study of migrations from post-transformation societies

such as Ukraine or Poland is particularly relevant, because this interdisciplinary approach encompasses various aspects—political, social, economic, biographical, making it possible to put under scrutiny the various micro-level motivations of individuals seen through the prism of the subjective perception of well-being which is (not) realised in the greater social, political, and economic context. In this way, it also allows the analysis of the collective processes through the experiences of individuals.

In this article, I will refer to the Social Quality framework and the chosen notions it takes into account as the matrix for migration aspirations and choices of the Ukrainian female migrants to Poland, and show how these notions are reflected in their biographical accounts.

Socio-Economic Context

In the pre-transformation times, Ukraine was not only the third biggest entity of the USSR, but was also reported to be one of the most developed and prosperous Soviet republics with the mining and heavy industry, as well as efficient agriculture among other assets. Nevertheless, it was much more severely affected by the systemic transformation than, for example, Belarus or Russia. In 1989, towards the end of the Soviet Union, Ukraine recorded its highest ever GDP per capita (Lapshyna and Düvell 2015), which later on fluctuated depending inter alia on the hyperinflation, two economic crises (1998 and 2008), and political unrest, never (thus far) reaching the state of the late 1980s.

One of the quantitative indicators which can be referred to in order to show the difficulty of the socio-economic situation in Ukraine is the Human Development Index (HDI). This is a statistic composite index comprised of four major factors: life expectancy at birth reflecting the ability to lead

a long and healthy life, mean and expected years of schooling, and gross national income per capita reflecting the ability to achieve a decent standard of living, and it is used for ranking countries in four tiers: very high, high, medium, low (UNDP 2016).

Table 1. Human Development Index value 1990-2015 for Belarus, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine.

	1990	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	position in 2015 ranking
Poland	0,712	0,784	0,829	0,834	0,838	0,85	0,852	0,855	36
Russian Fed.	0,733	0,72	0,785	0,792	0,799	0,803	0,805	0,804	49
Ukraine	0,706	0,673	0,734	0,739	0,744	0,746	0,748	0,743	84
Belarus	no data	0,681	0,787	0,793	0,796	0,796	0,798	0,796	52

Source: Compiled by the author based on the data from UNDP 2016.

The data above show that within the 25 years of the systemic change Poland made steady progress with the HDI progressively rising (especially after joining the EU in 2004), Russia suffered some period of regress, but then managed to successfully rise, and in 2015 both classified among the top 50 countries (out of 188 countries in the ranking) with “very high” HDI. Belarus, though had a worse starting position and is slower in its development, also shows a progressive tendency leaving Ukraine quite far behind, and is at the top of the ranking of the countries of “high” human development. Ukraine is in the most difficult, unstable situation, struggling to “get back on its feet” yet the ever-fluctuating HDI clearly shows that uncertainty and unpredictability is still part and parcel of the everyday life.

The length of this article does not allow for a full comparative analysis of the situation in Ukraine with other post-Soviet republics or Poland, and this is not to say that the hardships generated by the transformation process there were of a unique nature. However, many factors make Ukraine an exceptional case study, among them the scale, the length of duration, the uncertainty and instability caused by the fluctuating economic situation, the ubiquitous corruption which has flourished as one of the strategies and tactics of coping with the difficult material situation (Lapshyna 2014), the decline in life expectancy, the long-term inability to provide for the basic needs (Abbott and Sapsford 2006), as well as the new forms of migratory practices.

The reason why I direct my research attention to women is that mobility is a gendered practice, just as the labour markets and practices function along the gender lines. In the case of Ukraine, though the unemployment was reported to be of an egalitarian nature, on average it took females longer to find a job, and their salaries were lower than men’s (Fedyuk 2016:75). At the same time “it was often women who sought out alternative work first, partly for pragmatic reasons as the household needed an income, but also because ‘women’s’ work was more freely available, especially in the newly emerging service sectors” (Round and Williams 2010:185).

Naturally, the migration which boomed at the onset of the 1990s was not a new phenomenon as such. At the end of the 19th century, the demographic growth, scarcity of land, and lack of work made Ukrainians (just like Poles) migrate to the Americas, during the Soviet times seasonal labour migration to Russia and other Soviet Republics took place, or people were forcefully deported for ethnic reasons (Lapshyna and Düvell 2015; Fedyuk and Kindler 2016; OSW 2017). However, what was new in the migrations that started in the 1990s were two things. Firstly, the directions—Ukrainians engaged in different forms of migration (first seasonal, circular, and usually illegal, then legal, educational, and professional) exploiting and exploring the new possibilities of European destinations: Poland, but also Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Czech Republic, and Germany. Secondly, roughly since the twenty-tens there has been a rapidly growing, previously not very widespread trend to migrate to Poland for educational purposes,³ there

³ According to the statistics published by the Polish Central Statistical Office (2016), over a decade 2006-2016 the number

are also more and more young specialists, entrepreneurs or family members that join their kin who had immigrated to Poland earlier (OSW 2017:11). However, whereas in destinations such as Italy, Spain, or Portugal, the Ukrainian migrants are typically middle-aged women prevailing in the care-work sector of the economy (OSW 2017:40), in Poland, the occupational profile of a Ukrainian migrant is more diverse, and the gender division less obvious, and will depend on the time period and age,⁴ which in turn requires a more varied analysis. What is more, since 2010 Poland has become the most popular migration destination for Ukrainians within the EU countries, and it is the only EU country where since 2014 one can observe a dynamic increase in their number, the prognoses being that the numbers will rise. Statistics provided by the Office for Foreigners regarding permanent residence permits issued also show that women are increasingly deciding to settle,⁵ therefore becoming the present and future citizens. It is therefore valid for this group to be researched more thoroughly, taking into account the more diverse characteristics of migrants and such factors as

of foreign students in Poland has risen by 5,7 times and currently amounts to 57,119 undergraduates, 53% of which are Ukrainians. The second largest group are Belarusians who make up 8% of the total number. This has resulted in coining the term of ‘Ukrainization’ of the Polish higher education.

⁴ In 2008 and 2012, two major studies were conducted in Ukraine on a representative group of 20,000 households, whose aim was to estimate the size of migration. In 2012, among the younger migrants (25-49 years) 2/3 were men and 1/3 women, but among the 50+ age group females outnumbered men significantly, and Poland was the second destination of immigration (14,3%) after Russia (43,2%) (OSW 2017:6-7). Even if in statistical terms, within 2010-2012 in Poland men accounted for 89,205 and women for 79,150 Ukrainians working abroad, in comparison with other destinations it can be seen that almost 20% of all Ukrainian female migrants worked in Poland, whereas only 11,5% of all the males did so (OSW 2017:8).

⁵ In 2016, 47% permanent residence permits were issued to women, in 2017—49,6% and in 2018—50,2% (Office for Foreigners 2016; 2017; 2018).

gender, education, high-skills, to name a few. Especially that concerning Ukrainians, if the analyses adapt a gendered perspective, there is little focus on the other-than-the-family context (Fedyuk 2016).

What made Poland attractive as a destination were several factors. The most obvious one is the geographical and cultural proximity, but there were also a number of other measures facilitating mobility, such as the agreement on small border traffic from 2008, allowing the people residing in the border zone to enter Poland without a visa to a distance of 30 km (Malynovska 2016:11), Karta Polaka from 2007 which came into force in March 2008 (literally meaning Pole's Card, also translated as Polish Card or Polish Charter). It is a document which originally could have been granted to a person from the former 15 USSR Republics⁶ who submitted a written declaration of belonging to the Polish nation (and met other conditions⁷ specified by the Act of Law). This was not equal to obtaining Polish citizenship, but did put the cardholder in a privileged position, by, for example, allowing them to: obtain a national visa entitling to multiple crossings of the Polish border, to apply for permanent residence/citizenship (both free of

charge),⁸ to study, and above all it granted them open and equal access to the labour market. Another conducive factor was the simplified rules for the employment of foreigners from Eastern Partnership countries, the so-called "declaration system"⁹ of 2015⁹ (OSW 2017:27).

Methodology

In general, research into the highly-skilled migrants—the privileged elite of migrants—will more often concentrate on the quantitative aspect—either on enumerating them (Salt 1992; Docquier, Lowell, and Marfouk 2009; Blitz 2010; Kofman 2000; 2012) or on researching those professional groups that are numerous enough to be statistically significant. There is also a strong "economic bias" of analyses and the male-hegemonic approach (at least in symbolic terms) towards the "world of skills," usually understood as the male-dominated and knowledge-based sectors of the economy such as finance, science, and technology (Kofman 2000; Iredale 2005). On the other hand, qualitative research into migration which adopts the biographical perspective tends to focus on the intra-EU migrants and does not consider the gender dimension as a factor differentiating the migrants' experiences (Każmierska, Piotrowski, and Waniek 2012; Piekut 2013; Ryan and Mulholland 2014)

⁸ In 2016, the Act was amended, and from then on the holders of the Card who came to Poland with the intention of settling permanently would be granted permanent residence free of charge, and after one year they would receive the Polish citizenship.

⁹ It granted foreigners the right to work for 180 days without the need to obtain a work permit, and until January 2018 such declaration was free of charge. As of 2018, it costs 30 PLN which is still a rather symbolic administrative fee.

even if female migrants tend to outnumber male migrants in most developed countries (Dumont, Martin, and Spielvogel 2007). The aim of this article is to put under scrutiny the experiences of the highly-skilled Ukrainian females who have thus far received scarce attention in the migration literature, if any at all.

The analytical section of this article is written on the basis of my research sample—I have chosen 16¹⁰ (out of 29) unstructured interviews with biographical, narrative elements with Ukrainian female migrants, and to some extent I also use the observations I could make while engaging in casual conversations with 2 of the women. They all came to Poland as (young) adults having obtained tertiary education in their home country (except one interviewee who came to Poland after finishing secondary school and did the whole course of her studies at a Polish university) and have been living in Poland between 1-19 years (at the time of the interview). The diplomas held by the interviewed women ranged from Bachelor's to Master's and even a few PhD degrees, yet most of my interviewees at some point continued their education in Poland, for example, doing post-graduate studies which would equip them with additional qualifications needed at work. What is crucial, however, is that, firstly, most of them have already had work experience before coming to Poland, and, in theory, were able to provide for themselves in their home country. Secondly, after migrating, they all took up employment rel-

¹⁰ I have chosen those interviews that were the richest in the empirical content which is the focus of this paper.

evant to their education and/or expertise¹¹ and have had no experience of working in the secondary "migrant" segment. Moreover, the women I talked to came from all parts of Ukraine¹²—the western region (historically linked to Poland¹³) and cities like Lviv, Lutsk, Uzhhorod, Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, a small town in the Ternopil Oblast, the capital city of Kiev, the southern areas like Odessa, or Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula, and the eastern part and cities of Bachmut, Dnipro, or Berdiansk.

Most of the empirical material was collected between March 2015 and September 2016¹⁴—the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, then transcribed and anonymised. 12 women lived in the Warsaw area, 3 in Cracow, and 1 in Szczecin. Most interviews were conducted in Polish, as the women spoke it fluently, and in 2 cases of the interviewees who at the time of the meeting had been in Poland the shortest (1 year), we talked in English.

¹¹ 9 of the interviewees work in private companies or multi-national corporations (in finance, banking, research, sales, logistics, and other), 4 are engaged in non-government institutions (they have created a niche where they use their high qualifications, for example, a lawyer, and work in intermediate positions among the Polish and migrant communities), 2 women work for the Polish public sector or in science/teaching, 1 works for the mass-media.

¹² The reason why this is significant is that the east part of Ukraine has always been more Russia-oriented and migrating westward from that region was less common (Lapshyna and Duvell 2015:4).

¹³ The western part of Ukraine bears more historical ties with Poland. Some cities, for example, Lviv or Ivano-Frankivsk had been under Polish rule a few centuries ago, then became part of Galicia, one of the crown lands of the Austrian Empire, which also covered the south-east regions of Poland until 1918. Afterwards, they were again part of Poland until 1939. Another western area bearing historical ties with Poland is the Volhynia region.

¹⁴ One interview was conducted in February 2018.

Since my target research participants do not work in a migrant “niche” and they largely function outside migrant networks, I had to seek contacts in a few ways. First, I contacted my personal acquaintances, then I wrote directly to the women I knew from the media, next I got in touch with the interviewees who were recommended by my friends. After that, I started looking for contacts on various social media fora for expats and in some migrant-related institutions, for example, NGOs, and the remaining potential interviewees were indicated through the snowball method through my other respondents.

Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Migratory Decisions

In this section, I will put under scrutiny the chosen aspects of the four major prerequisites to one’s satisfaction of life as laid forward by Beck and colleagues (2001), namely, the economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and conditions for empowerment, and how (the lack of) these contributed to the interviewed Ukrainian women’s migratory decisions.

Economic Security

As I had shown in an earlier section of this article with the example of the Human Development Index, Ukraine’s socio-economic situation is far from optimistic. In the 1990s, the hyperinflation wiped out savings, the wages went unpaid, and whenever the economic figures would improve, a major economic crisis would hit (especially in 1998 and 2008) and acutely affect the people (Burakovsky and Movchan 2011; Lapshyna and Düvell 2015). In the

case of my interviewees, it can be observed how migration at a given period was determined by those different factors. Polina, who came to Poland in 1997 at the age of 21, recalls:

I was already a year after graduation and in Ukraine, there was the situation that they were not paying salaries, especially to teachers...I finished English Studies, I tried to teach for a year...I was a young girl, and that somehow did not suit me. And at that time it turned out that in Poland the Russian language emigrated from schools as a foreign language, I do not know if it was in ‘97, probably a bit earlier, and that on the peripheries there is a shortage of teachers of English in large numbers, and I suspect, I mean, I do not suspect, I am sure that I am one of many people who came from Ukraine just to teach English, mainly in some villages, smaller towns. [Polina, 40y.]

She recalls that her parents were both doctors, so in fact she could have stayed and been financially supported by her parents, but for her migration was an act of maturity and gaining independence—she soon realised that being only 22 she can work in her profession, and have enough money to be independent, to travel, to buy clothes, and even to put some money away. She says that in Ukraine for a long time a teacher could not afford to go to the seaside or skiing, and that once she got a taste of a better life, she did not want to return.

I do not know how to explain it. You know, if you are a tourist, perhaps you do not feel it. It’s different [in Ukraine]. Here [in Poland] you just breathe more easily, and you cannot see such, there are not so many tired people. [Polina, 40y.]

Twenty years later, when international corporations have already established their branches in East Europe and internal corporate transfers became a career option, the migration motivations became more than monetary. Here I would like to refer to the life story of Yuliya, who came to Poland at the age of 28 by relocating within the same international corporation from the Kiev branch to the Polish office. In Yuliya’s case, migration was part of the whole family’s long term plan, which dictated her choice of studies and learning foreign languages from an early age. She recalls:

My parents were a young couple with kids with most... how to say... hard struggling time in Ukraine, beginning of 1990s., and they just decided, that was why, it was if you set such goal, life in the EU or the US, whatever you will choose, will be much more comfortable and easier, and better... That was the approach. [Yuliya, 29y.]

Therefore, she had been investing in her future migration for years, fostering contacts, jumping at every opportunity to take part in international projects. Back in Ukraine, she pursued a career in the financial sector in one of the major international companies, yet as the 2008 crisis came, she lost her job along with 80% of her colleagues. She reports using the time of unemployment to reassess her life, and as she got employed again in the corporate sector, she kept communicating her pro-migratory approach to her managers:

I was all the time saying that if you have any opportunities of going abroad, keep in mind that I’m ready to go. I’m free and nothing is keeping me so much. [Yuliya, 29y.]

Poland was not really her deliberate country of choice, but it was the one where the offer of transfer came from, so she jumped at the opportunity, even if within the company hierarchy it was a demotion as she had to assume a lower position. Nevertheless, she did negotiate the financial conditions in order to have a satisfying ratio of her earnings and life expenses:

These conditions here for work are much better as working hours are lower, they are paid, even over hours are paid, and relationships with clients maintained better by the partners and managers, distribution of work is better quality and all these things... What is the bad side is that now my salary is...3 positions higher than in Kiev so when I’m senior here, a senior manager in Kiev has a lower salary because of exchange rate, and that’s what I feel people [in the Kiev office—A.D.] don’t like, they, like one year ago we were at the same level, now I’m much higher than senior managers with my salary and I’m saying, “Guys, I’m spending my salary there, which is, I’m absolutely on the average level of life, if I could spend that salary in Ukraine, yes, it would be much better.” [Yuliya, 29y.]

On the one hand, she gained economic security, which is not only manifested through higher earnings, but also by the stability of the currency, which allows, for example, to make exotic travel plans, as well as spontaneous city breaks in European destinations. On the other, it creates resentment among her former Ukrainian colleagues, who feel that she is *betraying and leaving people with problems*, with her former managers giving her negative campaigning, spreading rumors that she was *sold like a slave*,

so as to prevent others from following her example. Yuliya no longer shares the common fate and burden, and therefore the price she pays is the loosening of the social bonds with her Ukrainian friends and colleagues who stayed in Kiev.

Social Cohesion

Values and norms are notions which relate to two different orders—the moral and the social one—yet inseparably lay the foundations for the functioning of a given society, helping build trust, solidarity, and a sense of common good. Bribery and corruption are examples of a violation of such cohesion, as both the donor and the recipient abuse the collective rules, practices and standards for private gain. Such practices occur in every country and on every continent, so Ukraine is no exception, yet the scale—the ubiquity of corruption in almost every sector (Lapshyna 2014), the social acceptance of such proceedings, and the importance of such informal income to the everyday life is what makes it virtually impossible to maintain any standards. Round and Williams (2010:190) quote the results of a Transparency International (2005) survey, which stated that “in Ukraine 82% of respondents had recently paid a bribe to access services or goods that they were entitled to, the highest figure in the world.” In the pre-transformation times, corruption was also present, yet on a lower scale, and went in line with the culture of gift-giving as an expression of gratitude or expectation of a favour. It manifested itself through giving a bottle of good alcohol or a box of chocolates in return for a fast-track procedure (Lapshyna 2014). However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has evolved

into a regular and expected system of hard currency payments encompassing every sphere of social life.

Bribery is said to be difficult to observe and study empirically, hence most research on corruption focuses on its determinants rather than manifestations or practices (Lapshyna 2014; Shaw, Katsaiti, and Pecoraro 2015). The strength of doing qualitative research and conducting unstructured interviews lies in the fact that the interviewees are asked to tell a spontaneous story of their life, therefore the topic of corruption and accounts of such practices arise naturally in their biographical narrations. As already said, corruption translates into many areas of life, but in the following passage, I will focus on education (since this topic frequently appeared in the stories of my interviewees) as an example of a social institution where it prevents individuals from fulfilling their need for social cohesion.

Education is the one human development aspect that Ukraine can boast about, with 85% of the population having at least secondary education. However, at the same time, there is said to be a mismatch between the accessibility and the quality of schooling (Burakovsky and Movchan 2011:36). What can also be seen from the gathered empirical material and should be added to maladies is the extensive and sanctioned system of bribes. One of the interviewees recalls how she had wanted to study International Relations—the most prestigious department at her university—yet had to study Banking, because of corruption. She recalls her entry exams:

When I passed Ukrainian Literature and Language I answered all possible questions, and they created and they started asking me all possible Ukrainian rules, and I answered everything, they were really surprised because they could not...fail me, and they asked one question which I didn't answer, and the answer was, “Ok, you don't know anything,” it's like 3 out of 5, and with 3 I could not pass...and the lady who originally examined me, after all, she met me and asked, “And how are you? Did you manage to enter the university?” and I said, “No, because of you” and she felt pity...Finally, I met then with the Dean of the department which I targeted and they said that I successfully did exams, like written exams, 95 out of 100 for math, and he said, “Which good student we're losing just because of this system” and I said, “But, this is YOUR problem, do something with that” and basically I finished my school, university with excellent marks. [Natalia, 29y.]

Natalia was an exemplary student, yet she did not pay for her place at the university so she could not study at the faculty of her choice. Her example illustrates that not only do the individuals' dreams and plans get shattered, but also the schools admit not necessarily the best students, but the most profitable ones, hence the “prestige” of such institutions becomes rather dubious, followed by the inflation of diplomas, and in the long run the country is losing its most prominent graduates as they seek and find better jobs abroad.

Research has shown that corruption is a strong and important migration driver and that almost 50% of the Ukrainian population aged 18-39 reveal aspirations to live and work abroad, at least for a period

of time (Lapshyna 2014). Such systemic problem translates into the migratory decisions of the whole families and their biographical plans, for example, Lesya decided to migrate to Poland in 2013 at the age of 35 with her husband (who as a result had to undergo deskilling himself) and two kids as she perceived her children's future in Ukraine as a “waste of money.” Such decisions to invest into the education of children outside Ukraine get confirmed in the words of a Polish private university official. In a casual conversation with a Polish professor, the scholar recalled a Ukrainian father who had said that he would rather cover the full costs of a 5-year tuition at a Polish private university as it is countable and more predictable—at least he knows from the onset how much it would cost him, with no additional expenses on the way, and that it will probably still be cheaper than the education in Ukraine with all the additional, informal payments considered.

Some of my interviewees have had the chance to study in both Ukraine and Poland. Lidia studied abroad for 10 months with a scholarship, but then returned to her home country and recalls:

In Ukraine, I wrote, I finished the MA, but it all started to, it was 2013, everything started with this [the Euro] Maidan, I was not ready, I did not want...because before Maidan I had to pay for the MA defense as if unofficially, it is known and this, the system was already very difficult to fight with. I am just such a person that I have never given bribes in my life, and decided that it just probably does not pay off from the moral perspective, to pay for being, for defending my MA, and I was waiting that something will change

after [the Euro] Maidan,¹⁵ but really not much has changed in this respect, because this system is just like this, you know, in this society so deeply rooted, unfortunately. [Lidia, 28y.]

Lidia decided not to continue doing her research in Ukraine and came back to Poland in 2014 to pursue PhD studies, as there was a government-funded programme for foreigners and no unofficial payments were required. This could be interpreted as a conscious, moral act of rebellion against the system in which bribery and corruption constitute a monolithic social structure which Lidia does not want to be a part of, and as the expression of bitter disillusionment with yet another revolution (in this case, the Euro Maidan protests of 2013-2014), which turned out to be a lost hope for change.

However, to show the acute pathology of the system, it is worth quoting fragments of the interview with Valeria, a 33-year-old historian holding a PhD diploma, who also had a chance to study both in Ukraine and in Poland, and gives a testimony of self-reported bribing. Valeria was an exemplary student and finished secondary school with merits (with a silver medal). Her dream was to study law, but as she recalls, it was unfortunately impossible

due to different corruption reasons, because in her times only the financially privileged ones with connections could study law or medicine. For this reason, she chose to study history, which was not free of bribery either:

At the Faculty of History in the fifth year of studies [2007—A.D.], everyone [80 people—A.D.], even those who did not want to admit, everyone confessed...“I paid so many dollars and I paid that many dollars,” and so on, it depended on who and where he had to go through, such chains and connectors. And what also counted was that I had a silver medal, so I did not have many examinations, I did not have to take one in Ukrainian language, only historical subjects, so it was probably cheaper for one exam too [laughs]. In my case, it was USD 600, it was the year 2002 and what is interesting, my parents did not have this kind of money, my mom was earning maybe USD 200, so we had to borrow from my sister’s husband, who at that time sold a car...Only two guys in my year did not admit [that they had to pay a bribe—A.D.], including my husband and one more friend from western Ukraine...they had to pay too, but didn’t confess. [Valeria, 33y.]

Lapshyna (2014:118) reports that “at least 30 percent of Ukrainians enter colleges by paying bribes while many others use their connections.” However, from Valeria’s narration, we can see that the figure can rise to 100%. Corruption seems to be a vicious circle encompassing all levels of education—bribes are paid for securing a place at a state institution, exam scores, final grades (Shaw et al. 2015), but money or connections are also needed to land a job as a teacher or lecturer (Lapshyna 2014).

In my times, meaning until I left in 2008, if I did not know the right people, it was impossible to get a job, even at a private university where I worked. I got [that job] thanks to my tutor, who just knew that I was not from [name of city], who helped me, in a human way, without any money. There was no such thing [bribery—A.D.] here, and the Dean was involved in it, because they knew that there must be a place for me in these doctoral studies, and there was no place because the Dean’s son and his deputy’s grandson had it [secured]. [Valeria, 33y.]

What Valeria describes as a simple, human gesture is a situation which bears the hallmarks of sanctioned systemic pathology, and would otherwise be referred to as nepotism. She cannot pursue PhD studies immediately after obtaining an MA diploma due to the fact that all the places are already “booked” for the authorities’ relatives, but she is granted the opportunity to work for a year as a lecturer at a private university. Two years later Valeria comes to Poland to do a special MA programme dedicated to students from the East at a university, and she recalls how shocking it was to defend her diploma in Poland:

Here [in Poland] the defense of the Master’s thesis, there was a date set especially for me...there were four professors, I came and they asked me questions from different areas, I went out, in 5 minutes they called me back, greeted me, shook my hand and said, “Congratulations on your success,” then they gave me a book which they had signed in remembrance, and so on. In our country, it was done in a different way. In Russian, we say *nakryvat polanu* which means laying the whole table with vodka, wine, food, and so on, we all chipped in and it was

in this way...first thing [in Poland] you do not need to pay anyone to study, and they pay YOU a scholarship. [Valeria, 33y.]

The individual approach, the fact that she was the main focus and the subject of the exam, that the date was set for her and she was given an occasional gift or paid a scholarship to study was a mirror-reflection of the reality she knew and experienced back in Ukraine.

Taking all the above into consideration, it comes as no surprise that the Polish authorities took advantage of the competitiveness of the domestic education system and launched regular recruitment campaigns in Ukraine, in order to compensate for the shortage of Polish students due to the demographic decline and a partial outflow of young people to universities in the European Union countries, offering various scholarship programmes.

Social Inclusion

One of the major institutional limitations to the post-modern, mobile people are borders and the constraints of the visa regimes, which is particularly acute to the non-EU nationals from countries bordering the EU member states. The paradox of citizenship and ethnicity in the case of some Polish-Ukrainian families is that sometimes the factors determining an individual’s status are purely historical, and to some extent accidental. One of my interviewees, Ksenija who comes from the borderland area of the former Polish city of Lviv, recalled that the World War II had separated her grandmother, who had stayed in Lviv, from her brother, who had been living in Warsaw at that

¹⁵ The Euromaidan, also referred to as Ukrainian Spring, was a series of pro-European protests that started in November 2013 in Kiev at the Maidan (The Square), which met with violent reaction of the Berkut riot police. They evolved into revolutionary nationwide demonstrations, escalating in February 2014, with over 100 protesters killed by the pro-government forces. The initial manifestations were sparked off by the government’s decision to postpone the signing of an association agreement with the European Union. As the clashes and violence intensified, the citizens were calling for the president’s resignation and a change of the government and the corrupted system, whose symbol was the president V. Yanukovich (Zhuk 2016).

time. Two generations later Ksenjia is considered a Ukrainian whereas her cousins are Polish, even if the geographical distance between them is merely 450 km. For such reasons (among other ones as well) there have been a number of measures facilitating travel, work, and studying for Ukrainians, which I elaborated on in the socio-economic context section. Nonetheless, it was as late as June 2017 that Ukrainian citizens holding a biometric passport could finally travel visa-free to most European Union countries for up to 90 days. However, since all of my interviewees had come to Poland before that regulation came into force, and all of them are working full-time, some of them also required a work permit. It is worth adding that when Poland joined the EU in 2004, this resulted in a massive outflow of the Polish workers to the immediately opened labour markets, especially in the UK and Ireland¹⁶ and as a consequence highlighted the growing and urgent need for replacement migration.

Virtually all of the interviewed women indicated that the administrative hassles constitute one of the principal problems connected with relocating. Getting all the documents, scheduling appointments at the offices for non-EU nationals is a lengthy and stressful process. Therefore, those ones who were holders of *Karta Polaka* pointed to it as a significant institutional facilitation. Anastasiya, who had done postgraduate law studies in Germany, worked in major international institutions, inter alia, in Brussels, recalls that despite having achieved a lot at some point, she was just

¹⁶ This exodus is estimated to have reached upwards of 1 million people by 2007 (Castles and Miller 2009).

tired of the bureaucratic matrix of reapplying for a work permit in Belgium every 6 months, which was at the same time blocking her possibilities of getting a new job there.

I found out that people who have *Karta Polaka* do not need a work permit and for me...I had this card and in fact I had never treated Poland as a country where I would like to work, because I always had some bigger horizons, New York, London, Brussels, but I was really tired of these bureaucratic issues and I thought maybe I will take some break to settle down, not to wait every six months what will happen with these documents, and to change jobs every six months, I will move to Poland. [Anastasiya, 27y.]

Having a regulated legal situation and permanent employment, one can take full advantage of the offer of possibilities that open up. Most of my interviewees mentioned the possibility to travel visa-free and having access to inexpensive transport as a great asset. In Ukraine, even if one can afford it, planning holidays abroad is a lengthy, inflexible, and stressful process:

You need to have a visa for all your travels, so you cannot just go somewhere where you want. You cannot plan your holidays on an ad hoc basis, because you just have to buy everything a month in advance, book it, apply for your visa...according to our law... you have to book [the holiday] earlier and you cannot change it...and if your visa does not come...you will not go on vacation where everything was booked, the tickets will be lost, well, that's about what I'm talking about... [Diana, 27y.]

The interviewed women, having satiated their European appetite open up (as long as they have such wish and enough financial resources) to more exotic destinations. Anastasiya had gone on a spontaneous holiday to Brazil, Natalia to the Philippines. Valeria, who tries to go somewhere exotic at least twice a year, and has already been to a few countries in Asia, the Pacific, or the Caribbean, says that living in Poland she can spend her free time even without leaving the country in a much more proactive way:

[In Ukraine] you cannot because for now there is no such infrastructure...First of all, Ukraine is bigger, if you'd want to go from Lviv to Kharkiv, you have to spend the whole day, if by plane, it will be faster, but in Ukraine, if you look at earnings in Ukraine and, for example, later convert them into flight tickets, it would be much more expensive, it is easier here in Poland. In Poland, you can take a car, and here, for example [sightsee] Teutonic castles, and there are some cycling routes, and other, plenty of everything and all the infrastructure. [Valeria, 33y.]

As for other qualitative infrastructural improvements, it is, for example, the efficient public transport system and other city facilities (public bikes, cycling paths, street lighting) that get quoted by the Ukrainian interviewees. Diana devotes much of the interview to praising the Warsaw public transport—buses which have air conditioning, reliable timetables, cheaper tickets, public bicycles. In Dnipro, where she comes from, there are only overcrowded expensive private minibuses, with a flat ticket rate per ride regardless of the duration of the ride, but they are only good for those who are not in a hurry, as she says.

There is no space, it does not arrive on time, and sometimes it does not stop at my stop at all, and, of course, there are traffic jams. And then you come to work so terribly tired, pissed off, you are in a bad mood, because everyone was treading on your feet, everyone else is also pissed off. It's good that you caught it at all, you do not know whether you will be able to get to work on time. When you arrive, you do not have such a good mood, because you had lost everything in those bus rides, and then you return home in the same conditions later. [Diana, 27y.]

She also mentions that in contrast to the Ukrainian public offices, in Warsaw everything is well organised and transparent, one gets a number in the queue, the clerks are (usually) polite and helpful. She recalls that the first time she visited the tax office she was literally shocked to see a children's corner and took a photo, as she did not know such things existed.

You think, "Oh my God!" here is such a civilisation, and you came from such wildness, wow! Children's corner... after 3 years, of course, you get used to it...you are starting to approach it in the way that you expect, it is not just wow, but that's the way it should be. [Diana, 27y.]

Diana, whose younger sister migrated to the US, concludes that everyone in her circles is just simply looking for a better quality of life.

Conditions for Empowerment

The last category I will consider in this paper is, in fact, an intersection of the previous three aspects. If individuals are to be able to assume agency and have the capacity to control their lives, they need

to have material security, which they can pursue, enjoy, and realise in predictable conditions with commonly accepted values and norms that are supported by institutional order and infrastructure. In order to show how migrating to Poland is conducive to creating such conditions for an individual's subjective perception of empowerment, I will refer to the story of Natalia, a corporate transferee like Yuliya, and a single mother of a 6-year-old.

Back in Kiev, Natalia used to work extremely hard, for example, recalling one day when she had spent 27 consecutive hours in the office, and decided that this is not the quality of life she wants to have for her and for her child. As she had cooperated on different projects with the Polish branch of her company, once she got an offer, she decided to take advantage of the opportunity and relocated first herself, and 4 months later the child. She, just as Yuliya, emphasized that despite also working a lot in the Polish office, the conditions are more favourable, and that while in Poland she still does overtime, it is not to the extent that she used to do in Kiev. For Natalia, empowerment is realised through having the financial means and infrastructural possibilities to manage all the aspects of her life—work, business travel, childcare, and active leisure. She recalls the situation when she experienced the qualitative change in her life:

When we discussed how old I am, I'm 29 and she's 25 [the Polish babysitter—A.D.], she said she thought I'm much older than she, and the comment was that because I'm just 4 years older than her and I have a good position, and not bad money, and I travel a lot, because our first meetings were like I asked her

to come when I had like a day I started at 5 o'clock in the morning, I left keys to my friend to come and put the child to school because I was going to Vienna. So, in the morning, I went to Vienna before I left keys to my friend. Then the nanny came and stayed, took a child from school and stayed till 9 o'clock. At 9 I came back. But, during the day I was in Vienna, I took from Vienna a taxi to Bratislava, in Bratislava I had a meeting, it was like breakfast in Warsaw, lunch in Bratislava, and then I came back to Vienna and flew back, so, it was the first day of, let's say, organising everything, it was first time when I left my child for a nanny, and for me it was very important that I can be independent, that I have a person to whom I can delegate my child, I can organise everything without support of ANYBODY, but just relying on myself. [Natalia, 29y.]

She finally has the time, means, and structural opportunities to shape the reality she is living in:

I created, let's say, like an own world...I have my shop, my swimming pool, my work, my flat which is very close to each other, and basically, 10 minutes walk from one place to another, everything is very convenient. At the beginning I started, for example, I had more free time, I started normally reading, I started make some sport, swimming, running, everything, and I can say, moving here [to Poland], personally for me, was an increase in quality of my living, let's say, because, as I said, in Kiev I had very few time for my child. [Natalia, 29y.]

Natalia also mentions that migration to Poland allows her to make use of the untapped potential for the spontaneous enjoyment of life, which she recalls

was more difficult back in Ukraine. She can decide in the morning about a weekend cityscape travel in the afternoon, or leave the office at 5:30 p.m., take her child, and at 8 p.m. be sitting on a bus to Kiev in order to celebrate her birthday with family and friends. However, when she asks her mother to visit her in Warsaw in a similarly spontaneous way, she hears, "No, no, no, it's not possible." Even if in fact it is possible, it is a difference in the mental approach that one does not simply have to plan everything in advance, anticipating problems that will arise, but just enjoy life here and now. Yet, just as Yuliya, she pays the social price, as she stopped sharing information about her trips on social media in order to not make people back home jealous.

Conclusions

In Eastern Europe, the systemic transformation of the 1990s came about as a shock, individuals and households were not prepared either mentally or formally for what was to come. There was no plan, no support, no transfer of the know-how how to function within the free-market economy. Naturally, some individuals did manage to take advantage of the new opportunities arising from the legal loopholes and through personal contacts with the state apparatus, yet the vast majority was left to cope with the everyday hardships on their own.

Ukraine is in many ways a unique case study, it is an example of a country which was once a prosperous and thriving republic, but since the 1990s underwent a triple transformation—"the formation of nation states, the collapse of the non-market command economy, and the introduction of elements of

a market economy (including employment insecurity and market prices) and the collapse of a social structure" (Abbott and Sapsford 2006:252), which resulted, on the one hand, in the decline of the standard and quality of life of many individuals, families, and household, and, on the other, in massive migration outflow. In the beginning, it was largely in the pursuit of paid work as an ad hoc response to the economic uncertainty. However, with the prolonging instability and bleak prospect of constructive changes, migration has become a permanent tactic of almost half of the population who wish to work or just live abroad and experience a better quality of life (Lapshyna 2014).

The Social Quality approach allows us to look beyond the economic migration motivations, as in fact none of the interviewed women pointed to a higher salary or the need to support remaining family members as the primary incentive to relocate abroad. It was rather the overall better working conditions, the lack of the ubiquitous corruption, the flexibility of travel resulting from their regulated legal status, the developed infrastructure, and the transparency of the social system allowing for greater self-realisation and for assuming agency, which in general translates into the capacity to actively take control of their decisions and life choices. The interviewed women express gaining a sense of European dignity, manifesting itself, inter alia, in the possibility to choose and enjoy a lifestyle they want and value.

On the other hand, as I wrote at the beginning of this article in the theoretical section, in the study of migration there is a wide spectrum of approaches

which are at best middle-range theories, which can and should complement each other depending on the research problem. For this reason, the Social Quality approach will not suffice to explore all the waves of migrations of Ukrainians to Poland, especially that, for example, as of 2014 there have been more men coming and this is attributed to the escalation of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

To conclude, the socio-economic costs of systemic transformation in Ukraine are multidimensional, and the length of this article does not allow for an exhaustive analysis, yet the overall and chronic life

dissatisfaction, especially among women (Abbott and Sapsford 2006), and the more educated ones (Lapshyna 2014) constitutes an important migratory push factor. At the same time, this outflow of the educated and skilled ones results in human capital loss so much needed for sustainable economic and social development of Ukraine (Lapshyna 2014). As for Poland, which was chosen here as an example of the receiving country, due to the influx of Ukrainian students and migrants, can compensate for its own human capital outflow to the European Union markets, and the demographic decline.

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