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Beyond openness and prejudice: The consequences of migrant encounters with difference

Abstract

This article investigates the consequences of migrant encounters with difference in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender. While the notion of encounter has attracted much academic attention, in particular with regard to multiculture, social diversity and the challenge of living with difference, many of these debates tend to, oddly enough, overlook migrant populations. Furthermore, although they acknowledge that significant numbers of migrants to diverse societies such as the UK originate from much less diverse communities, they rarely reflect on the intricacies of production of difference in these respective places. Recognising these limitations, this article outlines the consequences of encounters with difference in the context of migration from Poland (a relatively homogeneous postcommunist society) to the UK (a 'superdiverse' postcolonial society). The article draws upon extensive empirical material collected among Polish post-2004 migrants to the Northern English city of Leeds. It establishes that migrant encounters result in development, revision or change of values and attitudes towards difference. This may involve a range of personal stances including favourable and prejudiced attitudes as well as, most likely, 'complicated' and 'in-between' responses.

Introduction

Given the recent increase in East-West migration in Europe, the capacity of migrants to live with difference becomes a crucial issue for European societies and policy makers. Arguably, these large-scale migrations have been followed by encounters with 'the unfamiliar' or 'the

other' and have impacted socially, culturally and emotionally on the lives of many migrants. The notion of encounter has recently reinvigorated academic discussions on multiculture, social diversity and the challenge of how to 'live with difference' (e.g. Hemming, 2011; Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, 2012; Leitner, 2011; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Neal et al., 2013; Valentine, 2008; Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012; Wessendorf, 2013; Wilson, 2013). However, many of these debates tend to, oddly enough, overlook migrant populations and what they bring to encounters. Furthermore, although it is acknowledged that significant numbers of migrants to diverse societies such as the UK frequently originate from much less diverse communities, there is relatively little consideration of how and why difference is understood in these places. In response, in this article I outline the consequences of migrant encounters with difference in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender. In doing so, I argue that migrant encounters significantly contribute to the broad body of the encounter literature and extend our understanding of the (trans)formative nature of meaningful contact with difference (cf. Valentine, 2008).

Crucially, I explore these issues by looking at post-2004 migration from Poland to the UK. In 2004 eight Central and Eastern European countries entered the European Union (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). One consequence of this was a drastic rise in international mobility along the East-West axis, with the largest migration flow observed between Poland and the UK (Black et al., 2010). While the extent of Polish migration to the UK is difficult to measure (Harris et al., 2012), according to the 2011 Census data over half a million Poles lived there early 2010s (ONS, 2011). The prominence of the Polish minority is further reflected in Polish being the second most spoken language after English in England and Wales (ONS, 2013) and Polish women opening the rank of non-UK-born women giving birth in the UK (ONS, 2012).

This migratory context is also important given the profoundly different geo-historical positionalities of Poland and the UK. Despite a longstanding history of diversity prior to World War II, Poland has become relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, nationality and religion in the aftermath of the war 1939-1945 and the communist regime 1945-1989 (Davies, 1981). This has been broadly argued to impact on distinctive understandings of sameness and difference within Polish society (Marciniak, 2009; Owczarzak, 2009). On the other hand, the UK is a 'superdiverse' post-colonial state with an uninterrupted history of immigration throughout 20th and early 21st century (Vertovec, 2007). It embraces broad representations of ethnicities, nationalities, religions, languages, social classes and complex intersections of these categories. Against this backdrop, it has been suggested that for many Polish migrants to heterogeneous societies such as the UK, the act of migration is followed by meaningful encounters with increased cultural diversity (Jordan, 2006). These experiences are potentially of great importance for the understanding of the effects of migrant encounters with difference. As such, they are illustrative of the challenges for living with diversity in Europe.

However, while there is substantial literature on various aspects of everyday lives of Central and Eastern European migrants (including Poles), less has been said about how they respond to diversity and difference in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender. Even though several researchers of East European migration suggest that understandings of these notions are prone to evolve post-migration (see e.g. Cook et al., 2011a, b; Datta, 2009a, b; Fox, 2013; McDowell et al., 2007; Siara, 2009), more comprehensive research is necessary to holistically explore how and why values and attitudes towards difference develop or change through sustained contact with 'the unfamiliar' or 'the other'. In particular, studies situated within geographies of encounter

paradigm (Valentine, 2008) and aiming for investigating migrant values and attitudes are likely to shed more light onto what happens when people from less diverse societies such as Poland face 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2002) in the context of migration.

This article draws upon extensive empirical material collected for a study designed to specifically address these issues (author). It builds upon multiple narrative interviews with a group of Polish post-2004 migrants to the diverse UK city of Leeds (Piekut et al., 2012). I begin the article by briefly reflecting on the debate around the 'capacity to live with difference' that has recently (re-)emerged within the geographies of encounter literature. Then, I critically engage with the research that has implicitly looked at migrant encounters through, for instance, investigating labour migrants' workplace experiences or conceptualisations of nationality and ethnicity. This is followed by a discussion of the methodologies that I employed. Finally, I explore the consequences of Polish migrants' encounters with difference by unpacking research participants' responses including favourable and prejudiced attitudes as well as a range of 'complicated' and contextualised stances towards difference.

Geographies of encounter and the 'capacity to live with difference'

Although the concept of encounter dates back to sociological research of the 1960s, it rather owes its recognition to contemporary geographers who from the early 2000s onwards have increasingly utilised it in the debates around social diversity, difference and multiculture. The earlier contributions to the geographies of encounter literature are largely situated within the urban context and draw attention to the importance of the everyday city experience (e.g. Binnie et al., 2007; Watson, 2009). Here, observation-based studies link mundane

interactions with the changing perceptions of otherness (Laurier and Philo, 2006; Wilson, 2011). While they remain crucial in understanding the significance of conviviality and urban etiquette (Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014), they have been suggested to imply that "low-level sociality and banal everyday civilities have enduring effects" (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012: 2050). It has been, indeed, acknowledged that much of urban contact between people and groups hardly count as encounter as it tends to be momentary and insignificant (Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2008).

In her reflections on geographies of encounter, Valentine (2008) argues that a significant part of the literature on cosmopolitanism and urban citizenship romanticizes public interactions and is based on an assumption that contact with difference translates into respect or greater openness towards diversity. In criticising this assumption, she explains that tolerance of others performed in civil encounters in public spaces is not the same as personal respect for various forms of difference. Inspired by the seminal work of Allport and his discussion of the contact hypothesis (1979 [1954]), Valentine (2008) explicates that rather than fleeting encounters, the so called meaningful encounters have a capacity to challenge and transform individual values and attitudes. Such encounters are at heart of this article.

A crucial space for meaningful interactions with difference seems to be what Amin (2002) has termed 'micro-publics' and recognised as workplace, schools, youth centres, sports clubs and other places of association. Following this understanding, social scientists have increasingly looked at 'sites of encounters' including neighbourhoods, schools and university campuses as well as means of transport (Andersson et al., 2012; Hemming, 2011; Leitner, 2011; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Watson, 2009; Wessendorf, 2013; Wilson, 2011). However, some significant spaces of contact with difference such as family and home,

workplace or leisure spaces – although addressed in some publications (e.g. Cook et al., 2011b; Harris and Valentine, forthcoming; Schuermans, 2013; Valentine et al., 2014; Wilson, 2013) - remain underexplored and require more scholarly attention, in particular with regard to migrants.

It is important to note that difference in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender has been central to geographies of encounter. Various studies illustrate that the presence of difference or minority groups initiates negotiations of sameness and otherness, inclusion and exclusion (Amin, 2002). For instance, by looking into how hetero-normative parishioners and clergy of New York Episcopalian churches narrate their encounters with the city's LGBTQ population, Andersson et al. (2011) investigated tensions between religion and sexuality. Specifically, they explored how certain places (e.g. churches) might serve as spaces of both inclusionary and exclusionary practices.

Importantly, in the geography literature personal encounters are frequently linked with the broader processes involving the development or change of values and attitudes towards difference. In a study of contact between Russian immigrants and local German residents in Eastern Berlin, Matejskova and Leitner (2011) notice that fleeting interactions between the representatives of both groups may reinforce pre-existing stereotypes about national or ethnic otherness. On the other hand, collaboration is likely to generate closer and more meaningful encounters that engender empathy and positive attitudes towards difference. Interestingly, favourable attitudes towards individual immigrants are rarely scaled up to the whole group. This resonates with Valentine's (2008: 332) argument that "in the context of negative encounters minority individuals are perceived to represent members of a wider social group, but in positive encounters minority individuals tend to be read only as individuals". In other words, negative encounters are more likely to change people's

opinions about a whole minority group for the worse, than positive encounters for the better.

As critically focused as it is, this literature has been nonetheless argued to predominantly concentrate on 'here' and 'now' of encounters (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012). Although a few authors (e.g. Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012) propose a processual approach to the study of encounters, and argue that they stretch beyond the present to include the past and the future, further research is needed to understand the consequences of encounters in terms of evolving values, attitudes and behaviour. In particular, more insights are necessary with regard to how positive or negative attitudes are developed, challenged or reinforced through meaningful interactions that take place in changing geo-historical and national contexts (Valentine et al., 2015).

Migrant encounters

Although migrants are still less visible in debates in geography on how to live with diversity, migrant values and attitudes towards difference have been addressed by a number of migration scholars, including the researchers of Eastern European and Polish migration. Siara (2009), for example, focused on how users of online discussion platforms for Polish migrants to the UK negotiated values and norms in relation to gender and ethnicity. She established that while a number of respondents referred to the patriarchal model of gender roles, others criticized such expectations and called for equality. She also found that although some users expressed prejudiced attitudes towards mixed race and/or inter-faith relationships, others produced a discourse of ethnic tolerance and openness towards difference. The study

demonstrates that the meaning of gender or ethnicity "may be heavily contested once living in a multicultural environment" (Siara 2009: 183).

In a similar vein, Datta (2009b) noticed that ideas of ethnicity, nationhood and gender were constantly reshaped by Polish construction workers in London, UK. In her own words, "earlier perceptions of difference get translated and transformed (...) as new attitudes towards others are formed in new places, under different structures of power" (2009b: 139). The changing nature of migrant values and attitudes towards difference is further implied by other studies of migration experience and transnational identities (e.g. Burrell, 2009; Ryan, 2010; White, 2010).

While there seems to be an ongoing discussion about how migrant understandings of sameness and difference are shaped through international mobility, migrant interactions with embodied difference are addressed less. In a study of neighbourhood and workplace encounters of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK, Cook et al. (2011b) note that for many 'newcomers' everyday proximity with difference does not open up spaces for engagement and break down prejudice or barriers of integration. Largely superficial, as the authors claim, "*rubbing-along-together* does not necessarily equate to good relations" (Cook et al., 2011b: 737) between the migrants and host communities which only 'tolerate' each other. Elsewhere Cook at al. (2011a) mention, however, that although for some migrants contact with social diversity contributes to the development or reinforcement of prejudice, for others the experience of multiculture is not only positive, but also personally enriching. Therefore, migrants (and Central and Eastern European migrants in particular) as well as their experiences in receiving societies cannot be conceptualised in homogeneous terms.

Significantly, in the context of East-West migration, the interplay between bodily encounters and unfavourable and hostile attitudes towards ethnic, national or religious

difference appears to gain a growing attention (Fox, 2013; McDowell, 2008, 2009; McDowell et al., 2007; Moroşanu and Fox, 2013; Parutis, 2011). It is important to acknowledge here, however, that these debates draw upon labour migration and, in contrast to non-migrant geographies of encounter, tend to investigate work-related interactions rather than wider relationships with difference. Labour migrants who, for various reasons (e.g. poor language skills), work below their actual qualifications have been reported to feel disadvantaged, devalued and deskilled in the UK (Currie, 2008). These sentiments - alongside the precarious positionality of some economic migrants – have been claimed to contribute to the development of less tolerant or racist attitudes towards difference (Cook et al., 2011a; McDowell, 2009; McDowell et al., 2007). While the arguably insecure or underprivileged position of some labour migrants might fuel negative perceptions of difference, it is crucial not to overlook the influence of other circumstances on the development of unfavourable attitudes towards the ethnic, national or religious Other. It has been, indeed, suggested that such attitudes may be affected by the conceptualization of whiteness and white privilege (Fox, 2013; McDowell, 2009; Parutis, 2011).

Notwithstanding the role the migration literature plays in exploring migrant understandings of, and interactions with difference, it raises further issues. First of all, by analogy to the critique of geography of encounter literature (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012), many writings into migrant perceptions of 'the different', seem to overestimate the effects of fleeting encounters and rarely include broader discussion on the consequences of meaningful contact. Also, given the prominence of the literature that specifically looks at labour migration and the workplace, more attention needs to be paid into how, when and in what circumstances encounters with diversity affect non-labour migrants' values and attitudes. Polish migrants in the UK are, for example, a highly diverse cohort in terms of

views, beliefs and approaches towards their own migration (Garapich, 2007). This suggest that through meaningful encounters with diversity they may possibly develop a wide range of stances towards difference beyond hostile and prejudiced attitudes. This is, however, less discussed as fewer studies holistically focus on diverse migrant samples and diverse responses towards embodied difference. Finally, migratory context needs to be more evident in researching meaningful migrant encounters. While the fact that many migrants to heterogeneous societies (such as the UK) come from less diverse communities is frequently acknowledged, less attention is paid into how certain migrant attitudes are possibly embedded in broader geo-historical and culture-specific understandings of difference. In this article, I address these gaps and extend the existing literature on migration experience, and the prevailing effects of migrant encounters with diversity and difference.

Study outline

This article draws upon 14 case studies each involving one post-2004 Polish migrant to Leeds, UK. As part of each case, I conducted multiple narrative interviews (at least two) with migrants as well as asked them to produce audio-diaries and complete a supplementary survey. In is important to stress, however, that in this article I only draw upon the interviews (n=32). This is because the audio-diary method generated predominantly general narratives about diversity and belonging (which I explore elsewhere, see author) and the survey was used to identify themes for interviews and to ensure that I did not miss any relevant demographic characteristics. The interviews, conducted between mid-2011 and mid-2012, lasted between 70 and 180 minutes and explored the nature of encounters with difference

prior to and after moving from Poland to the UK. As such, they explicitly addressed the consequences of migrant encounters.

In recruiting research participants, I was seeking people of various socio-economic backgrounds and diverse stances towards difference. With regard to stances, I strove to gather a group of people whose narratives disclosed a broad spectrum of responses to difference. With regard to participants' backgrounds, I tried to diversify the sample in terms of age, gender, family/marital status, education, occupation, religion/belief and length of stay in the UK. Given the size of the sample, I prioritized age (participants' ages varied between 21 and 51), gender (nine women and five men) and length of stay in the UK (arrivals between 2004 and 2011). While 'older' participants expressed more prejudiced views compered to 'younger' participants, the sample is too small to claim any effect of age on the data. Gender did not seem to influence participants' attitudes as both men and women expressed a range of stances towards difference. On the other hand, length of stay in the UK appeared to impact on participants' capacity to reflect on their lived experience. With the exception of one participant, who had lived in the UK for several months at the time of the first interview, all had spent there at least a couple of years (five years on average). They were, therefore, able to recall many examples of encounters with diversity and elaborate on how their ideas of difference developed or changed through migration.

Acknowledging that "people construct identities (however multiple, intersecting and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories" (Somers and Gibson, 1998: 38-39), I employed narrative analysis to explore the empirical material that I collected. Narratives are social products created from, within or against diverse culturally and historically specific stories and contexts which delimit what can be said and what shall count as meaningful or nonsensical (Maynes et al., 2008). By employing

narrative analysis I was able to explore relationships, interconnections and socially constructed understandings that commonly occur within narrative accounts.

Given the broadly debated significance of positionality for the research process (Kim, 2012), I carefully considered the influence of my position on the collected data (i.e. Polish migrant researcher studying migrants of the same ethno-linguistic background). I found it particularly consequential with regard to the language research participants employed to refer to difference and assumptions about shared understandings of otherness they made (for details see author). The implication of this intricate positionality was also the collection of data in Polish and a necessity to translate it into English for dissemination. Here, the main challenge involved maintaining the comparability of meanings between the original utterance and the translated piece (author).

I chose Leeds as a research site because it offers a range of possibilities of encounters with difference alongside the axes of ethnicity, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender (Piekut et al., 2012). Indeed, the city has a proportion of minority ethnic population close to the national average (15% against 14% in England according to the 2011 Census). Its significant Pakistani and British Pakistani community together with other South East Asian groups constitute over a half of the city's non-White population (according to the 2011 Census). In addition, although Leeds represents a successful transition from an industrial city into the post-industrial metropolitan area of relative prosperity, it nonetheless embraces areas of deprivation and exclusion shaped by ethnic and class dynamics as well as immigration (Stillwell and Phillips, 2006).

All of the quotations I explore in this article are taken from my translated transcriptions of the interviews with Polish migrants. I use three ellipsis dots in brackets to indicate that a small section of text has been removed to facilitate readability. I also provide clarifying

pieces of information in square brackets. The names I use in the article are all pseudonyms to ensure participants' anonymity.

The consequences of migrant encounters

While, unsurprisingly, some day-to-day encounters with difference explored in this study remained fleeting (and thus hardly disrupting personal values and attitudes), many interactions were argued by the research participants to be meaningful (Valentine, 2008). As such, they resulted in the development, revision or change of values and attitudes towards difference. This involved a range of personal stances from strong negative prejudice, through 'complicated', contextualised and/or situated responses, to acceptance, familiarity and engagement.

Crucially, although in the interviews research participants were asked to elaborate on their values and attitudes towards various axes of difference, ethnicity, religion and sexuality (non-whiteness, non-Christian religions and non-heteronormativity in particular) were more extensively discussed than class, social status and gender. The preoccupation of respondents with these axes of difference should be understood against the backdrop of what is socially constructed as difference in the Polish context. Non-white skin colour, for example, has been suggested to draw increased attention of Polish migrants due to the relative whiteness of the Polish society (Ryan, 2010). The prominent role of Catholicism in Poland, as well as its capacity to shape understandings of sexuality, has been also broadly acknowledged (Borowik, 1996; Marody and Mandes, 2005).

In the three sub-sections below, I explore examples of the consequences of migrant encounters with difference which are illustrative of the broader findings of the study. While

some research participants expressed either favourable or unfavourable attitudes (this is explored in the first two sub-sections), the majority of participants negotiated highly contextualised and/or fluid stances (discussed in the last sub-section). This draws attention to the predominance of complex, or perhaps 'complicated', responses towards difference.

Towards familiarity and engagement with difference

While somewhat underappreciated in the broad body of the encounter literature, positive effects of encounters with difference were narrated by a number of Polish migrants to Leeds. Julia, for example, a part-time teacher of English as a foreign language who specialises in teaching adults, extensively reflected on her encounters with Muslim women of various nationalities.

> I developed my attitudes here [in the UK]. (…) I faced a huge diversity here. Positive, they [her feelings] are very positive – especially towards women – Muslim women. Their care for family, their role in family. (…) I feel so (…) enriched with experience with these people. (…) During these five years I met so many new people, from so many unfamiliar countries. I know a lot about Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran now. (…) I wouldn't be able to learn this stuff [in Poland]. So, it's great I met that many people.
>
> Julia (female, aged 28, arrived to the UK in 2006)

In the interviews, Julia stressed that repetitive and intense interactions with female Muslim students enabled her to become familiar with Islamic traditions. As many participants in this

study, she had never met a Muslim person while she had lived in Poland and found such encounters particularly formative in terms of understanding of Muslim communities in the UK and more broadly. Furthermore, it was through such encounters that she developed many favourable attitudes as well as strong willingness to engage with difference on a daily basis.

Similarly to the case of Julia, Lena, a charity worker, admitted becoming familiar with ethno-national and religious difference through her workplace encounters.

> Generally speaking, I have now a greater understanding of people from various religious and cultural groups – for example people from Pakistan or India. (…) Also, people from Africa. I worked with such people… Apart from the fact they were from different countries, they had various problems. For example, I worked with people who looked for jobs or people who were refugees. (…) Being among them made me understand why they (…) behaved in certain ways and where it came from and why they had certain opinions.
>
> Lena (female, aged 29, arrived to the UK in 2005)

Julia's and Lena's narratives suggest that both respondents developed favourable attitudes as a consequence of encountering difference. Importantly, in both cases the majority of these encounters were work-related. Migrant workplace encounters have been so far largely conceptualized in terms of prejudiced and even racist attitudes (Cook et al., 2011a; McDowell, 2009; McDowell et al., 2007). This resonates with a broader tendency in the literature to look into exclusion and negative experiences of otherness at work (Harris and

Valentine, forthcoming). Against this backdrop, less attention has been paid to favourable attitudes towards the ethnic, national or religious Others that are shaped through the experience of working in diverse environments. Julia's and Lena's workplace encounters are very significant in this respect and illustrate that greater understanding of difference, sense of familiarity and engagement with diversity are as well likely to be the consequences of migrant encounters.

Becoming prejudiced

While the cases of Julia and Lena demonstrate that some migrants develop favourable attitudes towards difference, the case of Irena and Piotr may suggest otherwise. Due to her much poorer English, Irena has been forced to work below her skills ever since she arrived to the UK. At the time of the fieldwork, she worked in a popular Leeds restaurant employing people of various ethno-national backgrounds. This everyday contact with difference resulted in very strong negative prejudice towards Black people and the revision of her 'ambivalent' attitude pre-migration.

> I've become a racist when I came to England. I'd never been a racist
> before - I'd always been compassionate towards Black inhabitants of the
> globe. Have you ever seen this TV series "Roots"? It was about Kunta
> Kinte and his life history. (…) So, this TV series used to be very popular
> and everybody in Poland was so compassionate towards Black people. I
> was the same! (…) Now I work with Black people and I observe [them] –
> believe me, I think that some people should stand there with a whip and
> supervise this whoever person who cannot work. They cannot work. (…)

There are two brothers in my restaurant (…) X. is a cook. He's amazing.

(…) Hard-working, great guy. Whereas Y. is just a layabout. When I see

that he does nothing and takes money for it, I'm just furious. So,

generally, I cannot tell everybody's like this. (…) But, in the majority of

cases - they [Black people] unfortunately don't work. And, sometimes I

have the impression that they believe they should be protected in this

country due to the fact that they're Black. Sometimes I also feel our

managers are afraid to tell them something, so as they're not accused of

racism.

Irena (female, aged 50, arrived to the UK in 2008)

Throughout the interviews Irena was strongly convinced her attitude towards Black people pre-migration was appropriate and far from racist. This attitude, that could be described as benevolent racism (Whitley and Kite, 2009), was based on the feeling of compassion which was reinforced by TV series, films and literature openly exoticizing difference. While in the quote above she mentions one title only, in the interviews she referred to books and films telling stories of 'good' or 'oppressed' Black characters (e.g. 'Uncle's Tom Cabin' by Harriet Beecher Stowe). Irena's subsequent move to the UK and a meaningful encounter with Black people at work completely redefined her ideas and attitudes and made her aware of being racist. Interestingly, this prejudiced attitude seems embedded in Irena's personal work ethic which she misconceives as a feature dependant on racial belonging.

A similar set of racist views was expressed by Piotr, a factory worker. Likewise Irena, in the interviews Piotr was quite explicit about becoming prejudiced post-migration as a

consequence of intense, and mostly work-related, encounters with ethnic and national difference.

> Have I changed? I guess, I have a different approach to other nations and ethnicities – Black people for example. You know, I've been working under Chinese people for the last six months. And, I'm truly convinced that they exploit people much more than Pakistanis. I consider Pakistanis quite lazy. And, Chinese people – believe me – they are so greedy. (…) I feel I couldn't live with a Black person in the same house. (…) And, I also wouldn't like to live with Pakistanis. I could live with English people. So, this is influenced by the skin colour, I guess. Although, English people are also slovenly and I really like order.

> Piotr (male, aged 40, arrived to the UK in 2004)

It is important to note here that the majority of positions Irena and Piotr held after moving to the UK were low-skilled, including production-line work or cleaning, and frequently below their actual qualifications. Although labour migrant identities and attitudes are clearly differentiated by age, gender, skills, skin colour and class (McDowell, 2008), low-skilled migrants in the UK have been argued to use stereotypical assumptions about embodied attributes of their co-workers (McDowell et al., 2007). In the context of their precarious positions, feelings of being disadvantaged or devalued (e.g. Currie, 2008) as well as competition for economic resources, this often results in new and deeper divisions among various groups of workers as well as racial, religious or other prejudices (Cook et al., 2011a,

2011b; Fox, 2013; McDowell et al., 2007; Parutis, 2011). Furthermore, such attitudes often mobilise racialized discourses associated with many derogatory characteristics such as laziness or a bad work ethic (Fox, 2013; Parutis, 2011).

'In-between' and 'complicated' attitudes

While the narratives I have discussed thus far suggest that the consequences of migrant encounters with difference involve development or revision of both favourable and unfavourable attitudes, it needs to be reiterated that the effects of encounters are likely to be much more complex. As such, they may (and often do) include situated or mixed stances (i.e. both favourable and prejudiced). Furthermore, in line with my discussion earlier in this article, many of these attitudes are also developed, revised or changed beyond the workplace – in various other settings (e.g. school, home) and through diverse relationships with difference (e.g. partnerships, friendships). This was evident in the narratives of the majority of participants of this study. Rather than becoming unconditionally favourable or unfavourable, their attitudes were negotiated, fluid (i.e. 'in-between' prejudiced and positive) and 'messy' reflecting the complicatedness of the social world and human relations. I illustrate this 'messiness' below by exploring four distinctive examples.

The first example embraces the narratives of Filip and Iga both living and working in diverse environments close to one of Leeds' universities. These participants argued that they had never encountered a non-heterosexual person before moving to the UK. Both also claimed that they developed strong positive attitudes towards gay men through their friendships post-migration. Below is how they narrated these encounters as well as their feelings towards non-heteronormativity.

I hadn't known any homosexual or bisexual person before I came to the UK. (…) I have [now] very friendly relations with a few people who are homosexual. (…) They are really well-organized, have this amazing eye for details. (…) What I'm also jealous of is their skill to combine colours, clothes, their ability to be very tactful and sensitive and empathic. And, it's very interesting that these features are repeated every time I meet a new homosexual person. (…) This refers to men mainly. Because, I had an experience with a lesbian and she hated men terribly.

Filip (male, aged 28, arrived to the UK in 2005)

I was thinking how I would react if I had met somebody of a different sexual orientation [in Poland]. And I thought that I could have some issues towards him or her. But now, having met them – I believe they're very often more wonderful people than we [heterosexual people]. (…) They're not so hypocritical as we. (…) I have nothing against gay people and civil partnerships. But, I don't think it's normal that they raise children. Because - if we look at it - there are two males or two females. And, no matter how much they try – I think a kid gets harmed. (…) I don't want to insult them in any way (…). But, I don't think they would be good parents. I know there are families with a father and a mother, an alcoholic family for example, and in such a family a kid doesn't get the upbringing he or she should get. But, at least there's this male-female model preserved.

Iga (female, aged 30, moved to the UK in 2005)

It seems that despite their favourable attitudes (Filip and Iga, indeed, truly enjoy the company of their gay friends), both respondents draw clear boundaries between the imagined 'us' and 'them', hetero- and non-heterosexual people. While engaging with negotiations of the acceptable and the unacceptable, Iga in particular appears to suggest that raising children is a privilege reserved for hetero-normative people. More curiously, she implies that a dysfunctional family (exemplified here by a figure of an alcoholic parent) is a more appropriate environment for a child than a same-sex family. Although various studies illustrate that diverse family arrangements are practiced in Poland, understandings of family in heterosexual terms still dominates the Polish public discourse (Mizielińska, 2010). It is furthermore strongly embedded in the hegemonic narratives of Polishness that Polish migrants to the UK have been argued to employ (author). This may be a reason why Iga fails to recognise her attitude as prejudice and strongly believes her approach towards her gay friends is favourable and appropriate. Above all, both narratives demonstrate that, while Filip and Iga appear to experience meaningful (positive) encounters, their stereotypical understandings of difference rather than being challenged are continuously reinforced.

The second example of the complicatedness of migrant attitudes towards difference is the story of Magda. While happily married to a Muslim migrant of Northern-African background and describing her inter-faith (Catholic-Muslim) relationship as transcending religious and cultural divides, in the interviews Magda expressed a range of mixed feelings (including prejudice) towards Muslim communities and Islam. This is demonstrated in a quote below in which Magda admits that she and her husband have a profound (yet consciously neglected) dilemma related to their future children's religious attachments.

We still don't agree about that. (…) I'd prefer my children to be of my religion and he'd prefer the kids to be raised in his. So, as for now – we don't have children. But, I don't know how we could solve it. We can adopt a child. If we adopt a child, this kid can be raised in a religion he or she was born in. (…) I don't know what we'll do. Personally, if it is a boy – I'll have nothing against [him being Muslim]. But, if it's a girl – I'd prefer her not to be [Muslim]. They [women] do have limited rights. (…) If my daughter was Muslim and in the future had a husband who's like my own husband, there's absolutely no problem. But, my husband is quite unique when I compare him to the majority of [Muslim] people I know.

Magda (female, aged 29, moved to the UK in 2007)

This quote demonstrates that Magda's complicated, yet predominantly positive, encounter with a Muslim person does not appear to influence her attitude towards the whole group, i.e. Muslim people (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Valentine, 2008). Indeed, Magda perceives her husband as exceptional in comparison to other Muslims, men in particular. This only reinforces her prejudice and mobilizes racialized as well as gendered discourses associated with the alleged domination of Muslim men and oppression of women (Said, 2003 [1978]; Tarlo, 2007). Magda would not want her daughter to be Muslim implying that she might as a Muslim woman be oppressed in the future. At the same time, she would not oppose for her son to be Muslim. Even though she continuously experiences largely positive encounters with religious difference at home, her prejudiced attitudes towards Muslim men

and the assumed oppressive power-relations in Muslim communities seem unlikely to be challenged.

Magda's narrative is also interesting, because it contributes to and extends the understanding of geographies of home and/or intimate encounters which remain largely underexplored (Schuermans, 2013; Valentine et al., 2014). In particular, it suggests that such issues as family roles, home-making and raising children are prone to fuel tensions and mobilize prejudiced discourses. This echoes the significance of family values for many Polish migrants to the UK I have noted earlier in this article (i.e. Iga) as well as elsewhere (author).

The next example of the 'messiness' of the effects of migrant responses to difference is the narrative of Marek. While many research participants expressed complex attitudes towards singular axis of difference, Marek appeared to develop attitudes towards the intersection of two (or more) categories of difference (e.g. class and ethnicity; gender, religion and ethnicity). This tendency is also inferred by Magda and Filip, quoted earlier, who seem to hold differing views about Muslim men and women (Magda), and gay men and lesbians (Filip). It is, however, most evident in the narrative of Marek below. Marek used to live in a large city in the United States prior to moving to the UK. In the interviews, he clearly differentiated between middle-class Black people and Black working-class youth.

> I developed some prejudices towards Black people there [in the US].
> They grew even bigger when I came here [the UK]. (...) It's not about the
> whole race. (...) It's about the Black minority which lives on benefits. (...)
> We used to live in a block of flats. There was a guy living above us, he
> must have been from Africa. He was terribly loudly. (...) So, it influenced
> me and made me think that they [Black people] cannot live in a

community. But, I also met many Black people who were very eloquent, good persons, many of them taught me (…) – they were really great people. I think that unless it's a person who wears a suit, he or she will probably be loudly, may look for [troubles] and is not capable of living in a community.

Marek (male, aged 32, moved to the UK in 2007)

Marek's prejudice towards the intersection of ethnicity and class is particularly well reflected in the metaphor he uses ('wearing a suit') to differentiate between educated, as he implies, middle-class Black people and ill-mannered, as he suggests, Black working-class youth. Suit is here not only a powerful symbol of inclusion into the group of 'respectful' citizens Marek identifies with, but also a rhetorical tool allowing the respondent to legitimise and rationalize his prejudice (Valentine, 2010).

The final example of 'complicated' migrant attitudes includes the narratives of Piotr and Iga (both quoted earlier). These narratives are illustrative of what I term 'situated attitudes', i.e. the attitudes towards the same category of difference that were argued by the study participants to differ in the UK and Polish context. In the two quotes below, Piotr and Iga elaborate on the 'situated-ness' of their feelings towards social status (homelessness). While these respondents' interactions with homeless people in Leeds were rather limited in comparison to other cases explored in this article, they were meaningful because of their repetitive nature and capacity to disrupt the previously held understandings and attitudes.

I think there should be no homeless people in this country [the UK]. (…) Because you can achieve everything here, right? I'm not speaking of

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having amazing education – you can achieve things with a very simple profession. (…) In Poland it's slightly different. I always felt sorry for these people. I still feel so, but I feel less sorry here [the UK]. Because, I know that with a minimal effort they could improve their situation and standard of living. In our country [Poland] it's slightly different.

Piotr (male, aged 40, arrived to the UK in 2004)

The situation in Poland is much worse – I mean financially and politically. I think that it's much more probable that a person becomes homeless in Poland than here [in the UK] – and I can understand being homeless there. However, I cannot understand it here… A person must be choosing to live like this. It sounds badly, but from my perspective - a person who came here without the knowledge of English and managed to start a life – I cannot understand why somebody able to speak English has this sort of a problem.

Iga (female, aged 30, moved to the UK in 2005)

Clearly, Piotr's and Iga's narratives demonstrate that their attitudes towards homeless people are to a significant degree place dependent. What is in the respondents' words 'understandable' in the Polish context, seems to be stigmatised while encountered in the UK. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that this attitude may be fuelled by the broader understanding of the UK as a society where personal or professional success is 'easily' achievable. Similar construction of the UK against Poland has been discussed by Galasińska (2010) who has looked into Polish migratory discourse in the context of postcommunist

transformation. The author has noted that Polish migrants to the UK tend to attribute 'the normal' to the British context while 'the abnormal' to the Polish one. In the migrants' stories Galasińska (2010) investigated Poland was, indeed, depicted as 'a pit' or 'the middle ages' – a place of lacking work opportunities and offering lower standards of living. Importantly, such discourses seem to further draw upon a broader tendency among recent Polish migrants to the UK to essentialise Poland and the UK as binaries (author).

Piotr's and Iga's narratives further evidence that beyond individual experience, migrant attitudes towards difference are also prone to be shaped by broader migratory contexts as well as and culturally-specific discourses of sameness and difference. This was also evident in the narratives of Iga, cited earlier, whose understanding of sexuality appears to be embedded in distinctive conceptualisation of hetero-normative family as a core Polish value.

The empirical material that I have collected through interviews with Polish migrants to Leeds suggests that through migration between two geo-historical contexts and an increased meaningful contact with diversity, migrants are likely to develop, enhance or revise their values and attitudes towards difference. These 'new' stances include not only positive and prejudiced understandings and attitudes, but also a whole set of 'in-between' and 'complicated' approaches. Crucially, what makes these encounters distinctive from the encounters between, and among, non-migrant populations are culturally-specific understandings of difference that some migrants mobilise while encountering difference and trying to 'make sense' of it. This is particularly visible in how some respondents in this study conceptualised family and child rearing or homelessness.

Conclusions

By exploring encounters with difference in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, social status, sexuality and gender, in this article I have investigated how people's values and attitudes towards diversity are developed, revised or interrupted through migration. I have focused on meaningful encounters argued to "change values and attitudes and translate beyond the specifics of the individual moment" (Valentine, 2008: 325). While Valentine (2008) has conceptualised such meaningful contact as disrupting negative attitudes and generating respect, I understand 'meaningful-ness' of encounters more broadly, as a capacity to form, alter or complicate people's feelings about difference.

In the article, I have specifically looked at post-2004 migrants from Poland (a postcommunist country relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, nationality and religion) to the UK (a super-diverse postcolonial state). This case is illustrative of the challenges that arise with increased migration between distinctive socio-historical contexts. Although it is unique in a sense that geo-historical positionality of Poland may produce distinctive understandings of difference, the consequences of encounters I discuss remain relevant to broad migratory contexts.

The article contributes to the geographies of encounter literature in a number of ways. Firstly, it investigates migrant population thus far frequently overlooked in a broader discussion on how to live with diversity (e.g. Amin, 2002; Cook et al., 2011b; Neal et al., 2013; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2013). Secondly, by looking at various circumstances in which migrant encounters take place, it illustrates that home and workplace, relatively underresearched until recently (e.g. Harris and Valentine, forthcoming; Schuermans, 2013), are indeed likely to be sites of meaningful (migrant) contact with difference. Finally, in attempting to understand the complex nature of migrant values and attitudes, the article

considers what migrants 'bring' to encounters. In doing so, it recognises that people's values and attitudes (e.g. understandings of family or social status) are embedded in broader geo-historical and culture-specific understandings of difference (Valentine et al., 2015). This is something the future research needs to take particular account of. Otherwise, there is a risk that the discussion of how difference is produced, lived or mobilised in the context of migration (or by migrant communities vis-a-vis host society population) becomes superficial and incomplete.

Furthermore, the article extends and nuances emerging debates on East-West migration in Europe and migrant experiences of difference, so far selectively explored in disciplinary literatures (i.e. mostly with regard to prejudiced attitudes, labour migrants and their workplace interactions). By showing how Polish migrants' values and attitudes may develop, are revised or changed, it draws attention to a complex repertoire of stances being the consequence of meaningful encounters. While a few cases explored in this study suggest that some migrants develop prejudice towards difference, the issue that is often exclusively explored with regard to Central and Eastern European migrants to the UK (e.g. Fox, 2013; McDowell et al., 2007; Parutis, 2011), other demonstrate that favourable attitudes, acceptance and engagement with diversity are also likely to be the effects of migrant encounters. Crucially, the article stresses that alongside explicitly positive or negative attitudes, the majority of research participants expressed what could be described as 'in-between' or 'complicated' feelings. By shifting from openness to prejudice, respectful to essentialist discourses, these stances remained fluid, selective and contextualised. As such, they are reflective of the intricacies of lived experience of difference (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012).

Importantly, in the article I have looked at what could be described as post-encounter and have paid less attention to the pre-encounter (values and attitudes towards difference that migrants held upon arrival to the UK). This is not to suggest that migrant values and attitudes are not influenced by experiences of individual migrants prior to migration, their socialisation or personal dispositions. Rather, my intention is to stress that through migration values and attitudes are likely to further evolve in various ways. Inspired by recent studies (e.g. Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012), I understand values and attitudes as processes that stretch beyond the present to involve the past and the future.

This study suggests that encounters with diversity have a profound impact on the capacity of migrants to live with difference. It illustrates that migrants may respond to difference in complex ways which are likely to be informed by context- and culture-specific discourses of 'otherness'. Against the backdrop of accelerated migration in Europe, and globally, these findings are of particular importance for further academic as well as policy debates.

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