

Migration and Europeanisation



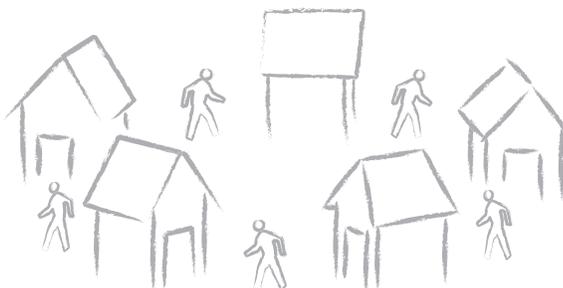
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Changing identities and values
among Polish pendulum migrants
and their Belgian employers



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
Chapter I: MIGRATION	19
I. Migration from Poland after 1989	19
II. Poles in Belgium and Leuven	36
Chapter II: ENCOUNTERS	45
I. Social capital and the collective identity of Polish pendulum migrants in Leuven	45
1. Social capital	45
2. Social capital in the life of migrants	49
3. Social capital vs. social identity	55
a. Residents	56
b. Guests	64
c. Commuters	73
d. Diasporians	77
4. Identities in flux	81
II. Migrant identity – between homeliness and foreignness	83
III. Belgian employers towards their domestic workers	102
1. Circumstances	103
2. Contacts	108
3. Relations	116
Chapter III: INFLUENCES	125
I. Belgian employers' changing perception	125
1. Stereotypes	126
2. Comparison	135
3. Europeanisation	142
4. Individualisation	147
II. Polish workers' changing values	149
1. Identity and civic society	149

2. Stereotypes.....	153
3. Cultural and social pluralism	156
4. Tolerance	162
5. Trust	165
CONCLUSIONS	175
BIBLIOGRAPHY	183

INTRODUCTION

Geographical identities have, until recently, mainly been based on national or regional elements. In their contacts with foreigners, people have primarily identified themselves with their local community, region, ethnicity and/or nation. This territorial identification seems to impede a common European nation-building; only towards non-Europeans do Europeans present themselves as Europeans, but towards each other, they always stress their national or other geographical origins.

However, the national and ethnic weighting in identities seems to have decreased gradually over the last fifteen years. As a result of disappearing borders, people from different European countries have got to know each other better and better. Whereas in the past this concerned only limited groups (intellectual elites, mixed marriages, etc.), contacts are now growing on a mass scale. More and more people travel and discover new regions in Europe that had previously been off the beaten track, or migrate to richer areas and start a new life there, without losing contact with their homeland (Stola 1998; Moya 2007; Fihel, Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2007).

Migration inside Europe affects the process of European integration (Okólski 2001). The interactions between migrants and members of receiving societies have two dimensions: the individual, when thinking about people who interact, and the holistic in the case of the confronted cultures which are represented by these individuals who act (see Mucha 2006: 251-252). One can notice that as a consequence of such contacts these newly established social relations are primarily ethnic in character.

The consequences of these contacts and relations are not completely clear. One could assume that they have an influence on identity building. People indeed get to know each other and discover common features, such as similar historical developments, shared stereotypes or percep-

tions of other groups, both European and non-European, or common values that distinguish them from non-Europeans. If such a process exists, it could be called 'Europeanisation'. This phenomenon is understood in different ways (Börzel, Risse 2000; Bukowski, Piattoni, Smyrl 2003; Checkel 2001; Dell'Olio 2005; Featherston, Radaelli 2003; Harmsen, Wilson 2000; Kurczewska 2008; Olsen 2000; Spohn, Triandafyllidou 2002). All meanings have a dynamic character. In the first and most popular approach, Europeanisation is treated as a process of European integration in a normative and institutional context. It means the voluntary limitation of a state's prerogatives, replaced by supra-national structures connected with the European Union (Kurczewska 2008: 32-33). In a second understanding, Europeanisation is tied up with a political and economic order. In this understanding it focuses on different styles of political activity specified for Europe. In a third approach, Europeanisation is a cultural process. It means the formation, construction and reconstruction of European identity (Bauman 2004). This Europeanisation process focuses on a search for the basic and fundamental elements of European identification. It is this cultural understanding of Europeanisation that is used in our research and in this book. Generally speaking, it means for us a process of assessment of common meanings on environmental, social, and cultural reality by Europeans.

However, there still remains the question of whether this Europeanisation really takes place and this is the key issue of our research project. In this book we want to analyse to what extent the current intensification of contact between different European ethnicities has had an influence on the integration of identities and the development of a common European identity. We do this from the perspective of migration and consider how European migrants in other European countries – obviously in comparison with other kinds of contacts – have played a role in Europeanisation, i.e. in the construction of a common European identity.

Indeed migration seems to be one of the most far-reaching tools in the establishment of contacts. It is much more intensive than, for instance, travel which takes place over a short term only and does not necessarily lead to long-term contacts. Many people only visit tourist areas (holiday resorts, historical city centres, museums) and do not become acquainted with the realities of life and people there. Migration, on

the other hand, is more permanent and leads to deeper contacts. It therefore deserves more attention, although one should be aware that it can also be problematic. Most migrants within Europe are the so-called commuting labour, irregular migrants (Jandl 2007), pendulum or incomplete migrants (Łukowski 2001; Okólski 2001a). The majority of them sustain close ties with members of their home society (Basch, Glick-Schiller, Blanc-Szanton 1994). They leave their fatherland only temporarily, settle in another European country for some time, but still want to return home in the future. They become transnational migrants who thus live across borders in this way (Grillo 2007: 200). Their life is divided into a period of emigration and a period in the society of origin. As a result, they maintain contact with their home country and with their native community in the host country, and are not inclined to integrate themselves into the host society. This could have a negative impact on their contact with the local population in the host country and mutual Europeanisation. This is one of the aspects that are investigated in our research.

However, we will not only be analysing the migrants' identities, but also that of their hosts and this is one of the original scopes of this book. We investigate if the members of the receiving society are influenced by their foreign contact with migrants, and thus also subject to Europeanisation. In researching both sides of the migration process we have tried to transcend in our analysis the idea that "the national perspective of politics and society, as well as the methodological nationalism of political science, sociology, history, and law, confirm and strengthen each other in their definitions of reality" (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 5). Moreover, the research of migrants and their hosts' identities can teach us about the place of migration in the Europeanisation processes.

The new European identities of pendulum migrants have developed as a result of the contact and interaction with the receiving societies. In our opinion, these identities are based on elements of a cultural hybrid (Werbner 1997). On what particular factors are they constructed and how do migrants and their hosts bridge ethnic and linguistic borders? There are several kinds of elements of a cultural hybrid. The first is a shared history and culture (e.g. translations of literary works), but it is limited to the elite. The common distinction of other groups (e.g. communities of Muslim migrants) is another one. There is also the recognition of common values which means that migrants become familiar with

many values and features of the host society they were distant to before (e.g. democracy) as well as those unknown in the society of origin (cultural pluralism). Their living conditions during the emigration period could teach them other values, such as social responsibility or tolerance towards other ethnicities and social groups. Inversely, the host society could be affected by the values of the migrants they have contact with, such as by their mutual assistance and solidarity. Concrete contacts as such also lead to a more tolerant attitude of the hosts towards other ethnicities.

The concrete research presented in this book was conducted on Polish migrant workers in the Belgian town of Leuven, a provincial city which is host to the best known and biggest university in the country. The choice for this case study is based on several factors. Polish workers are one of the best known and most widespread European migrant workers in Europe. Since the beginning of the 1990s, several thousand, even tens of thousands, Poles have worked in many Western European cities (Okólski 2007; Kolarska-Bobińska 2007; Ministerstwo Gospodarki 2007; Kępińska 2006; CBOS 2006; CBOS 2007). Many of them have been residing there for a decade or more, and have thus had the opportunity to be Europeanised. Most of them have maintained contact with the homeland, and are even forced to return regularly as, in most Western European countries, they could – up until recently – only stay legally with a tourist visa. This makes them extremely interesting, as they can not only inform us of their views on Western European society, but also on their perceptions of the Polish homeland. In this way, one can see to what extent they are alienated from Poland or, on the contrary, influence their compatriots who remain at home.

The best known destinations of Polish workers are the United Kingdom (especially after 2004), the USA, Germany and France. However, because of its location between those bigger host countries, there is also a tradition of Polish migration in Belgium: political refugees in the 19th century, the recruited labour force in the interwar period, Displaced Persons after WWII (in both 1940 and 1950, more than 50,000 Poles lived in Belgium), refugees during the Cold War (especially in the 1980s, when the seat of “Solidarność” abroad was in Brussels). While the latter waves certainly produced networks that started chain migrations after 1989, Belgium became attractive for other reasons also, such as the

market of second-hand cars near Roeselare. As a result, one estimate states that nowadays, 50,000 Poles live in Brussels and the same number in Antwerp, and several other thousand in smaller cities.

Certainly these migrants in smaller cities have not been studied before. Yet, they must be even more interesting for research on the changing identities and paths of Europeanisation. On the one hand, the host scene – a provincial city – has been more closed to foreign cultures and identities than a cosmopolitan capital such as Brussels. On the other hand, Poles in smaller cities form a smaller community and have not developed the organisational life, including Polish shops and even businesses, which exist in Brussels and Antwerp. In this way, it is a better case to study the non-institutionalised contacts between guests and hosts. Leuven, which is inhabited by between several hundred and perhaps even more than one thousand Poles (from a total population of 90,000 people), is all the more interesting because it is a Flemish city. Research on the Belgian Polonia has always concentrated on the French-speaking part of the country (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2001; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2002; Kuźma 2004; Kuźma 2005), among others because Polish scholars are much more familiar with the French language than with Dutch. However, the Flemish part of the country is important too: it is richer, more problematic (the far-right Vlaams Belang is a Flemish party), and could be more difficult to integrate into (the Dutch language could be an obstacle for Polish migrant workers when making contacts). Yet another advantage is the absence of orchestrated media campaigns from the authorities (such as the one of the *plombier polonais* or ‘Polish plumber’ in France), which allows us to analyse spontaneous processes.

This research is important in order to learn more about the construction of European identities. Migration is a mass phenomenon in Europe nowadays and plays a crucial role in the building of contacts between European nations, yet we still remain very much in the dark as to these processes. As a result, politics ignores the phenomenon and its possibilities. If a policy towards migration is made, it only strives for short-term and economic objectives: sending countries such as Poland encourage the migration so that it can give new impetus to economic development. The host countries, such as Belgium, take only the interests (or rhetoric) of native workers into account, and postpone the opening of the labour market for the inhabitants of the new EU member states. Although Poles

are living and working in Belgium, they are not subject to policy-making, and remain in a grey zone of vagueness and obscurity.

A better understanding of contacts and their influence on European identity building is the first step to better guidance and policy-making which is not based solely on economic terms and tries to utilise migrants in the Europeanisation process. In this way, the research wants to pull the presence of Polish pendulum workers from the sphere of prejudice and stereotypes, of economic interests and social problems, and analyse new, positive functions.

While this research is new, it obviously touches on several fields where intensive research has been done in the last years. It also should be underlined that the project was conducted in an interdisciplinary way (Castles 2007: 353-355) by scholars with different specialisations (sociologists, anthropologists, Slavonic specialists and historians). This combination has led to research that is important from several perspectives, the most concrete one being Polish migration. Several scholars have already conducted research on migration movements, living and working circumstances, juridical aspects of their stay abroad as well as the organisational and social life of Poles in Belgium (Siewiera 1995; Kuźma 2004; Kuźma 2005; Grzymała-Każłowska 2001; Grzymała-Każłowska 2001a; Grzymała-Każłowska 2002). This prior research obviously provides us with a perfect framework, but also shows us some limitations. It analyses the Polish presence in the biggest cities, mostly in the French-speaking ones, and neglects the migrants in smaller Flemish cities. It concentrates on the most visible migrants (e.g. members of organisations) at the expense of individualised migrants that do not belong to associations or networks, but are certainly as important. It also deals with primarily sociological questions, and does not work from an anthropological perspective. The same goes largely for the research on Polish migration in other European and non-European countries (Eade, Drinkwater, Garapich 2007; Heffner, Solga 1999; Jończy 2003; Korczyńska 2003; Kowalska-Angelelli 2007; Kropiwec, King-O'Riain 2006; Ludwiczuk 2000; Rauziński 2000; Romaniszyn 1996; Sakson 2005; Slany, Małek 2005; Solga 2002).

The project can also give us new perspectives on the attitudes of Western European societies, in this case the Belgian one, towards immigrants. Because of its political and social importance, this is a popular

research theme (Leman 1997; Leman 2001; van den Broeck, Foblets 2004). However, it has largely concentrated on non-European migrants (political refugees, illegal immigrants, Muslim immigrants), who are much more 'problematic' in Western societies. In this way, it generalises migration and puts European migrants on the same level as non-Europeans. It is clear that this is a faulty generalisation and, moreover, such research does not pay attention to Europeanisation processes.

The research was done by means of in-depth interviews, in which open questions were answered orally. This is the only way to discover shades and nuances, and also leaves the door open for new findings. The questionnaire created for the interviews with the Polish respondents was divided into five sections. The first dealt with the decision to migrate and the initial period of stay in Belgium. The second included questions about relations with and attitudes towards members of the host society, as well as with migrants of other nationalities living in Belgium. The third was about contacts with the home society; relations with close friends and family who stayed in Poland. The fourth touched upon contacts and relations with other Poles living abroad. Finally, the fifth section was about the feeling of Europeaness as well as attitudes towards the process of European integration. In the case of Flemish respondents, the questionnaire encompassed three basic issues: contacts (their beginnings, development and consequences) with Polish workers, an evaluation of the migration phenomenon and attitudes towards migrants, and the feeling of a European identity.

It should be stressed that our research was first of all of a qualitative nature and that we primarily paid attention to the content of values. At least two levels were adopted in the interviews. Firstly, contacts between Polish migrants and Belgian hosts were reconstructed in a quantitative as well as qualitative manner. How regularly do Belgian employers and Polish workers meet? Do they talk about things other than labour and practical arrangements? If so, what about: daily life in Belgium, relatives in Poland, personal experiences in the past, history or politics (of which country?). In other words: what do they know about each other? Do they also meet informally, i.e. in contexts other than the work environment? Have they taken breaks (tea, beer, cigarette) or had lunch (during work time or afterwards) together? In which language do they communicate?

Secondly, the influences of the contacts should be made clear: how do they change the images and perceptions of the others, and one's own values and identities? Of course, this has to be done in an indirect way: changes can take place unconsciously, and values and identities are not passed directly. As a consequence we have used some criteria that can be linked to scales of values and Europeanisation. A sense for democracy, for instance, can be measured by means of participation or abstention in elections; solidarity by means of an imagined situation in which the reaction of the employer is asked after the employee has had a work accident. All of these questions were asked in an open way so that not only situations, but also assessments of employers and workers could be made clear. For instance, concerning the knowledge of languages, we not only asked which languages were spoken, but also why they did or did not learn a language or whether they find that they (or the other) should learn a certain language.

Through this research a kind of synchronical image was made of values and identities among Belgian employers and Polish employees. There are three types of relations which determine this picture:

- relations between migrants and the receiving society,
- relations with other migrants in Belgium,
- relations of Polish migrants with their group of origin.

In our research we tried to reconstruct the principles underpinning the creation of pendulum migrants' and receiving society members' identity, then to make a presentation of dominant relations between migrants and the receiving society, a presentation of relations within Polish migrants groups as well as between migrants and their group of origin, and to place these relations in a wider context of Europeanisation and European integration processes.

We realised our field work in the spring and summer of 2007 with some additional data also collected in 2008. The forty interviews with pendulum migrants were made by Polish sociologists who are the co-authors of this book. We started to do this by using the informal contacts and ties of scholars from Leuven University with Polish migrants. Next we found the interviewees by the so called 'snowball' method, using many different lines of it. Generally we had no trouble finding the interlocutors, even though some of them were hesitant about being recorded in the interview process.

Almost all of our interviewees have immigrated to Leuven and live and work there. They came to Belgium from different regions of Poland with the majority from villages and small towns of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and some from the Małopolska, Warmia-Mazury and Wielkopolska provinces. The large majority of our interviewees are women who primarily work as domestic workers, whereas the men interviewed work primarily in construction. In terms of age, the group of Polish migrants is very heterogeneous, ranging from their early twenties to their early fifties. Concerning their social origins, the group is also very diverse since whilst most of our interviewees have a basic secondary school education, some of them are well educated specialists.

The interviews with Belgian employers were made by students of the second year of Slavic Studies from Leuven University. They did this under the coordination of the Belgian co-author in the spring of 2007 in the framework of a course on historical and sociological methodology.¹ All interviews were written out and translated into English for a common discussion. This methodology has an obvious disadvantage: students are in a learning process and are often doing such in-depth interviews for the first time. This is sometimes evident from their interviews, which may contain suggestive questions or lack additional questions that would have been very interesting. However, it has also some advantages: firstly, the collective research led to new ideas and original approaches. Interviews were prepared in class and all students had to discuss the course of their first interview and were in this way made ready for the following interviews. Secondly, the search for employers was done independently, which stimulated the representativeness of the group. Everybody found their own interviewees, so that the chance that many people would come from similar categories was reduced. Such a methodology sometimes even seemed necessary: it proved difficult to find some interviewees, so a couple of dozen would have been even more complicated. Some students made use of original methods, such as posting announcements on public transport or addressing people speaking Polish. Most of them, however, made use of

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their personal contacts and interviewed landlords, friends, and relatives.

All in all, thirty interviews proved suitable for the research. Twenty of them live in Leuven, its suburbs (municipalities that had been independent ones [i.e. had been separate communities within Belgium] before 1976, such as Heverlee and Wijgmaal) or its neighbouring municipalities (e.g. Bertem and Veltem-Beisem, the latter being part of Herent). Ten others live in cities with a similar character to Leuven (thus not Brussels or other big cities). The large majority of the interviewees are women: only four men were interviewed, of which two were employed as seasonal workers in Western Flanders and Limburg, two other provinces in the west and the east of the country. This is not a coincidence: domestic work is still largely the field of women.

In spite of the lack of representativeness, the only interviewed husband of a household that was cleaned by a Polish domestic worker confirms the impression that men are less in the know when it comes to their domestic workers. In terms of age, the group is very heterogeneous, ranging from women of 24 to those who are 80 years old. Most of them are between 35 and 50 – undoubtedly the age group that employs relatively more Polish domestic workers. Concerning their social origins, the group is also very diverse, although educated and/or affluent interviewees seem to be in the majority – this is also perhaps connected to the reality.

We have organised the book into three sections. The first part focuses on a description of the social, economic and political background of emigration in Poland and Polish immigration in Belgium. The dynamics and nature of Polish emigration has changed according to the social, economic and political upheavals that Poland, Europe and the world have undergone over the last three decades. Outlining this broad context is of extreme importance since it not only explains the main reasons which stood behind Poles' decisions to leave the country but also allows us to grasp the immense changes in the character of migrants' trajectories. These general reflections are supplemented with more detailed information on the size and character of the Polish migrant community in Belgium and Leuven seen from the host society's perspective. This chapter also gives detailed descriptions of the social and cultural characteristics of Polish migrants, paying special attention to the last wave of migration caused or assisted by European integration.

Having reconstructed these changing frameworks in the sending and receiving societies, as well as the emerging new transnational one, the second part of the book goes on to describe the encounters of migrants and their hosts in everyday life. The main concern of this section will be the consequences of these encounters on the understanding of this new social reality for both sides.

The first chapter looks into the amount and character of social capital of Polish migrants, and its influence on the processes of reconstruction of their social identities. It introduces issues which lie at the heart of this aspect of the migrants' situation, which make them redraw their social maps composed of former points of references and revise their previous combination of 'significant others'. The identification of dominant patterns of social contacts between different types of Polish migrants and other segments of the population of Leuven is intended to show a variety of possibilities in the reconstruction of collective identities of migrants, where the national one is seen as their most important framework of reference.

In the second chapter we continue to disentangle the complicated strategies of building feelings of homeliness, belonging and identification. Geographical movements are not always paralleled by social and cultural mobility and there are many variables which have an impact on reconstructing social boundaries and redefining who 'we' and 'others' are. This is especially the case here since the essence of pendulum migration consists of a borderline frame of identification which stems from the liminal character of incomplete migration. This frame of identification is, for most migrants, very dynamic and contextual and, since it takes place in a very heterogeneous environment, new boundaries become much more blurred and complex than simple national classifications.

The third chapter changes perspective and shows these encounters from the hosts' side. We wanted to show how Belgians encounter Poles in Leuven, under what circumstances they decided to enter relationships with immigrants, how they communicated to maintain these relationships, what they did to make them work effectively and in a way satisfying in the employer–employee context as well as beyond it.

This leads to the third part, where we trace the effects of the renegotiation of the images of two communities through their mutual influences. In the first chapter we investigate the influence made by Polish

migrants on Belgian employers. Our main concern is to capture the reasons which made the employers change their stereotypes, attitudes and distances towards Poles, Poland and, in a more general way, towards the Central and Eastern European region. We investigate this in the European context and analyse to what extent when, how and why Poland is perceived as European when compared with other countries.

The last chapter aims to shed light on the character of these changes in identity and the system of values of the Polish pendulum migrants which helps to build bridges and trust among Polish migrants and the other inhabitants of Leuven. We try to answer the question concerning their consequences for fostering processes which may establish a common framework of values, as well as the norms and principles characteristic for a contemporary ideal of European civic society.