



New friends in new places: Network formation during the migration process among Poles in the UK

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to on-going work that seeks to understand the dynamic nature of immigrant social network formation. We explore three propositions, derived from the literature, that might be expected to characterise the ways in which migrant associational ties evolve during and immediately after arrival in their destination country. Evidence is drawn from 42 interviews conducted between January and December 2008 with predominantly Polish migrants to the UK (28) as well as domestic service providers (14). In agreement with the existing literature on immigrant social network formation we find that weak associational ties between migrants are locally dense and rapidly formed. More surprisingly, we also find that the Poles in our sample from lower socio-economic groups tended to rely heavily upon weak associational ties while higher socio-economic group Poles tended to rely on associations made through their employing institutions. This illustrates the importance of socio-economic status in framing co-ethnic migrant network formation. This is significant because we also find that weak associational ties are not unambiguously beneficial to lower socio-economic group migrants who tend to (have to be) more compromising about, and therefore more compromised by, the social ‘friendships’ that result.

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1. Introduction

Recent work in migration and transnational studies emphasises the ways in which migrants’ networks change upon arrival in their destination countries (e.g. Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; Menjivar, 2000). A range of empirical work has demonstrated that migrant networks are by no means static, and that ties both to origin countries and to fellow migrants change once larger migrant communities are established and migrants themselves begin to settle in their destination countries (for a discussion in the East-European context, see Elrick, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008; Wallace, 2002). Drawing upon 42 interviews with recent Polish and Lithuanian migrants to the UK as well as some service providers, this paper explores these relationships in the context of the experiences of Poles in the UK.

These interviews were conducted as part of a broader study into the role of migrant places of worship in intra-migrant relationships among the Polish community in three medium-sized northern-English towns (see Gill, 2010). The aim of the overall project was to determine how successful and unsuccessful place-making processes occur when migrant communities are striated along lines of difference such as ethnicity, age and reasons for migrating. The role of places of worship as publicly important migrant spaces, but also as sites at which the tensions between different categories

of migrant are played out, was central to the investigation (see Erdmans, 1998, for an account of similar tensions between Polish migrants in America). During the research, however, we were struck by the frequency with which our interviewees referred to the changing nature of migrant networks, as well as the differential experiences of these changes across migrant groups of differing socio-economic statuses. The wealth of stories relating to these dynamics of network attachments that arose during our interviews forms the justification for the present paper.

Our intention with the overall project was also to provide a complementary perspective to the literature on migrant experiences in the UK that tends to be either London-focused in particular or concerned primarily with the South of the country in general. Although some studies have provided a balanced approach to the experiences of Polish migrants in the UK away from London and the South East (Burrell, 2003; Stenning and Dawley, 2009; Temple, 1999), an urban-centric approach that privileges the Southern parts of the UK continues to be evident in the context of research into recent A8 migration to the UK (Düvell, 2004; Eade et al., 2006; Jamoul and Wills, 2008; McDowell et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2008; Wills, 2005). This is particularly unsatisfactory because post-2004 A8 arrivals to the UK display a marked tendency to locate in rural areas in, for example, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire (Commission for Rural Communities, 2007) with less than 14% of those registered for employment locating in London in comparison to around 40% of previous migrant cohorts (Drinkwater et al., 2006).

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This distribution is partly driven by the high post-2004 demand for temporary workers in sectors that are drawn to cheap land prices, such as agriculture and construction (see [Anderson et al., 2006](#)). It is also driven by the activities of informal and licensed gangmasters – organisations that arrange the relocation of groups of workers to the UK – in providing seasonal, casual workers in areas that have both large populations and plentiful arable land ([Geddes et al., 2007](#); [Produce Studies Limited, 1999](#)). Our participant population was drawn from three northern-English towns, each with a population between 50,000 and 150,000, and this focus has allowed us to draw out some of the differences between the experiences of our participants and those in larger metropolitan areas.

This paper explores a series of debates about the nature of migrants' dynamic network formation upon arrival. First, we find that friendship ties formed upon migration, and the networks that result from these, tend to be adaptive, localised and situational, formed very quickly and often structured around specific practices that migrants would not necessarily feel an affinity to in their origin countries, such as religious practices. Second, we also find that the dynamic formation of social networks, and especially relatively instrumental networks of acquaintances rather than 'genuine' friendship ties, is affected by the socio-economic status of migrants. This allows us to respond to the greater attention being paid to the ways in which class, interacting with other lines of difference such as gender, race and nationality, influences the migratory experience ([McDowell, 2008](#); [Mckenzie and Rapoport, 2007](#); [Smith and Mackintosh, 2007](#)): In the light of some previous studies, reviewed in the following section, it is surprising that we find that weak associational ties play a decisive role in the settlement processes of lower socio-economic classes. Third and more fundamentally, contrasting to the generally positive view of weak ties among new immigrants found in the dynamic network formation literature, we find that there are a series of disadvantages associated with weak ties that, bearing in mind the socio-economic distribution of such ties, could result in a class-specific burden borne by lower socio-economic groups.

[Conradson and Latham \(2005\)](#) outline the need to define precisely what friendship means and to be open to the different types of friendship in order to facilitate productive scholarship that is concerned with migrants' social network formation. Mindful of their argument, we employ the Polish language distinction between different types of acquaintances in order to more accurately illustrate our findings. In the Polish language there are words that describe three different degrees of friendship. From the most intimate to the least intimate, these terms are "przyjacieli", "kolega", and "znajomy". The closest English translation for *przyjacieli* would be close friend. A *kolega* could be translated into buddy, chum, or mate, and *znajomy* would be an acquaintance.

The paper moves through three stages. First, the literature on dynamic social network formation during migration is reviewed in order to introduce the debates to which the paper contributes. Second, the specific case of recent Polish migration to the UK is discussed and our research sample, sampling strategy and methodological approach are outlined. Third, the characteristics of the process of network formation among new migrant Poles are outlined, focusing upon the features of the networks that are formed, the types of 'friendship' that emerge as social networks evolve and the influence of socio-economic status upon network formation.

2. Key debates about dynamic migrant network formation

The concept of chain migration, defined as '... migration that occurs in a sequence, when the movement of one person causes others to follow' ([Hiebert, 2009](#), p. 78) has been popular for nearly 50 years in the study of migration processes. Early approaches

([Banerjee, 1983](#); [MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964](#); [Massey et al., 1993](#)) have benefitted in recent years from work that gives renewed attention to the changing patterns of migrant networks during migration, settlement and return ([Rogers and Vertovec, 1995](#); [Wierzbicki, 2004](#)). This is not to underestimate the importance of enduring ties that pre-exist and out-live the migration event (for recent contributions see [Clark et al., 2009](#); [Gopalkrishnan and Babacan, 2007](#); [Ho, 2008](#)). Nevertheless, [Boyd \(1989\)](#) represents one of the first commentators to call for a more dynamic conception of migrant networks, discussing, for example, the influences over migrant networks during settlement and integration and emphasising how the 'network resources' available to migrants change with length of residency and how they also impact upon new cohorts of migrants. Since then, a range of academics have examined the characteristics of migrant network formation.

[Zaretsky \(1996, p. xiii\)](#), for example, notes how Thomas and Znaniecki, in their classic five-volume study of Polish migration to America between 1880 and 1910 (published between 1918 and 1920) 'stressed that [migrants] changed by adapting to social groups to which they were connected, groups that were themselves changing.' This observation is also borne out in [Menjívar's \(2000\)](#) detailed examination of Salvadorian immigrants in America. Describing the 'jagged' (*Ibid.* p. 115) processes by which network ties are formed, she emphasises the fluid and contingent nature of network ties, writing that 'An individual may mobilize resources for particular purposes at one point in time, but as objectives change, the source of help may also change ... Sometimes people mobilize networks to attain a particular objective, but these can assume an ephemeral existence; after having fulfilled their objective, they may disband, and a new network may not have the same composition' ([Menjívar, 2000](#), p. 115).

The constant evolution of migrant networks, according to need as well as structural factors such as host country policies, means that commentators have noted how migrant networks are often highly localised, and formed and disbanded relatively quickly. Discussing low skilled, illegal Polish migrants' network formation in Brussels, for example, [Grzymała-Kazłowska \(2005\)](#) outlines the contingent nature of their networks which are not always welcoming to newcomers. When labour markets become saturated, for example, intense competition between workers can result, producing sudden and sometimes costly contractions of the circles of trust that migrants enjoy.

The impact of migration on the form and nature of ties to origin communities has also been noted. [Smith \(2006, p. 55\)](#), for example, discusses the ways in which Mexican migrants to the United States sometimes remain politically influential in their origin towns – indeed they can become more influential than before they migrated. This is partly as a result of the financial remittances they send home, which allows them to combine their exit strategies with a powerful political voice (see [Hirschman, 1970](#)). In a different context, [Conradson and Latham \(2005\)](#) also identify the ways in which migration can alter the networks of relationships of migrants with sending communities. They argue that in some cases the sheer numbers of migrants who travel results in some networks that pre-existed the migration event 'undergoing almost complete temporary relocation' ([Conradson and Latham, 2005](#), p. 287).

This paper takes up two current debates about dynamic migrant network formation. The first concerns the different ways in which migrants from different socio-economic backgrounds experience network formation. The strength of associational ties, for [Granovetter \(1973\)](#) depends upon the time, intensity, intimacy and reciprocity that characterises a relationship. He puts forward the general argument that weak associational ties – what we call *znajomy* – are important in job searches because they give searchers access to a higher number of distant social circles. Numerous authors have pointed out, however, that this seems to apply more

to highly skilled workers than to the less highly skilled, who tend to continue to rely upon close friends and kinship networks to find employment (see, for example, [Wegener, 1991](#)). Some authors have argued that this is also true of migrants, who are less likely to use impersonal means of searching for jobs if they are looking for relatively low paid positions ([Sanders et al., 2002](#)). For example, [White and Ryan \(2008\)](#), citing [Jordan and Düvell \(2003\)](#) and [Jaźwińska \(2001\)](#), write that, although ‘professional and skilled migrants are known to be less dependent upon kinship networks, these migrants may have access to other types of network such as ‘weak ties’ that enable and facilitate their migration’ ([White and Ryan, 2008](#), p. 1472). In support of this hypothesis, [Sanders et al. \(2002\)](#) find that, of 633 job spells experienced by Chinese, Filipino and Korean immigrants in the US between 1989 and 1990, there were statistically significant differences between the propensity for low prestige and high prestige jobs to be found using impersonal methods as opposed to interpersonal ties. Specifically, highly skilled migrants were more likely to rely upon impersonal job search methods, while less skilled migrants were more likely to rely upon interpersonal contacts.

A number of authors have guarded against the conclusion that highly skilled migrants are more likely to utilise weak ties and that lower skilled migrants are more likely to utilise strong ties, however. [Harvey \(2008\)](#), for example, finds that both junior and more senior British and Indian expatriates in Boston used both strong and weak ties, while [Wong and Salaff \(1998\)](#) find that both middle-class and working-class emigrants from Hong Kong displayed a preference for using strong ties in the form of either family or close friends. From a different direction, [Poros \(2001\)](#) complicates the debate by suggesting that highly skilled migrants in particular are likely to utilise organisational ties – contacts they have made through the institutions in which they work – which are more likely to be weak associational ties in Granovetter’s terms, but need not be. All of these considerations must also be set in the context of a range of complicating factors that affect both job searches and settlement processes in general, including the age and position in the life course of the migrants who are involved, as well as their intentions regarding their length of stay ([White and Ryan, 2008](#)).

A second, more fundamental, debate concerns the costs of utilising weak ties. [Granovetter \(1973\)](#) defines ties positively, emphasising intimacy and reciprocity: ‘the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterise the tie’ ([Granovetter, 1973](#), p. 1361). Yet, a number of authors have identified negative ramifications of utilising ties for migrants. [Portes \(1995\)](#), for example, employs a more balanced approach, arguing on the one hand that ‘Networks are important in economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital and information’ (*Ibid.* p. 8) but noting on the other hand that there are ‘costs of social interaction’ (*Ibid.* p. 9) and that ‘depending on the characteristics of their networks and their personal positions within them, individuals may be ... tightly bound by group-enforced expectations’ (*Ibid.* p. 12). Some of the ways in which ties bind (see [Conlon, 2010](#)) are elucidated in [Mahler’s \(1995\)](#) detailed ethnography of the migrant experience in America. She describes the ways in which networks can become all-encompassing and, ultimately, containing, giving the example of the situation of Noemí, a Salvadorian woman in a minority pocket of Long Island which is 85% African-American and the rest Latino. ‘Noemí’s world’ [Mahler \(1995, p. 106\)](#) writes, ‘... has evolved parallel to the world of the larger society, and there are few links between the two. Immigrants yearn for a taste of what they know exists beyond their thresholds and beyond their reach’. In a different context, [Ho \(2008\)](#) graphically illustrates the ways in which family ties expose migrants to forms of emotional manipulation by the Singaporean state through restrictive policies towards dual

citizenship. She argues that ‘familial logics may work to bind trans-migrants to particular geographical and national contexts ... The Singaporean example shows the ways in which a familial regime is co-created and capitalised upon by state managers’ (p. 166). Taken together, these studies raise the question of the social and psychological costs of interpersonal ties.

We approach the debates reviewed here by offering three propositions that we subsequently explore using our empirical observations. First, the literature suggests that migrant social networks are quickly formed, relatively transient, and easily disbanded, especially with regard to weak associational ties (for the Polish case see, for example, [Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005](#); [White and Ryan, 2008](#)). Our first proposition is that we would expect to witness similar characteristics in our own sample. Second, the literature is divided over the usefulness and accuracy of suggesting that higher skilled migrants exhibit different patterns of network formation to lower skilled migrants. If there is a proposition from the literature, it is that the highly skilled tend to favour weak associational ties while lower skilled workers favour closer ties and kinship networks ([Wegener, 1991](#)) and that this proposition holds for migrant groups ([Sanders et al., 2002](#)). Third, the literature in general has been positive about weak associational ties ([Granovetter, 1973](#)), while a minority of authors have pointed out the costs of association. In line with the dominant view, we examine the proposition that network ties are for the most part beneficial to migrants.

3. Characterising Polish social network formation in the UK

In line with the general literature on migration, friendship and social capital, work on post-2004 Polish migration to the UK in particular points towards the need to more fully understand the changing dynamics of migrant networks during the migration episode. On the one hand, many studies focus upon themes that are related, but do not directly address the issue of migrant network evolution, ranging from, although not limited to, the renegotiation of gender roles through internet use among diasporic Poles in the UK ([Siara, 2009](#)), the political and social consequences of long working hours and poor economic conditions ([Drinkwater et al., 2006](#); [Spencer et al., 2007](#); [Wills, 2005](#)) and the transnational links that Polish communities continue to maintain with their countries and regions of origin ([Burrell, 2009](#)). On the other hand, those studies that do address migrant network evolution open up a number of important further avenues for research. As [White and Ryan \(2008, p. 1471\)](#) argue in the context of their study of Polish transnationalism between Poland and the UK, ‘Because of the loose and vague ways in which networks are conceptualized, insufficient attention has been paid to how transnational networks are sustained and developed or how migrants access existing networks or establish new ties in the ‘host’ society’ ([White and Ryan, 2008](#), p. 1471).

In our research, 42 interviews were conducted with Polish migrants (26), Lithuanian migrants (2) and domestic service providers (14) between January and December 2008. Participants were selected from three medium sized urban areas in the North of England. Salient characteristics of the research sample are illustrated in [Table 1](#). We determined low or high socio-economic status based upon three proxies of low status: poor English language fluency, low skills and low wages earned. At times it was difficult to judge whether a migrant was a low or high status migrant, especially when one or more of these indicators did not coincide (e.g. a migrant may be highly skilled but poorly paid). We therefore allocated ‘low’ socio-economic status to those that displayed at least two of the characteristics listed, based upon the information made available to us by the interviewees. Some interviewees, however, were not classified high or low status due to the paucity of information they made available.

Table 1

1. Residing in medium sized towns/rural areas	Medium sized towns	20
	Rural areas	8
2. Low/high socio-economic status	Low socio-economic status	12
	High socio-economic status	13
	Unclassified	3
3. Date of most recent migration to UK	Pre 1989	4
	Pre 2004	8
	Post 2004	16
4. Plans to return home	Within the next year	7
	Within the next 5 years	12
	No definite plans to return	9
5. Interview language	Polish	6
	English	22
6. Access Strategy	Visit to place of work in person	2
	Snowballing	20
	University Contacts	2
	Approached with formal letter followed by phone call	4
7. Reasons for migrating	Primarily economic	14
	Primarily political	2
	Primarily familial	10
	Other	2
8. Contact with anyone in UK before migrating?	Przyjacieli or kin	10
	Kolega	2
	Znajomy	12
	No previous contacts	4

One could argue that the division of migrants into low or high status imposes static categories on a dynamic and heterogeneous population. Indeed, [White and Ryan \(2008\)](#), who employ a distinction between confident and unconfident migrants, are critical of this practice, pointing out that although categorisations 'are useful conceptual devices, they should to some extent be seen as ideal types rather than actual descriptions of reality. There are many 'mongrel' migrants' ([White and Ryan, 2008](#), p. 1473). This is especially problematic when we consider that many Poles entering the UK have been employed in jobs that under-utilise their skills, indicating that low wages earned, in particular, might not accurately reflect social position ([Drinkwater et al., 2006](#)). We would, however, defend the use of socio-economic categories on the basis that class continues to be a factor that impacts on the lived realities facing migrants. While socio-economic class may be less visible than other traits, or its influence may occur through its interaction with other lines of difference ([McDowell, 2008](#)), it nevertheless demonstrably affects life chances, social interactions and aspirations ([Bourdieu, 1986](#); [Sayer, 1999, 2000](#); [SurrIDGE, 2003](#)). Inevitably there will be exceptions to the categories used in this study, and cases that are difficult to classify. [Harvey \(2008\)](#) for example points out the propensities for migrant identities to evolve profoundly over time, complicating any attempt at classification. It is also important to contextualise any discussion of class in relation to intervening influences such as one's age and position in the life course. This does not, however, justify a reduced attention to the political-economic structural forces that, over time and repeated occurrences, exhibit specific, measurable and exclusionary effects over diverse populations.

The sampling strategy employed for the research was predominantly a mixture of cold contacting and snowballing from these initial contacts. Gatekeepers such as factory owners, Polish priests and shopkeepers were contacted either with cold visits to their places of work or with formal letters followed by phone calls to ask for an interview. Where successful – and over 50% of those contacted agreed to an interview – the initial contacts were asked to provide details of other potential interviewees. We were aware that this snowballing technique could present a skewed picture

of the Polish immigrant community if our initial, gate-keeping interviewees preferred to recommend certain people within their network such as those people they liked or thought were suitable to represent Polish migrants. Managing the impact of interviewee networks on our sample is particularly important for this research because it concerns precisely the evolution of social networks. For this reason we were selective about the suggested interviewees that we did follow up according to a pre-determined guide. This guide specified which sectors of the immigrant population should be represented in the research: ensuring a balance between male and female, high and low skilled, practicing Catholic and not, and English language speaking or not (on this final point, four of the interviews were conducted entirely in Polish and another two partially in Polish). We were therefore able to exercise discretion about the suggested contacts that our initial interviewees offered to us, according to the requirement that each of these groups was represented.

Moreover, the interviewees that participated in our study had all been in the UK for over 12 months, and the majority for a lot longer. Their networks of friends and acquaintances had consequently evolved considerably since their initial arrival. The immediate upon arrival and post-arrival networks that interested us in this study were therefore not the ones that were traced by following the sampling recommendations of interviewees (where we chose to do so). Indeed, the fact that the majority of interviewees had not kept in contact with (and in a number of cases could not remember the names of) the members of their initial social network underscored the transitive nature of these networks and confirmed our research findings. The majority of our interviewees were remembering their initial orientation networks and emphasised how different these networks were from the more enduring social networks they were part of at the time of the interview, assuaging any concerns we had about sampling on the dependent variable.

A number of challenges of access were encountered during the course of the research. A high degree of nervousness about how the interview material was to be used was evident, possibly reflecting a degree of distrust of authority among Poles which has been linked to the communist history of the country ([Garapich, 2007](#)). In response to these concerns, an internet site was created (available at <http://www.PolishdiasporaUK.com>) which we found to be useful in assuaging the concerns of interviewees about the research process because it provided an accessible record of the research process as it developed.

4. Characterising Polish migrant network formation in the UK

In this section, we link the themes from our interviews back to the propositions about migrant social network formation made earlier. In particular, the key distinctions between static and dynamic social network systems, different typologies of friendship and acquaintance according to the purpose of associational ties, and the effect of socio-economic status in structuring both of these, are evident throughout the results.

4.1. Who forms weak associational ties?

We proposed that low socio-economic status migrants might rely more heavily upon networks, and especially kinship networks, while higher status migrants would more usually rely only on weaker ties, following work by [Wegener \(1991\)](#) and [Sanders et al. \(2002\)](#). We found, however, that lower socio-economic status migrants tended to rely upon loose, non-kinship based networks to a large extent. Grzesiek, for example, is a Pole in his early-20s who had little knowledge of the English language and had never

been abroad prior to migration. He came to a northern English sea-side town with his brother in the summer of 2004, 3 months after Poland joined the European Union. He describes himself as part of the first wave of post-EU migrants, when the Polish population was still low. His goal was to earn enough money from 2 months work to pay for his first year of university, which was starting in October 2004. After 2 months, his brother returned to Poland, but Grzesiek remained to learn English, and at the time of interviewing was in the last year of his undergraduate degree.

Grzesiek's contact with his local support network started before getting on the plane to England: "we had somebody who would pick us up from the airport, and organize a house for us" he recalls. "If I didn't have them, I don't know what we'd do. . . I've never been outside of Poland before that." However, importantly, Grzesiek was not close friends with this contact, not mentioning them by name during his interview nor keeping in contact with him for very long after his arrival. This 'friend-of-a-friend', this *znajomy*, picked Grzesiek up from the airport and took him directly to a 'temporary home' – a former motel ("it wouldn't even be called a motel back in Poland, it was horrible," recalls Grzesiek) which was inhabited by a dozen Polish workers as well as the owner. Another interviewee, an English language teacher, recalls the period that Grzesiek is talking about (mid- to late-2004) as one that was notable for the poor living conditions of many unskilled migrant Poles. "Poles really did live in horrible conditions. You know, in one room they'd sleep wherever you could – on tables on beds on the floor, under the floor in the kitchen."

Michał, another low-skilled migrant in his late 40s, outlined his reliance upon weak associational ties by pointing towards the pseudo-economic functions that migrant social networks perform. With the help of a *znajomy*, Michał first came to Northern England on a temporary basis to earn money for his wife and children in Poland. He moved into a cramped, shared apartment with nearly a dozen other Polish men immediately after he got off the plane. Much like in Grzesiek's case, there was a *znajomy* to pick him up from the airport and then take him to his shared apartment. Without knowing anyone beforehand, he says that he found his support network at the place he was living. This network became crucial in helping Michał gain information on finding employment, a bank, and healthcare. It also functioned as an informal skill pooling system – "one knew a bit of English, another did something else. And so one helped another. And then I helped fix their car because I am a mechanic. You know, you helped one another out." This exchange formed a sort of barter system, Grzesiek explained. These would emerge in and around immediate living spaces, houses and apartments, "you formed these networks. You lived with seven, 10 people. And you shared some friends of friends of some other friend."

These low socio-economic status migrants appeared to share a wide, yet relatively loose social network that typifies the sort of weak associational ties that Granovetter (1973) discusses. Importantly, though, the barter system and the pooling of skills indicates that, at least in the initial stages of migration, lower socio-economic status migrants would participate in these networks for want of the ability to navigate informational systems in the receiving country on their own. Higher status migrants on the other hand, who might be more confident in White and Ryan's (2008) terms – including being more skilled, privileged or English-language-proficient – often had little or no co-ethnic network in their host country. Someone like Marcin, a doctoral student in Economics who is fluent in English, had nobody to pick him up at the airport and nobody to find him accommodation, but did not share Grzesiek's sense of helplessness without this social network in England. He explains that "This is mainly because I travelled abroad quite a lot. My girlfriend also had a scholarship in a variety of places. And I've been to these places when she was abroad. And well, I have a lot of friends from different countries. So that's why

this nervousness about migrating doesn't really exist." For Marcin, his lack of integration with other Poles is a matter of choice – he neither needs nor desires to network closely or loosely with other Poles. He was keen to reiterate that he does not see himself as part of any Polish community and argues that, for him "the whole problem of integration doesn't really exist" because "it's not like I can't really integrate". What sets Marcin apart from Grzesiek is his knowledge of English, which allows him to make friends not necessarily with the English, but with other international students who converse in English but share the migrant experience. Marcin is also younger than Michał, feeling fewer economic pressures as a result of his lack of dependents and position in the life course. This allows Marcin to be more selective about his networks of friends because he is not limited to co-ethnic ties.

Bartek, a doctoral student in chemistry, came to England with a different purpose. As a high status migrant, he possesses good qualifications and speaks fluent English as well as having a well-paying scholarship. He realized that because of his financial and educational situation, he does not come across the issues that other Poles experience. "Some Poles who come here live 20 people to one house. They really try to save on accommodation costs. Money really counts. You know, I have a scholarship from the university and I have enough to live in a normal place, with four people from different countries. . . ." He also explained that when he is looking for an apartment, he does so autonomously without reliance on the Polish community – "I'm not interested in finding roommates from Poland. You know? When I am looking for an apartment, then I'll just turn to the local papers. Or the local websites, or to real estate agents". For Bartek, the factor that distinguished him from less skilled migrants is his computer literacy, combined with his command of English. When asked why some Poles seek out other Poles in England, while others – including himself – do not, he explains:

"I really think this has to do with the barrier stemming from the level of education. You know, we travel a lot, we've been abroad, we know languages, we can understand the internet well. And a person who comes here, you know I see these profiles everywhere – travelling back and forth, a guy in his 40s who comes from a small village, who doesn't really know how to use a computer at all. And who doesn't know the language at all or practically at all. You know, for him, it's like going to Hungary for us. Imagine you don't understand anything and your Internet was all in Hungarian. I mean, I'm sure you'd try to find a Polish person then with whom you'd be able to communicate."

Other high socio-economic status migrants also displayed a similar lack of co-ethnic social networks. Justyna, who holds a Masters in Linguistics, had nobody to show her around and found an apartment with a multicultural group of students. Ewa, a dentist in her early thirties with no dependents, is another high socio-economic status migrant who was headhunted from Poland to come to work in the UK, and quickly adapted to her new job and life abroad. She rarely mixes with Poles in her local area and very rarely relies on any *znajomys* for help in finding jobs or accommodation. She explains how she met a group of international people through her work, and formed close bonds with them. These were migrants, but not co-ethnics:

"You know I think that from the very beginning I hang around with people from my practice. Because they were foreigners as well and so we have had encounters, not only at work, but also after work. So we spend time together after work. We organize a common excursion – Lake District. Then I met umm. . . some other English or American dentists. So now we've got a circle of friends. So I think that they give me this support, and so I can rely on them. So we go out. And if there is anything I would like, I know that I am not on my own. They will give me a hand if I need it."

Here, Ewa illustrates how close personal attachments can evolve from organisational ties (in Poros' (2001) terms) over time. While the accounts of these different experiences of migration are, of course, only partial, they represent the general views of the high socio-economic status migrants in our sample. In contrast, it is easy to see why low socio-economic status migrants might well be more reliant upon broad, loose co-ethnic social networks to fulfil a range of social functions.

4.2. How do weak migrant social networks behave?

An interesting question from the perspective of social network theory is how these migrant networks behave (Boyd, 1989). We found that the social networks that many low socio-economic status migrants become part of are often specific to their immediate neighbourhoods and situations. They are often determined by whoever happens to be at a particular time and place: in the shop, in the library or in the workplace at the time when a new migrant needs help and support, for example. This means that in practice there is very little choice about who one gets to know within the network: there is a tyranny of micro-geography and happenstance that determines loose associational ties. "These small networks rarely cross," Grzesiek explains, emphasising their local, situated character in agreement with the "Little Poles" that White and Ryan (2008) and Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005) identify. Despite the locally specific nature of the networks, however, we also found evidence that they were extremely important to newly arrived Poles. Michał describes how he found a job on the advice of a migrant whose name he did not even know. "She just told us to go walk around town asking for a job. . . without her I wouldn't know what to do." Grzesiek also recalls how his *znajomys* helped him in "getting a bank account. . . either someone takes you, leads you to a bank, helps you. . . Or someone told you that there is a library there, you could get on the internet and download [a chat system] and talk to your friends in Poland or send emails or whatever. Or like 'Here you'll buy a special phone card which gives you 2p per minute to Poland'". He also explained that, "Either you'd find a job on your own, or someone would go to the job centre and show you the way to find a job. This is how you print something. This is where to call. That's how it worked." We found no evidence that Poles thwarted the attempts of other Poles to find work, as Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005) found, perhaps as a result of the fact that the northern English labour markets we studied allowed Poles to work legally and may not have become saturated in the way Grzymała-Kazłowska describes. What these accounts do indicate is the everyday importance of loose associational networks, where associations are formed quickly and may be highly impersonal, but the resulting advantages are central to the welfare and successful integration of newly arrived, low socio-economic status Poles.

Another characteristic of these associational networks concerns their substitution for formal, market-based mechanisms of organization. It might be assumed that, as migrants settle, they may begin to substitute formal market relations for the less formal, looser relationships of the migrant social network, possibly because formal market relations may be more reliable. In fact, however, it appears as though at least in the initial stages of settlement, there are incentives to substitute away from formal market mechanisms of exchange as settlement proceeds. It would be over-deterministic to associate this penchant for informality with the documented historical reliance of the Poles on thick webs of informal service provision (Zaretsky, 1996) or the distrust of authority that the communist era cultivated (Wedel, 1986 cited in White and Ryan, 2008) but suffice it to say that this observation is consistent with both traits.

Eliza, for example, discusses the substitution away from formal job agencies as Poles become more settled in their new locations

"In some cases support networks begin to form through the job agencies. Agencies would give you a job and a place to live but they take off a large percentage for their accommodation and from the wages. So after [the job agency] these groups start to form: acquaintances or friends. And then they start looking for something on their own without the agency". One implication of this finding is that, if migrants have fewer financial resources to draw upon, then the loose formal associations that weak migrant networks offer might be relatively more important to them than to more privileged migrants who can afford to pay agencies for their services.

A final characteristic of the loose associational ties that are formed during the migration process is the rapidity with which they are constructed. As Grzesiek explains, the necessity to build up one's support network for a lower socio-economic status migrant is imperative in functioning and adapting in the host community. Because of this necessity, networks must be created very quickly. Contact building thus functions at a more rapid pace than it would at home – Grzesiek calls this type of friendship-making a 'chain reaction', describing the process as follows:

"You can create one really quickly. You go to work, you search for some work, and it turns out that they gave you that work because you live above that hotel. And you're lucky enough to work with some Slovak guy or a Polish guy. The Polish guy already has some friends somewhere. You go somewhere out for a beer with him and you meet some other friends of his, and that network quite quickly gets created. And if you don't know any Polish people then obviously you create these connections with some English people. . . So really, you can quite quickly create some acquaintances. I don't know anyone who would be alone or live alone."

4.3. What are the disadvantages of belonging to a weak social network?

The preceding discussion indicates that the low socio-economic status migrants in our sample rather than high status migrants form loose co-ethnic associational ties, while the high socio-economic status migrants we interviewed display relative independence both from kinship ties and loose co-ethnic associational ties, but may be viewed as more institutionally dependent (Poros, 2001). It is also clear that the co-ethnic associations formed are important to low socio-economic status migrants in particular, because they can offer a range of immediate sources of help and advice in specific, local circumstances and may offer a way to avoid agency fees. There are, nevertheless, some significant drawbacks to being involved in loose associational ties: the 'social costs of interaction' that Portes (1995) refers to. These drawbacks became evident from the way that a number of high socio-economic status migrants talked about the loose social ties that they were thankful to be able to avoid.

While some high socio-economic status migrants state that they have 'no need' to connect to people from the Polish community, some also express their dislike for Polish migrants, avoiding connection with them out of choice. Marcin the doctoral student, for example, is less embedded in dense migrant networks than most of the low socio-economic status migrants we interviewed. He explained this by stating that he had "no interest" in meeting with Polish migrants for the following reasons:

"Often these people turn out to be quite primitive, quite often they are racists, anti-Semites, religious fanatics. . . well perhaps not fanatics, but people who are quite devoted to their religion which is something I really don't like. It's not something I'm really into. And of course, I admit this is a certain prejudice which I have, but this prejudice is there for reasons which often prove themselves

to be true. . . It really comes down to the fact that at the University, you meet people who are quite different than those whom you meet on the street who came here to pick potatoes."

By conceiving of other migrants as 'primitive', Marcin is firmly distancing himself from migrants of a lower socio-economic status and is clearly disdainful about some of their practices and habits. Similarly, Iwona, a high socio-economic status migrant who is married to an accountant, tries to "avoid contact with the Polish. I have two acquaintances here, that's it. The rest, when it comes to the Polish, then I just treat them like distant acquaintances." When asked why, she stated that:

"I'll tell you quite frankly. If you're on the street or at the store, when I hear the way in which the Polish are acting, the way they talk to one another, well I just feel embarrassed. Embarrassed. And if I have the opportunity, I don't give away the fact that I am from Poland. I feel sad saying that, but that's life I guess."

Iwona does not have children yet, but plans to. Nevertheless, she has grave reservations about having children in the UK due to what she sees as a dangerous environment for Polish youth, brought about by the behaviour of some young Poles. She explains how her brother, who is younger than her and came to the UK 3 years previously, had suffered racist attacks by English youngsters for reasons that Iwona traces to the Polish youth in her area.

"Well my brother is here as well. He's been here for 3 years. He works 'till quite late, because he takes two shifts. He got beaten up twice, simply because he was Polish, by the English. But I think that's partly the fault of the Polish because well, there is a group of people, whom I think. . . shouldn't be ever allowed to leave Poland. Perhaps they just have to first learn how to live among other people. What I mean is that their behaviour provokes the English."

Between them Marcin and Iwona paint a depressing picture of the way in which social networks are viewed by high socio-economic status Poles who have migrated to the UK. On the one hand, according to Marcin, they may often hold 'primitive' views and on the other hand, according to Iwona, they may well have poor manners and conduct themselves in 'embarrassing' ways. Of course, there is likely to be a degree of exaggeration here, and the condescending tone with which some of these views are expressed should be a cause for concern in its own right. Nevertheless, the point remains that the social networks of migrated Poles may well entail a degree of socializing with people that would not normally form part of one's circle of friends or acquaintances. Higher socio-economic status migrants are able to avoid these difficulties – Marcin or Iwona each have a choice to avoid connections between people who are considered less interesting or less desirable. Migrants of lower socio-economic status on the other hand, are more likely to be locked into their support networks even if they do not necessarily feel comfortable with them.

4.4. How do lower socio-economic status migrants feel about being part of a weak associational network?

These disadvantages of relying upon weak associational ties are not lost upon lower socio-economic status migrants, who expressed their frustration at having to maintain contact with loose, co-ethnic associational networks. Grzesiek, for example, explains that migrants like him are bound to their social network, whether they like the people around them or not. Networks, he stated, are created out of necessity, not out of affinity, as they are in Poland:

"In Poland, you create your own network of friends. You meet somebody, you like them, and then you think, okay! And if you don't like somebody and their character, if they drink or steal or

whatever, you just turn your back on them and say 'See ya,' and that's it. And here that choice is a bit harder. You have less of a choice. And quite often these people aren't really from the best parts. . . I keep contacts here in [northern English town], because I have to, with people whom I would never want to have any contact with in Poland. Because I just don't take to their character – because they steal, or take drugs, or drink all the time. And in Poland I have my own friends who really suit me, and with others, I don't have any contact."

Grzesiek also blames this on the density of the networks he interacts with in England – people know each other from a variety of contexts and, as stated earlier, rarely escape this network. Because he explains, "you don't know those people from another network on the other side of the city, you end up having to stick around with those people you would never really hang out with." Adding to this density, often less confident or low skilled Polish migrants live and work with the same people. Or if not, they live with the partners and other *znajomys* of their workmates. Grzesiek explains that "you meet with them if you want to or not. . . you have to tolerate them. You have to be nice. You have to pretend to be interested."

Mateusz, a driver for a transport company who left his wife and children to work in the UK (they subsequently migrated to be with him), relied upon a series of *znajomys* despite having some organisational ties before coming to the UK. He explains how it would have been very difficult to orientate himself without these loose ties:

Mateusz: Well in general it was like this – that I'd have some work and an apartment. They [his employing organisation] picked me up and then dropped me off at an apartment but I didn't have a mobile phone or anything like that so I couldn't really get anything organized.

Interviewer: But tell me then more about that – you had a friend here?

Mateusz: Well I knew a friend here who had been working here for two months. And when I came here, then he went to London at that time. So he was in London and I stayed here. But you know, obviously, word-of-mouth, or friend-to-friend, one knows English more, the other one knows a little less. And so you just pull one out and then another one out to help. And I mean if I have to then I'll understand 50% of what's being said. You know, it wasn't that bad.

However, Mateusz goes on to explain the downsides of utilising loose associational networks in this way. There are cases, he explains, where the *znajomy* he knows

"Among one another, are quite unfriendly. Instead of being friendly to one another and helping each other, they just cause harm. I'm now not talking about everyone. I am not. Because we shouldn't say that "oh, all Poles will really be horrible to one another". But there are cases where you're just afraid to say anything because they'd just stab you in the back."

One Polish priest that we interviewed was particularly concerned about the uneasy relationships that Poles form with each other upon arrival in the UK:

"A guy came last week –and asked me if I have the internet. And I said that I have it. And so he said that he wanted to buy a ticket to get back to Poland. . . And so I said 'Well, wow, you drove all this way to come and buy this ticket? You couldn't go up to some friend of yours and buy a ticket through their internet?' The majority has the internet. And you know, he said that he doesn't trust them! He was scared that someone would look at his [credit] card, that someone would cheat him out of some money, or whatever. You understand? And so that's why he'd rather go up to a priest than to ask

somebody. Some friends. Because he was scared, he told me honestly. So I think people don't integrate as much because they don't know each other, because they had some bad experiences, maybe someone did trick them."

This level of 'integration' that this interviewee is talking about is not a level of integration into the host society, but rather a level of co-ethnic integration within the Polish community – locating the precise dynamics of the evolution of migrant networks as key to the determination of migrants' welfare. This interviewee's assessment of *znajomy*-relationships also illustrates the difficulties inherent in using regular notions of 'friendships' in translation. This linguistic difference between Polish and English, as stated earlier, helps us display the level at which interaction stops within the support network of low socio-economic status migrants – Poles who are just *znajomys* need not necessarily trust one another at all.

Connection between *znajomys* is often utilitarian. While *znajomys* might not like each other (like in Grzesiek's case) and may not trust each other (like in the case of the man buying the airline ticket), they may interact when needing to find out where to get a job, or how to fix their car (like in Michał's case). Two unfortunate side-effects of this arrangement, however, are that it is sometimes very difficult to draw the line between opportunism and friendship, producing anxiety about being able to trust *znajomys* with important or valuable things. Secondly, perhaps as a consequence of the difficulty of trusting *znajomys*, or perhaps as a result of the difference in behaviour and taste among migrants who are thrown together in rapidly formed, local social networks, there are aspirations to escape the networks of contact that migrants find themselves in. Ewa, for example, attends the English Catholic church in her town because she prefers it to the local Polish church, partly because she feels no enduring affinity with the often low socio-economic status Poles that frequent Polish services. Commenting upon the behaviour of recent migrants at church, she outlines how migrants very often long to escape the social networks that they have had to become a part of. "Once a migrant's English is good enough" she explains "they run away from the Polish church and they go to a regular English Catholic church... if they are interested in faith and not in gossip".

5. Conclusions

This paper set out to examine three propositions from the literature on dynamic network formation in the context of Polish migration to the UK. First, the literature emphasises the locally specific, temporary nature of loose associational ties among migrants. This is evident both in the general literature on migrant network formation (Menjívar, 2000) and in the specific literature that deals with Polish migrant network formation (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; White and Ryan, 2008). Although our sample size is small, indicating that caution is needed in order to interpret our findings, we found evidence in support of this general characterisation of migrant networks.

Second, the literature is divided over the question of whether loose interpersonal ties are more commonly found among highly skilled migrants (Sanders et al., 2002), or whether there is no meaningful pattern in the distribution of interpersonal ties among different socio-economic migrant groups (Harvey, 2008; Wong and Salaff, 1998). Very little literature, however, has suggested that lower socio-economic status migrants experience higher levels of loose associational ties, while our findings do support this conclusion. This can be partially explained in Poros' (2001) terms: higher socio-economic status migrants may derive benefits from their organisations, rendering interpersonal ties of all strengths less important to them.

The fact that higher status migrants do not need loose associational ties with fellow migrants, however, does not explain why they also choose to disassociate from them. The explanation may lie in our third finding, that there are social costs of weak associational ties (see Portes, 1995). While the social costs of strong associational ties has been noted in the literature (for example, Ho, 2008), less attention has been given to the social compromises that migrants must make in order to benefit from weak associational ties. Given our second finding, that lower socio-economic status migrants in our sample tended to rely upon weak associational ties more than higher socio-economic status, this could indicate that the costs and risks of weak associational ties constitute a class-specific burden upon lower status migrants.

Two implications arise from these observations concerning the character of Polish migrant network formation in the UK. First, the aspiration of migrants from lower socio-economic backgrounds is often to disassociate from the networks that they have, through necessity, formed. Second, relatedly, the fact that migrants may need higher levels of support immediately after their arrival, but that this level of dependence soon reduces, may cause significant tension within migrant communities as co-ethnic ties are exploited in the short term and then rejected. This is likely to be particularly acute when migrants with relatively high skills are forced into low skilled occupations and social circles immediately upon arrival, as has been the case for many Poles arriving in the UK (Drinkwater et al., 2006). Under these circumstances we can expect under-employed Poles to utilise the benefits available through loose associational ties initially, but subsequently to seek to escape from the social circles they have occupied, contributing to significant intra-ethnic tension.

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