

## — BOOK REVIEWS —

**Izabela Grabowska (2016). *Movers and Stayers: Social Mobility, Migration and Skills*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 242 pp.**

Are migrants ‘special individuals’? This apparently innocent question has been long overlooked by migration studies and by sociology more generally. It is only relatively recently that it has been picked up as a specific key research issue. And with good reasons: with the world migrant population expanding, ‘international mobility’ has been highlighted as a significant cleavage that cuts across societies and cohorts, possibly shaping emerging inequalities and socio-cultural differences. Existing migration theory can, at best, account for the direction and (rough) size of population flows in aggregate terms, but it remains almost blind to the profile of who is going to move and who is, in fact, more likely to stay put in sending communities. This is a serious limitation in both theoretical and policy-oriented terms.

Grabowska’s book addresses the issue openly with reference to the single largest nationality of migrants within Europe – Poles. She relies on a multiplicity of quantitative and qualitative sources, navigating through data collected between 1996 and 2012. But first of all it grounds data analysis in a pre-eminent theoretical preoccupation: what makes some people move and others not? To this end, Grabowska delves primarily into social theory, focusing on the ‘agency vs structure’ debate (Chapter 1). Among all possible social behaviours, migration – being a life-changing course of action – is a good litmus test of the relative importance of external constraints and intentional choices in human behaviour. Grabowska evokes Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory and Margaret Archer’s morphogenesis as particularly inspiring perspectives that reconcile opposite takes on migration choices. Relying mostly on Archer, her secondary reading of existing research, especially but

not only on Polish migrants, leads her to highlight reflexivity as topical to migration accounts in different settings. In her view, reflexivity serves as an interface between structure and agency – although eventually with a prevailing agency twist.

Grabowska’s methodological underpinning is Adaptive Theory (AT) – in fact, more an epistemological stance than a theory in itself. Chapter 2 is indeed a plea for the triangulation of data sources, the assemblage of factual and subjective information, the merging of deductive and inductive theorising. There is no doubt that all this sits well in a critical positivist approach, but perhaps the author should have better detailed how this overall framework applies to her own study of social and spatial mobility. In fact, the following chapters follow this general inspiration, but do not translate it into a tightly knit (and hard to achieve) combination of structural and agent-based information. What is rather reported is an assemblage of quantitative and qualitative information. In the author’s defence, it is fair to acknowledge that most self-defining mixed-method studies end up being a juxtaposition of different types of data (typically, survey-generated information and open-ended interviews). This book is no exception.

Chapter 3 tackles the core theme of the volume – that is, the relationship between spatial and social mobility. Grabowska has the merit of perusing the classics of social mobility research – back to pioneering research from the 1930s – in the light of spatial mobility, at times venturing into ex-post conclusions, such as: ‘in industrial societies migration is a result not a cause of social mobility’ (page 62). This effort spans space, time and disciplines, also discussing the work of economists (in particular, Chiswick and associates) and serving as an antecedent to her own analyses of Polish migration in the post-communist decades. A clear divide is outlined. Migration out of Poland before EU enlargement used to be short term,

from the countryside and prevalent among low-qualified workers. Accession to the EU reshuffled the profile of Polish migrants. Compared to stayers, the post-2004 migrants are younger, much more likely to be men, and somewhat more likely to be highly educated and already employed (as well as over-represented among qualified workers and owners of firms). This latter characteristic is perhaps the most unexpected from a strictly economic viewpoint. Financial resources (and thus, having a decent job already) are a pre-condition to migration plans – which is, by the way, what most research on less developed countries attests as well.

The spatial-social mobility nexus is explored through population surveys carried out in 1999, 2007 and 2008. In a comparison of first and last jobs in individual careers, Grabowska finds that the social mobility rates of Polish movers have departed from those of the stayers since EU accession (page 85). This increased social mobility occurs both downwardly and upwardly. However, migrant-only surveys nuance this picture by showing that the social mobility rates of more recent migrants are lower than those of their predecessors in the 1990s (page 86). Apparently, social mobility has declined for all, movers and stayers, in Poland. Why? Grabowska mentions areas of origin of migrants as a possible root cause of differing trajectories but, unfortunately, does not carry out any multivariate analysis to control for other covariates that may in fact condition social mobility outcomes. Additionally, she does not discuss the social class schema that undergirds her analysis and that, to some extent, does seem to depart from standard classifications (such as EGP<sup>1</sup>) used internationally. All this makes her findings rather shaky and inconclusive.

Perhaps a deeper analysis of only the largest nation-wide datasets would have yielded more insightful results. And indeed, Chapter 4 concentrates on one of these surveys, applying sequence analysis. Four types of career sequences are identified: ‘anchoring’, ‘improvement’, ‘degradation’ and ‘zig-zag’. While the typology makes sense, it would have been appropriate to make its construction explicit. How are sequences clustered? Which technique was used? Not

surprisingly, movers are more likely than stayers to experience both ‘improvement’ and ‘degradation’ over their occupational careers. Unexpected, in fact, is the difference in the role of education: definitely more closely associated with upward mobility among movers than stayers. Migration, therefore, appears to amplify the social mobility potential of human capital – something that the Polish context may not be able to trigger. This is an intriguing finding that may well be tested in other contexts.

In Grabowska’s strategy, quantitative analyses are complemented by qualitative work histories of 18 return migrants interviewed in 2011–2012, along the lines of seminal work by Daniel Bertaux. The author explores how work careers are interpreted and filled up with meanings by migrants. The structural forces that make careers oscillate along a ‘changeability vs stability’ axis intersect with the subjective perception of job sequences as ‘conditioned vs planned’. Accounts of ‘incidents’ and ‘anchors’ are contrasted to those that hinge around ‘explorations’ and ‘projects’. According to Grabowska, what makes people opt for one or the other vocabulary is each person’s degree of reflexivity – the capacity to engage in an inner conversation about one’s place in the world. Following Archer, reflexivity is nuanced and knows different manifestations, not necessarily leading to the same course of action. Curiously, risk-taking is not evoked here as a critical ingredient in catalysing reflexivity into action. On the one hand, bringing psychology in could be the next step in this line of analysis about the functioning of migrants’ life choices. On the other, however, there could be more to these life histories than the author’s categorisation implies. For instance, the existence of dual careers, one in the country of origin and the other abroad (seasonally), does not necessarily reflect limited agency and planning. While routinised and income-oriented, this type of arrangement has its sophistication and may in fact express a deep thrust towards experimentation that transcends its declared goal (i.e., to make extra money). More or less consciously, such an experience can well affect identities and orientations. In other words, a rhetorical emphasis on instrumentality does not prevent expressive aspirations, which may nonetheless remain in the

background in the interview situation. As any interviewer knows, however thick respondents' narratives are, they can also be incomplete and 'adapted' to the prevailing interpretive framework.

The final chapter looks at in-depth interviews from a different angle: the skills acquired as migrant workers. In the particular case of post-accession Polish movers, market demand was higher for jobs at the low end of the service sector in which, apparently, 'serving skills' are trained and appreciated. Such skills, Grabowska holds, nurture the practice of reflexivity through the monitoring of clients' emotions and interaction dynamics. Post-Fordist employment matches with the migration experience to raise 'awareness of one's self and others in the context of opportunities and constraints', endowing migrants with 'the skill of being mobile both mentally and physically' (pages 192 and 194). While suggestive, these conclusions are again not entirely warranted by the data at hand and could well be challenged in causal terms. It is indeed the same author who oscillates between considering 'reflexivity' sometimes a pre-requirement of migrant selectivity and sometimes an effect of the migration experience. Perhaps future research may seek to disentangle this dilemma with an appropriate (panel-like) research design.

The book suffers from some language imperfections and would have benefitted from more thorough editing. Moreover, it is made heavier by redundancies in discussing well-established concepts ('social structure', 'social mobility', 'career') that would be more appropriate in a PhD thesis or a handbook than in a research monograph. Literature reviews are also extremely detailed but perhaps occupy too large a space in the volume, taking centre stage where they should only form the backdrop to the original analyses. Overall, however, these are minor shortcomings that do not diminish the originality of this work, which launches a bridge between migration and social mobility research – two thriving domains of sociology from which there are surprisingly few examples of cross-fertilisation. *Movers and Stayers* poses an important question – what is the contribution of migrants to home and host societies' social

mobility? – with original materials and sensitivity. The answers may be partial and still tentative, but should not be neglected in future studies on this topic.

*Ettore Recchi*

*Sciences Po, Observatoire Sociologique  
du Changement (OSC), CNRS, Paris, France*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Goldthorpe class scheme', in: *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Retrieved May 28, 2017 from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/goldthorpe-class-scheme>.

**Michał P. Garapich (2016). *London's Polish Borders. Transnationalizing Class and Ethnicity Among Polish Migrants in London*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, pp. 343.**

This long-awaited book is a recent addition to the considerable volume of important research on post-enlargement Polish migration in the UK. Originally guided by a methodological nationalism paradigm, Garapich's study on Poles in London approaches the topic of migration and ethnic identity from a different perspective. In contrast to other works within this field, which prefer to study sameness and uniqueness, the author focuses on class and intra-ethnic divisions within migrants' boundaries, deploying other important concepts from related disciplines, such as 'imagined community' and discourse. But what makes this book even more special is its examination both of how Poles makes sense of the super-diverse locality of a global city with its own complex ethnic relationships, and of how they use, perform, thrive in, but also sometimes struggle with, transnational living. By the same token, a vigorous ethnographic methodology, rich sites of data collections, a thorough examination of multi-genre data (i.e., qualitative interviews and focus groups coupled with field notes from participant observations), as well as a richness of examples from the field to illustrate the author's point, all turn this book into a fine example