

***Polish Families and Migration Since EU Accession.* By  
Anne White. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2011. 266 pp.  
Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables.  
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***Kinga Pozniak* University of Western Ontario**

In *Polish Families and Migration Since EU Accession*, Anne White examines the experiences of Polish migrants to the UK after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. The book's focus is on the migration experiences of working-class Polish families, as told largely by women in their roles as wives, mothers and workers. White addresses questions such as why Poles leave Poland for the UK, why some migrate individually and others with families, how migration strategies reflect, shape and perhaps alter gender roles, how migrants live their lives in the UK, and what factors cause people to contemplate return migration. This research is based on 115 interviews with Polish women residing in four UK cities (Bath, Bristol, Trowbridge and Frome) and two Polish cities (Sanok and Grajewo) as well as data obtained from a specially-commissioned survey. White's discussion is organized around concepts including livelihood strategies, migration culture, networks, transnationalism, integration and acculturation, and enlivened by substantial excerpts from her interviews.

This book makes a number of contributions to the study of migration and to the anthropology of Europe. The experience of Polish migrants to the UK is set against the backdrop of local, national and transnational political, economic and social conditions. Many people's decisions to migrate are triggered by Poland's high unemployment rate (particularly in certain regions), an outcome of the economic reforms adopted after socialism's collapse. While some regions in Poland have a long-standing history of migration, the character of this migration has changed particularly since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, which rendered borders between Poland and fellow EU states more permeable. In recent years, the UK has become one of the most popular destination countries for emigrating Poles. Faced with job precariousness and low wages, people often perceive themselves as forced to migrate, not "for bread" (ie: the barest livelihood) but rather to attain what they consider a "normal" or "decent" lifestyle, consisting of home ownership and education for their children.

The migration experience of Poles after 2004 contributes many insights to the study of transnationalism. Poles arriving in the UK often do not have definite plans as to how long they will stay and whether or not they will return. They frequently receive visits from relatives in Poland, and some visit Poland up to a few times a year, often using the trip as an opportunity to visit the doctor, dentist and hairdresser. Such "temporariness" and "open-endedness", argues White, are privileges of those "without legal restrictions on

their movement and with access to cheap international transport” (15). At the same time, White also acknowledges financial and other limits to people’s transnational activities.

Another concept that receives substantial attention in the book is that of migration networks. White shows that many people’s migration decisions are influenced by the availability of pre-existing family networks in a given destination, although of recent the services of recruitment agencies are becoming increasingly accepted. Upon arriving in the UK, many people also seek out networks with fellow Poles in Polish grocery stores or in Saturday schools for their children.

A particular strength of the book is White’s focus on people’s experience of migration in the context of family. Although this experience is narrated primarily by women, it illustrates that migration decisions and experiences are strongly influenced by partners and children. In contrast to the 1990s migration model, where one parent (usually, but not always, the father) migrated, Poles are increasingly more likely to migrate as families, often with children, an option that is perceived as healthier both for the marriage and for the parent-child relationship. The well-being of children is a major factor influencing parents’ migration decisions. Many parents, for instance, are hesitant to return to Poland once their child has started school in the UK, for fear that they will not be able to adapt to the Polish education system.

In her analysis, White is attentive to how the migration experience is informed in part by the migrants’ social class. She notes, for instance, that the majority of her interlocutors do not have university education or advanced English skills prior to migrating. Upon arriving in the UK, the majority of women accept work as cleaners while their partners work in construction, repairs or as bus drivers. Such jobs will not support a lavish existence, yet Poles find them satisfactory since they do provide secure employment and a respectable wage that allows for a higher standard of living than they would have in Poland.

White is also correct to stress the importance of locality and local political, economic and social context (both in Poland and the UK) in shaping migration decisions. Different towns within each country offer different employment and life opportunities, and when making decisions, people compare living conditions and opportunities in specific towns: for example, Sanok, Poland versus Bath, England. Furthermore, different regions in Poland (and high-sending regions in particular) develop their own specific “migration cultures”, which shape decisions about where to migrate, the acceptable motives for migration, and the networks available to migrants in their place of destination.

This book would be of interest to scholars and students interested in migration, transnationalism, and identity, particularly in the context of the European Union.