The Unbearable Lightness of Moving: Czech Migrants Making a Home (or Not) in the UK*

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Abstract: This article builds on the emerging tradition of transnationalism in migration research, which considers both migrants' 'making a home' in their host societies and their continued attachments to their places of origin as parallel processes. It examines the factors that influence migrants' simultaneous negotiation of 'belonging' in the home and host societies. This question is particularly significant in the 'liquid' context of free intra-EU mobility. The analysis is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in 2014–2016 with 41 Czech migrants who had moved to the United Kingdom in 1990–2015. Building on existing research of Central and Eastern European migration, the article shows that despite their diverse trajectories, most interviewees strive for 'grounded' lives with a family and a predictable future. Their sense of 'belonging' is affected by their reasons for coming to and staying in the UK, but especially by the presence or absence of agency; whether the migrant's decision to stay was voluntary or dependent. Aspects of the individual's migration situation and personal characteristics are also shown to structure migrant belonging. The concept of a 'leap of faith' is introduced to capture the role of a conscious commitment to settling in the host country, both physically and mentally, and thus re-gaining 'control' over one's migration trajectory in cases when the decision to stay was not made independently.

Keywords: liquid migration, settlement, belonging, reasons for coming and staying, agency

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Introduction

East-West migration within the European Union (EU) following the 2004 and 2007 enlargement waves has received extensive attention in recent years. Scholars have examined the impact of Central and East European (CEE) migration flows on the economies of the EU15 states [Kahanec, Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2009], or the role of economic mobility in CEE migrants' career strategies [Parutis 2011]. Intra-EU free movement of EU citizens has been conceptualised as 'mobility', which is less restricted than international migration from third countries but still not as free as internal migration [Favell 2013]. As well as supra-national legislation, national laws, the situation on the labour market, and public attitudes all contribute to individual migration experiences. Even people who are free to move 'there and back' within relatively culturally and socially homogeneous spaces negotiate multiple engagements in their home and host environments. Although they may not be facing insurmountable legal barriers or a threat to life, their subjective well-being may suffer because they are unable to 'make a permanent move' [Moskal 2013]. This may be exacerbated by their intensive transnational living [Vertovec 2010: 15].

This paper presents the outcomes of a qualitative study that is part of a broader research project on migration from the Czech Republic (CZ) to the United Kingdom (UK).[1] My aim is to investigate the factors that influence feelings of 'belonging' in the home and host societies. Along the way, I analyse the role of reasons for coming to and staying in the UK, the 'liquid migration context', and the conflict between individual agency and dependence as factors explaining the subjective migration experience.

My theoretical framework builds on the body of academic literature that studies 'liquid migration' as a characteristic of contemporary intra-EU mobility, postulating 'liquidity' as a context rather than an individual mobility strategy. The concept of 'belonging' in the home and host societies is used to bridge the divide between the migrant experience of 'making a home' in the country of settlement, while maintaining attachments to the country of origin. My analysis shows that belonging is influenced by the reasons for coming to and staying in the host country, aspects of the migrant's individual situation and personal characteristics, and especially individual agency in migration decision-making. Building on this groundwork, I introduce the concept of a 'leap of faith' to signify the act of committing oneself to a 'full' life in the host country, and thus re-gaining agency over one's migration trajectory in cases when the decision to stay was not independent, but return cannot take place due to circumstances beyond the migrant's powers. Taking this mental 'leap' helps bring one's emotions about life in migration 'under control' and thereby achieving a more 'grounded' life.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in 2014–2016 with 41 Czech migrants who moved to the UK between 1990 and 2015. The interviews

[1] A dissertation project focusing on the integration and local/transnational civic engagement of Czechs in the UK.

focused on migration trajectories, feelings of belonging in the home and host societies, and how those feelings relate to local and transnational civic engagement. In this text I focus on migrants' negotiations of multiple identificational attachments in order to examine the questions of belonging, agency, and liquidity. Even though I do not engage in a discussion of the role of different forms of transnational practices for migrant belonging, the tensions between migrant affiliations with 'here and there' form an inseparable part of my methodological orientation [Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004].

The article is organised as follows: I first contextualise the study politically and geographically and explain the theoretical framework. After presenting the methodology, method, and data, I discuss the findings from my analysis. I identify the key reasons for coming and staying and show the role played by agency, the 'liquid migration context' and the 'leap of faith' concept in structuring migrant belonging. The paper concludes with an overview of the findings and a discussion of the positioning of Czech mobility in the context of CEE intra-EU migrations, as well as the importance of taking family context into account when considering migrants' decision-making.

Political-geographical context

The Czech Republic and the United Kingdom were selected for this analysis as two countries that in certain respects are outliers in their respective regions. The UK is a typical Western EU migrant-destination country in terms of its long-term political stability, economic prosperity, and relatively open immigration policy. It stands out by having been one of only three EU15 states not to introduce any Transitional Arrangements[2] on immigration from new member states after the 2004 enlargement, and one of the three EU members where English—the most widely studied foreign language worldwide—is the official national language, which in effect made it the biggest recipient of EU10 labour and study migrants [Kahanec, Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2009]. As many as 580 000 CEE citizens entered the UK's Worker Registration Scheme after 1 May 2004, and in 2005 the share of EU8 workers increased to 25% of the migrant labour force [Okólski 2007: 12–13] The state's long-term sceptical attitude to the EU project and a recent rise of anti-Eastern European migrant sentiments, which culminated in the Brexit vote in June 2016, add to the paradoxical position the country occupies within the context of intra-EU migration.[3]

[2] Restrictions on the free movement of workers from new EU member states, which existing member states can apply to a new member for up to seven years after accession.

[3] Even though Brexit will surely affect CEE migration to the UK (and to the rest of the EU15), this article does not consider its impact owing to a lack of suitable data and the author's belief that the findings here will still have relevance for the study of Czech and CEE migration to the UK and within EU in general.

Some 2.5 million people with Czech origins live outside the Czech Republic [MZV ČR 2012]. The country's history of westward migration makes the CR significant in the context of the CEE in three respects. First, the volume of migration has never been large enough for the Czech Republic to be considered a major migrant-sending country. This was true in the 1948–1989 period, when emigration from Czechoslovakia was illegal, but people migrated nonetheless as a form of political protest or in search of freedom [Jirásek 1999]. It also applied in the 1990s when the new political freedom inspired some people to move abroad, but apparently gave many a reason to stay or even return [Nešpor 2005]. Lastly, it continued to be true even after 2004, despite the public disappointment with the development of the political and economic situation in the Czech Republic since 1989. Although the number of people migrating annually peaked at more than 34 000 in 2003–2004 (compared to a few hundred emigrants yearly in 1994–2000), net migration rate remained positive throughout the post-socialist era and the number of leavers declined rapidly again from 2007 onwards [ČSÚ 2016]. A reason for this may be that the Czech Republic claims to be one of the EU countries least hit by the 2008 economic crisis. Second, for over a century, most Czech migrants have been drawn to the same destinations, regardless of the political circumstances. With over 46 000 Czech residents, the UK is the prime Czech migrant destination in Europe and the third-biggest Czech migrant recipient worldwide, following the USA and Canada with approximately 1.6 million and 80 000 Czech residents, respectively [ONS 2017; MZV ČR 2012]. Even though the Czech minority in the UK is marginal in size compared to other CEE minorities,[4] its presence there has historically been repeatedly fortified with inflows of new migrants.

Central and Eastern European migration to the EU15

CEE migration to Western Europe, driven by uneven economic development and the divergence of political regimes in the 20th century, has been of continuous interest to scholars [Okólski 2007]. This phenomenon gained new momentum with the 2004 EU accession of eight CEE states (A8). According to Okólski [2007: 23], three forces explain the size and directions of A8 post-accession migration: low wages and/or unemployment in the sending countries; labour shortages in the receiving countries; and cross-EU15 differences in the opening up of labour markets. This explains why A8 citizens took advantage of the new opportunities for intra-EU mobility in larger numbers than expected and why so many of them headed to the UK and Ireland as opposed to Germany, which had been CEE migrants' prime destination before accession [ibid.]. According to Fassmann, Kohlbacher and Reeger [2014: 45], there were five million CEE citizens living in EU15 in 2011.

[4] The UK had, for instance, one million Polish and 212 000 Lithuanian residents in 2017. The total size of the foreign-born population in the UK was 9.3 million, and foreign nationals accounted for 6.1 million [ONS 2017].

Theoretical framework

Liquid versus settlement migration

Scholars have noted the multiplicity of migration temporalities among CEE migrants to EU15, including seasonal, short- and long-term, permanent, and repeated migrations, many of which can be characterised by their 'liquidity' and an uncertainty about the future [Engbersen and Snel 2013; Drinkwater and Garapich 2015]. Inspired by Bauman's [1999] 'liquid modernity', Engbersen and Snel [2013: 34–35] define 'liquid migration' as mobility that is unpredictable in terms of destinations and duration, that is often repeated, and that is individualised, economically oriented, and rooted in the 'migratory habitus of "*intentional unpredictability*"' [Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006; my emphasis]. This term captures the approach of 'keeping all options open', having no fixed aspirations and obligations. According to Grabowska-Lusińska [2013], it comes about either as a survival strategy in the face of insecure economic circumstances, or as a reflection of a person's inability to decide about their life goals. This echoes Favell's [2008] analysis of 'Eurostars', young, highly skilled European professionals who on the one hand indulge in a liberating, 'de-nationalised', 'detached' existence in European metropolises, and on the other negotiate the need to settle at some point in their lives.

Liquidity is made possible by the free movement policy that gives European citizens legal residence status in any destination within the Union [Engbersen and Snel 2013: 33]. It has been observed that most A8 migrants move in their 20s and 30s and are single and childless [Moskal 2013; Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich 2009]. They are willing to take rather low-skilled jobs, even if they often have a high level of education, in exchange for quick financial gain and/or international experience as such [Isański, Mleczko and Seredyńska-Abou Eid 2013]. Low-skilled employment is perceived as a short-term step beneficial for their economic and social mobility in the destination country or 'back home' [Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006]. This process has been described by Parutis [2011] as a progress from just '"any job" to a "better job" in the search of a "dream job".'

In some respects, liquid migration is an extension of Okólski's [2001] (pre-accession) '*incomplete migration*', which is, however, seen to have concerned mainly low-skilled, rural or marginalised groups seeking irregular employment, while liquid migration is mostly associated with highly educated migrants with a regular work contract. Garapich [2008] acknowledges (Polish) post-accession migration as a continuation of pre-accession migration, but more demand-driven and based on the migrants' greater awareness about their labour market status.

Liquid migration can be understood as part of the growing 'super-diversity' of world migrations, enabled by political, economic, and technological developments, like reduced travel costs and advanced information and communications technologies [Vertovec 2007]. A8 migration to the EU15, however, is specific in that the 'disappearance' of state borders has transformed old international eco-

nomic migration patterns into '(semi-)internal' migration, allowing CEE citizens to look for employment in Western Europe in a trial-and-error manner with relatively low financial and time costs and little economic risk [Engbersen and Snel 2013]. When the intended migration goals (improved language skills, increased savings, international experience, socio-economic mobility) are fulfilled or fail, the migrant can always return or re-emigrate [Engbersen and Snel 2013: 37].

Krisjane, Berzins and Apsite [2013: 87–88, 99] highlight the non-committal nature of post-accession migration, noting that 'migrants who initially viewed themselves as temporary or seasonal can become permanent migrants in response to economic shock in the host and home countries', even despite the seriousness of their intention to return. In a similar vein, Ryan [2015] portrays Polish post-accession migration to the UK as a repeatedly extended stay. Transnational attachments might serve to support or deter such a decision [Moskal 2013].

Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich [2006] have introduced a typology of Polish migrants in London based on their attachments to the home and host societies. The circular 'stork' migrants choose repeated short-term trips as a long-term strategy, while 'hamsters' migrate only once for a longer period with the aim of a quick financial gain to use back home. 'Searchers' deliberately keep their options open, are young, individualistic, ambitious, and perform low- to high-skilled jobs. They are more open to staying than the preceding groups mentioned here, but can well imagine returning or migrating elsewhere. 'Stayers' are settled in the UK on a long-term basis, intend to remain, and generally have high social mobility ambitions in the UK. They value the migration experience for the acquisition of economic, as well as other forms of capital. The current paper borrows a few of these categories to illustrate the differences in belonging between Czechs in the UK.

The typology of CEE migrants in the Netherlands put forward by Engbersen et al. [2013] represents a similar, yet slightly different approach to studying migrants' differing attachments to their home and host countries, operationalised as language skills and usage, income and employment status, relationship status, but also social networks, civic engagement, and institutional attachments.

The theory of liquid migration has been challenged by Bygnes and Erdal [2017] who have shown that Polish and Spanish migrants in Norway in their 30s and 40s, whom they label as 'adult', as opposed to the 'young' 20-somethings, seek to establish settled, family-oriented, economically stable, and dignified 'grounded lives' through their migration projects. 'Liquid migration' serves rather as the context from which they draw in this effort, which makes their 'quest for normalcy' more difficult [Drinkwater and Garapich 2015]. Bygnes and Erdal [2017] claim that rather than voluntarily choosing liquid migration as a strategy, individuals in countries with highly deregulated labour markets sometimes end up being 'trapped' in liquid migration; being forced to stay mobile to provide for their families, while their 'home', their family, and their social networks stay put.

The few studies that have dealt with Czech migration (before and after 2004) have found that much of it might consist of temporary mobility connected with

improving language skills, studying, gaining work experience, and short-term economic betterment, all of which are directed towards using the accumulated capital to improve one's life standard in the country of origin [Pařízková 2011; Vavrečková and Hantak 2008]. They thus provide evidence for the prevalence of 'hamster' mobilities among recent Czech migrants. The current analysis shows that while 'hamster' motivations might be quite common among Czechs' reasons for migrating, 'grounded' family life aspirations lead some of them to stay, findings similar to those of Bygnes and Erdal [2017].

Belonging

The concept of 'belonging' is used in this article to examine the individual migrant experience of being part of the 'social fields' *here and there*; to bridge the divide between the migrant experience of 'making a home' in the country of settlement, while maintaining attachments to the country of origin [Binaisa 2013; Lacroix 2013]. My conception of 'belonging' derives from Bosswick and Heckmann's [2006: 17] 'identificational' dimension of integration, defined as the '[a]cceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the sphere of primary relations and networks of the receiving society. (…) Indicators are social intercourse, friendships, partnerships, marriages and membership in voluntary organizations'. Identificational integration comprises the individual's identification 'with the goals of [the] institutions [of the receiving society] and … a feeling of belonging and inclusion to the immigration society' [ibid.]. In contrast to the 'structural', 'interactive', and 'cultural' dimensions of integration, which focus on objectively measurable variables such as employment status, quantity of social ties, or language skills, this is the authors' sole dimension of migrant integration, which takes the point of view of the migrant and considers less easily measurable phenomena such as the adoption of values, quality of relationships, or feelings of acceptance, studied in this paper.

'Belonging' has been further operationalised using the definition of Anthias, who espouses its relational nature by stressing that 'to belong is to be accepted as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in [its future]. To belong is to share values, networks and practices' [2009: 8]. In interviews, sharing values and practices was tackled by a question about the adoption of general values, cultural norms, and codes of behaviour. Some interviewees spoke about differences of 'mentality'.

Belonging is also 'about experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in *practices*, *experiences* and *emotions* of inclusion' [ibid.; my emphasis]. In my interviews, these are revealed in statements about direct experiences of acceptation or discrimination by the 'society'. In other words, 'belonging is never entirely about migrants' subjective feelings of "fitting in" or not, but also relates to how (powerful) others define who belongs' [Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 523].

The dilemma of 'home' is an indivisible part of the operationalisation of 'belonging' in my analysis. 'Home' is tackled as a notion of a space where one feels safe, comfortable, happy, and content, which may be intertwined with an idea of a particular dwelling or place [Anthias 2009]. Authors have pointed to the ambivalence in many migrants' conceptions of 'home', which seem 'to extend outward and to be mobile, but also to be grounded and sedentary' [Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 518]. The transnational nature of migrant being may lead to conflicts of 'double belonging', which blur the idea of 'home' and complicate the ability to settle in one place both physically and mentally—'make a permanent move' [Moskal 2013: 158]. Such conflicts are reflected in homesickness and recurring (idealised) consideration of return, further aspects of (troubled) migrant belonging considered in this paper [Grabowska 2016; Hornstein Tomić and Scholl-Schneider 2016].

To sum up, in this paper 'belonging' is used as a relational concept deriving from migrants' emotional and practical attachments to 'here' and 'there'. It is formed by the migrants' subjective identification with the 'mentality', values, practices, and goals of the societies in question, as well as by the acceptance expressed by (representatives of) the societies themselves. Apart from the migrants' feelings of 'fitting in' or experiences of inclusion, it is reflected in the structure and quality of their social networks, including intimate and family ties, as well as in their contacts with strangers (e.g. having close friends or feeling discriminated against by employers in the UK or CZ). In addition, whether their notion of 'home' is abstract or concrete, fluid, changeable or fixed, ambivalent or clear, indicates their sense of belonging to either society.

Agency

'Agency', as opposed to 'dependence', is another key theoretical concept in my analysis. Described as a 'slippery' concept [Hitlin and Elder 2007], it has been defined as (a mixture of) free will, the capability to initiate (self-)change, self-efficacy, 'planful competence', action that involves intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness [ibid.: 172; Giddens 1986: 9, 14]. There is some disagreement as to whether it is a universal human capacity or a variable one that some people have more of—for example, based on previous successful decision-making [Hitlin and Elder 2007: 183]. Building on existing theorisations, this paper operationalises 'agency' as, on the one hand, the inherent human capacity to take free, intentional action to change the course of events, and, on the other, the 'self-reflective belief about one's capacity to achieve (short-or long-term) goals' [ibid.: 182]. In other words, all individuals are able to take (free) action, but in certain respects or in certain situations this may be circumscribed by circumstances or overridden by someone else's agency, depending on the actor's self-confidence and power to put their preferences into force [ibid.; Giddens 1986; Hoang 2011].

It is useful to recall two aspects of 'agency' here: its 'temporal orientation', which is why it has frequently been taken up in life course studies, and its rela-

tion to 'structure'. Emirbayer and Mische define human agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)' [1998: 963]. Grabowska claims that these three components of agency are valuable for explaining the meaning of migration within occupational lives and the opportunity structure in which these are embedded [2016: 86]. In a similar vein to Bygnes and Erdal [2017], she examines the problem of creating goal-oriented career trajectories in the context of liquidity, where individuals might easily get caught up in 'incident' and 'drifting' behaviours and lose responsibility for lives 'of their own', i.e. lose agency over their life trajectories [Grabowska 2016: 86].

Wingens et al. [2011: 10–11] take a different approach, describing three types of time in relation to the role of agency in the life course: micro-level biographical time, meso-level institutional or social time, and macro-level historical time. While the first concerns individual ageing and personal experiences, the second comprises the 'social clocks' that schedule the timing of 'events in particular life phases … make life course events, whether resulting from individuals' own decisions or just happening to them, on-time or off-time, [possibly leading to] specific socially (dis-)advantageous consequences', and the third is represented by historical events, such as, in the context studied here, the Czech Republic's accession to the EU in 2004. One of the greatest challenges for human agency is to synchronise the three types of time in one's life course; migration often introduces asynchrony, which can lead to frustration and unhappiness [ibid.]. Many of the dilemmas of belonging studied below can be ascribed to such asynchronies in the life course.

Sociological literature has mostly approached 'agency' through the structure vs agency dilemma, with the prevailing conclusion recently being that the two should be perceived as compatible aspects of human social existence, rather than opposing understandings of it [Giddens 1986; Wingens et al. 2011]. This discussion is important for the purposes of this paper in that it shows how context-dependent individual decision-making is, i.e. highlights the role of the place and the (economic, social, political, historical, geographical) space in which the decision to move, stay, or return takes place. It should be recalled that the opportunity structure a migrant draws on in this act comprises not only the state of economic and political affairs or the social atmosphere in the countries left and entered, but also the family relationships and social networks he/she is part of [Wingens et al. 2011: 10]. A native spouse may increase a migrant's potential to integrate economically and socially by widening their social networks and contributing to their language proficiency [Muttarak 2011], but 'mixed' families may also end up isolated as a result of having little in common with the majority population [Aure 2013]. In addition, agency is also subject to interpersonal power relations [Giddens 1986: 9; Hoang 2011]. The agency of the partner the dependent migrant is following may suppress the agency of the migrant, who may then develop con-

flicting feelings about remaining in migration [cf. Hoang 2011]. This highlights the role of the household as an important unit of analysis in migration studies, which is why migrants' concerns with the interests of their partners and their children, which received a lot of space in many of the narratives I studied, are given so much attention in my analysis. Also, it shows that like a lot of the other decision-making that occurs at life's turning points, migrants' moving/staying decisions are not unambiguous; as spouses, partners, parents, or children, they often prioritise the best interests of their significant other(s) and/or other structural circumstances , such as employment opportunities, salary level, or various social aspects, over their own personal preferences, sometimes with questionable consequences for their subjective well-being.

In this article, 'agency', as opposed to 'dependence', is considered, on the one hand, as an aspect of a migrant's staying in the host country (whether this is his/her free, voluntary decision) and, on the other, as the ability of the migrant to keep his/her migration trajectory 'under control' face to face with the 'liquid migration context' [Grabowska 2016; Bygnes and Erdal 2017].

Methodology, methods and data

My discussion is anchored in a transnational methodological framework, which approaches migrants' relations to both their societies of origin and settlement as an important component of migrant life stories [Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004]. Locally bound identifications and activities are analysed in relation to migrants' 'sustained social, economic and political engagement across borders' [Vertovec 2010: 13], considered key for establishing, maintaining, and solidifying an individual's position and subjective identification within both societies concerned. My findings provide evidence for Lacroix's description of transnationalism as the 'choice which results from a non-choice, i.e. from the wish not to choose between assimilation and return … [marking] the various strategies through which migrants strive to align the different poles of their identity' [2013: 1023].

A qualitative research design based on narrative semi-structured interviewing was used. In-depth, individual-centred qualitative methods make it possible to 'access the underlying meanings of people's "everyday" by trying to uncover their subjective experiences and shared intersubjective understandings' [Peychlová 2012: 18; Titchen and Hobson 2009]. A precondition for this is to arrange the interview situation so that it resembles an informal conversation; making sure the relationship between the interviewee and the researcher is 'horizontal' instead of 'hierarchical' [Kohler Riessman 2002: 701]. This makes it possible not only to gain access to the research participants' 'authentic' attitudes and lived experiences, but also to identify originally unthought-of areas of their lives that may turn out to be relevant [Lawson 2000]. This approach enabled me to cover the planned interview areas and to test the validity of some of the delineated

topics in the initial stages of interviewing, and thus to refine some questions and concept definitions [Shacklock and Thorp 2009: 156]. It also led to the discovery of the role played by the 'constant awareness of the possibility to return' and the 'leap of faith' in structuring migrant belonging.

My analysis is based on 41 in-depth interviews with Czech migrants living in the UK collected in 2014–2016 (29 women, 12 men, 1.5 hours on average). Research participants were selected according to the timing of their migration to the UK (1990–2015) and recruited using a variety of channels (ethnic associations and online forums, Facebook groups, personal contacts, snowball sampling). Interviews were conducted in Czech in their homes, workplaces, or in public places. At the participants' request or for practical reasons, one interview was replaced with a written exchange and seven interviews were conducted via Skype.

The participants lived in nine NUTS 1 regions of England, including London, and Ireland. Length of residence in the UK ranged from seven months to 20 years; the sample thus included both pre- and post-accession migrants. More than half of the participants were in their 30s, a fourth in their 40s, and some in their 20s and 50s. More than half had university education, 14 secondary, and four had vocational education. Their work trajectories varied. Some had left for the UK as students or upon completing their studies, some had been unemployed, others had quit their jobs in order to leave. Most of them worked, in jobs ranging from elementary occupations to professionals and managers. Eight were homemakers (all caring for their mostly pre-school children and one for his ill wife), two were unemployed. Fourteen were married and lived with their spouses, twelve cohabited with their partners, four had a non-cohabiting partner in the UK, three were divorced and eight single. Ten of the participants' partners were British, two non-European, and thirteen Czech. Over a half of them had children; most of those were minors living with them in the UK, and most of those who were adult lived there too, but independently.

The interviews centred on migration motives and trajectories, experiences and strategies of integration, aspects of belonging, considerations of staying and return, and their relation to various professional and private local and transnational practices. In several cases, follow-up chat conversations or e-mail exchanges took place some time after the interview to clarify interview statements or find out how the participants' trajectories had developed. Interview transcripts were coded using open, axial, and selective coding and analysed in Atlas.ti using conversation analysis with the aim of saturating pre-defined thematic categories and identifying newly emerging topics [Silverman 2005: 183–186; Strauss and Corbin 1990]. Summarising participants' key characteristics in a table helped to group them.

The study's limitations lie in the gender and education imbalance of the sample and the potential bias caused by the self-selection of participants, possibly towards those with a positive migration experience. In order to overcome the latter I tried to diversify recruitment channels and devoted sufficient time in

interviews to issues in the migration experience that participants expressed more ambivalence about. In fact, very few narratives captured stories of pure success and happiness. As education did not seem to work as a key factor in my analysis, I would say this imbalance did not have a crucial impact on the results. Similarly, the gender composition did not seem to skew the findings, though this risk must be kept in mind when reading them.

Findings

The analysis will not only show that belonging is influenced by the reasons for coming to and staying in the host country, aspects of the migrant's individual situation, and personal characteristics, but also that agency (whether the decision to stay has been an independent one or not) plays a key role in structuring Czech migrants' belonging in the host society. In addition, the 'liquid migration context' will be shown as a factor that may complicate belonging by undermining the migrants' ability to settle in the host country both physically and mentally. By taking a 'leap of faith', however, they may exercise their agency over their migration trajectory to obtain a more 'grounded life'.

Reasons for coming and staying

The reasons for coming to the UK and the reasons for staying on a (more or less) long-term basis are often not identical. Most participants' reasons for staying transformed over time and accumulated as they moved up the career ladder, started families, or grew accustomed to a new lifestyle and to the norms and values of the host society—often all at the same time and in relation to the length of time spent living in the UK (Ryan [2015] reports similar findings).

The reasons identified for coming and staying can be classified into the following seven categories.

1. 'experience' (the wish to try living abroad, usually accompanied by the goal of learning English and/or earning and saving money, sometimes described as a needed change in one's life)
2. studies (enrolment in a university programme)
3. work (an economic concern, the aim of obtaining 'any job' [Parutis 2011], preconditioned either by the individual's aim to earn and save money to use after returning to the Czech Republic, or by a long-term struggle getting by, including experiencing unemployment)
4. career (orientation towards socio-economic mobility)
5. partner (reunification with or accompanying a partner who prefers to or must live in the UK, usually due to his/her employment)

6. children (concern for one's children's best in terms of education, living environment, language skills, social identification etc.)
7. social reasons (living standard, discrimination, social security, life/career prospects, lifestyle, independence, language, social ties, politics, society)

While *experience*, *studies* and *work* were named rather as reasons for coming, *career*, *children* and *social reasons* grew in importance later in the migration trajectory as reasons for staying. The category of *partner* was the most stable over time—it was most often given as a reason both for coming and for staying. These findings distinguish the Czech sample from other research on recent CEE migrants in that family and social reasons for staying appear equally or more important than economic reasons [cf. Drinkwater and Garapich 2015].

The participants' migration plans both at the beginning of their migration trajectories and at the time of interviewing, particularly whether they planned to return to the Czech Republic or not and in what time frame, were structured by the type of reasons they gave for coming and/or staying. As will be shown in the next section, feelings of belonging in the home and host societies were influenced by whether the migrants' own agency was behind these reasons or whether they stemmed from circumstances the migrants saw as 'external' to their will.

Stay, return, or decide later? The role of agency in structuring migrant belonging

In this section, I will borrow a few categories from the typology by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich [2006], which are instrumental in illustrating differences between migrants based on their reasons for coming and staying, and the role of individual agency for the feeling of belonging.

'Stayers'

At the time of interviewing, 19 of my 41 interlocutors were determined to stay in the UK. All but two of this group had spouses or long-term partners in the UK and 12 of them had children. All migrated in their 20s, some in their 30s. They represent the type of migrant dubbed 'stayers' by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich [2006] in the sense that they had already been settled in the UK for a fairly long period (16 of them had lived there for seven or more years) and generally had strong social mobility ambitions in the UK, regardless of their education level and current occupation, both of which varied widely. Most importantly though, most of them were fully enmeshed in UK-based social networks and situated the focal point of their working and social lives there (see also 'settlers' in Engbersen et al. [2013]).

This group included migrants who ended up settling in the UK after an original 'trial' stay (original plan was to return) or after which they would 'see

what next' (original plan was open), as well as such who came to the UK with a plan to stay.

For those whose original plan was open or a temporary stay, this always comprised work experience such as a temporary job or internship, mostly coupled with the aim of improving their English and saving money, after which the migrant would return to the Czech Republic to pursue a career there [cf. Isański, Mleczko and Seredyńska-Abou Eid 2013]. Yet, circumstances, such as a long-term job offer, a romance, or the realisation that their living standards or lifestyle in the UK were better than those they would have in the Czech Republic, led to the person staying much longer. In comparison to the reasons for permanent settlement identified by Krisjane, Berzins and Apsite [2013] among Latvian migrants, family or social reasons were given more often than economic ones, as the following example shows.

> The original plan was that I would go somewhere for six months and improve my English. I had already started looking into job offers [in CZ] (…) The political situation [in CZ] was one of the factors that kept me away from going back. (…) Plus, my English still [wasn't good enough]. I said—it makes no sense going back now because I still haven't learned what I wanted to, I still don't speak as well as I would like to. (Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK) [5]

These research participants describe the story of their staying in the UK as a positive coincidence. An important aspect of these stories that distinguishes them from more ambivalent migrant stories in the sample is the element of 'individual agency'; they describe their decision to stay as a *fully voluntary, independent decision*. This voluntariness, as well as the appreciation of the 'new opportunity' that the country has given them, is what contributes to their strong feelings of belonging to UK society, as we can read in the following quote.

> I didn't finish [university in CZ]. I decided to stay here … I felt after those eight months here that I had started something here and wouldn't have the chance to finish it [if I were to return]. It seemed more important to me than going back to Prague and studying at university. (…) I liked London, I enjoyed everything here, everything was so new and … when I compared the two options (…), here suddenly everything suited me better somehow. So I decided to stay. (Daniela, 30s, working, 10 years in the UK)

Cook, Dwyer and Waite [2010] demonstrate that among their CEE research participants too, the prevailing reason they developed a long-term attachment to the UK was that life there had given them a sense of empowerment and dignity.

[5] The names of the research participants have been replaced with pseudonyms. All interview quotes were translated from Czech by the author.

Feelings of empowerment and, in turn, of belonging in UK society were also reflected in the stayers' accounts of identification with British society, as Kateřina explained:

> I do have a few Slovak and one or two Polish friends here. But [I spend more time with English ones]. I think the culture and the mentality are so different. My mentality has changed so much since I have been living with an English partner. (Kateřina, 20s, homemaker, 8 years in the UK)

The migrants who were already determined to stay at the outset of their migration trajectories were similarly positive about their decision. They described the story of their coming to the UK and staying as natural and their reasoning about remaining as clear-cut, like Klára:

> I left [for the UK] with the plan to stay. I figured—there's no future [in CZ], OK, so it's time to pack up and go somewhere else, draw a line and start anew. (Klára, 30s, working, 3 years in the UK)

Most of the stayers cited their career, partner, and children simultaneously as reasons for staying. They were satisfied with their decision to migrate and the development of their life trajectories since then, which they mostly described as the result of their free, informed choice, a natural part of their career and life development, in which 'action, agency, [a person's own] self-control and (…) perception that "migration must be under control" is clear' [Grabowska 2016: 100–101].

'Searchers'

The second group of 12 participants were keeping their plans 'open'. Only one of them was married, four were single, one divorced, and six others cohabited with their partners. All but three in this group were childless. Most had tertiary education and most performed jobs corresponding to their education level and qualifications. The duration of their stay in the UK ranged from 1 to 11 years. Most of them had migrated in their 20s, some in their 30s. This group most resembled the 'searchers' as defined by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich [2006]. Like their Polish counterparts, their general reference point was the UK, and they valued the economic and lifestyle opportunities offered by the UK; career and lifestyle/living standard were the most common reasons for staying. They were open to staying, but so far remained neutral about the 'geographical placing of their futures' [Bygnes and Erdal 2017: 104], implying an openness to challenge and opportunity (cf. 'bi-nationals' in Engbersen et al. [2013]). They had strong social ties in both the UK and the Czech Republic and were generally satisfied with the balance, not really acknowledging their weakening contact with their extended family and their old friends as a problem [cf. Favell 2008: 203–205]:

> … when I come to [my birth town], I usually go out with all the friends I am interested in seeing, we talk over everything, and then I leave again. It's not like we need to call each other all the time. (Luboš, 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK)

This is the only group in my sample that could be claimed to be deliberately and actively engaged in liquid migration. However, despite having declared that their plans are open, most of them are already at an advanced stage of their career, which they describe in goal-oriented and pragmatic terms. They do not generally resemble 'explorers' with no clear vision of the future and they do not seem to perceive the future as (painfully) uncertain [Grabowska 2016: 96–99; Bygnes and Erdal 2017: 108–109]. Rather, the fact that they are often single and childless or involved in relatively new love relationships seems to be why they do not feel comfortable in declaring they are planning to settle somewhere for good. They explicitly or implicitly posit this as a decision they will make later, together with their (potential) life partners:

> [My future career plans] depend a lot on whether we stay here or not. Because … before [our two-year-old son] starts going to school, we need to decide whether we'll be here or in Czechia. (Prokop, 40s, working, 10 years in the UK)

However, in most cases their work, migration, and life trajectories show that they are ultimately also striving for a 'normal', settled life in a stable relationship and with a family.

All but one interviewee in this group declared they came to the UK with an 'open' plan. Their reasons for coming were diverse, including work, children, a partner, gaining experience, studying, divorce, or discrimination. Their reasons for staying were often different from the ones they had for coming, but they were relatively uniform across the group as such, in most cases relating to their career, a partner, lifestyle, and living standard, like in the case of stayers. Like the stayers, they generally portrayed their migration trajectories as a product of their own agency and evaluated them positively. Even though, on the one hand, this supports the side of the debate over intentional unpredictability that sees liquid and 'Eurostar' migration as a liberating project of personal development [Favell 2008: 3–9], it must be stressed that most searchers demonstrably hoped for a relatively stable future.

'Return-wishers'

The last group, comprising 10 interviewees, were those who wished to return. Most of them were married or cohabiting, two were divorced. All but three in this group had children. Five had tertiary education, four secondary, and one primary. They had been in the UK between 3 and 11 years. Some were in their 20s when they migrated, some in their 30s, and some in their 40s. Only two per-

formed specialist jobs corresponding to their tertiary education, four were homemakers, three had domestic/caring jobs they were overqualified for, and one was unemployed. None of them was a 'hamster' or 'stork' type of migrant in the sense of Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich [2006] or a 'circular' migrant as described by Engbersen et al. [2013]. Their reasons for staying were primarily partner, children, or social, and all of them had been based in the UK for a relatively long time. Paraphrasing Bygnes and Erdal [2017: 109], their outlook could be described rather as 'working in the UK, living in the Czech Republic'. They fostered rich transnational ties with their friends and family in the Czech Republic through frequent and long phone and Skype calls, e-mailing, and Facebook messaging. They looked at returning as their ultimate dream, but did not see it as very realistic.

There were three notable respects in which this group was different from Bygnes's and Erdal's [2017] Polish interviewees. First, none of them was single or separated from their nuclear family in the Czech Republic. For the two divorced participants the key motivation for returning was the security of a familiar environment and the welfare protection that they (being in their 40s and 50s) wanted to enjoy in retirement after having experienced a change of career abroad. The rest of the return-wishers were living with their partners, most of whom had a stable job in the UK, and most often also with their children, some of whom were of school age and enrolled in British education institutions.

Second, the prevailing motivation for returning in this group was not straightforwardly the fulfilment of a short-term plan to accumulate capital. Even though everyone in this group had originally come to the UK for a temporary stay or with an open plan, all but the two divorced ones eventually ended up reconsidering it and agreeing to remain in the mid- to long term, usually in the interests of their partners and/or children, as illustrated by Jaroslav:

> See, I am here mainly because of [my children]. If it wasn't for them, maybe I would have been back home a long time ago. But mainly … because I know they have a future ahead of them, you know? For example at school (…), they are managing much better now. (Jaroslav, 40s, homemaker, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK)

However, despite having invested a lot of effort, time, and money into this new project, all of them were disappointed with life in the UK, which is why they turned back to their original intention to return and to the safety net of old friendships and family contacts back home [cf. Moskal 2013]. This disappointment was connected to a set of negative experiences, such as a lack of success in establishing themselves on the British labour market (deskilling, unstable contracts), a sense of uprootedness, non-acceptance and estrangement from the British society, and social isolation, as illustrated by Ilona:

> For me—and for my husband too—it is important to have some social status. And that we can never have here with our Eastern European accent. The English are

> so politically correct, they don't show it that much, but you can feel it … even at my husband's workplace all the bosses are English, even though in general the employees are from everywhere … but even my husband, who thinks about this much less than I do, sometimes says, 'you know, us from the East, they will never take us seriously'. (Ilona, 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK)

This sense of alienation was sometimes amplified by a lack of English language skills and/or homesickness, as expressed by Olga:

> We're not doing bad … We have everything we need. But (…) I am terribly homesick, I am that type. I think it is also due to my age. (…) I think I am too old to adjust. I don't know. Even though (…) I always had to be active (…) I was ambitious, I still discovered that home is home, right? That my home is there [in CZ], not here. Even though I have my home here with [my British partner], I am still at home there, I feel my home is there, even though my parents aren't living anymore. (Olga, 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK)

Third, these interviewees differed from Bygnes and Erdal's in that the reason they could not return was not (primarily) a lack of economic opportunities or bad social security conditions, as the situation on the Czech labour market and the provisions offered by the Czech welfare state were not as dire as those the authors described in Poland and Spain. Rather, the highly skilled interviewees in this group had difficulty finding a fulfilling job in the UK and were confident they would find one in the Czech Republic easily [cf. Aure 2013]. In most cases they were 'stuck' in the UK because their partners (some of whom were Czech and some British) could not or did not want to move to the Czech Republic. Ilona's quote vividly illustrates the mixture of frustration and helplessness:

> [My plan is to return to the Czech Republic], but my [Czech] husband doesn't agree with this, he wants to stay longer. But that's not a rational decision, I think. (…) That won't bring anyone any benefit, just potential complications for the children's education. (…) The money, that's one thing. And the second thing is … He doesn't like changing things that work well and says—[what] if they fire me? (…) And I think that subconsciously he's also worried about how we could live in the Czech Republic. He has become very critical of the situation there. (Ilona, 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK)

As in the case of migrants who feel more at home in the UK and are more satisfied with their trajectories, there are also other factors that contribute to the return-wishers' troubled feelings about belonging. However, the crucial difference is that most of the narratives describe their *personal will* being overridden by *someone else's* (a partner's or children's) *will* or the family's 'objective' well-being. The decision to come or stay because of a romance, discrimination, or unemployment is being blamed for the participants' having given up their independence,

career prospects, social ties, interests, or their own well-being (*losing 'control'*), which is a fact they now sometimes regret. These migrants' reactions to the question of where they feel 'at home' were the most ambivalent, as in the following quote [see also Ralph and Staeheli 2011]:

> If you live here for more than three years, you start being so ambivalent about it that you don't know anymore. And either you decide to go back, or you stay and you waver. I don't know, I have it half-half now, because the father of my daughter and his family are here. (…) I think home is both here and in the Czech Republic. I can't say there is just one home. (Marta, 30s, homemaker, 7 years in the UK)

This reveals that what seems to steer the migrants' sense of belonging in the host society is whether they identify with their reasons for staying or perceive them as external to their own will, imposed on them by circumstances or by another person. Not identifying with the reasons for staying arises when there is a disparity between the migrant's subjective preferences in the question of whether to stay or return, and the *accepted* reasons for staying. Agency is thus an important structuring factor in migration decision-making, because it establishes a sense of empowerment, of having the migration project 'under control', and thus contributes to a feeling of self-satisfaction and subjective well-being. If a migrant perceives his/her migration trajectory as a result of having given up their agency in favour of someone or something else, then it sooner or later becomes difficult to develop a sense of belonging in the host society. As the presented quotes imply, this mental process does not stand alone. It is influenced by other aspects of the individual's migration situation and personal characteristics, such as length of stay in the host country, age at the time of migration, job satisfaction, access to social networks, value identification, or a person's individual temperament, the effects of which might be difficult to disentangle, and which it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse in detail. The next section will investigate yet another factor that complicates the feelings of belonging, which seems to lie in the background of the factors listed to this point—the 'liquid migration context'.

The lightness of moving

The above overview of the three types of migrants identified in this analysis echoes the findings of Bygnes and Erdal [2017] that living a 'grounded', settled life, as opposed to one characterised by uncertainty and an unpredictable future, is the ultimate desire of most 'older' adult migrants, regardless of whether they see their future in the host or the home country, elsewhere, or in a geographically (as yet) unspecified space. My findings thus support Bygnes and Erdal's conclusion that 'liquid migration' is the legal and administrative *context* in which their migration and life trajectories must be analysed, rather than examining it as a chosen strategy or lifestyle [2017: 114]. A problem arises when a migrant's notion of a 'grounded life' is based on or tied to return, but return does not take place for

the reasons described above. Such migrants might end up being 'trapped in liquid migration', not necessarily because they are being forced by economic factors to remain mobile, as described by Bygnes and Erdal [2017: 105], but in the sense that they are physically living in the UK, but mentally are being pulled back to the Czech Republic. This 'trap' can be avoided in two ways: first, by reversing the situation (e.g. by convincing one's partner to move to the Czech Republic), and second, by embracing the status quo as the best of all options and committing oneself to living a 'full' life in the host country; a change of attitude that will now be described as a '*leap of faith*'.

Contemplating return was a common feature in all the narratives. Although few research participants considered return realistic, most of them harboured some such idea, considering it either the last resort if their migration plans failed or as a kind of fantasy (the 'myth of return' [Anwar 1979]), as illustrated in the following quote from Blanka.

> Researcher: Do you sometimes think about returning to the Czech Republic?
> Sometimes, when something upsets me [*laughter*]. Recently I started to think that I could leave everything and go …take over my father's job. I was depressed about working in a huge company where things change constantly … So I had this period when I thought—I'll do the exams, take over dad's clients … But those are more fantasies. (Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK)

A constant awareness of the possibility of returning, which is an inherent characteristic of the EU 'liquid migration context', sometimes had the effect of complicating a migrant's feeling of belonging in British society. As the following quotes suggest, in cases when it was not the migrant's personal decision to stay, putting up with actually staying was difficult because the person was not able to definitively move to one place or the other both physically and mentally. Instead of serving as a source of opportunities, the 'liquid migration context' thus rather acted as a 'trap', complicating the migrants' feelings of belonging to both societies, and, in effect, causing a sense of in-betweenness detrimental to their subjective well-being.

> I think we have it harder [than people who were virtually forced to migrate due to discrimination and enduring unemployment in the home country] in that we can choose whether we stay or go back. (Ilona, 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK)

> Originally, I came to the UK for a new experience and to learn English. However, the family we worked for asked whether we would like to stay longer. Then I started to study at a university, so it was better to stay in the UK, and in the meantime the economic crisis started in Europe, and we had a secure job in the UK but not … in the Czech Republic. In the end … we are [constantly] looking forward to returning home, but are constantly postponing it. (Zdena, 30s, working, 9 years in the UK)

Zdena was not the only one who described her stay in the UK just as a repeated extension of her original temporary visit, which is a typical effect of the 'liquid migration context' [Ryan 2015]. This points at the role of (not) taking a determined stand on (the length of) one's migration, or, effectively, (not) deciding where one *wants to belong*, letting one's agency be overruled by circumstances (getting caught up in one's 'non-choice' [Lacroix 2013]), as Olga's case illustrates:

> … I still believe we will [one day] live in the Czech Republic. But I don't know what to do, because there are some good things and some bad things here and in the Czech Republic [too]. I'm just confused. I don't know. I'm afraid of going back and at the same time I want to be there. (Olga, 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK)

A gradual extension of the stay in the host country—along with changing reasons for staying and changing individual life plans—can sometimes occur almost 'unconsciously' [Ryan 2015: 5], so of significance is whether the migrant maintains a homeland orientation and avoids 'mentally' settling in the host country, or, conversely, whether the migrant embraces the host country as his/her new *home* and forms a (new) *feeling of belonging* and thus also a sense of psychological well-being. For this transition to occur, the migrant has to take a 'leap of faith'.

I use the term 'leap of faith' to describe the mental act of committing oneself to establishing a 'full' life in the country of settlement—in other words, of allowing the possibility of re-migrating to the country of origin to become just a formal aspect of the migration experience, instead of a real, repeatedly contemplated option. Whether or not a migrant has taken a leap of faith very much relates to how seriously they consider returning. Even though the collected narratives provide only a few specific quotes to illustrate this literally, the overall message of the individual stories shows that this leap can occur years or even just a few months after migrating, before migrating, or never. I will now try to illustrate the role this leap of faith plays using a few examples from my sample.

While Marek claims not to have yet decided whether he would stay in the UK 'for good', he seems to be fully enmeshed in UK society and describes the UK as his mental and material 'home', in contrast to the nostalgic home that his parents' house and familiar spots in the Czech Republic represent for him. The practical aspects of his life have made him accept the UK as the place he belongs:

> Researcher: When did you realise you would probably stay here?
> I haven't yet. But … let's put it this way. We have a [pre-school daughter], my wife is black, so in the Czech Republic it surely wouldn't be ideal for them. (…) I would like for [my daughter] to learn English perfectly, which means she must go to an English school. (…) [Recently, my mother] asked me, 'Are you ever going to return?' And I said, 'I don't know'. And now, well, this week, I am going to buy a house. (…) Which means, I must [earn money in the UK] for at least fifteen, twenty years, so I can pay the mortgage. So this is how it is. (Marek, 30s, working, 9 years in the UK)

Martina's case represents an example of a migrant having taken a leap of faith on behalf of her children and her feeling 'grounded', despite her troubling experience of having few social ties, her poor language skills, and her repeated difficulty finding a stable job:

> I miss a lot of things, but home is here. Home is, I have my own [rented] house here, I got used to it, I take it this way, that I have something of my own here. (…) I am happy to be in one place. The only thing I am interested in is the future of my children, their upbringing, the area we live in. (…) I got used to living here a lot. (Martina, 30s, working, 3 years in the UK)

Conversely, Jaroslav, whose experience was similar to Martina's in the respects indicated above, provides an example of someone who has not taken a leap of faith:

> We are at home [in the Czech Republic]. We live here, but we are not at home here. Still … we still have one foot in the Czech Republic, if you think about it. (Jaroslav, 40s, homemaker, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK)

The stories of Ilona, Marta, Olga, Zdena, and other return-wishers outlined above could serve as further examples of migrants who have not taken a leap of faith. On the other hand, Vilém, a stayer whose migration experience has been marked by homelessness, poor language skills, and family break-up, is a clear illustration of a migrant who has determinedly embraced the UK as his new home:

> … I would not go back to the Czech Republic, you know? I bought a house here, all this—and I used to be homeless! All straight. No fraud, all straight. I sweated it out. (Vilém, 40s, working, 11 years in the UK)

Although all of the findings regarding 'leap of faith' could to some extent be affected by temporary developments in the individual migrants' life, and could have come out differently had the interviews been conducted at a different time, they still add an important component to the picture of the complexity of influences that structure what I have called *belonging* in this paper. They show that migrants can have their migration trajectories *under control*. Even though more in-depth analysis of this process is needed, it is clear that taking a conscious 'leap of faith' is one way of avoiding the 'trap of liquid migration' and thus of exercising personal agency over one's perception of staying in the host country, even if it cannot be exercised over the migration trajectory as such, and thereby achieving a more 'grounded' life abroad.

Conclusion

Migrant integration is gradually being looked upon less as just a matter of the migrants' adapting to their host societies. Instead, 'transnational' approaches that consider individuals' continuing attachments to their places of origin have been growing in popularity since the 1990s. This article builds on this emerging tradition by taking migrants' attachments to the home and host countries as the groundwork for analysing their (troubled) feelings of belonging and the factors that contribute to this.

The intra-EU migration environment is particularly fruitful for analysing migrant transnational living in that its 'semi-internal' character provides for truly 'liquid', trial-and-error mobility that involves relatively little time costs and low economic risk [Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006]. However, as this paper has shown, even people who are virtually free to move 'there and back' within spaces that are culturally and socially related negotiate multiple engagements. Their subjective well-being may in fact suffer either if against their own will they are not able to return or if they are not able to 'make a permanent move' [Moskal 2013].

Even though the study has shown that some Czech migrants might engage in genuinely 'liquid migration', and deliberately keep their options 'open', it seems that this is rather just a phase in the migration trajectory, which is likely to be replaced by a desire for a more predictable, settled life, with a fulfilling career, social ties, and in a society one identifies with [cf. Bygnes and Erdal 2017]. The analysis of their reasons for coming to and particularly staying in the UK has shown that their migration motives are rarely primarily economic, as is often claimed about CEE intra-EU migrants [Drinkwater and Garapich 2015]. Instead, family and various social reasons seem to play a decisive role when it comes to the question of staying, returning, or postponing return.

However, the process of nurturing a sense of belonging in the home and host countries is always structured by a series of factors, which include the migrants' personal characteristics and aspects of their individual migration situations, such as age at the time of migration or the length of stay, but also external circumstances and the mental processes by which the migrants either actively and independently exercise their agency or let it be overrun by feelings of inability and dependence. When a migrant perceives his/her long-term or permanent stay in the host country as a decision taken voluntarily, with his/her agency, then he/she seems to be more likely to develop a sense of belonging in the host society. On the other hand, not identifying with the reasons for staying tends to hinder the development of a sense of belonging in the host society, bolstering the migrant's attachments to the home country.

While a certain level of undecidedness about whether one will return to one's home country one day can be observed in most migrants' thinking, the migrants who take a 'leap of faith' with regard to settling in the host country both physically and mentally seem to be more satisfied, as it empowers them to work towards a more 'grounded' life, instead of getting 'trapped in liquid migra-

tion' [Bygnes and Erdal 2017]. The finding that some migrants will always yearn to return despite being settled long term in a host country should not, however, always be understood as an inability to decide whether to stay or go on their part. It can also be the result of dissatisfaction in various spheres of their lives, the tendency of migrants to idealise homecoming and their homeland, and probably also their personal temperament. The mental act of taking a 'leap of faith' to (re-)gain agency over one's migration trajectory in cases when staying is (to some extent) involuntary might be a way out of this dilemma. However, as only a superficial analysis of this phenomenon was possible in this study, the findings call for more thorough analysis and for research in other national contexts.

It cannot be said whether Czech intra-EU migrants are significantly different from other CEE migrant populations in their reasoning about staying or returning. Rather, this study seems to confirm the findings of other scholars of CEE intra-EU migration that in the context of migrants' long-term life visions, liquidity might be perceived as a trap rather than a desired strategy [Bygnes and Erdal 2017; Drinkwater and Garapich 2015]. Also, it needs to be acknowledged that even though this study identified a strong settlement tendency among the Czech migrants interviewed, the collected data did not allow for studying the motivations and visions of the migrants who had returned to the home country. As other studies have shown [Pařízková 2011; Vavrečková and Hantak 2008], short-term 'hamster' mobility is also relatively frequent among post-accession Czech migrants in particular. Last, it remains to be seen how the post-Brexit situation will transform CEE migration to the UK and within the EU in general.

My study highlights the importance of viewing migrant decision-making as intertwined with the preferences and needs of their family members and of distinguishing between their individual agency and their respect for other members of their household in order to uncover the inconspicuous private power hierarchies that may explain the dilemmas of belonging [cf. Hoang 2011]. Although family, love, or various social factors often serve as key motives for migration or for staying on, they rarely suffice on their own to satisfy a migrant's need for personal fulfilment [e.g. Aure 2013]. However, if dependent migrants are able to find opportunities to realise themselves economically and socially, this may help them (re-)gain agency and develop a feeling of belonging in the host society. This is something that academics, but also integration policy-makers should bear in mind.

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