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**PRIVILEGED MOBILITY AND UN-MEDIATED CHOICE?
THE CASE OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING
IN TRANSNATIONAL LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS**

The imperative to be mobile in today's western societies can be interpreted as the individual's need for mobility to accomplish individual plans and projects (Kesselring 2005)

In postmodern times of emphasized fluidification, individualism and cosmopolitanism, mobility becomes self-evident and naturalized, yet socially desirable and anticipated. Therefore it is valuable to use ethnography to look at individual experiences.

They are young, educated, and mobile, pursuing their dreams and goals while living in big cities: Poles and other (not only) European citizens who maintain transnational long-distance relationships create perfectly suitable representatives of the category of 'privileged mobility'. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2016–2018, and it employs an auto-ethnographic perspective in order to examine the notion of privilege (Amit 2007), with its borders and limitations, through the analytical lens of mobility. The article puts forward the perspective of my research participants and thus provides a detailed portrait of the researched group, in order to show how mobility is rooted in their everyday lives and how privileged they really are. I argue that mobility, defined as one of the most stratifying factors (Bourdieu 1984), can be applied as a mirror that reflects position in the social strata. In this specific ethnographic context, spatial mobility can be seen as a useful tool, which exposes social and individual dimensions of being privileged while living in transnational long-distance relationships.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, long-distance relationship, mobility, motility, privilege, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

Young and educated Poles who live in big cities and pursue their individual goals, while at the same time being involved in long-distance romantic relationships with people of a different nationality (either from European or non-European countries such as the US, Colombia, Argentina or Bolivia), seem to be a perfectly representative group of privileged mobile people. The category of 'privileged mobility' stands opposed to forced mobility and is characterized by the broadly understood concept of un-mediated personal choice and by an inscribed capacity to be mobile.

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This article examines the notion of privilege (Amit 2007), with its borders and limitations, through the analytical lens of mobility. The central questions of my research on transnational long-distance relationships deal with the strategies and practices employed in this particular type of relationship between two people. I argue that various kinds and types of mobility can be applied as a mirror to reflect position in the social strata.

My ethnographic research, conducted in 2016–2018, is integrated in the broader field of social science research on migrations and emotions (love) in times of late mobility or post-modernity. As these are the main theoretical concepts that inform my research, I will discuss them briefly before building up my analysis based on the results of ethnographic fieldwork. Researchers and philosophers have addressed issues related to the transformation of love in the era of late modernity, as does Zygmunt Bauman (2003) who discusses the topic of love from the point of view of ethics and philosophy. Love is situated here in the context of transformation of interpersonal relationships. Anthony Giddens captures it as a ‘pure relationship’, based not on responsibility but on the will of the partners. Although the above approaches are related to the topic of my research, they deal with love understood in general, broad terms, and not strictly within transnational relationships at a distance. The works of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2013a, 2013b) inform my research greatly and are closest to my interests. They frame the current condition of interpersonal relationships in the area of intimacy as ‘ordinary chaos’ and present it as a main characteristic of the ‘new era in intimate relations’. According to these sociologists, this chaotic relationship is caused by the conflicts that occur between love, family and growing personal autonomy. The topic of long-distance relationships remains under-represented in social research, and especially in anthropology, and works that do deal with this topic focus on couples of the same nationality and/or married couples, e.g. cross-border marriages (Dahinden 2016; Krasteva-Blagoeva 2016).

Mobility, on the other hand, is defined by Noel Salazar as ‘always materially grounded and the movement of people entails, not only a measure of economic, social, and cultural mobility, but also a corresponding evolution of institutions, technologies and well-determined laps of human mobility’ (2017: 5). The different ways of being mobile can help define social groups, as well as their privileges or marginalization(s). Representatives of privileged mobility or mobility by choice (such as highly qualified mobile employers/employees) and representatives of forced mobility (such as refugees) experience different kinds and different levels of systemic limitations.

In my specific ethnographic context, spatial mobility can prove to be a useful tool which exposes the social and individual dimensions of being privileged while living in transnational long-distance relationships in individualizing modernity (Giddens 1994; Beck 1994). The following sections provide a detailed and in-depth portrait of the examined group, in order to show how mobility is rooted in their everyday lives, how privileged they really are, and where potential limitations are placed.

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The starting point for my research was auto-ethnography. My own experience provided the grounds for examining transnational long-distance relationships not from the point of view of

psychology, sociology or communication sciences, but from an anthropological perspective. Key to my research was the fact that I shared with my interlocutors similar cultural, social and probably also economical capital, as well as the capacity to be mobile. At the time of my research, I was living in a big city and having a long-distance relationship with a Spanish partner. Although my own perspective enables me to share an empirical background with my research participants, it is their experience that played a central role in my research and does so in this paper.

To examine their perspectives I conducted field research over 2 years that includes 19 in-depth, non-structured and non-standardized interviews, participant observation, ethnographic notes and an auto-ethnographic perspective¹. I interviewed a total of nine couples. In composing the research group I used the snowball method, which seems very much appropriate for the subject, given the field site I have chosen (Marcus 1995). The final research group contained mostly young Polish women (8), and one Polish man, who were involved in relationships with people from abroad. This gender division was not intentionally designed; it rather appeared as a side outcome of the research, but it could be taken into consideration as a topic for further research and considerations.

The interviews were conducted in Polish (9), English (9) and Spanish (1), either face to face or using instant messenger such as Skype. Since my research participants use all kinds of instant messengers in their everyday life, it was a common means of communication for all of us. Therefore it did not trigger any bungling or create impressions of awkwardness in conversations intermediated by technology. Usually our interviews had an informal dialogical character: we exchanged experiences and thoughts on a given topic. I was often asked about my own experience. Interviews were conducted in cafes or at my interlocutors' apartments, the places always chosen by the participants. Even though conversations through technologies were not problematic, I strived to conduct as many interviews as possible face to face, which was possible due to quite regular meetings of the couples and the high mobility of my research group. Ultimately, only 3 of the 19 interviews were conducted through Skype. I decided to talk separately with each partner, which enabled me to focus on the individual dimensions of their experience. Being in a long-distance relationship (as in any other) can be experienced differently by each of the partners, as they can cope in different ways with emotions such as longing or loneliness. Sometimes the partners remembered facts or events that had occurred in the relationship differently. Factors such as the place chosen to live (native country or not, therefore either close to family or friends, or abroad in order to educate themselves or work) influenced the way in which they were dealing with living in a long-distance relationship.

While writing the research project I did not assume I would treat my own experience in any other way than a starting point, and a helpful element in doing this kind of ethnography. At the time, I was also in a long-distance relationship with my Spanish partner.

Considering the intimate specificity of my research, a certain ethical problem appears in treating the researcher's experience in strictly methodological way. During the interviews

¹ This article was written based on fragments of my MA thesis 'Transnational long-distance relationships. Strategies and practices', available at the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw.

I was bringing up emotional, very intimate and personal subjects, so not sharing anything from my own experience, did not seem fair or morally appropriate to my research participants, especially when they wanted to know my perspective. However, these ethical concerns were not just about my interlocutors, but also about my partner. Thus I decided to add my partner's perspective and to ask him the same questions. I recorded the interview, but I chose not to transcribe it. I was able to provide anonymity and data protection for my research participants, but I would not have been able to do that for my partner. Moreover, sharing both roles as researcher and partner created certain difficulties and limitations of speech that I was trying to avoid by talking with my other interlocutors separately.

However, it is impossible to break out of the privileged authority role of a researcher, who will always have a significant amount of power over the interview as well as over the construction of the later text. Thus in my case auto-ethnography turned out to be a useful tool in the process of gaining a certain sensitivity, bringing my attention to the ethical aspects and raising awareness about the possibilities and limitations of my own positionality.

RESEARCH GROUP – WHAT MAKES THEM PRIVILEGED?

My research focused on a group of young Poles (9) and foreigners (10) aged between 23 and 33. They were either students or had completed their studies no more than seven years before the interviews were conducted. Some of them combined studies with work, while others already had full-time jobs. Most of them come either from the capital cities of their countries or from big, modern cities (like Warsaw, Poznań, Gdańsk, Oslo, Basel, Bogota, Buenos Aires). A few of my interlocutors were born in smaller cities, but they moved to bigger cities to access more possibilities in finding a job or pursuing higher education. All of them had done so after graduating from high school, thus continuing their studies, and all of them speak at least one foreign language². They travel to different countries at least twice a year and most of them participated in Erasmus exchange programs or went to study abroad in order to enhance their language skills. Mobility had therefore been a present element in their process of socialization before they became involved in transnational, long-distance relationships. Some of them are already fully independent from a financial point of view, while others are still supported by their families, even if only partially.

Even though they come from different countries (some of them even from different continents) and different cultures, what they share is similar social, economic and sometimes even cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Social and cultural capital can be seen as common, because my interlocutors grew up and have been socialized in societies and cultures that emphasize a set of values common for the Western world, in terms of importance of education, career and self-development. Moreover, they all share a transnational field (Glick Schiller 1995) in this case created by the relationship. They are also connected by a cosmopolitan field that their lifestyle and relation entail. Despite the fact that their economic capital can vary, it

² The exception to the rule is 33-year-old Brad, who comes from the US and has English as his mother tongue. The fact that he did not have to learn any foreign language might be seen as a privilege.

still gives them the possibility to be and remain on the move. In this way, they are strongly connected by the cultural competence of knowing how to be on the move, the capacity and the possibility to be mobile. These factors give them the possibility to construct a life based on the values that are significant for them – in a certain sense, having a ‘good life’ (Fisher 2014: 2).

One of the strategies they use in order to maintain everyday contact is the use of technologies (Jurkane-Hobein 2015). Communication in everyday life is mediated by applications like Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, and Facebook messenger, which constitute the basis of their communication. They use text messages as well as recorded voice messages and video calls. This paper also looks into these virtual and communicative non-spatial forms of mobility, such as those mentioned above, as they play a crucial role in sustaining and maintaining the contact in my research participants’ everyday life. It is worth mentioning that such a form of non-spatial mobility is not free from limitations (for example, having a proper connection which would enable fluent conversation). Another common impression shared by my research participants is that contact through all kinds of technologies has a phatic function (summarizing one’s day, what one did, what one ate, or the persons with whom one met). Often they also connected it with a lack of physical contact, not being able to touch a person while having a conversation.

Some of the couples I talked with plan their conversations more precisely, while some are almost constantly on-line and refer to their practices as more spontaneous. Even though factors like geographical distance and financial possibilities vary from couple to couple, and as a result so do their opportunities to meet each other, in all of the cases I have studied the possibility to stay spatially mobile is always on the horizon. And this, in fact, is a privilege.

Vincent Kaufmann, Manfred Max Bergman and Dominique Joye introduced a holistic term called ‘motility’, to describe the individual’s capacity and potential to be mobile. In doing so, they employ the notions of access, competence and appropriation. ‘Generally motility encompasses interdependent elements relating to access to different forms of and degrees of mobility, competence to recognize and make use of access, and appropriation of a particular choice, including the option of non-action’ (2004). This term and the set of meanings attached to it can give a nuanced picture of an individual’s relation to being mobile. At the same time, it represents a form of capital that may be linked with, and be exchanged for, other types of capital (2004). Compared to Bourdieu’s concept of capital, motility is a broader, wider and less hierarchical term, that some may even identify as an umbrella term. The authors discuss motility in terms of both vertical and horizontal dimensions of social position, thus differentiating it from economic, cultural, or social capital, which deal mainly with hierarchical positions. However, because of its holistic nature, *motility* gives the possibility to adjust individual perspectives to the new dynamics of highly mobile modern societies. It can be a pertinent methodological and conceptual tool that allows social scientists to fill the potential gap without abandoning other insight from studies on spatial and social mobility. Focusing on the relation between spatial and social mobility, those who coined the term argue that social structures and dynamics are ‘interdependent with the actual or potential capacity to displace entities such as goods, information or people’ (Kaufmann, Berman and Joye 2004: 745). This perspective entangles an understanding of mobility as a strictly structuring dimension of

social life. Spatial movement is perceived as a way of linking individuals to social relations, work life, and needs of consumption or leisure activities.

Considering the above, but also the notion of agency (Archer 2000) and the intrinsic choice within privileged mobility, we can put forward the assumption that such mobility structures lives. This occurs due to the possibilities put forward by the systems and technologies providing virtual, physical and communicative mobility, and to a lesser extent through free and individual choice. *Motility* as a term allows us to combine social and spatial mobility. According to Bourdieu, the ‘field of possibilities’ understood as social space is always limited by structure and dispositions, and is thus shaped by habitus and different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) (Bourdieu 1984: 10). Kesselring underlines that mobility cannot be seen as pure freedom, but rather as a way in which individuals adapt their personal needs, wishes and demands to collective premises for mobility – a process of creation of one’s life through movement while adapting heteronymous rules and structures (2005).

There is a visible component of flexibility that characterizes my group of research participants, and several factors contribute to this image: being young, educated, but not yet defined by their profession, and not yet attached to the job they do or to the place in which they settled. Most of them are still studying, do not have a permanent job and are ready to stay mobile in order to meet and finally live in one place with their partner. All of them consider a long-distance relationship to be something temporal and all of them agree that such a situation needs to end at a certain point in the future. As Kaufmann points out, the relation between flexibility and the ability to carry out plans and projects is inscribed in the notion of *motility* (2004). I argue that in the case of my interlocutors various factors play a significant role in their *motility*: their age and the fact that they had long-distance partners, while still being in a moment in life when decisions about the next steps are not definitive. Many of them declare preparedness for being and staying mobile either as a result of their own choices or their partners’ choices. When discussing their plans for the future, some consider relocating either to their own country of origin or to the country of their partners, while others plan on living somewhere else. My interlocutor from Colombia, Valentina³ (aged 24), had recently moved to Warsaw at the time of our interview, in order to be with her boyfriend, Jan. She describes the situation as following:

We decided that here (Warsaw) was better option... But we never... I think that if one day the **option of moving somewhere else comes, we will be fine**, I think about myself and about Jaś, that we adapt very well, we lived somewhere else, we already lived in Australia [during the language course, when they had met – A.S.], **we travel a lot** and every time we do travel we manage together. We use his strength and my strength.

Dan is in relationship with Gosia; they are ‘living-together-apart’ and maintaining their relationship between Poland and Belgium⁴. This is how Dan talks about their plan to move:

³ All the names of the interlocutors in this paper have been changed in order to protect their privacy.

⁴ I use the term living-together-apart in order to show that a relationship and being together can happen while living in two separate places. The more common term in social sciences is living-apart-together – the term refers to the couples living in the same city and not sharing a household (Levin and Trost 1999; Carter 2015; Jamieson and Simpson 2013).

So, it's that also and that's why it was Poland first, but maybe after her PhD we will think about... another country for 1, 2, 3 years or if I really don't fit with Poland, then it will be maybe Belgium or another country...

These two quotes indicate constant preparedness and flexibility, which are on the one hand facilitated by the various forms of capital at the disposal of my research participants, and on the other hand are anticipated due to lifestyle, relationship status and particular moment in life.

COSMOPOLITANISM AS A MODE OF PRACTICE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

In my ethnographic fieldwork narratives about mobility revealed convergence with the notion of cosmopolitanism, which is usually related with a broadly perceived 'openness'. That, however, does not add much value to the understanding of the term. Ulf Hannerz described cosmopolitanism as rooted in a practice – a cultural competence, a practiced skill, which enables more or less easy movement through the system of meanings and meaningful forms (Hannerz 1990: 23). Hannerz proposed the concept of world culture, where all the structures of meaning and expression are becoming interrelated. Although the term does not imply a total homogenization of cultures, we are dealing with a 'global oecumene', and the world has become one network of social relationships, and between different regions there is a flow of meaning as well as of people and goods (Hannerz 1996). In this perspective cosmopolitans are those who value diversity as such, but they are not likely to get it. Vertovec and Cohen (2002) summarized the rapidly expanding literature on the concept and proposed six perspectives. Drawing upon Vertovec (2000) they argue that the notion of cosmopolitanism can be understood and used as '(a) socio-cultural condition; (b) a kind of philosophy or worldview; (c) a political project towards building transnational institutions; (d) a political project for recognizing multiple identities; (e) an attitudinal or dispositional orientation and/or (f) a mode of practice or competence' (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 7). These formulations give a certain structure to the notion of cosmopolitanism and can prevent the loose approach that social scientists tend to take. In my ethnographic context I understand cosmopolitanism as (f) a mode of practice or competence related to mobility.

*Yeah that's kind of what I was thinking like from the cultural side we are both, she especially, but both like, **I travel a lot, I'm fairly global** (Bradley, 33, programmer, originally from Delaware, currently living with his girlfriend in London).*

When asked about future plans Tom from Australia said:

You got your way with that person and that person is simply standing by you. You get along, people get similar things. She perhaps like me likes cities. Both we like cities not too expensive... not ridiculous. London is mental for that. And so... Warsaw has that local aspect, like other cities. Like she enjoys Milan, I enjoy Milan as well. But it's easy going. You know... Nothing is a draw in a case where one person just really doesn't want to go somewhere. I think you choose that person and that chosen for reason. That person wanna go somewhere. It is similar reason for you. Because it is same stages in your live. Especially aspects like finishing uni. With different or same ages that... So... You know, if I said: let's go to Sydney or Australia. Then nothing... if we have

time, cause I would like to taste thing, as space up on her as well. And I think she would be up for it. You know... I know she wouldn't be up for it now, possibly three, four years' time and we initiated the career and start somewhere else, and that's scary. But I think we could be up for it. But...we see what happens at the moment, not big thing.

What is worth noticing is the fact that the narratives put forward by my research participants do not always comply with actual practices and do not always apply equally to both partners. Many of them are more attached to their homes or countries and they strongly identify with one place, some less, but they all try to compromise their position for the benefit of the relationship.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND NON-SPATIAL FORMS OF MOBILITY

As noted by Vertovec (2009), the notion of cosmopolitan cultural competence resonates with an array of other terms that social scientists use in order to render the impression of openness and draw attention to interrelations between migrants' cultural practices. He states that cosmopolitan cultural competences are related to the transnational way of life, which is exactly the case of my research participants. The moment when a long-distance relationship begins, it opens a Pandora's Box with transnationalism on the cover. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc defined transnationalism as "processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlements" (1994, 2005: 8). Following this connotation, if we look at transnationalism as a network that connects people and distant places, this is precisely what a long-distance relationship is for my respondents. In some cases the relationship links only two places, in some even four. Bradley is originally from Delaware and his family still lives there, but he moved to New York before relocating to London, where he lives with Agnieszka. She is Polish, was born in Warsaw, but up until now has spent all her life with her family in Berlin. Their relationship is a network among Warsaw (where they travel to visit part of Agnieszka's family), Berlin (to visit her sister and parents), London (where they live) and Delaware (where Bradley has his relatives). Furthermore all of these places are connected through technologies that enable everyday communication. It is important to note that neither cosmopolitanism nor transnationalism imply uprootedness or definitions of identity limited by the concepts of nationality or ethnicity. According to Peggy Levit and Nina Glick-Schiller one person can belong to more than one nation/state (2004). They present the terms "transnational way of being", which is related to social practices and migrant relations and "transnational way of belonging" which is a conscious identification with a particular group within the limits of transnational fields (Glick Schiller 2012: 26).

One of the recurring questions in my interviews was the one about the place considered 'closest to their heart', or the one they would describe as 'home'.

This was Tom's answer:

It's very, very hard to value like that. Just because most my life I've spent in England. And... I have a house there, friends there. I know England very well. Um... London. But I don't have any

emotional attachment to it. So.... I'm very detached terms of having a concrete home. With Nela is different Warsaw is for her... I think. That's what I would say. But... for me it's... extremely flexible, because my concrete emotional home is in the middle of the countryside in France, that's where my cousins and family are from.

According to Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska (2015) it is impossible nowadays to write about migration from an anthropological perspective without taking transnationalism into consideration, especially as such a perspective always tries to consider social actors' views and practices. Similarly to cosmopolitanism, transnationalism is often criticized for a lack of definitional accuracy. Clarifying the term is even more important in times of increased development of technologies, as they have brought a meaningful contribution to extending the areas where social scientists can research transnationality. In my own research I understand it as collection of practices which create transnational ways of living evoked by long-distance relationships with a foreigner.

Vertovec claims that transnationality is an expression of globalization. He describes the extension of transnationality from the point of view of the development of telecommunication, calling these changes socio-cultural transformations (2012: 59). Currently we can talk about all kinds of completely free-of-charge applications and instant messengers that involve video, which have opened a series of new communication channels. For my research participants they play an absolutely crucial role in maintaining not only their relationship, but also connections with friends and family between different countries. As noted by Manuel Castells, new technologies are the core for today's transnational nets (2007). Technologies do not create new social patterns, but they enhance the ones already existing. Socio-cultural transformations described by Vertovec are so significant that Castells' statement is no longer valid in the ethnographic context of my research. Three out of the ten couples I interviewed met through the application called Tinder, which was created in 2012. Their relation is not only maintained by technology but also has been initiated by technology. Hence we observe the creation of a new social pattern, which is recently becoming more and more common. This pattern accepts and recognizes as equivalent the relations initiated through technology.

Robin Cohen argues that in present times transnational relations do not have to be reduced to territorial exclusiveness, because in the current cyberspace era diaspora can be maintained and re-created through cultural artefacts and common beliefs (1996: 516). Although technologies have indisputably created a series of possibilities, they also have their limitations. One of them is an inscribed lack of physical contact that my interlocutors declare they miss. A second aspect, and one of the outcomes of this lack of touch is the phatic function evoked by speaking through technologies. A third one would be any technical problem that makes fluent conversations difficult to sustain.

MOBILITY AS A SOCIAL NORM – MAKE THE EXPECTATIONS MEET

Most of the people involved in this research are aware of the fact that in order to accomplish individual plans and projects they have to remain flexible and mobile. They are living in times of individualistic discourse that sets personal development and self-realization at the

very center of attention. This discourse of individualizing modernity promotes a certain belief in the creation of one's destiny, thus assigning the individual full responsibility for successes and failures. It frames agency as unlimited and creates an illusory impression of a boundless field of possibilities. Moreover, in order to be successful, one should reach a certain level of stability, therefore one needs to be happy and fulfilled on both levels – professional and personal. According to Małgorzata Jacyno, the pursuit of rationalization of life, in order to improve its quality by accomplishing health, happiness, youth, money, well-being and broadly understood happiness, stands at the very center of this individualistic narration (2007: 7–8).

My research participants clearly follow this path, trying to gain the socially valuable education and experience combined with personal life. Influential theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai, Bruno Latour, Ulrich Bech, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman and John Urry have analyzed contemporary capitalism and globalization processes, including an increasing number of diversified types of mobility understood as movement of people, goods, ideas, and values (Salazar Jayaram 2016: 3) Their perspectives, which treat mobility as self-evident, contribute to the more and more common understanding of mobility as central to our cosmopolitan modernity. As Nowicka and Rovisco (2009) accurately underline, this tendency to see cosmopolitanism and reliance on mobility capital as normative naturalizes it as a fact of life and as a general rule that does not require closer examination or justification. By proposing the fluidification approach, Bauman (2000) argues that we have moved away from a 'heavy' and 'solid', hardware-focused modernity, ruled by rationalization and order, to liquid, ungraspable, under-defined software-based times. The problematic aspect of Bauman's view of liquid, constantly mobile modernity is the fact that it is deprived of a reachable structure. It creates a guise of a free world without borders and limitations, ungraspable, but at the same time de-territorialized and wide open.

I found it useful to set aside the level of theory for a moment and have a closer look into the level of practice. As well-educated individuals, scholars are perceived as a privileged mobile part of the society. They travel for work, participate in conferences, are invited to symposiums, and in the case of anthropologists they travel quite often to different parts of the world in order to conduct fieldwork. From a distance, they seem to make a perfect example of mobility by choice. Their privilege becomes relative when we examine the deeper context of an academic structure. What would happen if young scholars were not mobile? They would simply refuse to go abroad, to get further education, or to participate in conferences. The system of education would recognize them as not complying with standards; thus their value would diminish. This example points out how mobility can be profoundly rooted in social structure. An analogical mechanism functions in the case of my interlocutors. As they are young, educated, developing individuals, they are expected to be open-minded, flexible and mobile. A person who is not interested in any form of spatial mobility that requires going abroad would be probably called closed-minded or perceived as not modern enough. Their socialization process treats mobility as a social norm. On the one hand, mobility is for them embodied knowledge, part of their habitus, something routinized, automatic, that the body and mind know how to do. It is an effect of the sedimentation of values and practices which occur in embodied know-how. At the same time, it is supported by participation in a kind of learning that environments produce, and not merely reproduce. On the other hand, it is

socially and sometimes maybe even economically expected for them to be mobile. As noted by Vered Amit (2007: 1) it is a truism to say that privilege is relative, since a perspective becomes valuable when it sees the particular social and political context, and by means of relating the issues of relative advantage or power. Although I do agree with Amit, I would add one important component – an individual ethnographic context.

MOBILITY IN LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS – INDIVIDUAL NEED OR SOCIO STRUCTURAL REQUIREMENT?

There is a common feeling expressed by my interlocutors that a long-distance relationship is not the same as a ‘normal’ one. Actual long-awaited physical meetings are often associated with holiday or vacations, while everyday life following the ‘living-together-apart’ pattern is lonely and emotionally difficult. In order to gain control over this feeling my research participants need a structure, usually based on planning and organizing – planning time and movement. In this narration a sense of planning becomes crucial, both in terms of everyday conversations and physical meetings. Tom (24) comes from Australia, but he lived all his life in England. When asked about his way of dealing with being away from his girlfriend, he responded as follows:

Ummm... It’s hard sometimes. How we deal with it? Sometimes, we do, we do miss each other. But you know, we stay in the moment we know what’s going on around us. **We make plans**, we make sure that **we have plans in the future that when we can see each other**, we can enjoy time with each other. Because the tickets are cheaper... so **you have to organize long terms**. It is no way around that. You have to buy three months in advance, two months in advance. Especially holidays, so yeah, you just **plan ahead to make sure you keep contact**.

[A.S.] So... Is that always like that... that when you are saying ‘goodbye’, you know when you are gonna see her again?

Yeah.

[A.S.] Yeah?

There is always a plan. There is always a thing. I realize you need structure. **Structure is very important in a relationship so people can feel comfortable**, and they feel more comfortable with structures. I was less, as much as she was about it, I mean the structure. But I realized then more and more. That structure is important... Before I was less like: ‘ah, it’s fine’. I was more like that: ‘ahh, it’s fine... cool’ And Nela was more with organizing and... aaaaa... Not because I didn’t wanna see it, it’s just because I was a bit lazy. But I realized is important so... I’m doing it now.

At the moment Tom and Nela had already been together for a year and a half, maintaining their long-distance relationship between Milan, where she was studying for her master’s degree, and London, where he was temporarily working in a start-up company. During the interview they told me that they were struggling with the decision of where to live (Warsaw or London) and the decision depended on the jobs they were envisioning and the actual possibility of getting the jobs. Another couple – Fane and Agata – met in the same international selling company. Fane is Romanian, aged 33, and works in the IT business, Agata is Polish, aged 29, and is a business coach.

There was a plan B, in case Warsaw didn't work out. I mean if I couldn't manage to find a job here. There was an option to move to Belgium. Because she studied there, she knows the country, she likes the country. I'm speaking a bit of French, I visited also Belgium like for one week and I liked it very much. And there was a moment like three years ago, when I was in between jobs and I really wanted to move on from Romania and Belgium was the first choice.

In this quote we can observe how strictly my research participants have to plan in advance in order to maintain their relationships. What becomes visible is a constant readiness for adjustment despite difficulties such as distance, time difference or financial expenses that spatial mobility entails. The perspective of my interlocutors shows that long and short-term plans concerning spatial and non-spatial mobility are needed for maintaining the relationship's structure.

CONCLUSION

By following strategies and practices of young, educated people living in transnational long-distance relationships, and by employing the analytical lens of mobility, this paper indicates the complexity and relativity of notions of privilege. There is a certain tendency in social research on postmodern love that creates the illusion that we are living in times of endless possibilities, un-mediated choice, emancipation of the individual and pure and chaotic relationships, whereas my ethnographic field shows the contrary. Even though we are living in liquid times we are not free from structures which are responsible for framing our choices, the direction and trajectory of our path. Therefore terms like privilege(-d) (mobility) or (mobility by) choice, seem to lose their clarity, when we take a closer look at the ethnographical context.

The account of my research participants showed that capital and the capacity of being mobile known as *motility* give access to a vast field of possibilities. Transnational long-distance relationships are just one of the outcomes of these possibilities. Nonetheless, certain prerequisites or requirements arise as a result of living simultaneously in times of emphasized fluidification and cosmopolitanism, where mobility becomes self-evident and naturalized, although socially desirable and anticipated. In this particular ethnographic case, the requirement of being mobile is both individual and social. Young people who live in big cities should stay mobile in order to be socially and professionally valuable and relevant, or simply to comply with social standards. Additionally, living in a long distance relationship creates the prerequisite for staying mobile in order to be fulfilled on a personal level. Considering mobility a social norm may produce social tension or sometimes even social pressure. In addition, life in a transnational long-distance relationship generates a need to be on the move, to be flexible, and the necessity to schedule and adjust one's plans and ultimately oneself to the current situation.

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UPRZYWILEJOWANA MOBILNOŚĆ I NIEUWARUNKOWANY WYBÓR – NA PRZYKŁADZIE MŁODYCH LUDZI ŻYJĄCYCH W TRANSNARODOWYCH ZWIĄZKACH NA ODLEGŁOŚĆ

W postmodernistycznych czasach, w których podkreśla się zjawiska, takie jak fluidyzacja, indywidualizm i kosmopolityzm, mobilność staje się oczywista i naturalizowana, a jednocześnie społecznie pożądana i wymagana. Dlatego też, wykorzystując etnografię, warto przyjrzeć się indywidualnym doświadczeniom jednostki. Uczestnicy badań autorki to ludzie młodzi, wykształceni i mobilni, którzy realizują swoje marzenia i cele, mieszkając w dużych miastach. Są to Polacy, ludzie z Europy i poza jej granic, którzy utrzymują transnarodowe, intymne relacje na odległość. Ich kapitał społeczny i kulturowy oraz kulturowe kompetencje sprawiają, że można ich określić mianem grupy społecznie uprzywilejowanej. Antropologia migracji rozpoznałaby ich jako tych, którzy podróżują z wyboru, są więc reprezentantami migracji uprzywilejowanej, nie przymusowej. Artykuł powstał na podstawie badań etnograficznych przeprowadzonych przez autorkę w latach 2016–2018 i wykorzystuje perspektywę rozmówców oraz autoetnograficzną do spojrzenia na pojęcie przywileju (Amit 2007) i jego ograniczeń przez pryzmat mobilności. By pokazać, w jaki sposób mobilność zakorzeniona jest w codziennym życiu uczestników badań, oraz to, w jaki sposób są oni uprzywilejowani, autorka prezentuje szczegółowy portret grupy badanej. Badaczka stawia tezę, iż mobilność zdefiniowana jako jeden z najbardziej stratyfikujących czynników (Bourdieu 1984) może być stosowana jako lustro odzwierciedlające pozycje w warstwach społecznych. W tym szczególnym kontekście etnograficznym mobilność przestrzenną można postrzegać jako użyteczne narzędzie, które ujawnia społeczne i indywidualne wymiary uprzywilejowania osób żyjących w transnarodowych relacjach na odległość.

Słowa kluczowe: kosmopolityzm, związek na odległość, mobilność, motility, przywilej, transnarodowość