‘Everyone for themselves’? Non-national EU citizens from eastern and central Europe and the 2012 London elections

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Europe’s new movers and voters

- Growing numbers of ‘non-national citizens of the union’ in London and UK elections
- Around 500,000 in London (8% electorate)
- Numbers doubled over past 10 years
- EU enlargement key driver
- A8 and A2 EU accession states in eastern and central Europe
- Polish nationals largest group (+0.5m in the UK)
A8 and A2 EU accession states
New political rights

- EU integration creates political rights for ‘movers’ in local and European elections
- Council directive 94/80/EC; UK complied 1996
- Public and academic focus on economic and social dimensions of immigration to UK from A8 and A2 states
- Far less on the potential political dimension
- Significant number of movers to UK with established political rights; but are they taking up these formal opportunities to participate?
Understanding migration and political participation

- Political opportunity structure
- Political environment as a structure shaping the opportunities for migrants to participate in politics
- Largely an institutional approach focusing on politics and policy

- 2003/5 EU accession treaties; UK granted full access under worker registration scheme
- 'Right to reside' for economically active; permanent residency after 5 years
- Welfare rights to those under WRC
- Political rights following Council Directive 94/80/EC
- Policy regime shift May 2011 reduces restrictions
Understanding migration and political agency

• But as we shall see, despite favourable environment, levels of political participation appear low.

• This paper: balances an institutional approach that gives weight to the political context to one that starts with the individual migrant living in a particular local context.

• Drawing on political anthropology: how individual actors make sense of, or give meaning to, specific issues (in this case, their participation in British politics) using their own cultural understandings of the social world around them.

• Central position of the social actor (see Cohen, Jenkins)
Empirical data sources

• Qualitative interview data from fieldwork in April 2012 with Polish, Czech, Slovak and Lithuanian nationals living in London
• Election data from Hammersmith and Fulham
• Previous ethnographic studies of A8 and A2 migrants in London between 2007 and 2011
• [Details of sample and references in paper]
# Largest migrant populations in London

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poles as largest migrant population</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 (Barnet and Camden)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poles as second largest migrant population</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 (Ealing and Hillingdon; Merton and Wandsworth; South West)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poles as third largest migrant population</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (Enfield and Haringey)</td>
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Migrants generally have low political participation

- Registration rates non-national EU citizens in UK comparatively high; but voter turnout low (Collard 2011 – data hard to come by!)
- London data on registration, low numbers
- Turnout also low

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Turnout %</th>
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<tr>
<td>All electorate</td>
<td>49.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-national EU citizens</td>
<td>32.1</td>
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<td>Polish nationals</td>
<td>19.9</td>
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Understanding political participation: the post-communist legacy

- Same old political disengagement?
- Political knowledge of new migrants
- ‘Everyone for themselves’: busy people in a new country
- Weak mobilising agencies
- Clear distrust of the state ‘back home’; but high trust of UK institutions – British politics ‘can be left to others’
- Confrontational understanding of politics – seeing political engagement as a sign that something is wrong!
- Are the possession of social and political rights a demobilizing factor? Contrast previous studies of migration and politics in the UK and elsewhere
The new conservatives?

• We asked these migrants what was important to them in the context of the London election
• The ‘new conservatives’?
• Socially conservative, economically liberal
• Authority and self-reliance key values shaping attitudes to education, work, welfare and the family
• ‘Everyone for themselves’, even on an issue that is sensitive for Poles: homelessness (the guilty party are the homeless, not the conditions)
Not so colour blind

• Fear of crime, criticism of family policy (e.g. towards lone parents)
• Crime, welfare dependency, ‘difference’ concentrated in one group: ‘blacks’
• Very vaguely defined but clearly marked as ‘alien’, ‘non-European’ ‘them’
• Strong racial stereotyping, derogatory remarks (data from previous surveys/studies confirm this)
Race and social integration

• Migrants come from relatively homogeneous societies and ‘learn’ how to live in a diverse society
• Some are generally positive about diversity
• But: Relational perspective: by evoking blackness of others, ECE migrants emphasize their whiteness which assumes then the aura of self-evident normality strengthening their general stereotypical perception as ‘hard-working’, willing to integrate and being ‘culturally’ close to the dominant group (white middle class).
Conclusions

• Epistemological bias in migration studies: despite growing literature we know very little about this group of political actors
• Problems with political opportunity structure: once favourable institutional and structural conditions are set – this is clearly not enough to explain participation or non-participation. A more in-depth anthropologically oriented approach a useful balance
• This is a fairly passive group but with strong political attitudes on the family, economy, crime and diversity
• Race is an issues which combines these concerns and identifies them with a distinct group of co-habitants of London
• Who will mobilise these new migrant voters?