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Studying 'up' in migrant entrepreneurship

Privileged migrant entrepreneurs in Wroclaw, Poland

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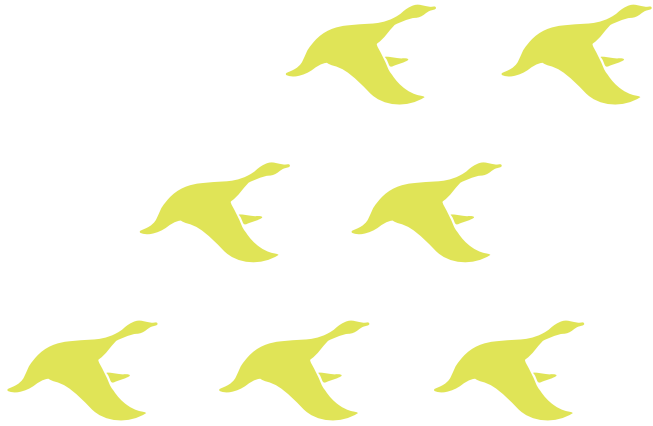
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7.



CHAPTER 7

**Equal players in an
unequal game?
Power and privilege**

“Every country has its own community of immigrants that are less favored and are pretty much doing the jobs that the local people don’t want to do. So for a Ukrainian coming here and setting up their own business, even though they have the language skills, because the languages are very similar, it would be very difficult for them from a perception point of view. Whereas, when we arrive, we are coming from super developed countries and we’re supposed to come with higher education and great knowledge and I think it’s just a matter of perception really, because we don’t have much more to offer”, (Louis, France, online marketing).

7.1. Introduction

As mentioned in previous chapters, ‘migrants’ are often depicted as lacking agency and subject to ‘restrictions, limitations, and discrimination’ (Benson & O’Reilly 2018: 11). As with many of the other issues identified so far in this dissertation, this narrative is largely the result of scholars’ almost exclusive focus upon migration in (semi-)periphery-to-core migratory contexts (Ilhan-Nas 2011; Dheer 2018). Yet, as I also have shown in previous chapters, when we switch the focus to migrants who have migrated in the opposite direction, we start to see how they cannot necessarily be assumed to be disadvantaged. On the contrary, I have shown how migrants moving in this direction are often diametrically *privileged*. But this dichotomy between privilege and disadvantage should actually come as no surprise, as ‘oppression and privilege operate hand in hand’ and ‘one cannot exist without the other’ (Ferguson 2013: 578). Just because scholars’ attention within the field of migration has been focused upon just one side of the equation does not mean that the other side does not exist. Indeed, logically, it has always existed in equal measure albeit, in the context of migration, it has remained largely unobserved and, subsequently, seemingly invisible. As such, ‘employing the notion of privilege is one way of shifting the gaze from those who are from underdeveloped countries, excluded or oppressed and onto those who are from overdeveloped countries, exclusionary or oppressive’ (Choules 2006: 276). This idea, that those from core-states are often more privileged, is even reflected in everyday language. They are frequently referred to not as ‘migrants’, but instead as ‘expats’, which has connotations of ‘whiteness’ and ‘privilege’ (Fechter & Walsh 2010; Leonard 2016). Even within the migrant entrepreneurship literature, many scholars have employed similarly loaded nomenclature, such as ‘expat-preneurs’ (Vance et al. 2016; Selmer et al. 2018) or ‘descending diaspora entrepreneurs’ (Harima 2014). Such terms seem to position these subjects as somehow *above* the position of ‘migrants’. Yet, importantly, most of the core-state migrants in this study can hardly be considered to be the ‘super rich transnational elites’ observed by Beaverstock (2002) or the ‘transnational capitalist class’ outlined by Sklair (2012) and, in terms

of financial capital, do not seem to be overtly privileged. As a matter of fact, as seen in Chapter 4, I showed how both groups of core- and periphery migrant entrepreneurs in this study seem to have relatively *equal* levels of resources (albeit with variation in the origin of such resources). Indeed, Louis (France, quoted above) seems to be conscious of this when he says ‘we don’t have much more to offer’. What is problematic here, therefore, is how both subject groups, despite displaying relatively similar levels of resources, appear to be showing variations in how they are privileged or disadvantaged. What, in other words, is granting certain migrants (usually those from core-states), in certain situations, certain privileges, if not their levels of resources?

The goal of this chapter is to shed some light on this and, in doing so, to complicate notions of privilege in migration research. In keeping with previous chapters, I will once again breakdown the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship into three (micro, meso, and macro) levels (Kloosterman 2010). In doing so, I will explore how, on a micro level, migrant entrepreneurs’ motivations and access to resources (and their *origins*) are interacting with the wider macro level environment, resulting in variations on a meso level between the two groups’ apparent levels of privilege and disadvantage. I start first, below, with the meso level by exploring and recapping how the two groups seem to vary in the ways in which they are privileged and/or disadvantaged.

7.2. The meso level: Privilege and disadvantage of migrant entrepreneurs

“Foreigners living in Poland will have experienced various reactions to having decided to live here: You’re from New York, wow! London? Cool! France? Nice place? Spain – great language. But also: Russia? This is a free country now, luckily. Ukraine? Oh. Turkey? Are you an Arab? I hope you are not a terrorist. Armenia? Where’s that? Can you see the difference? The west is the best, the east is the beast”, (Bobby Chopper, WroclawExpats.com).

This quote, ‘the West is the Best, the East is the Beast’, was published in an article on Wroclawexpats.com,⁷⁸ a website offering third party services to ‘expats’ in Wroclaw. Far from the author being racist or prejudiced against those from the East, they were attempting to draw readers’ attention to the (unfair) difference in reception which awaits foreigners in Wroclaw. This idea, that how people in Wroclaw are treated is influenced by their location of origin, was also very evident in the words of many of the migrant entrepreneurs I interviewed, such as Stuart (UK):

⁷⁸ Wroclawexpats.com (2018): <http://wroclawexpats.com/2018/04/expats-migrants-or-wroclawians/>

“There’s still a sort of mentality that when you’re from the West, you’re sort of somehow better. When you’re from the East, you’re somehow worse”, (Stuart, UK, IT company).

What is interesting here is that Stuart, despite being part of an ethnic minority, is considered to have a positive standing within society. As such, it questions the often assumed correlation between minority groups and discrimination (Lundstrom 2017). But, as can be seen, such a correlation for those from the ‘East’ remains very prevalent. Indeed, in addition to reports in the news of xenophobic attacks on Ukrainians,⁷⁹ many migrant entrepreneurs from periphery-states spoke of negative treatment based on nationality, such as Danilo (Ukraine):

“On Facebook one [Polish person] wrote ‘there are too many Ukrainians! Why are you coming still?’, (Danilo, Ukraine, construction company).

So, it seems that while Stuart (and those from the core-states) are often viewed in a positive way, Danilo (and many others from periphery-states) experience quite the opposite. In other words, within the environment of Wrocław, migrants appear to be subject to a variation in social standing, granted to its owners purely ‘by accident of birth’ (ibid: 120).

Such variation in social standing can have real implications for migrant entrepreneurs and their businesses. As seen in Chapters 5 and 6, originating from a core-state is often associated with higher levels of trust, quality, and, subsequently, *value*. For example, Mattheus (Germany), explains below how by virtue of being from Germany, his services are somehow worth more:

“I still get to charge more because I’m German. Not because I’m better than anyone else, but because I’m from the West. I have immediately a different standing somehow...Racism [laugh]. It’s racism that I benefit from, because there is in Poland a subtle sense of inferiority towards England and Germany and France and so on and, if you come from those places, and don’t have dark skin, you immediately have more authority somehow. It helped me. Maybe someone from Ukraine is seen as cheap labour, and someone from Germany is seen as someone who is choosing to be here. Like I would be more categorized as an expat, whereas someone from Ukraine would be more categorized as a migrant”, (Mattheus, Germany, education consultancy).

79 Local (Wrocław) news story: “Man arrested for xenophobic attack on 2 ukrainians” <https://wroclawuncut.com/2019/03/27/man-arrested-for-xenophobic-attack-on-two-ukrainian-citizens/>

Mattheus, purely thanks to his German cultural capital, is the benefactor of significant advantages within Wrocław (namely, the ability to charge more), which seems to directly benefit his business. But, importantly, such benefits were not only restricted to a local level. We saw before in Chapter 5 how migrants from core-states can leverage their core-state social and cultural capital to bridge themselves to affluent core-state markets. Such capital is, apparently, valued by clients not only within Poland, but also *internationally*. To re-quote Seamus (Ireland) once again: ‘Being Irish, there is a higher level of trust.’ Seamus, in addition to others from core-states, have been able to leverage their core-state cultural capital (which, it seems, is associated with greater levels of trust) to acquire international clients. As such, it illustrates how certain forms of cultural capital are ‘transnationally acknowledged’ and ‘associated with high standards worldwide’ (Weiss 2005: 722). Conversely, (semi-)periphery cultural capital is often associated with lower standards and less trust. Indeed, this appears to be exactly the case for Artem (Belarus) who describes below his experiences at border crossings:

“I see it at the border, when you’re Russian or Ukrainian, they check it slowly, or doubt that you’re fair. And if you’re American, they just hurry to check you.” (Artem, Belarus, translation).

So, here, according to Artem, originating from Russia or Ukraine has connotations of *untrustworthiness*. As such, it adds to the general picture that those displaying cultural capital originating from periphery-states somehow have a disadvantaged social standing.⁸⁰

On the surface, this variation in social standing according to country-of-origin is nothing new. After all, there have been numerous studies which have documented the various forms of privilege of core-state migrants in (semi-)periphery contexts (Fechter 2005; Fechter & Walsh 2010; Hoang 2014; Lundstrom 2017). These studies, however, have focused on the topic of white privilege and how Western white migrants in postcolonial societies become the ‘visible other’, thereby inheriting a set of largely positive connotations. Yet, within this study of core-state migrants in Wrocław, whereby it is a largely ‘white-on-white’ non-colonial context, ethnicity becomes less visible. Despite this, migrants from core-states somehow manage to retain their goodie bag of unearned privileges. This, I will show below, happens through the dual process of 1. migrants, in lieu of skin colour, employing other

80 There were, however, a small number of exceptions whereby the origin of the migrants’ cultural capital did not always correspond to the paradigm of ‘core = positive’ and ‘periphery = negative’. For example, Mario (Italy) said that he had to provide a double deposit for his restaurant location, because the Polish landlord heard his Italian accent. Further, several migrants from Ukraine stated that they have been treated well in Poland.

methods to mark their core-state origins; and 2. such origins being interpreted by others as something positive. With regard to the former, these methods include referring to themselves not as ‘migrants’, but instead as ‘expats’ (Koutonin 2015; Cranston 2017), as well as attending ‘expat meetups.’⁸¹ This in itself lends support to other authors who have observed how migrants from economically developed countries often centre around certain ‘elite’ spaces, reinforcing their cultural supremacy (Piekut 2003; Lundstrom 2017). But there is also one more - and perhaps even more powerful - strategy which these migrants utilize in order to foreground their core-state origins. Here, I refer to the power of language, which I will now discuss below.

Power and language

Walter (UK) has been living in Poland for over a decade. Unlike many other migrants from the core-states subject group, he has actually been able to acquire a reasonable level of Polish. Historically, this would usually be welcomed by many Poles, who often viewed his attempts at learning the language as ‘cute’ and a novelty that someone from *England* would learn *Polish*, when it usually the other way round. Yet, more recently when he has been speaking Polish in public, his non-native accent has been interpreted as being *Ukrainian*. Walter speaks, below, about the totally different reaction this is often accompanied by:

“If you’re British, at least up until recently, you were kind of given privilege status. So if you go to McDonalds and say ‘hi can I have two big macs’, ‘oh yes of course’, whatever. But if you were to speak in Polish to them, nowadays they may mistake you for being Ukrainian as has happened to me and they treat you like shit”, (Walter, UK, English language school).

Language then, it seems, is being used as a signifier of nationality. Speaking English appears to align migrants with core-states, which then is attached to a higher level of social standing. Speaking periphery-state languages, by contrast, or speaking Polish with an accent which could be interpreted as originating from periphery-states, seems to correspondingly subject migrants to various disadvantages.

This privileged status of core-state languages is even visible when walking around the city centre. On most streets, you can see advertising for English (and also often French, German, Spanish and Italian) language schools. Walter, quoted above, as the owner of an English language school, directly benefits from this demand for core-state languages. Of course, he is not the only one who benefits. As seen in Chapter 3, for those who can speak core-state languages, finding well-paid employment (within the environment of Wrocław) seems relatively easy. For

⁸¹ For example, monthly InterNations events, as well as the weekly ‘Tower of Babel’ international meetup and Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BabelWroclaw/>

example, Paul (USA), could not find employment in Paris, but in Wroclaw it was a different story:

“I was in Paris...and I applied to like probably seventy different places over a nine month period and I received one phone call...I came out here [to Wroclaw] and...I put out my CV to five companies and within the same week I got five phone calls”, (Paul, USA, coffee roasting).

Paul’s ability to easily find well-paid employment thanks to his core-state language skills, when combined with the positive social standing which accompanies such languages, reveals how within the semi-periphery environment of Wroclaw ‘English-speaking Westerners can convert their native language proficiency, as hegemonic linguistic and cultural capital, into symbolic prestige and economic and social capital’ (Lan 2011: 1670).

For those from periphery-states, however, it is often quite a different story. Aleksander (Ukraine) is a good example. After his cafe in Wroclaw went bankrupt, he could only find relatively low-paid work as a waiter, despite possessing a PhD. So, why did Paul find it easy to obtain high paid employment, whereas Aleksander did not? It appears that the answer does not relate to their education level, rather, it seems more about their cultural (specifically, linguistic) capital. Put simply, Paul speaks a core-state language (English), whereas Aleksander does not. Indeed, this idea is supported by the situation of Aleksander’s partner who ‘is a German linguist, so careerwise it’s easier for her.’ Here, it seems that Aleksander’s partner (as well as many others from the periphery-states subject group who speak core-state languages) found it much easier to obtain well-paid employment in the mainstream labour market. Within such an environment, where core-state languages, as seen in previous chapters, have a higher value both socially and economically, it is perhaps unsurprising that very few (14.6%) of the migrant entrepreneurs from the core-states subject group have learned Polish. Indeed, this ability to migrate to a new country, not learn the host country language, and still retain a high standing within society, points to the imperialistic undertones of such migration (Croucher 2009: 484).

Does ethnicity play a role?

I mentioned before that this study is largely within a ‘white-on-white’ context. Nonetheless, for the small number (4) of migrants in the study who were visibly of colour, ethnicity appears to, at times, play a role. Until recently, walking around the city centre, it would be rare to encounter faces of colour. But, with the recent increase in immigration, including non-white immigration, it seems not only has the number of non-white people in Wroclaw increased, but also, correspondingly, the

number of racially motivated attacks.⁸² Such racism can extend into the business environment and have real impacts upon migrants' companies. For example, John (Nigeria), speaks to this:

"Well I think on OLX⁸³ I got a message when someone wrote and asked me where I'm from. I said I'm from Nigeria, you can read it on my description, and he said ok sorry", (John, Nigeria, English language school).

The business prospect declined John's English teaching services because he is from Nigeria. This seems in line with Lan's (2011) study, which found that English language schools often reject black teachers because their clientele prefer teachers who are white. At first glance, John's situation seems to be a clearcut example of racism. But, upon closer inspection, he points out that it is not so much about his skin colour, but rather the fact he is from Nigeria:

"If you're black and you're from the UK, it would be fine. They just need to get to know where you're from, I even see it on their faces you know, someone who has already rated you highly, talking to you with respect, the moment they get to know you're from Africa, ...And that's what I call racism, you know, when what I merit, you don't give me the opportunity, not when you call me some crappy name, or talk to me in some crappy way", (John, Nigeria, English language school).

In other words, John's negative treatment seems less about ethnicity and more about the country of origin. This highlights the subtle interplay between ethnicity and culture and, ultimately, suggests how within the environment of Wrocław, cultural capital can play an even greater role than skin colour. The significance of this will become clearer later in this chapter.

Politico-institutional privilege

Above I have shown how migrants can experience a string of unofficial privileges via the social prestige of core-state cultural capital. However, such privileges are not always unofficial and can, at times, be formally underwritten by governmental (and non-governmental) actors. Anna (USA), for example, speaks below about her comparative freedom of movement:

82 Local (Wrocław) news story about a racially motivated attack: <https://wroclawuncut.com/2019/01/23/racist-attacker-sentenced-to-10-months-community-service/>

83 A Polish internet directory which lists jobs and items for sale. It can be considered a Polish version of GumTree or Craigslist.

“As an American it’s super easy. We don’t have to have a visa. We just have to have a passport. You don’t have to have a way of working. I mean, technically you should be doing it on a working visa, right, you shouldn’t be doing this on a tourist visa, but you can. They don’t check. That’s a problem for your own immigration problems. But literally I could land tomorrow and go into urząd miejski [the government office] and I could be a business owner”, (Anna, USA, arts & crafts store).

The above quote reveals the privileged mobility which Anna enjoys. Despite being from outside the EU, she can easily move to Poland and set up a business. Indeed, this legal mobility for those from core-states seems to apply not only to traveling to Poland, but to many other locations around the world. Previously, we saw how Gabriel (France) plans on living ‘half the year in Asia and half the year in Europe’, a desire he expresses without ever considering visa restrictions. As such, Gabriel and Anna (as well as many others from core-states⁸⁴) demonstrate how certain groups seem able to migrate across political borders with ease (Sklair 2012; Lundstrom 2017; Benson & O’Reilly 2018). This privileged mobility seems a result of government policies which view such migration as *desirable* and which actively target and promote this demographic (Collins 2010; Sumption 2012; Bagley 2015). With such mobility comes great choice and, as noted in Chapter 5, this can allow these privileged migrants to take advantage of an international buffet of regulatory systems, picking and choosing the environments which best match their businesses’ needs. Or in the words of Kunz (2018):

‘Like other migrants, respondents skillfully navigated the global differences in wealth, power and status they were presented with. Yet, unlike many other migrants, they did so from a privileged position within the global power-geometries of international migration’.

However, for those from periphery-states, it can be a totally different story (as noted in Chapter 3). Andriy (Ukraine) and his wife, for example, wanted to move to Barcelona, but for visa reasons they could not, so instead they settled on Poland. Their plan is to obtain Polish citizenship, then take advantage of the freedom of movement within the Schengen area to move to Barcelona. In this sense, and as noted in Chapter 3, they seem to be performing a kind of international stepwise migration (Paul 2011; Zijlstra 2020), essentially taking the ‘long way’ to their desired destination as a result of lacking the privileged mobility of many of their counterparts from core-states. The variation in legal mobility of migrants according to their country of origin is, in essence, a form of formally underwritten

84 However, as previously noted, there was one exception, whereby Dave (Canada) had an issue with his visa and was subsequently arrested.

discrimination. Not only can such discrimination affect migrants' location of their business, but it can also affect the business itself. Symon (Ukraine) explains below:

"It would be easier, because if you're a Polish person you have many benefits which I don't have....For example money. This guy I told you about, he worked for 5 years, 3 years in Norway and 2 years in Poland for a transport company. He told me how much he earns, he earns 150 grand for 5 years. In Ukraine I worked in a bank in a good position. I'm not like just a guy who's sitting and speaking with normal clients, I work with business clients. I earned per month something like 800 or 900, something like 1000 dollars. In Ukraine it's good money, but if you want to start a business, it's nothing", (Symon, Ukraine, delivery company).

Symon attributes his lack of financial capital to his inability to legally migrate to a more economically developed country, such as Norway, where he could earn more money. As a result, he believes that being Polish (and having the freedom of movement which would accompany this) would make conducting business 'easier'. Clearly, then, when compared to many of those from core-states, there appears to be distinct differences in migrants' freedom of movement which, in turn, can affect their businesses.

Interestingly, regulation which treats people differently based upon their nationality does not only stem from nation-states, but also from the private sector. This can be seen from my dialogue with Bruce (Australia):

Bruce: "Probably being Australian made things a lot easier...They ask for a lot of verification, so if you're just a guy from Ukraine, or a young 19 year old Indian, now trying to start a business, it's painful, because you can see everything is there, you can sign up for it, but a week later, without any explanation, it's absolutely horrible the way they are treated, I'm in all the groups and forums and I can see everyday there is some form of national discrimination, where somebody was just deplatformed on Amazon after a year of working their ass off and investing their capital and marketing, just to get shut down, just because you started an LLC in America and your postal address is in Deli, so you're not a legitimate business. Knowing full well that PayPal isn't available in Nigeria. Are all Nigerians scammers? Fuck no they're not, and how are they not supposed to be scammers if we don't allow them to make legitimate ends online?"

Me: "So coming from Australia, you had less resistance in terms of PayPal and other online platforms accepting you?"

Bruce: "Yeah, when I started, you could open up 10 different PayPal accounts and use prepaid credit cards from Woolworths to verify them. I had hundreds of PayPal accounts."

As can be seen from Bruce's words, companies such as PayPal are, purely based upon nationality, restricting who can and cannot open an online account. Even from personal experience, having worked for an international online software company, I saw first-hand how it is common practice for firms to block all new signups coming from IP addresses in certain countries, such as Nigeria. And even today, at the time of writing, PayPal does not allow people in Ukraine to withdraw money to Ukrainian bank accounts.⁸⁵ So, as can be seen, formally underwritten discrimination based upon nationality seems not only present in the public sector, but clearly also extends into the private sector.

7.2.2. A recap of the two subject groups' variations in privilege and disadvantage

I have highlighted, above, some variations between the two subject groups in terms of their relative levels of privilege and disadvantage. Specifically, I showed: 1. how migrants with core-state cultural capital seem to have more social prestige (not only in the environment of Wrocław, but also internationally); 2. how this privileged position of core-state cultural capital is exemplified in the use of languages; 3. how this privileged position of core-state cultural capital can have economic privileges, including making it easier to secure well-paid employment; 4. how those from core-states often have more international mobility. But these represent only some of the multiple other variations of privilege which have been revealed throughout this dissertation. The goal of this section, then, is to now provide a more comprehensive list of all privileges (and, conversely, disadvantages) identified so far. Indeed, Table 7.1, below, summarizes the variations observed between the two groups.

⁸⁵ This statement is supported by my conversations with Ukrainians in Wrocław, as well as third party news articles such as this: <https://www.kyivpost.com/technology/paypal-doesnt-work-in-ukraine-but-resourceful-locals-know-how-to-use-it.html?cn-reloaded=1>

Table 7.1. Disadvantage and privilege: Core vs. periphery subject group comparison

Parameter	Core-states subject group	Periphery-states subject group
Social prestige within Wrocław	☑ Often spoke of benefiting from social prestige.	☒ Frequent stories of discrimination.
Mother tongue standing within Wrocław	☑ Core-state languages tolerated or even admired. Economically in-demand.	☒ Periphery-state languages less admired. Migrants often expected to learn Polish.
The ability to find well-paid employment	☑ Migrants often left well-paid employment to start their businesses (i.e. finding well-paid employment was relatively easy).	☒ Migrants often found starting their own business to be a better paid alternative than a job within the mainstream labour market.
Cost of labour	☑ Spoke of how labour from core-states costs more.	☒ Spoke of how labour from periphery-states costs less.
International mobility	☑ Rarely spoke of barriers to international mobility.	☒ Migrants often spoke of visa issues. Poland was often chosen as a 'second choice', because obtaining work and residency permits was easier than for their first choice (core-states such as Germany) was more difficult.
Feeling of security within home country	☑ Home country considered safe and with rule-of-law.	☒ Frequent stories of war and the lack of rule-of-law in home country.
Access to core-state markets	☑ Migrants seem better able to access core-state markets.	☒ Migrants seem less able to access core-state markets.
Access to periphery-state labour	☒ Migrants seem less able to access (comparatively) affordable periphery-state labour.	☑ Migrants seem better able to access (comparatively) affordable periphery-state labour.

Source: Data gathered from this study. Note: This information represents the general *trends*, but there were, of course, exceptions and variations within both subject groups.

As shown, migrants from core-states are privileged in many ways, while those from periphery-states seem to be conversely disadvantaged. In the same way that white people in McIntosh's (1988) groundbreaking paper seem privileged in the environment of American society, migrant entrepreneurs from core-states in this study seem to benefit in a similar way with 'an invisible package of unearned assets'. In Chapter 3, for example, while exploring the variations in the motivations of the

two groups of migrants, I showed how the ‘starting points’ of migrant entrepreneurs are often uneven. Those from periphery-states are born into economically deprived and unsafe environments, often lacking ‘rule-of-law’.

“I’m a person who saw in my life such things, you know, I saw war, I saw dead people...I would never wish for someone to see these things. Because in my opinion I’m a lucky person, I have family, my family has some amount of money. But I know a lot of my friends, a lot of people there who didn’t have this. [They] do not live anymore, because the first day of war they go to war and [they died]. A lot of friends I lost in this war.”, (Symon, Ukraine, delivery company).

Such variation was often found to provide a strong motivation for those from the periphery-states subject group to emigrate. Further, regardless of their motivations for migrating, the ability to do so varies between the two groups. In Chapter 5 we then saw an additional layer of privilege of those from the core-states subject group. Specifically, these migrants seem better able to access markets in core-states, while those from periphery-states seem less able to do so. Further, in Chapter 6, we also saw evidence of a labour hierarchy, whereby labour from core-states seems to be valued more than that of periphery-states. Yet, for these migrants there was one notable ‘privilege’, namely, their apparent greater ability to access this affordable (co-ethnic) labour supply. Migrants from core-states, by contrast, were shown to be more likely to hire (comparatively more expensive) native, Polish labour.

But here comes the key question: Why do such variations exist? Other studies of core-to-(semi-)periphery migration have usually attributed migrants’ privileges to variations in financial capital (such as Beaverstock’s 2002 study of ‘super rich transnational elites’), human capital (Vance et al. 2016), or ethnicity (Fechter 2005; Hoang 2014; Lundstrom 2017). However, as mentioned in the introduction, migrants in this study were found (in Chapter 4) to have relatively equal levels of financial and human capital, plus predominantly share the same (white) skin colour.⁸⁶ So, then, how, in the context of this study, is privilege and disadvantage realized? In order to gain insight into this, I turn now, below, to the role of the macro level environment.

7.3. The macro level: Environmental factors

In keeping with previous chapters, and in order to help organise and simplify the analysis, I have once again divided the macro level environment up into four separate

⁸⁶ Furthermore, most of the subjects in this study share two additional characteristics: 1. They are from the same continent (Europe) and; 2. they are from similar religious (Christian) contexts.

layers: 1. Socio-cultural; 2. Economic; 3. Technological; and 4. Politico-institutional. I begin, below, with the role of the socio-cultural layer of the environment.

7.3.1. The socio-cultural environment

Cultural hierarchies

As seen above and in previous chapters, in the environment of Wroclaw, certain cultures seem to be valued above others. This, by definition, constitutes a cultural hierarchy. The presence of cultural hierarchies provides a mechanism to explain how variations in privilege occur, despite both subject groups predominantly sharing the same skin colour and having relatively equal levels of resources. What seems to be playing the key role here is not necessarily the migrants' skin colour, nor their levels of resources, but rather their nationality and the geographical origin of their cultural capital. For example, let us return to the case of Walter (UK). As the owner of an English language school, he is one of many UK and USA entrepreneurs within the 'education' sector meeting the strong local demand for English language instruction. Ukrainian language schools, by contrast, are much harder to find.⁸⁷ In other words, it seems that local cultural hierarchies (on a macro level) appear to be creating opportunity structures (on a meso level) for certain languages (such as English) which are then acted upon by migrant entrepreneurs (on a micro level). Importantly, migrants' ability to act on such opportunities depends not just on their motivation to do so (as noted in Chapter 3), but also their access to the necessary resources. In this case, Walter, by virtue of being born and raised in the UK, has acquired certain cultural capital which is now, in the environment of Wroclaw, seems to take on structurally imposed value (Coleman 1988), subsequently becoming desirable and economically valuable.

Conversely, for those from periphery-states, it seems to be quite the opposite. Within such cultural hierarchies, their cultural capital can take on connotations of lower value,⁸⁸ with those from periphery-states being seen, in the semi-periphery environment of Wroclaw, as 'cheap labour'. Yet, within their own countries, their cultural capital may have had more value. For Andriy (Ukraine), he was a lawyer with a degree from a well-respected university within Ukraine, fluent in Russian and Ukrainian, with a good standing within society in Kiev. But in the context of Wroclaw, this cultural capital seems of little value. In such situations, migrants can make efforts to convert their capital into 'universally understood cultural currency' (Weiss 2005: 720; Erel 2010). In the case of Andriy, he has considered attempting to get his law degree recognized in Poland, however he tells me that it would

87 This statement is supported by the fact that out of 292 Ukrainian sole proprietorships, only 11 of them were in the 'education' sector.

88 However, it has also been noted that, within certain (semi-)periphery ethnic groups, shared cultural capital can have certain in-group benefits (Vershina & Rogers 2020).

involve two to three years of studying, so instead, opening a cafe seemed like a preferable option.

Cultural hierarchies across space

Andriy's situation highlights how different forms of cultural capital can take on different values in different spaces. This is also demonstrated by Josh (UK) who explains to me in a strong cockney accent how his standing within society has also changed since moving to Wroclaw, albeit for better and not for worse:

"I'm a native English guy. I'm sure you've experienced that. Even with women there is always an appeal, they notice the excitement of a foreigner, or an English guy, more and more people telling you they like your accent...I feel like superman in Smallville...In the UK, I would never be able to get as many good opportunities as I do here in Poland. For example Forbes magazine have asked to interview me, but in England they wouldn't give a shit about me", (Josh, UK, English language school and investor relations business).

Josh, apparently, did not have as many opportunities in the UK as he now has in Poland. Within the UK, his cockney accent is often associated with lower socioeconomic status (Giles & Sassoon 1983) which, incidentally, highlights the various 'shades of white' present within UK society (Halej 2015). Yet, upon migrating to Poland, Josh's UK cultural capital suddenly became interpreted as something extremely positive, resulting in him feeling 'like Superman in Smallville'. In other words, he was able to piggyback on the positive standing of UK culture within Poland, while simultaneously jettisoning the more nuanced negative interpretations of the specific standing of his own accent and class within UK society. At this point, I would like to reflect back on the notion of 'geoarbitrage' (Hayes 2014), which has been used in the context of migrants who geographically relocate in order to increase their relative economic standing. Josh's situation, however, highlights a new, cultural component to geo-arbitrage, whereby migrants can also alter their relative cultural standing. Indeed, this idea, that cultural capital can be interpreted differently across space, is further reinforced by Dave (Canada) who explained to me how his social prestige in Poland was nothing compared to what he had previously received in Indonesia:

"Some countries as a westerner you do get a prestige bump, but I don't feel that strongly in Poland, not like in Indonesia where you're a white guy and a rockstar", (Dave, Canada, Poland).

For Dave, traveling to Indonesia means an even greater increase in social prestige, enhanced by his white skin in a postcolonial context. As such, it reveals how

migrants like Dave, Josh, and Andriy ‘do not only cross national borders but also move between different sets of social classification systems that are tied to local, national and transnational hierarchies’ (Lundstrom 2017: 82, citing Kusow 2006). Subsequently, the value of migrants’ cultural capital, must be determined according to the cultural hierarchies within which they are situated, recognising that these hierarchies (and, therefore, the value of certain forms of cultural capital) can, and do, vary across space (Weiss 2005).

Despite this variation, certain cultural hierarchies seem more pervasive than others. As seen previously, various forms of core-state cultural capital seem to be valued not only within Wroclaw, but also internationally. For example, I demonstrated previously how core-state cultural capital seems to grant its beholders greater levels of trust in international contexts and is ‘associated with high standards worldwide’ (Weiss 2015: 722). This is supported by other studies which have likewise shown how core-state cultural capital is often positively interpreted in a range of other environments, including Hong Kong (Findlay et al. 1996), Jakarta (Fechter 2005), Singapore (Beaverstock 2002), and a number of former soviet republics (Vershinina & Rogers 2020). In other words, despite variation of cultural hierarchies on a local level, such variation seems to take place within broader global hierarchies.

Cultural hierarchies across time

Not only can cultural hierarchies vary across space, but they can also vary across *time*. Paul (USA) is one of the few migrants in this study who is of colour. Below, he talks about how, within the environment of Wroclaw, this used to be perceived as a positive thing, yet has changed in recent years:

“About 2-3 years ago, well no, before the new government came in, I was exotic. After the government came in...on the street, I’m a foreigner...My daughter and I have a code word for alcoholics or street people, so that I can get on the other side, we call them ‘ZELFS’. That’s just the secret word. So basically on a couple of occasions I’ve had a ZELF come up to me and ask me for a cigarette and I look mediterranean, I look like an Arab, if I say ‘no’, I’ve had a couple people shout ‘Alu Akbar’ at me”, (Paul, USA, coffee sales).

The environment within Wroclaw is, according to Paul, becoming increasingly hostile to people who look like they might originate from the Middle East. Paul’s skin colour used to be interpreted as ‘exotic’ and was bestowed with positive meaning within local cultural hierarchies. Yet now, within an increasingly Islamophobic society, it takes on more negative connotations. Ignoring the reasons for why this is happening, the important point here is how the environment is changing over time. Indeed, because ethnicity and religion are social constructs, they are,

inherently, fluid and subject to change (Murguia & Forman 2003; Garner 2006). This, of course, is nothing new. In the context of the USA, historians have reminded us that the relative positioning of ethnic groups within cultural hierarchies has been ever-changing and evolving over time. In the 19th Century, Irish, Jewish, Italian, and Slavic migrants were at first often treated as inferior and subject to discrimination (Jacobson 2001; Roediger 2006). This then began to change as these ethnic groups progressively moved upwards within cultural hierarchies during the course of the 20th Century. A similar trend was observed in the context of Irish migration to the UK (McDowell 2009). Clearly, such hierarchies have been present and evolving for hundreds of years (and, no doubt, since even before then, from the dawn of human civilisation - see Heinrich & Gil-White 2001). Yet, despite that, unlike ethnicity or gender, the role of privilege stemming from one's nationality and geographical origins has not (to my knowledge) been researched in as much depth (Choules 2006).

Top down or bottom up?

At this point, I would like to address how, so far, I have portrayed cultural hierarchies as being somewhat 'top-down' with migrants seemingly powerless to control how their various forms of cultural capital are valued (or devalued) within them. Yet, importantly, migrant entrepreneurs play an active role in the creation and continuation of such hierarchies. In a sense, this can be considered to be 'good news' for migrants, as it means they (and, in fact, all of us) have a degree of agency in terms of how we produce or breakdown cultural hierarchies. However, instead of attempting the formidable undertaking of changing these macro level hierarchies, the path of least resistance for migrants is to adapt, on a micro level, their own cultural capital in a way that positively raises their standing within these hierarchies. This was observed in Halej's (2015) study, whereby Central Eastern European migrants deliberately demonstrated behaviours commonly attributed to mainstream British society in order to raise their perceived status within UK cultural hierarchies. Further, although not included in the study, several of my friends from Turkey and Afghanistan (also residing in Wroclaw) recently explained to me how it is common for them to tell local Polish people that they are from Italy or Cyprus, which is a habit they have acquired in order to avoid negative reactions. In other words, by superficially changing their location of origin, they move 'up' cultural and religious hierarchies in the eyes of the Polish people with whom they are speaking. In doing so, their micro-level behaviour 'lights up' the presence of broader structures (Duneier et al. 2014: 7), revealing the presence of cultural hierarchies and, in this case, *islamophobia* within Poland.⁸⁹ Yet, ironically, their actions to overcome these structures are undoubtedly 'feeding back into constituting them' (Duneier & Molotoch 1999: 1291).

⁸⁹ For a more detailed discussion of racism toward 'skilled migrants' within Wroclaw, please see: Jaskulowski & Pawlak 2020.

While it may come as a surprise that migrants from periphery-states reproduce cultural hierarchies which disadvantage them, it should come as no surprise that these hierarchies are also reproduced by migrants who are *privileged* by them, namely, migrants from core-states. Let us, for example, return to the example of Walter (UK) and his English language school in Wroclaw. By providing English language instruction, he is reinforcing existing cultural hierarchies in three ways. First, he is part of an English-as-a-native-speaker demographic which is paid more money to teach English than non-native speakers, subsequently creating a 'misconception that teaching English is better carried out by native speakers', despite there being strong evidence that being a native speaker does not always equate to being a good teacher (Guo & Beckett 2007: 120). Second, by spreading the proliferation of the English language, he is 'contributing to neocolonialism by empowering the already powerful and leaving the disadvantaged further behind' (ibid:117). Third, by promoting the English language, he is not only increasing the standing of the language within the world, but also Anglocentric culture in general (ibid: 124). And, of course, in reinforcing the position of the English language atop cultural hierarchies, Walter simultaneously - albeit largely unwittingly - bolsters the demand for his school's services.

Furthermore, cultural hierarchies are not only influenced from 'above' and 'below', but also *laterally* across time. Taking this aspect into consideration can explain the current configuration of cultural hierarchies and why, for example, English language instruction is currently in greater demand than Ukrainian. Indeed, the reason for this lies well beyond the here and now. It is the result of a series of historical events, going back hundreds of years, stretching well-beyond the borders of not just Wroclaw, but also Poland, often said to be starting with the colonization of the Americas and continuing hand-in-hand with economic dominance (Guo & Beckett 2007; Phillipson 2018). In other words, the current local (Wroclaw) environment must not only be situated within hierarchies which stretch across space, but also *time* (Buzan & Lawson 2015).

7.3.2. The politico-institutional environment

I now turn to the role of the politico-institutional layer of the macro environment and the role it plays in creating variations in privileges between the two subject groups. As seen previously in this chapter, migrants from periphery-states often face a number of restrictions which are imposed by both the public *and* private sectors. As such, it highlights how not just governments, but also organizations, play a role in converting citizenship into a hierarchical structure. Passports themselves have no objective differences, but, when positioned within politico-institutional environments, they can take on structurally imposed value. Indeed, 'citizenship... is only graspable through how it is actually animated in life, through individual subjects, communities, organizations and state-making actors' (Fogelman 2018:

168). To put this into Mixed-embeddedness terms, through a lottery of birthplace, migrants' micro level cultural capital appears to interact differently within an uneven (and, frankly, unfair) macro level, international politico-institutional environment, resulting in variations on a meso level in migrants' privileges and disadvantages. Importantly, although each state has its own citizenship and assigns the rules regarding the privileges of that citizenship, it is part of a much broader, global politico-institutional environment, with clear trends of those with core-state citizenship receiving unearned privileges, while those with periphery-state citizenship face restrictions. And it is not a coincidence that core-state citizens - on a global level - often receive unearned privileges. Citizenship is, after all, 'a construct designed to protect the dominant group' (Choules 2006: 288). Accordingly, shining a light upon the privileged (politico-institutional) mobility of migrants from core-states offers us 'a way to better highlight the nature and implications of global inequality' (Croucher 2012: 2).

7.3.4. The economic environment

"For me Poland is a great place to have a business, the labour is cheap, the taxes are accommodating let's say, yeah, I feel like it's a great place to start a business. Here you can get an office that's cheaper, a lawyer that's cheaper, an accountant that's cheaper, the apartment where you live is cheaper, it makes more sense", (Tom, USA, financial trading).

As shown in previous chapters, migrants operate within an uneven, global, economic environment, whereby wealth seems to be concentrated in certain areas within core-states. Although this rarely resulted in corresponding high levels of financial capital among migrants from the core-state subject group (as seen in Chapter 4), it still provides an important layer of the macro environment within which migrant entrepreneurs operate, and which can subsequently help to explain the variations in migrants' relative levels of disadvantage and privilege. Indeed, the uneven socio-cultural and politico-institutional environments observed above are, fundamentally, built upon a foundation of economic disparity. For example, citizenship privilege, argues Choules (2006: 285), exists 'largely because of the disparity in wealth between countries'. Indeed, this ability to dictate the international politico-institutional environment goes hand-in-hand with economic dominance. Put simply, wealth creates power and power creates wealth: the one reinforces the other (Hickel 2017).

This macro level variation in wealth across the globe can also privilege (or disadvantage) migrants even before they migrate. As seen in Chapter 3, the variation in earning potential between the home- and host countries often underpinned the motivations of the migrations of those from the periphery-states subject group. After all, low incomes in periphery-states (combined with

unsafe politico-institutional environments) provide strong incentives for migrants to relocate to more affluent, stable areas (Faist 2000). Conversely, most of the migrants from the core-states subject group were found to move primarily for non-economic factors, suggesting that their migration is more about volition rather than (economic) necessity. In other words, migrants' motivations themselves seem to reflect unequal spatial variations in the global economic environment, revealing how certain migrations seem more privileged than others.

Yet, for several of those from the core-state subject group, such as Tom (USA, quoted above), their migration to Poland, as well as their decision to stay, was at least partially based upon economic reasons. Instead of migrating to Poland for higher incomes, they did so for *lower costs*, representing a form of 'geo-arbitrage' (Hayes 2014). Indeed, for those who are able to relocate to Poland to reduce their expenses, while retaining their relatively high revenues via their access to the lucrative markets in core-states (as seen in Chapter 5), migrating to Poland can be a very fiscally responsible business decision. Subsequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that this demographic is often seen as 'good migrants' which are economically positive for the local economy, as they are viewed as bringing in additional revenue and skills to the region (Croucher 2009; Dearie & Geduldig 2013; Vance et al. 2016). However, upon closer inspection, there is an argument to be made that such migrants are perhaps not as privileged as many assume. First of all, privilege is relative. Despite core-to-(semi-)periphery migrants (in many, but not all cases) being wealthier than the native population, these migrants were not necessarily wealthy in their home countries (Croucher 2012). Second, geoarbitrage may on the surface seem like taking advantage of spatial disparities of wealth, but the act of moving toward more affordable areas is paradoxically also a move away from more expensive areas. Indeed, many migrants in this study (from core-states) spoke of their home countries being exactly this: *expensive*. In other contexts, it has been argued that this constitutes a form of necessity migration, whereby stagnating economies and declining welfare states in many core-states are pushing migrants from core-states to (semi-)periphery-states (Dixon et al. 2006; Hayes 2015; 2018). Further, after a period of time in this more affordable (semi-)periphery environment, migrants can become 'trapped', financially less able to return to the comparatively expensive home countries (Drake & Collard 2008; Leonard 2010; Lan 2011). This in itself highlights how economic privilege and disadvantage can at times be more nuanced than one might expect and can be better understood once situated within the wider, global economic environment.

7.3.3. The technological environment

There is a fourth, and final layer of the macro environment which also contributes to realizing privilege (and disadvantage) of the migrants in this study. I speak, of course, of the role of the technological layer of the environment. In Chapter 5,

we saw how global differentials in the technological composition of macro level economies seem to become instilled on a micro level in terms of the industry sectors in which migrant entrepreneurs' are situated. Specifically, those from core-states seem more likely to have businesses in tertiary sectors (such as 'professional services'), while those from periphery-states were more commonly in secondary sectors (such as 'construction' and 'gastronomy'). This then, in turn, grants migrants from core-states with an advantage, as tertiary sector services seem to lend themselves better to long-distance distribution, allowing these migrants to target the more lucrative international markets situated in core-states. This privilege (of long-distance distribution) was recently brought to the forefront with the global COVID-19 pandemic. The government enforced lockdown in Wroclaw caused severe problems for many migrant entrepreneurs who were selling products and/or services to clients locally, such as Abebi (Nigeria) with her arts and crafts store:

"I never could have imagined being closed for days and days, with my cash flow abruptly cut off", (Abebi, Nigeria, African arts store).

Considering the majority of those from periphery-states service a local clientele, this lockdown disproportionately affected their businesses. This adds yet another layer of disadvantage onto the other layers previously outlined above. By contrast, many of the migrants providing services 'remotely' (i.e. predominantly those from core-states) were able to continue unscathed. Some even *benefitted*. Michael (USA), with his e-commerce business, speaks to this:

"My e-commerce business has been making record sales since the quarantine. Even though the product lines are totally unrelated to survival essentials. My guess is that people are at home, ordering everything online and having them delivered", (Michael, USA, e-commerce).

Clearly, then, migrants' position within the technological environment must also be taken into account when exploring who receives certain privileges and who does *not*.

7.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shown how migrant entrepreneurs cannot be assumed to be disadvantaged and, on the contrary, those from core-states (in particular) often demonstrate the exact opposite, namely, *privilege*. In the same way that white people in McIntosh's (1988) groundbreaking paper seem privileged in the environment of American society, migrant entrepreneurs from core-states in this study seem to benefit in a similar way with 'an invisible package of unearned assets',

such as social and linguistic prestige, the ability to find well-paid employment, relatively unrestricted international mobility, and easier access to affluent markets in core-states. Privilege, however, cannot exist without oppression (Ferguson 2013), so, perhaps unsurprisingly, migrants from periphery-states were found to be correspondingly subjected to *disadvantages*, such as a lower social standing of their cultures and languages, restricted international mobility, barriers to well-paid mainstream employment, and barriers to accessing affluent markets in core-states. There is, however, one exception, whereby periphery-state migrant entrepreneurs are privileged by their apparent superior ability to access more affordable supplies of labour from - or located in - periphery-states. Nevertheless, the broader trend of those from core-states receiving more privileges remains.

In other core-to-(semi-)periphery contexts, such privilege has been closely tied to the role of ethnicity (Fechter 2005; Hoang 2014; Lundstrom 2017) or resources (Beaverstock 2002; Sklair 2012). Within this study, however, both groups of migrant entrepreneurs were predominantly white and with relatively equal levels of resources which, subsequently, begs the question how the aforementioned variations in privileges can be accounted for. Looking for insight into this, I explored how variations in migrant entrepreneurs' motivations and access to resources (on a micro level) interact with the wider environment (on a macro level), resulting in apparent variations in privileges and disadvantages (on a meso level). In keeping with previous chapters, in order to simplify and organize the analysis, I subdivided the macro environment up into four separate layers: 1. Socio-cultural; 2. Politico-institutional; Economic; and 4. Technological.

Starting with the socio-cultural macro environment, I showed how migrants' variation in the geographical origin of their cultural capital, when positioned within cultural hierarchies, leads to differences in the interpretation and valuation of this capital. Specifically, it seems that core-state cultural capital, within the environment of Wrocław, takes on structurally imposed value (Coleman 1988), subsequently becoming desirable and economically valuable. These cultural hierarchies, I revealed, stretch well-beyond Wrocław, with core-state capital often being 'transnationally acknowledged' and 'associated with high standards worldwide' (Weiss 2005: 722). However, I also highlighted how there can be local variations, exposing how migrants 'do not only cross national borders but also move between different sets of social classification systems that are tied to local, national and transnational hierarchies' (Lundstrom 2017: 82, citing Kusow 2006). Further, in addition to varying across space, I also demonstrated how cultural hierarchies can vary across time. Despite their evolution over hundreds (and no doubt thousands) of years, I noted how, unlike ethnicity or gender, privilege based upon citizenship has not been explored in as much depth (Choules 2006).

I then switched the focus to the politico-institutional layer of the macro environment and the role it plays in disadvantaging those from periphery-states, who are often subject to a collection of regulatory barriers, both public and private,

which have the effect of reducing their politico-institutional mobility. Conversely, I showed how this layer of the environment grants those from core-states with relative freedom of movement, both geographically and in business matters. This, I argued, is no coincidence, as citizenship is, after all, 'a construct designed to protect the dominant group' (Choules 2006: 288).

I then outlined the crucial role of the economic environment in the variation of privileges between the two subject groups. First of all, I highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the economic environment and other levels of the macro environment. Second, I recounted how the uneven economic landscape leads to variations in the relative privilege (or disadvantage) of motivations for migrating, with many migrants from periphery-states migrating for economic reasons, while those from core-states often have the privilege of basing their migrations upon non-economic factors. Nevertheless, I also showed how this is not always the case, and how some migrants from core-states can themselves be considered 'necessity migrants', whereby stagnating economies and declining welfare states in many core-states are pushing them from core-states to (semi-)periphery-states (Dixon et al. 2006; Hayes 2015; 2018).

Finally, on a technological level, I showed how migrants' position within certain industry sectors (which itself is broadly a reflection of structural differences between core- and periphery economies) can lead to various privileges and disadvantages, namely, the ability to provide products or services remotely to affluent clientele in core-states. The idea of this ability as a privilege, I argued, was brought to the forefront during the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, whereby businesses providing services locally were negatively impacted by government enforced lockdowns, while many of those providing services remotely remained relatively unscathed - or even benefited.

Throughout exploring the role of this multi-layered macro environment, I highlighted three additional observations. First, even though the macro environment affects migrant entrepreneurs in a 'top-down' manner, the migrants themselves play an active role in the process, as they consume and reproduce macro structures on a micro level (Burawoy 2001). Second, the macro environment is not only present on a local (Wroclaw) level, but extends well-beyond the borders of Poland. Third, not only does it stretch and vary across space, but also across time. Taking these points into consideration, in addition to the phenomena I have highlighted in this chapter in general, I argue that the degree to which migrants experience privilege and/or disadvantage can only be properly understood if we first position them, their motivations, and resources, not just within the environment of Wroclaw in the here and now, but also within a global environment which itself is the result of a series of historical events over time (Buzan & Lawson 2015).