

## "Inside" and "Outside" of What or Where? Researching Migration Through Multi-Positionalities

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**Abstract:** Drawing upon my long experience of qualitative migration research, this article uses the concept of "multiple positionalities", to challenge the fixity of positionality underpinning constructions of "insiders" versus "outsiders" in the research process. While "insider" status is usually associated with shared ethnicity/ nationality, migration studies have been urged to go beyond the ethnic lens (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012; GLICK SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2009). I argue that migrants cannot be neatly contained within fixed "insider" ethnic categories; instead it is more illuminating to consider how identities are re-constructed through migration. In this contribution I use moments from a range of research studies with migrant women in London. In comparing and contrasting my encounters with these migrants, who come from Ireland and Poland, I critically reflect upon how empathy and rapport were negotiated through dynamic rhythms of positionalities—gender, age, professional and parental status and migratory experience, as well as nationality. In so doing, I consider the challenges but also the opportunities of researching within as well as across migrant populations and how this may inform an attempt to go beyond the ethnic lens.

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### 1. Introduction

Drawing on a feminist reflexive approach, this article challenges the usefulness of "insider" and "outsider" in research. For me these concepts raise the question—what or where are we inside or outside of? There is an implicit assumption of a clear fixed collectivity, usually defined through ethnicity (or nationality) of which one is either explicitly inside or outside. Such an assumption not only underestimates the multi-layered identities of researchers and participants, but also the dynamism through which varied dimensions of identity may be enacted during an interview. Each research encounter involves multiple positionalities including gender, age, class, religion, nationality, migratory experience, language, parental status, etc. [1]

While "insider" status is usually defined through shared ethnicity/nationality, migration studies have been urged to go beyond the ethnic lens (GLICK

SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2009). Thus, migrants should not be neatly contained within fixed "insider" ethnic categories (NOWICKA & CIESLIK, 2014). My contribution focuses on the fluidities of identities and suggests ways in which notions of ethnicity are re-constructed through migration. Highlighting examples of shifting positionalities, I suggest how the interview encounter may provide glimpses into the dynamic processes of re-construction and co-construction. [2]

This article draws on my long experience of qualitative migration research. As an Irish academic researching Irish migration to Britain, I have developed critical reflexivity on the notion of an "insider" researcher (RYAN, 2008; RYAN & GOLDEN, 2006). While many migration scholars develop a speciality on a particular migrant population, I undertake research with diverse migrants where I appear to occupy an "outsider" role (RYAN, KOFMAN & AARON, 2011). Researching different national groups aims to overcome ethnic exceptionalism that marks some migration research. However, interviewing migrants from different national backgrounds poses challenges. Limitations associated with language skills and country-specific expertise may serve to undermine researcher "authority" (MAUTHNER & DOUCET, 2003). Focusing on interviews with women from different migrant backgrounds, I critically reflect upon these limitations as well as how empathy and rapport were negotiated through positionalities of gender, age/generation, parental status and migratory experience as well as nationality. In so doing, I consider ways in which gender may, or may not, serve as a basis of commonality. I also explore challenges and opportunities of researching within, as well as across, migrant populations and how this may inform an attempt to go beyond the ethnic lens. [3]

Instead of insiders and outsiders, I suggest that interview processes should be understood in terms of the dynamic rhythms of multi-positionalities. Such an approach enables researchers to be reflexive about the instability and contingency of empathy, understanding and rapport, and how these need to be continually negotiated across layers of power differentials. [4]

## **2. Insiders and Outsiders: Considering Positionalities**

Carrying out social research, especially face-to-face encounters with participants, encompasses numerous complex and shifting boundaries. Research that requires a communication of opinions, feelings and experiences from the participants to the researchers needs to understand and negotiate, at least temporarily, the boundaries that may shape and impede that communication. These boundaries may be physical, temporal, ethical, linguistic, socio-cultural or religious and thus will be influenced by the gender, age, ethnicity and social class of participants and researchers. Reflexivity can help to reveal the complex dynamics which underpin the research relationship. [5]

Reflexivity in the research process, discussed by social scientists for many decades, is informed by interpretivism, feminism and critical discourses (MAUTHNER & DOUCET, 2003). However, some commentators argue that reflexivity can result in a form of self-indulgent narcissism where the research

becomes a form of catharsis for the researcher (PILLOW, 2003). Reflexivity may be used to seek similarities between researcher and researched; further affirming researcher authority and expertise. In this way, PILLOW argues, the research becomes a project of self-discovery for the researcher rather than enhancing understanding of wider social issues. By contrast, PILLOW speaks for "reflexivities of discomfort" (p.188) which rather than highlighting similarities with participants, continually explore "power relations" and the tenuousness and situatedness of knowledge. Thus, reflexivity demands "ongoing critique of all of our research attempts, recognising that none of our attempts can claim the innocence of success" (ibid.). PILLOW's critical engagement with reflexivity continues to be discussed across social science literature (see BONDI, 2009). [6]

Much has been written about multi-layered power dynamics, shifting boundaries, self-censorship, fractured selves and unsympathetic inter-subjectivities (COTTERILL, 1992; SONG & PARKER, 1995). The difficulties involved in "interviewing up" and across divisions of sex, class, ethnicity and age, have all been discussed (PHOENIX, 1994; TURNBULL, 2000). These discussions raise questions about the extent to which one can research a group or a topic which is beyond one's own personal experience. Ever since MERTON's (1972) classic essay "Insiders and Outsiders" there have been on-going debates about who can speak for whom and who can research whom. As BANKS (1998, p.7) asks, who can claim "authenticity"? In his typology of cross cultural research, BANKS sets out four ideal types—the indigenous insider, the indigenous outsider, the external insider and the external outsider. These ideal types encompass a range of identification with and understanding of "the community" which is being studied. For BANKS while "external insiders" may learn to appreciate the values of the studied community and may even become an "adopted insider", only the "indigenous insider" can be regarded as speaking with authority about a community (p.8). However, this argument has been criticised for underestimating the dynamism and complexity of researcher positionality (CHAVEZ, 2008). [7]

"Insider" status had been "viewed as the holy grail for the qualitative researcher" (GANGA & SCOTT 2006, §7) and seemed to "provide a level of trust and openness" that may not be otherwise attainable (DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009, p.58). However, "insider" research has also been criticised since participants and researcher may simply assume shared understanding and knowledge without explaining and exploring particular experiences and beliefs (CHAVEZ, 2008). Neither are "outsider" researchers better placed to collect richer data based on deeper probing of issues beyond their realm of personal experience. Outsider researchers cannot be assumed to be neutral and objective; "being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspectives" (DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009, p.59). [8]

In challenging the insider/outsider dichotomy, DWYER and BUCKLE argue instead for a space "in between". They cite the work of KANUHA (in DWYER & BUCKLE, p.60) in seeking to research "at the hyphen of insider-outsider". In this way, DWYER and BUCKLE suggest, researchers can only ever occupy the space in between; neither truly insiders nor completely outsiders. [9]

While this notion of "in-between" is attractive in breaking down the simplistic dichotomy of insider or outsider, in my opinion, it risks reinforcing the apparent fixity of insiders, outsiders and "in-betweeners". Instead, I wish to challenge any sense of "insider" or "outsider" as a fixed, unitary identity. The concept of positioning challenges the assumption of a unitary and essentialised "standpoint" and thus highlights the plurality of identities—age, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality. CHAVEZ refers to the dynamism and multi-faceted dimensions of research relationships: "a researcher can experience various degrees of insiderness and outsiderhood given how she/he is socially situated to (and by) participants during the research process, which affects various stages and aspects of the study" (2008, p.477). [10]

In this article I use dynamic rhythms of multiple positionalities to interrogate the assumed ethnic insiderhood which pervades much migration research. In migration research, insider status has frequently been conceived in terms of shared ethnicity. However, there have been recent calls for researchers to move beyond the "ethnic lens" (see AMELINA & FAIST, 2012). GLICK SCHILLER and CAGLAR are critical of what they describe as "the persistent use of the ethnic group as the unit of analysis in migration studies" (2009, p.184). They argue that there is "a voluminous historical and ethnographic literature that details the constructed nature of ethnic identities and ethnic group boundaries" (GLICK SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2009, p.184). Nonetheless, despite this literature, migration researchers continue to approach migrants' relationships to "economic, social and political forms of urban incorporation through an ethnic lens" (ibid.). Migrants from a specific country or region are assumed to form an ethnic group before their identity, actions, social relations and beliefs are studied. Such research design in effect prioritises ethnic identity over all other forms of identification (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012; NOWICKA & CIESLIK, 2014). [11]

Rather than assuming that migrants arrive in the destination country with a clear and fixed sense of national identity, it has been argued that "we-ness" may emerge as a constructed identification through the migration experience (PORTES & SENSENBRENNER, 1993, p.1328). Thus, it is more useful to begin by asking how identities and affiliations are constructed and negotiated through the migratory experience (RYAN, 2010). MAHLER and PESSAR argue that migration studies need to move beyond the study of "immigrant and ethnic subjects and institutions to explore how immigrant and native-born subjects are reciprocally constituted" (2006, p.38). Thus, as NAZROO and KARLSEN note: "Ethnicity is just one part of who we are and should not be viewed as operating independently of other elements" (2003, p.928). [12]

Similarly, GANGA and SCOTT (2006) observe that ethnic identity may interact with other facets of identity such as gender or generation to create marked differentiation in how identities are experienced and expressed. Hence, far from being fixed, stand-alone dimensions of who we are, gender along with ethnicity, age, class and religion, etc., are ingredients in a complex and active mix of identities. Therefore, GANGA and SCOTT argue, one cannot be simply an insider within a migrant or ethnic "imagined community". Instead they propose that

"degrees of social proximity" may be more useful in understanding the positioning of researchers and participants. [13]

In considering the researcher's positionality "it is useful to consider feminist research perspectives, and specifically standpoint theories of knowledge" which emphasise the importance of social location and identification of the researcher (FAWCETT & HEARN, 2004, p.206). This point is also noted by SONI-SINHA (2008) in research on women and employment in India. Although sharing an "insider" identity as an Indian woman, SONI-SINHA found that her class position, education and urban lifestyle defined her as an outsider; marking a boundary between her and the poor, village women she sought to interview. However, when contacting gate keepers her class position appeared to facilitate access and cooperation. This resulted in shifting positionalities as she negotiated multiple standpoints through research encounters with different participants. Thus, shared nationality, even when combined with shared gender, is no guarantee of mutually accepted "insider" positionality. [14]

It is not always easy or indeed possible to predict how one will be placed by the participants (RYAN & GOLDEN, 2006). The interview encounter is not only a process of individual "identity work" but also of mutual identity construction. Far from being stable these identities may be re-formed and re-shaped throughout the encounter as various verbal and non-verbal clues are used to piece together a sense of the other actor. RAZON and ROSS (2012) refer to the fluidity of identities throughout the research encounter: a dance in which both parties attempt to size up each other. [15]

I draw on the metaphor of a dance (LIN, 2014; RAZON & ROSS, 2012), to capture the intricate rhythms of shifting positionalities through the interview encounter. But this is not a dance in which the precise steps are known to both partners. RAZON and ROSS (2012) suggest that this can be a "power dance" which navigates the differential status of the interviewees and researchers. One may take the lead and attempt to guide the other partner through the sequence. This may result in a smooth and synchronised harmony. However, it may equally result in a series of awkward and faltering steps in which each partner is unsure how to position him- or herself and each other. The interviewer is trying to place the interviewee but at the same time the interviewee is also trying to position the researcher. The ways in which interviewees anticipate, position and adjust to the researcher may facilitate or hinder data collection by fostering harmony and trust or creating awkwardness and unease. [16]

Sometimes we collude in and adjust to particular positionalities if these appear to facilitate the research process: "we may actively engage in the construction of an identity that we would not necessarily choose for ourselves in any other circumstances" (CASSELL, 2005, p.174). For example, the interviewee may assume we know little about a particular topic and it may suit researchers to feign lack of expertise in an effort to elicit richer data. [17]

The next section discusses my various research projects and considers how critical reflexivity helps me to understand complexities and dynamics of positionalities. I argue that notions of insiders and outsiders are unhelpful and should be abandoned in migration research. [18]

### **3. Researching Migration**

As a sociologist, I am interested in social networks and the dynamic processes through which migrants access, maintain and create social ties with different people, generating different resources in particular contexts. In 2004-2005, I interviewed twenty-six women who had migrated from Ireland to Britain to work as nurses, focusing on their motivations, experiences and strategies of migration (RYAN, 2007). In 2006, I led a study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, on the experiences, strategies and social networks of migrants from post-accession Poland. A total of forty-six recent migrants took part in three focus groups and individual interviews. In addition, ten key informants from Polish organisations in Britain were also interviewed (RYAN, 2010; RYAN, SALES, TILKI & SIARA, 2007). In 2013, I carried out a mixed methods study with newly arrived teachers from Ireland working in British schools. This involved 114 female and male participants in an online survey, as well as twenty in-depth interviews and one focus group (RYAN & KURDI, 2014). [19]

Although all of these studies were defined by national categories, I do not regard these identifications as given or stable. I make no pre-judgements about how ethnic or national identity is experienced by these participants. Instead, the projects aimed to explore how identifications were constructed, negotiated and performed. [20]

In previous writings I have discussed the challenges and opportunities inherent in comparing the experiences of Irish and Polish women migrants in Britain (RYAN, 2009, 2013). I am mindful of the particular historical experiences and migratory movements of these different populations. It is not my intention here to compare these women as representative of specific national groups. Rather I am interested to examine how assumptions about commonality and difference are negotiated and actively constructed through the interview encounter. [21]

I have chosen to focus on particular moments from interviews in all three studies. In selecting interviews from each study, I aim to explore some moments of empathy as well as instances of tension. In so doing, I adopt reflexivity to consider the shifting rhythms that occur not only between but also within interviews, as commonalities and differences are co-constructed. These extracts were selected firstly, because they illustrate the complex and shifting dynamics of the interview encounter and in so doing provide glimpses into processes of co-construction and positionalities adopted and ascribed by the women and myself. I do not suggest that these necessarily represent all interviews, nonetheless, these particular examples highlight themes apparent in many interviews. Secondly, I chose these interviews because I conducted them in person with women who have high levels of English language fluency. This may be seen as a limitation. It

might have been equally illuminating to focus on interviews conducted using an interpreter, for example, or carried out with a native speaking researcher (TEMPLE, 2002). The challenge for a researcher who is working with any constituency of participants is to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and expertise; not just linguistic but also socio-cultural. Because migration is usually studied through an ethnic lens, researching across several national groupings may undermine researcher claims to "authority" (MAUTHNER & DOUCET, 2003). Although I do not profess to be an expert on Poland, I have been researching Polish migration for almost a decade and visited Poland many times in a professional capacity. Perhaps it is concern about limited expertise which prevents researchers from working across different migrant groups and results in many academics sticking to a research focus on just one, usually their "own", ethnically-defined group. These issues have been discussed in other contributions (RYAN, 2013; RYAN et al., 2011). [22]

All the projects used a similar research design: semi-structured interviews, usually lasting approximately one hour, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All data were analysed thematically using NVIVO software. The interview questions were usually also similar; primarily focused on training, employment, migration trajectories, social networks and family relationships. Transcending the interviewer/interviewee relationship, we also spent some time chatting about feelings about "home" and living in a foreign country. Although the Polish project and the Irish teacher study included men and women, the project on Irish nurses was made up entirely of female participants. Therefore, I have decided to focus only on female participants for this article. [23]

### **3.1 Interviewer as an assumed "insider" and generational shifts**

I have selected a number of moments from two interviews with Irish women. The first involves Fidelma<sup>1</sup>, from the Nurses Project, and the second Sile, from the Teachers Project. In these interviews our shared Irishness was assumed but largely unspoken. Nonetheless, there were moments when it was made explicit and formed the basis of a particular construction of commonality and inclusion or, indeed, exclusion. I am particularly interested in how age/generation created moments of empathy and rapport, but also marked tensions and a sense of distance. [24]

Now in her early fifties and divorced, with two grown up children, Fidelma had migrated to Britain in the 1970s to train as a nurse. She spent much of the interview talking about her experiences of migration, her career and complex relationship with Ireland: framed by her unhappy marriage and eventual divorce. It is possible to speculate that she shared these intimate details with me because I am a woman but of course I cannot know for sure if she would have told that story to a male interviewer. Her story of marital breakdown brought into sharp relief the differences between Britain (where divorce was widely available) and Ireland (where divorce was then illegal):

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1 All names of informants have been changed to preserve anonymity.

"My marriage was so crazy because of being brought up in Ireland ... I remember going home one year and I said to my mother '*I am going to get divorced*', but she said to me '*oh we don't have divorces in this family*', you know, this religious thing" (Fidelma). [25]

Throughout the interview Fidelma took for granted my knowledge of Irish society, she did not explain that until 1996 divorce was illegal in Ireland. Thus, it appears that she implicitly identified me as an "insider", an Irish woman with the necessary background knowledge to grasp the significance of what is being said. Elsewhere in the interview she continued to assume my knowledge of Ireland.

Fidelma: But don't you think Irish people can be very *mmm* [pause] they have this status thing, the majority of them have never done anything themselves, so I don't know where they get it from or why they have this idea and you're no good unless you've got this or that ...

Louise: but do you not think that things have changed a lot in Ireland now, they have divorce now.

Fidelma: oh yes. They have changed a lot but they haven't all changed. [26]

In this quote Fidelma included me by saying "don't you think"—there is a sense of collusion here—she drew me into a critique of attitudes in Ireland. She did not wait for my answer but perhaps had already decided that, as an Irish woman who lived in London for many years, I am likely to share this critique of attitudes in small town Irish society. Using "they", instead of "we", to describe people in Ireland, Fidelma not only distanced herself but also me from those people. In a sense I agreed to this collusion by not questioning this perception and by adding a further comment alluding to how things have changed in Ireland in recent years—"they have divorce now"; a point with which she only partly agrees. [27]

While Fidelma separated herself from Irish people back in Ireland, taking up an apparently "outsider" position, she changed the pronoun when describing Irish migrants in Britain: "them" is replaced by "we" as she located herself within an Irish migrant community.

Fidelma: Cos with all the Troubles<sup>2</sup> in Ireland at the time, people used to say terrible things to us about the Troubles, I think people were scared of us really.

Louise: do you think so?

Fidelma: ... I think yeah they were scared that we were Irish. That we had things to do with the IRA and all that stuff. [28]

As noted earlier (PORTES & SENSENBRENNER, 1993), circumstances in the post-migration context may help to forge a sense of "we-ness" among migrants with a shared national background. In the context of IRA violence and reprisals

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2 This is a reference to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who carried out a violent campaign for Irish independence over many decades often referred to as "The Troubles" and which included bombings in English cities including London, Birmingham and Manchester. During the 1970s-1990s, Irish people in England were frequently regarded with suspicion as "supporters of terrorism".

from the British authorities, Fidelma suggested that Irish migrants shared common experiences of suspicion. Although she did not explicitly include me in this viewpoint or ask me if I had any such experiences, it is possible to suggest that she openly expressed these views to me because we were both Irish migrants living in London. [29]

This sense of "we-ness"—"the Irish in Britain"—may imply a shared insider status but, as I illustrate below, that construction was highly contingent. [30]

In the Irish teachers study I was continually struck by differences and distance created by age. The average age of participants was 28, most were recent migrants, whose length of time in Britain was, on average, two years (RYAN & KURDI, 2014). Most participants saw their migration as temporary and fully expected to return to Ireland within a few years. Based on my years of migration research, and also my own personal experience, I believed that many would not return to Ireland as quickly as they expected. My attempts to probe deeper around this issue created some tensions in the interviews. This is apparent in the extract below from an interview with Sile, in her late 20s, who had been teaching in Britain for approximately two years and had recently become engaged to be married:

Sile: So, but the ideal, for me anyways is that we go home like in about three years' time and that we would bring up our children there

Louise: So that's interesting. I would love to come back and talk to you in 3 years' time and see [Talking simultaneously]

Sile: See whether actually I'm still here?

Louise: I've been here for 20 years and I think in the beginning [

Sile: I know

Louise: you sort of think, "*oh, well, I'll stay for a year or 2 years, 3 years, and then ...*"

Sile: I know ...

Louise: suddenly you look around and you're completely settled

Sile: well, I don't, this is the thing ... [31]

In this exchange, I draw on my experience to encourage Sile to elaborate on her reasons for assuming that she will return to Ireland. There appears to be a tension between us as she repeatedly interrupts my statement and concludes rather firmly by disagreeing with my proposition. Like Sile, many of the participants in the teacher project were young, single and childless for whom future parenthood was intrinsically associated with living in Ireland. As noted elsewhere (NI LAOIRE, 2007) many younger migrants express the view that children should experience the "rural idyll" of their own Irish childhood. This is often contrasted with the dangers facing children in Britain, especially London. For me as a mother who has chosen to bring up my son in London, the repeated emphasis of the Irish idyllic childhood, made me feel distinctly uncomfortable; striking a discordant note between me and these interviewees. Hence, instead of creating a common basis of understanding, motherhood (including future potential motherhood) served as a site of difference, even tension. [32]

The earlier, somewhat tense exchange with Sile may have shaped how she later explained her views of the Irish community in London.

Louise: So what's your perception of the Irish community in London? Do you have an image of what it's like?

Sile: [Pause] Well, I suppose it's [Pause] the Irish, I suppose there's two types. There's, obviously, there's the older ones. So I kind of categorise them, you know, the ones that go to the dances and go to the Irish Centre and do all that sort of stuff. They're the ones who got married ... they are the ones that kind of you know, started off the new life ... which is like commendable or whatever. But sometimes I kind of see them as kind of, I don't know, I feel sorry for them sometimes, because I can see that maybe that's not what they wanted for their lives. So they didn't want necessarily to live here. And obviously when you do live here for so long you just can't go back. 'Cos you've just changed and your relationships have changed and whatever. So that's them. And then the other ones, so people, the young people, I just see them as people like that want to have a good time, want to have fun but maybe not necessarily want to put their roots down here. [33]

Although she seemed somewhat hesitant and faltering in setting up this grouping of the two waves of Irish migrants, nonetheless, Sile clearly categorised younger migrants, including herself, as mobile, fun seekers, who will return to Ireland. By contrast she constructs the older generation, potentially including me—as I told her I had been in London for 20 years—as having settled in Britain unwittingly and "can't go back". She feels sorry for this previous generation of migrants. [34]

It is interesting to contrast the smooth rhythm of rapport I felt with Fidelma with the somewhat discordant encounter with Sile. Despite shared gender and country of origin, it is apparent that age and time spent in Britain were highly significant in framing our experiences and positionalities. Although nearly 10 years older than me, Fidelma and I had shared life experience of marriage, motherhood, living in Britain through the "Troubles" and this may have facilitated moments of empathy. By contrast, in the interview with Sile, age/generation served to highlight differences in our experiences and life stage. I felt frustrated by her depiction of older Irish migrants in London. I wanted to resist this negative and somewhat patronising categorisation. Far from feeling like an "insider" I felt distant and alien from Sile's imagining of the "Irish community" in London. [35]

### **3.2 Interviewer as assumed "outsider" and negotiating degrees of proximity**

In the study of migrants from Poland, the complexity of ethnic identity constructions in the context of migration was borne out by many participants (RYAN, 2010). Thus, it is important to consider how ethnicity and national affiliation were negotiated in the interview encounter. At the time of the interview Inga, a lecturer in her late 30s, divorced with two children, had lived in London for several years. Despite our different nationalities, Inga and I had much in common. Our shared status as academics was signalled by references to the

pressures of marking essays and students expectations, while our shared status as mothers was underscored by references to juggling childcare and career. [36]

Throughout the interview, Inga was explicit about her complex relationship with Poland. Although she maintained regular contact with her parents, Inga rarely visited: "I left Poland because I didn't want to live there, I don't see why I should go there". She went on to explain some of what she disliked about Polish society: "You know, feminism in Poland is a cursed word, you can't be a feminist in Poland, you can't be a single mother, you can't be a lesbian in Poland, you can't be this, you can't be that". As a feminist who grew up during the conservative, Church-dominated Ireland of the 1980s, I could empathise with Inga's critique of Polish society. [37]

In addition, she did not feel part of a wider Polish community in London. Having attended a Polish community event she described her reaction: "I really didn't like the Polishness of the Polish club and I quickly withdrew". She added that people at the club seemed to celebrate a nostalgia for Poland that she could not share. Thus, interestingly, Inga did not position herself as an "insider" within a Polish collectivity in London or in Poland. [38]

One could surmise that my status as a perceived "outsider" may have enabled Inga to work through her own position in relation to Poland and Polishness. Nonetheless, as noted earlier in discussing the interviews with Fidelma and Sile, negative opinions about elements of an "imagined community" may be shared with the interviewer because of complex layers of identity constructions. This challenges any simplistic assumption that migrants are more open to criticising the "community" simply because the researcher is either an "ethnic insider" or an "ethnic outsider". [39]

Throughout the interview, usually with little interruption from me, Inga reflected at length on her relationship with Polishness.

"In London there were a lot of issues around Polishness which confronted me in the beginning against my will. I thought '*why do I have to be bothered about my Polishness ...*' I thought it is enough to be myself, why do I need to identify myself as Polish" (Inga). [40]

GANGA and SCOTT (2006) speak of degrees of proximity between researchers and participants. During this part of the interview I felt a strong sense of proximity to Inga and found myself drawn into this discussion of migrant identity:

Louise: that is fascinating, being a migrant myself, though I have lived in London for a long time, I think you only become aware of your identity when you move out of your native environment ... people here are always confronting me with stereotypes of what it means to Irish and I reject those labels and stereotypes.

Inga: yes ... I even learned how to play this game, how to laugh at it "*Oh yes, of course people in Poland drink Vodka for everything.*" [41]

The interview unfolded through an easy rhythm with many moments of empathy. We shared many similarities including gender, age, professional and parental status. In the exchange above it is possible to interpret Inga and me as academics adopting critical reflexivity on ethnic stereotypes. But, on a more personal level, we also positioned ourselves as migrants who did not fit neatly into imagined national communities. [42]

The other extract from the Polish study is drawn from an interview with Wioletta, an older woman who had lived in Britain for many decades. As a "key informant" representing a Polish community organisation, it is noteworthy that Wioletta was strongly invested in depicting a shared sense of Polish we-ness. Wioletta was cautious about how she was quoted and repeatedly stated that we should not attribute certain quotes to her by name; despite assurances of anonymity, she was worried how her views may be perceived by wider audiences. Having been interviewed in the past by journalists, she was wary of the reporting process and determined to maintain control over how she was represented. Keenly aware of how Polish migrants may be perceived in Britain, she was anxious to put the record straight:

Wioletta: But I often wonder how English people feel about this influx of ... Eastern European and Central European workers, whether they are feeling threatened in their workplaces. I don't know.

Louise: Well, I am not English, so I don't know. I am Irish.

Wioletta: You are in the same situation as we are.

Louise: Yes, I am.

Wioletta: When we came to England in 19[...], it was very very English, very English. No immigrants at all. We were not welcomed. We were not made welcome. [43]

In this exchange, I made the decision to position myself as Irish, i.e. not English. Wioletta was clearly uneasy about appearing to criticise English people. She had asked not to have this quote attributed to her (hence, I have taken extra steps to anonymise her). I hoped that by positioning myself as Irish, a migrant, she may feel more open about expressing her true feelings. This may have been successful to the extent that she underlines our shared status as migrants "*you are the same as we are*"; enabling her to voice the view that post-war England had not been welcoming towards Polish post-war refugees. [44]

Nonetheless, while seeking to present a positive view of Poles, challenging negative stereotypes, she also highlighted differences within this imagined national community:

"I think that older generation Poles who were unable to go back to Poland for political reasons yearned after Poland, they were homesick, they wanted to keep Poland alive, almost a holy place and this love of Poland was passed on to the children and the grandchildren ... this new generation of Poles that is leaving Poland, their attitude to Poland is totally different. They say: '*Poland has done nothing for us ... there is no*

*work for us, so why should we feel emotionally tied to Poland? We are Europeans; we'll go wherever there is work available, where there is the money' "* (Wioletta). [45]

Throughout the interview she continued to draw attention to the generational differences within the Polish migrant communities in Britain:

"We didn't get any support from the British government, it was all our own sweat and blood, my parents' generation mostly, who did all the hard slog. And now these young people come and think they are entitled to it" (Wioletta). [46]

Thus, despite her initial efforts to present a sense of shared Polish we-ness, Wioletta repeatedly highlighted differences among Poles. In this way, like Sile earlier, she divides the "imagined community" into separate and distinct waves. While Sile positioned herself in the recent wave of highly mobile, fun seeking, Irish migrants, Wioletta firmly positions herself among the older generation of hard working and patriotic migrants. The way in which this young Irish woman and older Polish woman depict migrant waves suggests the salience of age/generation in how notions of "us" and "them" are constructed. There are also some similarities in the way in which I was positioned in both interviews; resulting in my sense of unease at how my migrant status was implicated in the construction of migrant communities. [47]

Having initially positioned myself as an Irish migrant, I was unprepared for how Wioletta would implicate me in her discussion of Polish migrants:

"I believe in Polish ... the Polishness of Poles and that eventually they will realise that they are missing out, because whichever way you look at it, living in a different country does not make you happy, I am sure you know this yourself being Irish that you hanker for your own ... you want to be with your family on a wider, in a wider spectrum. It's the same idea. We feel happier amongst Poles than we do amongst ... [fades out, did not elaborate]." [48]

In this quote she suggests that migrants are happier among their own and hanker to go back home where they belong. I felt quite uncomfortable about being drawn into this assertion. I did not necessarily feel happiest amongst "my own" nor did I hanker to go back to Ireland. However, having previously placed myself as Irish, I had left myself open to this positioning of me by Wioletta. As CHERENI (2014) notes, the ability of the researcher to define his or her positionality may be undermined by participants who place the researcher in unanticipated ways. Nonetheless, in hindsight, re-reading the transcript, I decided that placing myself as Irish and a migrant had been useful in revealing an attitude that Wioletta may not otherwise have shared so explicitly. [49]

Contrasting the exchanges between me and Inga and me and Wioletta illustrates the complex dance of positionalities. In both interviews I position myself as Irish and that seems to facilitate a discussion of negative attitudes towards migrants in Britain. However, in the interview with Wioletta, my positioning has an unintended consequence—creating a sense of discomfort for me—as she draws me into a

sense of nostalgia for a homeland which I do not share. Nonetheless, I choose not to acknowledge this, for fear of breaking the fragile rapport with this somewhat cautious interviewee. [50]

As discussed earlier, interview encounters involve mutual processes of co-construction (RAZON & ROSS, 2012). The way we researchers seek to present ourselves in the interview may be different from how participants perceive and position us. As CASSELL notes, various indicators may be used to shape "how I am interpreted by interviewees, although of course in most cases I can only guess the content of those interpretations" (2005, p.171). Identity work may be conscious or unconscious and may involve elements of cooperation or even conflict. The interview process is interactive but identity co-constructions are not totally elective. This process may occur subtly and silently and thus may be beyond our awareness. Perhaps only later, reading the transcripts or re-listening to the recordings, can we catch a glimpse of how an interviewee constructed our identity. [51]

#### **4. Concluding Thoughts**

I began this article, questioning the usefulness of the "insider/outsider" dichotomy, by asking what one is supposed to be "inside of" or "outside of". These concepts suggest a self-evident "community" of which the researcher is either a member (an insider) or not a member (an outsider). In migration research that "community" is usually defined ethnically. I linked my discussion to the wider academic debate about going beyond the ethnic lens (NOWICKA & CIESLIK, 2014). Migrants are not simply members, "insiders", within a clearly defined ethnic community. As GANGA and SCOTT (2006) observe, far from being united and cohesive "migrant communities" are divided by social fissures of class, generation and gender, etc. [52]

Over the years, there have been many attempts to clarify, qualify and modify what is meant by insiders and outsiders (CHAVEZ, 2008; DWYER & BUCKLE, 2009; RAZON & ROSS, 2012). Rather than offer further modifications, I have suggested that these terms no longer serve as heuristic devices for researchers and, thus, should be abandoned. [53]

Drawing on extracts from interviews with a range of different participants I have shown the shifting rhythms of the research process. Building on the metaphor of dance (see also LIN, 2014), I indicated how interviewer and interviewee continually move around each other positioning ourselves in relation to each other—sometimes in harmony other times in dissonance. Through these changing rhythms, moments of closeness, based on shared experiences, may be followed by a sudden change in tempo—a rupture—as one or both partners pull apart; treading on each other's toes. This reflexive focus on rhythms and re-positioning enables the researcher to appreciate how various facets of identities move in and out of focus. Sometimes one aspect of ourselves, e.g. professional status, may be salient drawing the two parties into synchronicity. Other times differences such as age/generation or parental status, may take precedence disrupting the smooth

flow, creating tension and forcing the dancers out of step. However, that is not to suggest that moments of rupture are not useful. Despite being uncomfortable, these exchanges may provide rich data offering an insight into particular points of view. [54]

Moving away from fixed notions of insiders and outsiders, the focus on dynamic positionalities also enables us to go beyond the ethnic lens by illustrating not only that nationality, or ethnicity, is only one aspect of identity but also that it is highly contingent and constructed. In a research context the salience of national cleavages cannot be taken for granted. As this article shows, some women were critical of aspects of ethnic culture or national groups. I was struck by the apparent honesty, openness and rawness of some critiques. In this regard, these participants were not unusual but reflect particular trends across my research studies. Nonetheless, the backdrop of social hostility towards migrants may shape how participants present themselves in research contexts. Experiences of hostility may reinforce a sense of "we-ness" versus "them"; with participants positioning themselves, and by implication also positioning me, in relation to particular collectivities. [55]

Using the dynamics of dance, instead of the static notion of insider or outsider, has also enabled an interrogation of my positionalities. I shared the same gender as these women and we were all from migrant backgrounds living in London. However, it is difficult to know for sure how my positionalities impacted on their views of me. In fact, across the studies under discussion here, the participants showed little curiosity about me. Thus, while they may have made assumptions about my sexuality, religion, class, I have few clues as to how they actually positioned me. I cannot know for sure how my status as a migrant, a woman, a professional, may have been relevant to them in particular ways. Nonetheless, in this article I identified some moments when aspects of my identity were explicitly used to position me in specific ways. [56]

To what extent am I making sense of all these multi-layered interactions retrospectively as I transcribe and analyse the text? As MAUTHER and DOUCET (2003) ask, how conscious are we really of these dynamics during the interview itself? My positionalities may not have been particularly interesting to the participants but clearly these are important to the research process because they shape the questions I ask, how I understand the answers and, importantly, how I interpret and write up the data. By adopting this reflexive approach I am not claiming the "innocence of success" (PILLOW, 2003) but rather trying to understand the complexity and dynamism of the research encounter. I do not claim that my position gave me better access to or deeper understanding of the participants. Rather I suggest that, through an awareness of the dynamic rhythms of our multi-positionalities, we can appreciate the complexities and contingencies of the stories that are shared and understood through particular inter-personal interactions in the research encounter. [57]

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