# Habitus Mismatch and Suffering Experienced by Polish Migrants Working below their Qualification Level in Norway

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*Recent research has reported that an increasing number of migrants in Norway are concentrated in the low-skilled sectors of the labour market, irrespective of their educational background, thus facilitating the formation of migrant niches in the long term. Despite the growing body of literature that raises the problem of downward professional mobility and deskilling among migrant populations, little scholarly attention has been paid to migrants' struggles and vulnerabilities as a result of underemployment. Drawing on 30 in-depth interviews, this article explores the common experience of habitus mismatch and suffering among Poles who have worked below their level of competence or professional experience since migrating to Norway. By analysing subjective experiences of downward professional and social mobility and the conflict between valued and stigmatised identities, the article examines the various habitus mismatches that contribute to suffering in downwardly mobile Polish migrants.*

*Keywords: habitus mismatch, suffering, stigmatised identity, downward professional mobility, class mobility*

## Introduction

The successful integration of immigrants into host labour markets not only contributes to host countries' sustainable economic development but also to newcomers' wellbeing. Among integrative mechanisms, labour market integration is considered one of the most important in the relationship between the individual (migrant) and society (Esses, Dietz and Bhardwaj 2006; Goul Andersen and Jensen 2002). In Norway, Polish migrants' high employment rates suggest their effective labour market integration, with 84 per cent aged between 16 and 74 being employed compared to 80 per cent of the overall population and 66 per cent of the migrant groups who are in the same age range and were covered by the same study (SSB 2017). However, when considering labour market integration, attention should be paid not only to whether migrants are employed but also to the

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types of job that they perform and whether these jobs are concomitant with their qualifications. Numerous studies have revealed that migrants are more exposed to work below their qualification level than non-migrants, both in Europe (including Norway) and worldwide (Beaverstock 2011; Cerna 2016; Duvander 2001; Nowicka 2014; OECD 2018; Salmonsson and Mella 2013; Syed 2008; Thompson 2000). Ethnically segmented labour markets contribute to the wasting of human capital, causing psychological distress among migrants that hinders integration efforts in other domains as well.

Although many insightful studies concerning downward professional mobility among migrants have been conducted in recent years (e.g. Beaverstock 2011; Cerna 2016; Duvander 2001; Man 2004; Nowicka 2014; Sert 2016), little attention has been paid to the struggles which migrants face when employed in jobs that are not only beneath their educational levels but also fall short of fulfilling their post-migration aspirations, thus negatively impacting on their wellbeing. UK studies on downward professional mobility and deskilling among Poles have attempted to explain the causes of the phenomenon (Nowicka 2014; Trevena 2013). Trevena (2013) ascertained that microlevel aspects, such as migration motives and intended length of stay, are crucial for understanding the reasons why highly educated Polish migrants take low-skilled jobs. She found that migrants had a stronger tendency to seek occupational advancement in the UK as their time living abroad increased. Nowicka (2014) attributed Polish migrants' acceptance of low-skilled jobs to their ambivalent attitudes towards the skills they gained through studies in Poland which they felt did not correspond to the UK labour market's requirements.

The scope of this article directs the discussion towards experiences that are related to downward professional mobility. Thus, unlike previous studies, it does not aim to explain the reasons that underlie the phenomenon itself but, rather, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Poles who work below their qualifications in Norway cope with their downward professional mobility?
2. What kinds of experience do they describe? and
3. How do underemployment and disappointed aspirations influence migrants' wellbeing?

Exploration of these research questions provides insights into the emotional and personal dimensions of international professional mobility and, in so doing, introduces the 'human face' to the scholarly discussion on 'labour migrants'.

Drawing on 30 in-depth interviews with Poles who have worked below their qualification level in Norway, this article explores the suffering that is caused by downward professional mobility. It analyses study participants' experiences of class mobility, the discrepancy between their sense of national identification and the stigma that is attached to this identity and the divergence between their educational and professional identities given the low-skilled work that they perform in Norway. Analysis of these aspects reveals how identities shape their everyday struggles with underemployment and how these identities and their social meanings influence migrants' wellbeing. The article develops the concept of habitus mismatch, which covers the study participants' experiences of multiple mismatches due to migration and underemployment. The article emerged from broader doctoral research in which the exploration of migrants' suffering was not an aim; however, analysis of participant narratives could not ignore the essence and commonality of this problem.

This article addresses two calls identified in the literature. The first indicates the need for sociology to acknowledge recent psychological works that have reported strict links between social mobility and increased vulnerability (Alcántara, Chen and Alegría 2014; Major, Dovidio and Link 2017; Simandan 2018) to diseases such as depression (Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, Haslam and Jetten 2014) and to explore the link between the subjective experience of social mobility and wellbeing. The second call signals the need to comprehend the multidimensionality of the social processes that are involved in suffering. As some scholars suggest (Major, Dovidio, Link and Calabrese 2017), research tends to focus on single mechanisms beyond the experience of

suffering (health vulnerability, distress or loneliness) – such as migration (Djundeva and Ellwardt 2019; van Den Broek and Grundy 2017), class mobility (Alcántara *et al.* 2014; Simandan 2018) or identification with a stigmatised group (Cruwys *et al.* 2014). This tendency has contributed to the omission of complexity and the mutual entanglement of the social processes that negatively affect people's wellbeing.

In the following sections, I first contextualise the Polish diaspora in Norway, focusing on the patterns that characterise Poles' participation in the Norwegian labour market. I then introduce the theoretical concepts used in my analysis – namely habitus, habitus mismatch, affective emotions, social identity (with a focus on national and professional identities and stigma) and class. I then explain the study's methodology and, in the subsequent section, present the results. The final section discusses the research findings and draws the main conclusions.

**Poles in the Norwegian labour market**

Poles are the most numerous national immigrant group in Norway. At the beginning of 2019, the number of Poles residing in Norway was 112 000, representing 2.1 per cent of Norway's more than 5.3 million inhabitants (SSB 2018).

A series of studies conducted by Jon Horgen Friberg over the past decade have provided valuable insights into Poles' participation patterns in the Norwegian labour market. Polish migrants have been subjected to social dumping and, in certain sectors, have earned the lowest wages (Friberg 2010). Although the Norwegian government has introduced some policies aimed at protecting migrants from economic exploitation and wage decreases in certain industries (Friberg 2010), Polish migrants remain over-represented in low-skilled jobs, with the majority of Polish men working in construction and the majority of Polish women providing cleaning services (Friberg and Eldring 2011). Another study confirmed that Poles are overrepresented in manual jobs at 36 per cent and cleaning services at 15 per cent (compared to 9 and 2 per cent respectively of all the people who are employed in Norway) (SSB 2017). These numbers do not address gender differences in employment patterns, although participation in certain sectors of the labour market differs significantly between Polish males and females (Friberg and Eldring 2011; SSB 2017). Poles are also underrepresented in academia in which 8 per cent of Polish migrants are employed compared to 32 per cent of all the people who are employed in academic jobs in Norway. With regard to managerial jobs, 2 per cent of Poles hold such employment compared to 11 per cent of all the people who are employed in Norway (SSB 2017). Given that the Norwegian labour market is nationally segmented, distinct migrant niches have emerged (Friberg and Midtbøen 2017, 2019). Norwegian employers perceive workers' professional dispositions through the prism of their nationality and Poles do not particularly benefit from this approach since they are viewed as effective and hard-working manual labourers who are unsuitable for jobs that require representative tasks, customer service or decision-making. In employers' views, Eastern Europeans, including Poles (in contrast to Swedes), lack the predisposition and social skills that would enable them to perform well in such jobs (Friberg and Midtbøen 2017, 2019).

The proportion (47 per cent) of Polish women in Norway who have a higher education degree does not differ significantly from the whole female population in Norway (45 per cent). A higher proportion of Polish women in Norway have graduated from high school (45 per cent) than in the female Norwegian population (33 per cent) (SSB 2017). The proportion of highly educated men is lower than that of highly educated women, both for the overall population in Norway and for Polish migrants there. The percentage of men with higher educational credentials in Norway is 33 per cent compared to 20 per cent of male Polish migrants. The proportion of male Polish migrants who have completed high school (66 per cent) is higher than the proportion of males in the entire Norwegian population (43 per cent) who have done the same (SSB 2017). Thus, despite high professional activity among Poles in Norway, and educational levels that do not differ from those of Norwegian nationals, Poles are still concentrated in low-paid, low-skilled jobs.

## Theoretical concepts

### Habitus mismatch and suffering

To analyse study participants' experiences, I have employed Bourdieu's concept of habitus – a product of social conditioning that is reflected in individuals' dispositions (sets of perceptions, beliefs and behaviours). Through constant interaction with social fields, habitus generates practices and transforms; however, its abilities to change are limited (Bourdieu 1990, 1999, 2000). Moreover, habitus is not necessarily coherent and has only a limited degree of integration; thus, individuals can occupy contradictory positions with various statuses (Bourdieu 2000). When the field changes, habitus does not automatically transform to suit its conditions. Such circumstances foster the occurrence of what I call 'habitus mismatch', which aims to develop Bourdieu's notion of 'cleft habitus' that he referenced based on his own life experience of upward social mobility. While the concept of habitus has been central to Bourdieu's overall conceptualisation, the notion of 'cleft habitus' only occasionally appeared in his work in relation to his dual experience regarding the prolonged divergence between his internationally recognised academic accomplishments and his low social origins (Bourdieu 2007). Interestingly, habitus and its transformations have been analysed in numerous social studies without noting that habitus mismatch often shapes individual experiences and underlies habitus transformation. Therefore, this notion warrants further consideration, use and recognition in sociological analysis.

This analysis focuses on study participants' suffering. While emotion is simply a category, specific emotions are attached to the realities of actual experience. As Barbalet (1998: 2) pointed out, sociology does not need another general theory of emotion but would benefit from a deeper understanding of particular emotions, especially those that are central to social processes. Ahmed (2004) pays attention to the ways in which emotions work as mediators between the psychic and the social, between the individual and the collective and between past and present. Instead of viewing emotions as belonging to the subjects, she proposes focusing on the ways in which emotions involve subjects and objects but without residing within them. Like habitus, emotionality, feelings and emotional encounters can guide us through different levels of meaning, involving memories, expectations, experiences, aspirations and imagination (Ahmed 2004: 120; Svašek 2008: 218). I approach habitus and emotions as mutually influencing each other. For example, when a migrant enters a new field and recognises the meanings attached to his or her national identity, the sense of national identification (incorporated into the habitus) causes him or her to experience certain emotions (for instance, shame). This is because of the affective value of meanings that have circulated within the field over time (cf. Ahmed 2004: 120).

The suffering discussed in this article incorporates several emotions that negatively affect study participants' wellbeing. The manifestations of suffering that they reported the most often were stress, depression, grief, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, feelings of isolation, weight loss and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts. It is beyond the scope of this article to diagnose participants' psychological conditions. Instead, suffering was approached as a lived experience and understood as an outcome of multiple habitus mismatches that resulted from downward professional mobility and migration.

Habitus mismatch analysis involved three specific mismatches: (1) social class mismatch, (2) the mismatch between national identification and the meaning and stigma attached to this identity in certain social contexts and (3) the divergence between habitus (and professional identity) as shaped by education (and professional careers) and low-skilled work. National and professional identity and a sense of class belonging are conceptualised as incorporated into an individual's habitus.

This article attends to subjective experiences of downward class mobility where class is understood as relational and symbolic, following Bourdieu's approach (Wacquant 2013). According to Bourdieu, in order to

distinguish between classes, one must analyse the properties embodied as class habitus, generating and unifying certain sets of practices and taking into account the symbolic dimension of group-making. Recognising the lifestyle that characterises a given class reveals hidden symbolic spaces (Bourdieu 1984, 1987). Bourdieu has avoided unambiguous definition of class; however, he proposed to define classes, *inter alia*, 'by the structures of relations between all the pertinent properties which give its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices' (Bourdieu 1984: 106).

Like subjective experiences of class, identities condition – and are conditioned by – habitus. Identities are social constructs produced in relation to others, whereas our sense of who we are depends on our (non-) belongingness to the groups or their imaginations (Jenkins 2008; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The collective process of identification occurs through interactions and is fundamentally based on constructions of similarity and difference (Jenkins 2008). Social actors construct their identities actively and the resulting constructions determine their sense of the positions they occupy in social space (Bourdieu 1987). As Jenkins (2008) noted, identities are attributes of embodied individuals; at the same time, they are collectively constituted, sometimes abstractly or symbolically. Identities are multiple and they are produced in discursive and interactive struggles over meaning. Depending on the situation, different identities may activate (Jenkins 2008; Simpson, Slutskaya, Lewis and Höpfl 2012).

Social identification positively affects the psychological condition and self-esteem by giving people a sense of belonging (Cruwys *et al.* 2014). A lack of positive social identification leads to feelings of disconnection or dislocation from the surrounding world; identification with stigmatised groups negatively impacts health (Cruwys *et al.* 2014). This analysis pays particular attention to national and professional identities, which are strongly activated when people migrate to another country in order to find a new job. Both professions and nationalities position individuals in social fields, albeit in different and contingent manners.

Professions differ in terms of prestige (Duemmler and Caprani 2017). They define individuals' positions in social space (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Domański 1991) and are important for identity construction (Duemmler and Caprani 2017). Professions not only dictate the activities which people perform at work but are also socially constructed and given meaning by those who perform them and by others – for instance, customers (Duemmler and Caprani 2017).

Like professions, nationalities determine individuals' positions in social space. The hierarchical positionality of nationalities shapes migrants' levels of (un)desirability according to their national origin (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2017; Loftsdóttir 2017), impeding some national migrant groups in deriving positive effects from national identity. Stigmas marginalise individuals by reducing their identities to one-dimensional characteristics (Goffman 1968; Prasad, D'Abate and Prasad 2007), leading to group members' perceived homogeneity. Belonging to a stigmatised group renders it particularly difficult to derive a positive identity from membership (Jetten, Haslam, Cruwys and Branscombe 2017). Link and Phelan (2014), drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic power, argued that the power of stigma serves the interests of stigmatisers by aiding in their exploitation, control or exclusion of stigmatised persons. Approaching stigma as an expression of symbolic power facilitates an understanding of how power relations determine not only the social positions of different migrant and non-migrant national groups but also whose interests are served by the particular distributions of symbolic power expressed through stigma.

Many studies have shown that Polishness is one of the most stigmatised national identities in the European context (e.g. Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2017; van Riemsdijk 2010, 2013). Poles are associated with cheap manual labour (Dyrlid 2017; Friberg 2012; Friberg and Midtbøen 2017, 2019) originating from the outskirts of Europe (van Heuckelom 2013) and often experience racism, xenophobia and discrimination in everyday life (Rzepnikowska 2019). In this article, I draw a link between national stigma and the lived experience of downward professional mobility.

**Method and data**

The aim of my study was to explore the personal experiences of Poles who have worked below their level of qualification in Norway. Qualitative methods serve well for understanding social processes and social meanings. Interviews allow study participants to speak in their own voices and language (Byrne 2018; Morawska 2018). Among the different types of qualitative interviews, semi-structured ones are recognised as allowing researchers to explore aspects not originally perceived as part of the inquiry (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018) while remaining within a thematic frame outlined by the research problem. Accordingly, I prepared questions and topics (such as participants' educational and professional careers and their migration to Norway); however, I offered the interviewees a free space in which to share their experiences, thoughts and perceptions.

My analysis was based on 30 qualitative interviews with 18 females and 12 males of Polish origin, aged between 24 and 59, who have been working below their qualification level since migrating to Norway. I define 'qualification' as the highest level of education achieved, professional experience gained or professional certificates earned, enabling one to perform a certain job. The sample comprised Poles who, at the time of the interviews, had been living in Norway for at least one year. I recruited the interviewees by publishing an invitation to participate in the study on the pages of the relevant Facebook groups.

I conducted the interviews in the five months between September 2017 and February 2018. Of the 30 interviews, 19 were face-to-face – taking place in Oslo, Bergen and Bodø – and 11 were conducted online via video conversations with participants throughout Norway. The sample included nine participants in their 20s, 16 in their 30s, four in their 40s and one who was over 50. They have diverse educational and professional backgrounds, with five holding a vocational degree or professional certificate, nine a Bachelor's degree, 15 a Master's and one a PhD. Almost all (27) entered the labour market in Poland or in other countries before migrating to Norway, with 18 having performed jobs corresponding to their educational level and field of study (e.g. seven had worked in their profession for more than 10 years before migrating), three having worked in jobs that were parallel to their studies and six having performed jobs unequal to their educational backgrounds. The participants had been living in Norway for between one and 15 years, including 17 who lived there for more than five years, indicating a somewhat long-term settlement pattern within the sample.

The average length of each interview was 1 hour and 40 minutes, with durations varying from 50 minutes to 2 hours and 40 minutes. The full-length interviews were transcribed and analysed. Thematic coding enabled me to grasp the various manifestations of suffering that participants reported in relation to underemployment and to discern and analyse its links to other experiences. As all the interviews were conducted in Polish, the excerpts supporting my analysis here were carefully translated from Polish to English to ensure the preservation of their original meanings. Participants' names have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

The semi-structured interviews and my explorative approach to the problem under study resulted in rich and differentiated narratives, some of which were highly personal, emotional and biographical in nature. The sensitivities and emotions that might be raised in interviews should be tackled with care by the researcher (Ritchie 2003). Having this in mind, I remained empathetic to the participants' emotions and did not insist on discussing these or continuing lines of questioning that elicited them in my interlocutor. In such situations, I tried to react with empathy and to leave space free for the interviewee to determine whether he or she would continue on the topic. I was both surprised and interested in how willingly they spoke about difficult experiences and emotions. This convinced me of the significance of subjecting emotional experiences to analysis and strengthened my belief in the importance of the personal, yet highly social, experience of downward professional mobility.

**Table 1.  Characteristics of the sample (N=30)**

| Characteristics | Category | Number of participants |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | Female | 18 |
| | Male | 12 |
| **Age** | 24–39 | 25 |
| | 40–59 | 5 |
| **Education** | Vocational | 5 |
| | Bachelor | 9 |
| | Master | 15 |
| | Doctoral | 1 |
| **Length of residence in Norway (years)** | 1–5 | 13 |
| | ≥ 5 | 17 |

**Findings**

*Downward professional mobility and suffering*

The interviews revealed the universality and gravity of the participants' suffering. Many became emotional while discussing their experiences of downward professional mobility and described their mental condition as poor. The most frequently reported issues were feelings of depression, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, weight loss, distress, a sense of shame and humiliation and frustration. As the analysis proceeded, the link between post-migratory downward professional mobility and suffering proved to be more complex than it had initially appeared. The analysis uncovered everyday psychological burdens related to performing low-skilled jobs, heavy psychosocial and emotional losses and the longevity of the suffering experienced. Study participants addressed these issues in diverse ways; here, Daria (three years in Norway) described her daily struggles working as a cleaner:

> *I try not to think about the future, because when I do, I break down. I know that I won't stand working in the cleaning services for too long. Despite that, it's okay when it comes to wages. As far as my psychical condition is concerned, more and more often something besets me. Considerations. I won't stand cleaning for a long time; maybe I'll be able to do it for one more year.*

Although Daria, who has a Master's degree in political science, assumed that she would work as a cleaner in Norway, the realisation of this assumption resulted in unexpected burdens. The daily work has been increasingly psychologically taxing. She indicates that, although her earnings are satisfactory, they do not compensate for the personal psychological losses which have become increasingly distressing. Piotr shares the sense of loss in his six years in Norway:

> *I've reached such a stage now that my head is filled only with confusion. Because I've lost my self-confidence, I no longer know what I truly desire and what I'm able to achieve.*

Piotr has a Master's in tourism and spent several years' as an assistant and later a project manager, overseeing EU projects in Poland. In Norway, he worked as a cleaner in a hotel for five years. During this time, he learnt to speak Norwegian and was ambitious in seeking work related to his pre-migratory professional experience.

The lack of professional development was unbearable for Piotr and many other of participants. They invested significant effort in improving their job positions, usually without achieved the desired results and causing them to doubt their own abilities. Such an unfavourable situation can last for years, as was the case for Ela after her 13 years in Norway:

> *I know that if I hadn't made the decision to change my job at that point, I would have... Because during those 11 years* [in Norway preceding the job change]*, I received antidepressant treatment twice because there were moments when I howled at the moon, moments when I was driving a car and I imagined what would have happened to me if I had driven right in front of that truck. And there were all these frustrations.*

Ela's words reveal not only the intensity of suffering related to the performance of unsatisfactory work but also its longevity. Research has found (e.g. Trevena 2013) that Polish migrants often assume that their stay in a host country will be temporary and therefore perceive low-skilled jobs as only a short-term necessity. Some participants in this study also assumed that their low-skilled jobs would be temporary. However, these positions frequently lengthened into years and became an 'extending temporality'. At the same time, the participants demonstrated quite agentic attitudes towards improving their employment positions, for example by acquiring language skills and repeatedly applying for jobs they desired.

The following sections depict the processes, experiences and performativities entangled in the social dimension of suffering due to downward professional mobility and migration. The results draw on a cross-case analysis of all 30 participants. However, for the sake of transparency and depth, I have focused in this article on the three cases which I consider to be the most representative in terms of demonstrating different aspects of habitus mismatch. Specifically, the case of Dawid highlights the subjective experience of downward class mobility and stigmatisation, while Ewa's case is the most instructive for analysing the mismatch between national identification and the meaning attached to this identity. Dalia's case best represents the divergence between a professional identity shaped during education and the performance of work that does not correspond to this education. I also use quotations from other participants to support my main arguments.

*Dawid: the subjective experience of downward class mobility and stigmatisation*

Dawid, who is a male in his 20s, has a BA in construction engineering. He moved to Norway to seek employment soon after graduation so that he could save money to put towards a car or a flat in Poland. At the time of the interview, Dawid had been working as a wall painter for a Polish company for 1.5 years. Before migrating, he had never considered working in his profession in Norway. Working as a wall painter in Norway, he explained, enabled him to save more money than would have been possible if he had worked as a novice engineer in Poland. What has changed significantly since Dawid's migration is his attitude towards using his education to work in Norway. Although he was initially ready to work exclusively as a wall painter, he started learning Norwegian after spending some time there and, after a year, he decided to start applying for construction engineering positions. When discussing his work as a wall painter, Dawid guided his narrative towards his Polish, male co-workers. As is evident in the quotation below, he first referred to his pre-migratory acquaintances, subsequently contrasting them with his current colleagues.

> *It is a nice feeling to recognise the value of the people I knew before, during my studies. I was surrounding myself with – I was aware of it* [at that time]*, but now I appreciate it – really valuable, very intelligent people; it was possible to discuss anything with them. And now – construction workers, well, the boys' lives revolve around work. Work, what to eat, where to go fishing, what to drink, smoking, and work. And for*

*me, it was, as I jumped into it from the outside, an overwhelming lifestyle. I was trying to organise my free time as well, to take a trip to the mountains or to sightsee in Oslo or something like that. They don't have this kind of attitude. They are, I don't know, so insular towards Norway, so hermetic.*

In addition to contrasting his school acquaintances' characteristics with those of his co-workers in Norway, Dawid juxtaposed his own lifestyle and attitude towards free time with those of his co-workers. According to Bourdieu, possession of a set of common properties is embodied as class habitus and its ability to generate similar practices and lifestyles characterises individuals in a certain social class (Bourdieu 1984: 101). Dawid's experience of downward class mobility, as expressed in the above quotation, reflects what Bourdieu calls a 'double isolation'; that is, isolation from both the current class and the 'class of origin'. The latter is typically accompanied by nostalgia for the group that was left behind (Bourdieu 1996: 107). Although Dawid was surrounded by people, both at work and in his place of residence (he shared a flat with some of his co-workers), the sense of mismatch constantly made him feel lonely; he stated that, for him, 'The loneliness was the hardest difficulty'. In a study on undocumented Polish migrants in Brussels, Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005) found that migrant networks not only play a crucial role in getting a first job abroad but also serve as fundamental emotional support when someone is coping with a new life situation. Dawid's story shows that the feeling of difference between his and his colleagues' habitus caused him to perceive them as people incapable of providing him with emotional support, which increased the difficulty of coping with the challenges he was facing.

In his narrative, Dawid distinguishes between his and his co-workers' class habitus – his being characterised by an open attitude towards culture and his co-workers by a hermetic one. He highlights this distinction by defining his position in terms of 'jumping outside' into his co-workers' mode of life. This exemplifies a narrative strategy of othering himself from his co-nationals in order to construct his identity profitably – cf. Garapich (2012) who found that, although Polish migrants strongly identify with Polishness, the feeling of shame resulting from its attached stigma leads to a tendency to emphasise their difference from 'typical Poles'.

In the following quote regarding his relationship with his boss, with whom he has developed a close friendship, Dawid guided his narrative towards his professional identity.

*I can talk to him about some things, like going fishing or... I don't know, I won't discuss the theory of relativity or evolution with him. You get it, right? That there is a gulf between us, like, ah... it's hard to talk about it. We are kind of different in terms of intellect. At a certain point, I also started to reflect on myself and came to the conclusion that, instead of broadening my horizons, fine, it's okay, I have a job, I earn money but I'm taking a step backwards in terms of intellectual development. Because I've been losing a grip on the strictly engineering industry, I've been forgetting those things that I learnt at university and I'm surrounded by people who are a little bit different to those with whom I used to spend time before I came here.*

The feeling of isolation from his own class induced him to reflect on his professional development. Working below his qualification level began to seem problematic to him when it intersected with social degradation. Although he was initially eager to work as a wall painter, his subjective experience of downward social mobility and deskilling, which he called a 'step backwards in terms of intellectual development', resulted in such heavy psychosocial losses that he could not continue working in low-skilled employment. He commented 'My self-esteem has suffered a lot throughout this year'. This shows that satisfactory earnings do not compensate for losses in personal and professional development and that many migrants do not accept working in low-skilled positions as readily as previous studies indicated (e.g. Trevena 2013). At the time of his interview,

Dawid was motivated to secure employment as an engineer and was markedly hopeful that he would be suc-cessful in doing so. Thus, Dawid, like many other participants, did not accept a low-skilled position in the long term; he also displayed agency in attempting to change this unfavourable professional situation.

The study participants often showed awareness of their reduction to the one-dimensional identity of being a Pole which, in Norway, was understood to mean being a low-skilled employee. One female participant, Kinga, who has an MA in law and works as a waitress, said:

> *I rarely say anymore that I'm educated as a lawyer; I just say that I'm from Poland, and then everything becomes clear, like, 'Okay. From Poland? So let's work in a hotel', right? It's so strongly considered Polish work.*

Like Kinga, many participants indicated that low-skilled and low-prestige jobs in Norway are particularly ascribed to Poles, imbuing Polishness with a specific meaning. The difficulty faced by participants is that they do, in fact, work in low-skilled jobs that seem to match the stereotypical image; however, performing these jobs does not correspond with their aspirations or self-image. They instead identify with the professions for which they were educated and, in many cases, in which they have professional experience. These perceptions of Poles as low-skilled, manual workers impact on Poles' interpersonal encounters and relations. In his inter-view, Dawid referenced the experience of stigmatisation, as illustrated in the quotation below:

> *I share housing with a Spanish guy, and a Norwegian female moved in a week ago; she asked where we come from. He replied, 'From Spain'. 'Oh, from Spain! Football, beaches, parties!' Her reaction was so positive. 'And where are you from?' 'From Poland.' 'Well, you build here, you work hard, you get the job done so thoroughly, you're hardworking'. And you can feel a distance.*

Dawid emphasised the difference he sensed in his flatmate's reaction to his origins as opposed to those of his friend, pointing out the distance he felt when he revealed his Polish nationality. He added that there were several occasions on which he met women at parties who, upon learning that he was Polish, were no longer interested in him. It is understandable, then, that he has come to believe that revealing his nationality has explicit negative impacts on others' attitudes towards him. It also exemplifies how the circulation of meanings affects migrants' experiences, emotions and everyday encounters.

*Ewa: national identification and the meanings attached to nationality*

Ewa, a female in her 40s, has an MA in physiotherapy with a specialisation in neurology. During her career, she travelled worldwide to take professional courses in both physiotherapy and the management of healthcare services. She has over 20 years of professional experience, including in physiotherapy and health centre estab-lishment and management. Ewa is a self-described 'accompanying' migrant. She explained this by stating 'I moved here [to Norway] to accompany my husband'. She obtained her first job and arranged accommodation through her network of Polish contacts. Employed through a Norwegian agency, she became a personal assis-tant to a disabled girl in a Polish family. Her responsibilities included housekeeping, such as cleaning and laundering. Together with her husband, Ewa moved into a basement apartment in a house that was owned by another Polish family who lived on the upper floors. Like Dawid, Ewa surrounded herself exclusively with co-nationals, both at work and at her place of residence. In this respect, Dawid's and Ewa's cases not only reflect the role that migrant networks play in steering migratory movements in specific directions but also demonstrate the extent to which sharing a common nationality may affect migrants' choices and actions when

seeking accommodation or employment – an interdependence that is widely recognised by migration studies (e.g. Grzymała-Kazłowska 2005). Although, at the time of the interview, Ewa had been living in Norway for 18 months, the first post-migratory year left a clear mark on her life, as described in the following quotation:

> *That year was one of the most difficult times in my life, I would say. Not only because of the work and the fact that I found myself in a totally different world, but also because of the conditions in the flat I was living in at first. (...) A lot of people were living there, different kinds of people, which is the other side of the coin.*

Ewa clearly identified the three intersecting aspects that played a role in the difficulties she experienced after migration – namely work, 'moving into a different world' and living conditions, especially flatmates. In sociological terms, her difficulties were attributable to the intersection of downward professional mobility, migration and the social environment she entered. Although a sense of commonality based on shared nationality initially guided her actions, over time she acutely felt the difference between herself and the people around her, both at home and at work, which she described as follows:

> *I witnessed pathological situations such that I had never experienced before over the 40 years of my life. And it was difficult; the most difficult thing was not to coarsen, to stay classy. Do you know what I used to do just after arriving in Poland? My son would pick me up from the airport, and I used to tell him, 'Daniel, just don't forget to bring my high heels'. It didn't matter that I was in a tracksuit; I was just putting on my high heels right away at the airport because to me, high heels are a symbol. Once, I had a teacher from Israel; she was a very wise woman, a doctor, and she always kept saying, 'Ewa, remember, the worse, the higher'. The worse the situation is, the higher the heels you should wear to feel better. (...) These high heels were so symbolic, it was like they were saying, 'Hey, you! Listen, jump out of these gumboots, leave this straw behind, and come back to life!'.*

Embodied habitus is an integral part of behaviour and manifest in it (Jenkins 2002: 75). According to Bourdieu (1990: 69), both a body and a language are stores of thoughts that are able to release themselves, independent of time and space, by 're-placing the body in an overall posture which recalls the associated thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, give rise to states of mind'. By wearing high heels, Ewa repositioned her body in a posture that recalled the status, social position and identity that had been suppressed due to life events. The affective emotions which she felt became socially communicated, playing an active role in the intersection of the social with the embodied dimension. This embodiment of habitus mismatch also demonstrates how Ewa constructed her social spaces. Like many other participants, she positioned herself differently in the social space of Poland compared to that in Norway. In their social fields in Poland, many participants felt a sense of 'being somebody', with many differentiated social identities and relationships whereas, after migrating, they became 'just a Pole' or simply 'nobody'. For instance, one participant stated 'I came to a foreign country, and I really became nobody here. And I clean the flats and clean the offices and my profession was not about me cleaning up somewhere, right?'.

For Ewa, the content and meaning of Polish identity became uncomfortable. She related the symbolic dimension of the high heels she wore at the airport to this topic. As evidenced by the following excerpt, she referenced the stereotypical picture of a Pole in Norway:

> *Thus, these high heels are the other side of these Poles. I mean 'these'... I'm a Pole, too but, these Poles in Norway, a large percentage of Poles, who, I don't want to name it, but we know what it is. On the whole,*

*they give this nasty picture of a Pole abroad – not only in Norway – and I lived in it, and I saw it. I was close to it.*

Interestingly, given her experiences, Ewa potentially justifies the stereotypical picture of Poles in Norway. Wearing high heels after arriving in Poland was an embodiment of Ewa's need to construct her identity as different from that of Poles. The move to Norway, where Polishness carries specific connotations, contributed to the experience of mismatch between national identity and its meanings. As a result, participants like Ewa tended to construct narratives that differentiated themselves from other Poles, again indicating a strategy of othering from stigmatised Polishness. Both the content of social identities and the meanings of groups as understood by their members powerfully impact on psychological conditions (Cruwys *et al.* 2014). In the following quote, Ewa speaks about her suffering as a result of multiple habitus mismatches:

*During that time, it felt as if the real 'me' was standing somewhere next to my body. I wasn't present there myself at that moment. I had to cut myself off from my own identity. I had to. (...) Between October and January, I lost 25 kilos; now I've put on weight again, but I had lost 25 kilos. Due to the stress. (...) I think that in the time following that – January, February, March – I think that it was depression, severe depression. I was just coming back to this apartment and covering myself with a duvet and sleeping in order not to see it, not to hear, not to see or hear anything at all. I didn't eat; sometimes I didn't even feel like taking a bath. I was moving myself into a state of non-existence.*

The habitus mismatches that Ewa experienced led to suffering so severe that it prevented her from functioning normally in her everyday life. Vianello (2014) found that highly educated Ukrainian women working as domestic help and caregivers in Italian households struggled the most when their employers (the family members living in the households) were poorly educated. The higher the employer's educational levels were, the better self-evaluation these women expressed. Ewa was a caregiver to a disabled girl in a Polish family whom she described as pathological and primitive. The girl's parents had lower educational levels than Ewa, yet Ewa was their subordinate. This relation strengthened Ewa's experience of habitus mismatch. Downward social mobility is a situation where individuals are particularly vulnerable to experiences that entail a range of negative health outcomes (Alcántara *et al.* 2014).

### Dalia: educational background, work, and identity

Dalia moved to Norway after completing a five-year programme in psychology and gaining her first six months of professional experience as a personal consultant in a large company. While studying in Poland, she accepted seasonal work during the holidays picking strawberries in Norway. Through the Erasmus programme, she also spent a semester at a Norwegian university. She quickly 'became fascinated by Norway' and dedicated much of her interview to describing the positive experiences she had at the Norwegian university, partly to justify her decision to move there after graduation. Her plan was to secure a job with a human resources company before learning Norwegian, with the ultimate goal of working as a psychotherapist. However, after migrating, Dalia quickly realised that securing her desired job in recruitment with her knowledge of English but not of Norwegian would not be as easy as she had expected. At the time of the interview, Dalia had been living in Norway for three years. Given that she needed to earn money to finance her stay, she decided to start working as a domestic cleaner. She commented on the subject as follows:

*D: I was working as… I don't want to use the word 'cleaner', but I was cleaning those houses, those two houses.*

*A: Why don't you want to use that word?*

*D: Because it doesn't suit me. I don't see myself in this profession, so…*

*A: You don't identify with it?*

*D: No, I don't identify with it at all. I understand that there's nothing bad about… If it's fine by someone and it's adequate for someone's ambitions, then okay, but for me?*

During the interview, Dalia avoided calling herself 'a cleaner' by using alternative phrases such as 'working in cleaning'. Acknowledging that professions have statuses that indicate people's positions in social space, it becomes clear that the status and social meanings associated with working as a cleaner were unacceptable to Dalia's self-identity. Later in the interview, Dalia described how the experience of working below her qualifications influenced her self-esteem:

*I would say that my self-esteem lowered drastically. I had such low self-esteem that… I had never had such low self-esteem before… It's like, you know… It's hard when you used to go to school, you were always a top student at primary school and secondary school, you used to have the best grades and diplomas with honours, and then you studied and you also graduated with the best grades and so on, and suddenly you work as a cleaner or a waitress. It was like hitting a wall.*

Dalia identified the educational results that have shaped her self-perception – namely being a top student, achieving the best grades and earning diplomas with honours. These educational outcomes have structured her habitus and identity. By juxtaposing these habitus attributes with the reality of working as a cleaner or waitress, Dalia's narrative offers a vivid picture of the experience of habitus mismatch. Setting aside their educational backgrounds to accept low-skilled work was difficult for most participants, one of whom said, 'Lowering my qualifications, it was a painful blow, a very painful blow'. Dalia's words similarly communicate the everyday psychological burden of performing a job for which she is overqualified:

*I remember, I was scrubbing a bathroom* [at the client's home], *and I started to cry. I was scrubbing this bathroom and thought 'Geez, Dalia, what are you even doing? You are here and instead of sitting, I don't know, going back to Poland, where, in Warsaw or Krakow, you would find a job at once in human resources because your friends found jobs in human resources after graduation, so why are you even here at all? (…) What are you doing here? Are you really scrubbing someone's bathroom!?'*

Interestingly in this excerpt, Dalia introduces an inner dialogue between the part of her that is cleaning a bathroom in someone's private home in Norway and the part that is a psychology graduate with superior career prospects in Poland. As Bourdieu noted, habitus destabilisation leads to a double perception of the self (Bourdieu 1999). Dalia's case highlights the potentiality of habitus mismatch to trigger a moment of consciousness with regards to one's own habitus. Furthermore, the quotation implies that the Polish labour market is still a reference point for Dalia and she is not convinced that her decision to migrate was the right one.

Falling unemployment rates and rising wages in Poland may contribute to migrants becoming increasingly sceptical of performing low-skilled jobs in other countries.

## Conclusion

This article has investigated cases of habitus mismatch that underlies the difficulty and suffering associated with experiencing post-migratory downward professional mobility. Outlining the multiple habitus mismatches that migrants face has enabled an exploration of how downward professional mobility influences migrants' wellbeing and increases their vulnerability. For example, identification with stigmatised Polishness proved to play a significant role in shaping Polish migrants' experiences of everyday struggles related to their underemployment. They struggle not only with performing the low-skilled work *per se* (resulting, among other things, in a feeling of a 'step backwards' in self-development) but also with the one-dimensional meanings attached to being Polish in the Norwegian labour market. These meanings, which influence migrants' positionality, affect their emotions and undermine their self-perceptions. From the study participants' perspective, the stigma they experience during everyday encounters places them at a disadvantageous position and categorises them exclusively as low-skilled workers. Moreover, they experience a mismatch between their professional identities and the status that is concomitant with the low-skilled jobs they perform. Class mobility leads to the experience of 'double isolation' – that is, despite being surrounded by co-nationals with whom they work and live, participants felt different and isolated. At the same time, they reported a sense of longing and nostalgia for the 'class of origin' that they left behind in Poland.

The experience of multiple mismatches leads to migrants' suffering. The most common manifestations of poor mental health, as self-reported by study participants, were feelings of depression, a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, weight loss, distress and frustration. These negative outcomes should be of particular concern since migration is increasing, migrants are more susceptible to underemployment than non-migrants and, as research has shown, some national identities are particularly exposed to racialisation and stigmatisation (e.g. Loftsdóttir 2017; Midtbøen 2019; Przybyszewska 2021; Rzepnikowska 2019).

This article contributes to the literature on international professional human mobility and perceived discrimination by introducing the emotional and human dimensions of these experiences. Migration research abounds in utilitarian terms such as 'target earners' or 'labour migrants'. However, these terms tend to deprive migrating individuals of their 'human face'. This article has proposed that researchers employ greater sensitivity in the study of human mobility.

The article also offers a conceptual contribution. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of cleft habitus, I have proposed extending the concept to habitus mismatch in order to cover the habitus destabilisation that results from the multiple mismatches that have been discussed. As this article has shown, the notion of habitus mismatch facilitates the analysis of migrants' lived experiences of downward professional mobility and its associated suffering.

## Conflict of interest statement

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