

# The post-2004 migration of Poles: beyond ‘oppression’ and ‘free will’ binary<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The traditional approach towards the conceptualisation of migration based on the notions of ‘oppression’ and ‘free will’ has been recognized as simplistic with regards to contemporary migration patterns. Acknowledging the existence of both forced migrants defined through the legal notion of a refugee, and voluntary ones (e.g. lifestyle migration), the example of post-2004 Polish migration suggests new evidence for re-evaluation of this divide by exploring the ‘grey’ spectrum of experiences that is left out.

The paper aims to address the following question: how can the migration experiences of Poles in the post-2004 context be conceptualised against the forced-voluntary migration binary? By focusing on the notion of subjectivity, this paper challenges these key categories within migration scholarship. This is to be done by applying Michel Foucault’s notion of power, to grasp its role in shaping the perception of reality and impacting the subjectivity of migrants; to shift the focus from negative or destructive power embedded in the notion of forced migration to the productive power and subjectivity as its effect.

## Keywords

Migrants; refugees; forced; voluntary; power; subjectivity.

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## Introduction

The limitations of the key categorisation in migration, namely, the binary divide between forced and voluntary migration have become the subject of a growing debate in migration scholarship. Recognised as simplistic, the flawed divide<sup>2</sup> fails to account for the complex experiences related to the contemporary migrations,<sup>3</sup> which cannot be qualified as either *forced* or *free*.<sup>4</sup>

While nowadays the phenomenon of forced migration is primarily understood in the context of oppression, the related terms have been argued to neglect migrants' agency and the role of social networks in migration.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the grounds for persecution, defined in the post-war context (namely, "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"<sup>6</sup>), exclude from the discussion on non-voluntary migration those who do not meet the narrow scope of the legal terms, elaborated in the aftermath of the Second World War and stipulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>7</sup> Thus, identifying as *forced* only those migrants seeking refuge in foreign countries poses a risk of classifying any other migration as voluntary, out of free will or "mere preference".<sup>8</sup> At the same time, some authors stress the vague and underdefined criteria for voluntariness in migration, which can be subjected to broad interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, one cannot negate the problem of the discursive power effect of respective labelling. Given the impact of discourse on social construction of reality,<sup>10</sup> this power effect of

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<sup>2</sup> Austin Charron, "‘Somehow, We Cannot Accept It’: Drivers of Internal Displacement from Crimea and the Forced/Voluntary Migration Binary," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 3 (2020): 433, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1685649>.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Castles and Nicholas Van Hear, "Developing DFID's Policy Approach to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons" (Oxford, 2005), [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ER-2005-Refugees\\_Policy\\_DfID1.pdf](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ER-2005-Refugees_Policy_DfID1.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018): 982, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384149>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Castles, "Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation," *Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038503037001384>.

<sup>6</sup> Article 1 A(2), UN General Assembly, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees" (1951), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Valeria Ottonelli and Tiziana Torresi, "When Is Migration Voluntary?," *International Migration Review* 47, no. 4 (2013): 784, <https://doi-org.e.bibl.liu.se/10.1111/imre.12048>.

<sup>9</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary," 985.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

the binary promotes a negative image of migrants<sup>11</sup> by contributing to the creation of a figure of ‘illegal migrants’, not falling within the scope of international protection regime, which, in turn, impacts the attitudes to and treatment of migrants by relevant authorities, affecting their lived experiences.

Acknowledging the existence of both forced displacement and lifestyle migration, this paper appeals to the example of the post-2004 Polish migration, to understand whether these mobilities can be conceptualised against the forced-voluntary migration binary. Arguing that this example stands for the ‘grey’ migration experiences, the article draws on the existent secondary literature pertaining to the analysis of the binary division and its critique, suggesting a novel angle towards the understanding of migration motivations through the lens of Foucault’s notions of power and subjectivity.

The notions of biopolitics and biopower are employed to unveil the way relations of power shaped recent migration dynamic and influenced lived experiences of migrants. More precisely, they are used to grasp the role of the 2004 EU enlargement and the UK’s ensuing decision to lift restrictions on labour market access for the nationals of A8 countries, as part of the structural context for migration, which is often perceived as ‘free’ or ‘voluntary’.

The paper first provides a brief overview of the existing approach towards the forced-voluntary binary, followed by the presented discussion on the emerging criticism of the divide in migration scholarship. The notions of power and subjectivity coined by Foucault are then applied to challenge the mentioned categories and to understand the role of productive power in migration decision-making. The conclusion highlights the need to study the nature of the choices made within the process of migration and the importance of recovering migrants’ agency through their own discourses. It is important to note that this paper stems from the preliminary reflections on the topic. Representing the work in progress and published in the framework of a larger project deliverable, the article will be subject to further corrections and updates.

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<sup>11</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary,” 983.

## The traditional approach towards forced-voluntary migration binary

To understand whether migration experiences of Poles in the post-2004 context can be conceptualised against the frameworks developed within the migration literature, there is a need to study the key categories of forced and voluntary migration, or, in other words, the conceptualisation of migration based on the notions of ‘oppression’ and ‘free will’. The traditional approach towards these categories is based on the differentiation between forced displacement and its normative understanding in line with the legal definitions of a refugee and asylum seeker on the one hand, and a free or voluntary migrant, mostly associated with economic motives on the other.

Thus, the understanding of forced migration is associated with “a lack of choice, a lack of any alternative”<sup>12</sup> embedded into the legal notion of ‘refugee’.<sup>13</sup> The proponents of the traditional approach towards the forced-voluntary divide stress its importance in view of a special status of forced migrants confined in the legal definition of refugee, stipulated in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Therefore, one of the major concerns related to the revision of this legal notion and the respective criteria listed in the Convention is reflected in the risk to undermine the existing legal protective mechanism for those forcibly displaced.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the well-developed scholarship in this field offers a number of criteria for migration to be considered as voluntary, namely, non-coercion, sufficiency, available exit options and information.<sup>15</sup> With regard to the former two, it has been argued that as long as basic rights of individuals are protected and the choice of migration is not evidently coerced, the migration can be perceived as voluntary.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the criterion of ‘available alternatives’ is understood as the availability of any other opportunities in migrants’ home country, which are “good enough” to pursue, based on the accessible information.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Turton, “Conceptualising Forced Migration,” RSC Working Paper Series (Oxford, 2003), 11, <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp12-conceptualising-forced-migration-2003.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Susanne Schmeidl, “Exploring the Causes of Forced Migration: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1971-1990,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1997): 284–308, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42864338?seq=1>.

<sup>14</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary,” 982.

<sup>15</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, “When Is Migration Voluntary?”; Serena Olsaretti, “Freedom, Force and Choice: Against the Rights-Based Definition of Voluntariness,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 53–78, [https://www.academia.edu/28530397/Freedom\\_Force\\_and\\_Choice\\_Against\\_the\\_Rights\\_Based\\_Definition\\_of\\_Voluntariness](https://www.academia.edu/28530397/Freedom_Force_and_Choice_Against_the_Rights_Based_Definition_of_Voluntariness); Erdal and Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary.”

<sup>16</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, “When Is Migration Voluntary?,” 785.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 798, 802.

## **The critique of the forced-voluntary migration divide**

It is noteworthy that the criticism of the traditional approach towards the dichotomy of forced-voluntary migration is a subject of a growing debate within migration studies. The mere division has been found simplistic with regard to contemporary migration patterns,<sup>18</sup> particularly in view of the argument that it is problematic to frame one's decision to leave one country for another "as entirely voluntary or entirely forced".<sup>19</sup>

The problem of the underdefined notions unveils the need for rethinking the traditional approach towards the respective conceptualisation. With regard to the phenomenon of forced migration, according to Castles, it represents a process, "in which human agency and social networks play a major part".<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is impossible to neglect the importance of agency even in cases of forced displacement. Moreover, acknowledging the importance of existing protection regimes based on legal vocabularies, it is crucial to go beyond the nation-state centred approach, shifting the focus onto the analysis of experiences, including those not seeking refuge but aiming to improve life conditions, often at the cost of temporarily sacrificing "comfort, well-being, and important aspects of their sentimental and social life".<sup>21</sup>

In turn, the vague and imprecise criteria for voluntariness create the need to differentiate between migration related to the 'joy' of mobility and adventure, and the more common aspiration to improve living conditions, where 'reasonable quality of life' is admitted to be a subjective notion.<sup>22</sup> Along similar lines, taking a perspective of the other side of the spectrum, all migration could be considered as non-voluntary due to the circumstances of global injustice, while a condition of an ideal-type world has been argued to be "too demanding" and "over-inclusive" as a consequence.<sup>23</sup>

It is still relevant to refer to some problematic points regarding the conditions of voluntariness. First of all, according to the criterion of non-coercion, it is important to note that the suggested framework is restricted to the legal terms, stipulated in the Article 3 of the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,

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<sup>18</sup> Castles and Hear, "Developing DFID's Policy Approach to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons."

<sup>19</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary," 982.

<sup>20</sup> Castles, "Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation," 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, "When Is Migration Voluntary?," 806–7.

<sup>22</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary," 985.

<sup>23</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, "When Is Migration Voluntary?," 785–86.

where coercion is understood precisely as “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”.<sup>24</sup>

This benchmark for defining voluntariness appears problematic as human migratory experiences could be conditioned by subjective interpretations of surrounding reality, as a person might feel coerced by the pressure within a household or community, which can be translated in the aspiration to improve living conditions. Hence, there is a need to study the role of power relations that encompass the entire populations in shaping their perception of reality.

Moreover, the subjective assumption of available alternatives which are *sufficient* and *good enough*<sup>25</sup> can also be shaped by numerous factors, such as access to the information, which, therefore, unveils the imprecise definitional status of the category with regard to human experiences and life trajectories.

It should also be noted that migration often leads to “worsening one’s living conditions, at least in the short run”,<sup>26</sup> which is particularly the case for many low-paid economic migrants within the EU. In this context, Erdal mentions the example of persons who could have voluntarily left their country of origin, and further engaged themselves in an exploitative employment due to perceived absence of available alternatives.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Kymlicka, provides an example of migration for the sake of minimal acceptable living conditions, which can result from the choice which is “voluntary in a very limited sense”.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, with regard to the interlinked criterion of available information as a factor for defining voluntary migration,<sup>29</sup> it is important to note that such aspects as the lack of adequate knowledge, the misinterpretation of acquired information or the dual role of technologies in

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<sup>24</sup> Article 3 (a), UN General Assembly, “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,” 2000, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4720706c0.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Colburn, “Debate: The Concept of Voluntariness,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008): 101–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00272.x>.

<sup>26</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, “When Is Migration Voluntary?,” 800.

<sup>27</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary,” 987.

<sup>28</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198290918.001.0001>.

<sup>29</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, “When Is Migration Voluntary?,” 802.

disseminating information leave room for questioning the role of information and consequences of its interpretation in migration decision-making.

Another critical view regarding the analytical relevance of voluntariness has been supported by the example of workers undertaking ‘3D jobs’ (dirty, dangerous and demanding). In this regard, Erdal and Oeppen pose a relevant question: “Is it enough to say that a worker in a 3D job is doing that work voluntarily because they are not enslaved, when the alternative to doing that job is perhaps destitution?”<sup>30</sup> In other words, the issue of relationship between ‘*voluntary*’ economic migration and labour exploitation practices, experienced by Polish migrants in the UK, can challenge the notion voluntariness.

Finally, it is relevant to mention another approach to the categorisation under discussion, according to which forced and voluntary migration represent the sides of the spectrum of the experiences, where the degree of volition is the central point of the analysis.<sup>31</sup> Following this approach, it has been argued that migration decision-making and experiences cannot be simplistically labelled either forced or free, since it is problematic to characterise migration either as “whimsical preferences”, or by “coercive circumstances”: instead, Ottonelli and Torresi describe it as voluntary choice to migrate guided by “important values and goals in people’s lives”.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it is evident that the notion of voluntariness is one of the central contested terms in the study of migration due to its discursive and normative implications within the forced-voluntary migration binary. The above-mentioned criteria for its definition and relevant critique pose numerous difficulties in identifying the scope of voluntariness in the analysis of human experiences. In line with the mentioned examples, it follows that even in situations where a decision to migrate is of non-coerced nature, it still can be guided by the perceptions derived from the lack of adequate information. Yet, current understanding of the dichotomy leads to definitional restrictions of forced migration only to those facing utmost deprivation, while voluntary migration serves as a term for labelling mere preferences and voluntary choices.

The blurring divide between the categories, dictated by a complex contemporary context shows the need to challenge the traditional binary<sup>33</sup> and to look beyond the “the structure-agency

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<sup>30</sup> Erdal and Oeppen, “Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary,” 985.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 982.

<sup>32</sup> Ottonelli and Torresi, “When Is Migration Voluntary?,” 808.

<sup>33</sup> Castles, “Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation,” 17.

impasse”.<sup>34</sup> Considering the case of contemporary Polish migration as an attitude towards the surrounding reality, which “denotes their understanding, in a wide sense, of the benefit of changing their living conditions”,<sup>35</sup> it is relevant to appeal to Foucault’s notions of biopower and biopolitics presented below.

## **Polish migrants as targets of power**

The theoretical debate presented above unveils the need to challenge the forced-voluntary migration binary, notably stressing the necessity to reassess the notion of forced migration through Foucault’s notion of power, to grasp its role in shaping the perception of reality and impacting the agency of migrants. There is an attempt to shift the focus from negative or destructive power embedded in the notion of forced migration, to the productive power and subjectivity as its effect.

Being a central notion in the Foucauldian genealogical method, power is a relationship forming society and being “always already there”.<sup>36</sup> An important characteristic of power is that it is more than merely negative and coercive: it is effective not because of its repressive capacity, but thanks to its impact on human desires and its ability to produce knowledge. According to Foucault,

[...] power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because [...] it produces effects at the level of desire - and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the productive nature of power<sup>38</sup> is interlinked with another one of its characteristics: “relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Oliver Bakewell, “Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1689, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.489382>.

<sup>35</sup> Danuta Miłaszewicz et al., “Determinants of Polish International Migration in the Area of the European Union after 2004,” *Journal of International Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 65, <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071>.

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 141.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 136.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, 142.



Thus, these characteristics of power make it a transformative force of human life, shaping its desires and wishes.

While different strategies of power can be mentioned, such as sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical, it is important to appeal to the latter strategy of biopolitical governmentality and the interlinked notion of biopower. Unlike the simplistic nature of disciplinary power, which aims to increase the economic utility and obedience of the body,<sup>40</sup> the key trait of biopolitical governance is reflected in its regulatory measures, affecting all spheres of life “with the aim of safeguarding and securing the vitality of a population”.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, this strategy of administrating populations does not represent mere vertical control, typical for the exercise of sovereign power during the classical age – within the modern type of government it is integrated into the social practices and techniques to enable operation of power at the “large-scale phenomena of population”.<sup>42</sup> This main distinction of classical sovereignty as the right to suppress and punish from post-industrial power strategy of biopolitics is reflected in its aim to govern the population by means “that are able to orient their assent toward the standards that are functionally better suited with the social transformation agenda”.<sup>43</sup> Put in Foucault’s terms, “the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death”,<sup>44</sup> by employing “a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations”.<sup>45</sup>

To contextualize the migration experiences of Poles in the aftermath of the 2004-EU expansion through the lens of biopolitics, it is important to appeal to the observation provided by Burrell and Schweyher, who note that the UK’s policy of free access for the migrants from the newly joined counties was elaborated in the context of an intensified process of restricting the asylum regime, which can be perceived as “entrenching the de facto racialised contours of immigration

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<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 138.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Pinkerton, “The Biopolitics of the Migration-Development Nexus: Governing Migration in the UK,” *Politics* 39, no. 4 (2018): 453, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718809287>.

<sup>42</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriele Tomei, “Biopolitics and the ‘Complementary Heterogeneity’ of Migratory Flows in Italy,” *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 7–8 (2016): 1151, <https://doi-org.e.bibl.liu.se/10.1177/0896920515623075>; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 138, quoted in Bojan Savić, *Afghanistan Under Siege: The Afghan Body and the Postcolonial Border* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020), 28.

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, 137.

control”.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the racialised character of British immigration policy<sup>47</sup> has been argued to represent an example of a biopolitical regime,<sup>48</sup> where white Polish migrants had a privileged position.

Therefore, the impact of biopolitics on individuals as targets of power can be traced with regard to the migration decision making. Representing the object of biopolitics, populations are governed “by manipulating the choices available”,<sup>49</sup> and are encouraged “to self-optimize and self-care through cost-benefit calculations in all stages of life”,<sup>50</sup> while this “entrepreneurial image of self”<sup>51</sup> may result in a decision to migrate from one place to another.<sup>52</sup> Hence, while it can be concluded that power relations in capitalist societies shape “human behaviours through orienting the agency and self-control that actors exercise over their bodies, their desires and even their fantasies”,<sup>53</sup> the agency and mobility of Poles as practice which makes them ‘Polish migrants’ as targets of biopolitical relations still remains to be explored.

Therefore, the case of post-2004 Polish migrants in the UK gives the opportunity to understand how biopolitics operates upon lives. These migrations can be interpreted as a form of adjusting life choices and strategies to the dynamic of international labour market development – in this specific case, characterised by the enlarged EU labour market, inducing migration from its economic periphery to the centre. Thus, applying this lens also helps to disentangle the reasons behind the decision to leave home, consequently exposing oneself to potential exploitation and difficult living conditions.

Moreover, the mentioned concepts shed light on the debate pertaining to the binary of forced-voluntary migration, suggesting an alternative view on migration decision-making and further trajectories considering individuals as targets of power, which is productive and therefore impacts desires and wishes. Hence, Foucault’s notions of biopolitics and biopower undermine

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<sup>46</sup> Kathy Burrell and Mateus Schweyher, “Conditional Citizens and Hostile Environments: Polish Migrants in Pre-Brexit Britain,” *Geoforum* 106 (2019): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.08.014>.

<sup>47</sup> Luke de Noronha, “Deportation, Racism and Multi-Status Britain: Immigration Control and the Production of Race in the Present,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 15 (2019): 2413–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1585559>.

<sup>48</sup> Imogen Tyler, “Designed to Fail: A Biopolitics of British Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010): 61–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020903466357>.

<sup>49</sup> David Newheiser, “Foucault, Gary Becker and the Critique of Neoliberalism,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 33, no. 5 (2016): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415619997>.

<sup>50</sup> Jemima Repo, “Gary Becker’s Economics of Population: Reproduction and Neoliberal Biopolitics,” *Economy and Society* 47, no. 2 (2018): 237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2018.1484052>.

<sup>51</sup> Tomei, “Biopolitics and the ‘Complementary Heterogeneity’ of Migratory Flows in Italy,” 1144.

<sup>52</sup> Claudia Donoso, “The Biopolitics of Migration: Ecuadorian Foreign Policy and Venezuelan Migratory Crisis,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2020, 14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2020.1713854>.

<sup>53</sup> Tomei, “Biopolitics and the ‘Complementary Heterogeneity’ of Migratory Flows in Italy,” 1150–51.

the stability of 'free will' in migration decision making, which is influenced by the structural context. The case of Poles as subjects of biopolitics in the post-accession period represents an example of power producing the aspiration to maximize one's productivity by means of migrating to an economically developed core.

## **Conclusion**

The theoretical presuppositions overviewed above shed light on migrants' agency and the limitations of the forced-voluntary migration binary. The philosophy of subjectivity developed by Foucault unveils the need to study the compelled choices people might make based on the reality produced by power relations people are subject to. This approach also questions the traditional interpretation of the notion of forced migration, as it stresses the productive nature of power which shapes the agency and free will, challenging the purely negative meaning associated with power. Thus, 'forced' can be understood as 'coerced' or 'compelled', rather than through the lens of mere expulsion.

Moreover, it undermines the notion of voluntary migration, used often to describe labour mobility within the EU in particular, suggesting that voluntary migration also has a dimension of power to it. Opposed to sovereign expulsion, productive power challenges the ability of the notion of voluntariness and the related question of the range and quality of available alternatives in drawing the line between the free choices with regard to one's life plans on the one hand, and the coercive nature of the circumstances on the other. The aspect of agency and the relations of power appear intersected through the concept of the migrant's subjectivity and therefore are not opposed or contradictory. Thus, the example of post-2004 Polish migration, conditioned by developed power structures and related economic imbalances, as well as the current socio-cultural context of Poland, suggests new evidence for theoretical re-evaluation of the forced-voluntary migration binary.

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