In December 2016, Polish television broadcast an advertisement for Allegro, an online shopping site. The advertisement features Robert, a pensioner, purchasing English for Beginners and practising basic words and sentences on the tram and in the bath. Robert then travels to the United Kingdom for Christmas and greets a small mixed-race girl who comes to the door, with the words ‘Hello, I’m your grandpa.’ The video was watched by millions around the world and was the most popular Youtube film of the year in Poland, where a journalist for a leading newspaper claimed that ‘it would be hard to find a Pole who hadn’t seen it’ (Wątor 2017). The film depicted a poignantly familiar situation in a society where almost everyone has family and friends abroad. It was somehow also puzzling, given widespread stereotypes that older people are passive victims of migration and, moreover, do not learn foreign languages.

This book is, as far as we know, the first with the title ‘The Impact of Migration on Country X’, and is the most ambitious attempt to date to understand how migration influences social change in a specific sending country. It is not a historical study of migration’s cumulative effect on Poland, but, as the reference to EU mobility in the subtitle suggests, an exploration of how Poland today is changing. We consider some overall economic trends, but are particularly interested in how and why Polish society is evolving and how this is, to some extent, because migration affects Poles in their everyday lives. Although we do not try to answer the question of the extent to which social change is caused by migration,
migration rarely seems to be the main factor. However, once one begins to investigate, it seems there are many social trends which are reinforced – or in other cases held back – as a result of migration. For example, we present figures showing that more and more retired Poles are in adult education, and that active English-language knowledge has been increasing overall in the Polish population and even in older age groups. One reason is that – as we know from our own and other researchers’ interviews and participant observation – grandparents are indeed learning foreign languages to communicate with family members abroad.

Our book is unusual, as a work of migration scholarship, for its emphasis not on migrants but on stayers – people, like Robert, who live in sending countries but who also inhabit transnational social spaces, with multiple reference points thanks to their communications with people abroad and visits to foreign countries. Moreover, Polish society has been filling up with a particularly significant type of stayer: return migrants. According to survey data, 12 per cent of Poles resident in Poland have worked abroad in the last ten years, including 27 per cent of 25–34 year olds (Cybulska 2016, 1). Social change also occurs thanks to the addition of these returnees, changing the composition of society in Poland. For example, as discussed in chapter 8, the number of Poles in Poland who know openly gay people or Muslims (neither often encountered in Poland) has considerably increased in recent years.

The book identifies a number of important trends in Poland, taking into account imperfections in the data, complexities with regard to which subgroups of society are changing, and the presence of counter-trends. In each case we explore why these trends might be occurring, and consider how migration fits into this picture. The book also probes into deeper types of change: not just changing practices, but also the norms, beliefs and even values that can change as a result of those changing practices. For example, an important trend in Poland, as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), is towards more meaningful rights for women and minorities than existed under the communist regime. Gender equality is one of these, although it has received notable setbacks in Poland recently. Nonetheless, an accumulation of practices linked to migration do promote the underlying trend towards more equal gender roles. One example is rising numbers of women drivers in very recent years. In 2007, 30 per cent of women had a driving licence. In 2015, the figure was 48 per cent (Panek, Czapiński and Kotowska 2007, 42; 2015, 34). This trend towards ‘motor-parity’ (Bąk 2012) has many causes, but in small towns where many men are working abroad, the increase is especially noticeable (Kurczewski and Fuszara 2012, 92–3).
The book is deliberately broad in scope. A comprehensive account of migration impact on any country would be impossible, but our aim is to cover as many facets as space permits, keeping an eye out particularly for influences which may be contributing to key social trends. These, as discussed below, are trends which we identify as being especially significant in contemporary CEE. In other words, by keeping in mind at all times our aim of explaining certain social phenomena, we create a robust framework of analysis which helps us keep our potentially unwieldy mass of migration influences from spilling out in disorder.

Except in chapter 5, on labour market impacts, we depart from the conventional framework of analysis which, in utilitarian fashion, considers only social impacts that can be divided into ‘bad’ (e.g. brain drain and care drain) or ‘good’ (e.g. investment in education thanks to economic remittances, and knowledge transfer from receiving to sending countries). Scholars tend to conceptualise such influences as promoting or impeding development, and the overarching concept of development does impart a certain solidity to such cost-benefit framings of the topic. However, a ‘migration-development nexus’ is usually perceived to exist only in non-European countries or, exceptionally, in south-east Europe, not countries like Poland. This is not to deny that migration plays a role in economic development locally in some parts of Poland and could play more of a role in the future; we hope that our book will be useful to policymakers in this regard. However, since our aim is to achieve a wide-ranging account, a developmental lens is insufficient because it maintains a narrow normativity which renders many kinds of impact invisible to the researcher. Rather than proceeding from a mental list of development goals and thinking how migration could be a tool to their achievement, our analysis, by contrast, is ‘inside-out’ because we look inside a changing society first, and then outwards into the transnational social space in which that society is located.

The originality of our approach to social change in sending countries is curious, in view of the fact that one part of migration scholarship – migration economics – does already sometimes pursue an ‘inside-out’ approach. Economists of both sending and receiving countries pursue a counterfactual (‘what if?’) approach to calculate, for example, the extent to which economic remittances may be contributing to overall GDP growth, or how the departure or arrival of workers affect overall trends on labour markets – for example, as one factor contributing to falling unemployment in the sending country. Demographers, by the nature of their topic, inevitably consider how migration feeds into other demographic trends such as birth rates (Fihel and Solga 2014, 97–8).
Sociologists, by contrast, seem blinkered by a ‘methodological nationalism’, which leads them to seek the causes of phenomena only within society conceived as existing within the borders of the nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). This is well illustrated in the case of Poland, with its abundance of both mainstream sociological and migration research, but limited overlap between disciplines. Sociologists study people living in Poland, usually not even taking into account whether individual respondents within their samples have any migration experience. Migration scholars naturally study migrants and return migrants.

The dangers of failing to consider migration factors are illustrated by the story of Ireland’s ‘devotional revolution’ in the nineteenth century. The causes of this blossoming of religiosity have long remained a mystery – hard to explain with reference to trends in Ireland itself. However, Roddy (2017) has recently argued that the cause was exposure to religious literature produced in the United States. In other words, social historians had been looking in the wrong place for the explanation, seeking causes in Ireland, and failing to notice that the influences were coming from Irish migrants abroad. Already in the late nineteenth century, Irish people in Ireland were located in a transnational social space, and this is the space in which social trends were being formed.

We argue, therefore, that migration scholars can use knowledge of trends already identified by mainstream social science to look for what is changing as a result of migration. In turn, migration researchers can help non-migration scholars to decipher the social trends which their methodological nationalism is impeding them from fully understanding. We also argue for combining sending and receiving society scholarship. Our book shows how this can be achieved.

Analysts of receiving countries – at least since the transnational turn in the 1990s – are less blinkered by methodological nationalism. Receiving-society migration researchers could themselves benefit from more ‘talking across disciplines’ (Brettell and Hollifield 2008), and migration scholars and mainstream sociologists do not usually team up to write wide-ranging studies of impact on a single receiving country. Nonetheless, within narrower remits they adopt an inside-out approach. They are also preoccupied with stayers – citizens of the countries affected by immigration. Their research provides pointers for how to study impact on sending societies. The first pointer is simply to indicate the significance of migration. If we ask how a country is affected socially by international migration, and then think of the United Kingdom or almost any other western European country, we can readily see that the existence of immigration is an election-swinging issue, generating lively debate about the
cultural impact of migration, as society becomes more diverse. Scholars are particularly interested in how contacts between citizens and newcomers affect developments in race relations, ‘cosmopolitan’ attitudes and social cohesion. This combines with recognition that migrants’ lives often straddle two or more societies, involving everyday communication with, and frequent return to, their countries of origin. Ethnically diverse locations in receiving societies form part of a transnational social space. The receiving country literature asks how neighbourhoods change when more local people have contact with difference, while simultaneously being affected by media and political interpretations of cultural change. Identical questions can be asked about the other ‘end’ of the transnational fields: the societies sending migrants into diverse neighbourhoods abroad, migrants who then return to countries like Poland for visits or to resettle.

Very recently indeed, scholars developing Levitt’s (1998) concept of social remittances have begun to study how attitudes towards diversity travel back and forth between sending and receiving countries, and the impact of this on sending-country stayers. Our book builds on the work of Nedelcu (2012, writing about Romanians in Toronto) and a number of Polish colleagues (notably Garapich 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, and Gawlewicz 2015a, 2015b), as well as on our own research. Chapter 4 puts social remittances under the microscope. It scrutinises the concept, identifies how it can be used more precisely and suggests aspects that deserve greater attention than they usually receive. In particular, we emphasise the need to examine more closely how remittances ‘circulate’, travelling from sending to receiving countries, as well as vice versa.

We do not view social trends as unidirectional, since levels of religiosity, tolerance, democracy, prosperity and so forth in a particular country can rise, fall and rise again over time. All such phenomena are of course complex and can be variously defined. In order to understand the broader trends, it is helpful to consider the conclusions of anthropological and sociological non-migration literature on CEE. Though highlighting differences between countries, scholars also describe many twenty-first-century social phenomena and trends which are equally relevant in Poland. These include the growing strength of social movements and a somewhat uneven trend towards more equality for women and minorities, somewhat more trust and respect for the rule of law, but also the continuation of informal practices, pockets of nostalgia for ‘socialism’ and widespread scepticism and resistance towards top-down narratives.

Despite competing and complex tendencies, we do, however, see two clear-cut trends in CEE since 1989. One is that societies are now much
more like societies in western Europe, although it is better to view this as being about coexistence within a common transnational space rather than as a process of the East ‘catching up’ with the West, or as the distorted modernisation (Bafoil 2009) of the communist period being replaced by ‘real’ modernisation. The other, connected, development is that the post-1989 opening of borders let the genie out of the bottle. Even Poland, which had much more open borders than most of its neighbours, was a country where in 1990 most of the population had never been abroad. Travel and work abroad are eye-opening experiences, bringing recognition that there is more than one way to do things (although this does not always result in acceptance that alternative cultures and viewpoints are equally valid: see the discussion of ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ cosmopolitanism in chapter 8). One of our interviewees, a barman in Wroclaw, expressed this idea in simple terms: ‘Poland is a more open country since communism ended. Some Poles began going abroad and saw how people lived . . . and Poles who came back to Poland passed that on. That’s probably how change takes place here.’ The granddaughter’s appearance in the Allegro advertisement was a revealing moment. The little girl and her mother’s skin colour was perhaps dictated by technical reasons – to imply that they needed to be spoken to in English. Nonetheless, the implied normality of mixed marriages abroad, in this true-to-life advertisement, is highly significant in white, mono-ethnic Poland.

Overall, migration often contributes to social trends by virtue of a levelling effect which enables certain categories of the population to become part of that trend. For instance, the proportion of people in Poland who have been abroad has risen sharply since 1989, from under half to more than three-quarters. Retired people, who often lack the resources to travel on holiday, disproportionately travel to visit family and friends (Boguszewski 2016). In other words, this gives them an opportunity which they would not otherwise enjoy, as well as providing more exposure to difference for a social group which often shows up in Polish survey data as being more closed and intolerant. If more Poles speak English, this is mostly because almost all young people now have the opportunity to learn it at school. However, some grandparents (who all studied Russian at school) also learn it because they visit abroad, so they too become contributors to the trend of increasing competence in English. If more women are learning to drive, this is partly because wealthier families living in cities and suburbs can afford to have two cars. However, if poorer women in small towns also learn to drive – since their husbands are away working abroad – then this gives this relatively underprivileged category the opportunity to participate in ‘motor-parity’. As this example also shows, not all
migration effects are intended, and in fact women’s increased equality in particular often seems to be an unintended result of migration.

We use the word ‘migration’ rather than ‘mobility’ in the book’s title. This is largely because the book is situated within scholarship on the impact of ‘migration’. However, the subtitle mentions ‘mobility’, the word preferred by EU institutions and by many scholars of transnationalism. Our book frequently returns to the matter of how EU free movement of people makes impacts on the origin country different from those of more traditional migration. On the centenary of Thomas and Znaniecki’s classic The Polish Peasant in Europe and America it is appropriate to ask: what is different about migration impact today?

The EU mobility experiment, together with the unique historical phenomenon of the post-communist system transformation and the long shadow that it casts over twenty-first-century CEE, create a doubly interesting laboratory in which to develop new methods for understanding migration impact. Poland, as one of the most significant sending countries, the democratisation trailblazer and the possessor of the richest sociological tradition in the region, is a perfect case study. Of course, only 14 years have elapsed since Poland’s EU accession, and it would be better to study the phenomenon with the benefit of some historical hindsight. It may be that some of the impacts we describe prove to be ephemeral. Nonetheless, we hope that our study will provide clues for future researchers who wish to apply our methodology as a tool to understand migration impact in other EU countries, or explore still further aspects of migration-related change in Poland.

The book is structured as follows. Chapter 2 is an overview chapter which provides background on Polish social change and migration trends necessary to understand the rest of the book; summarises the findings of all the chapters; and ties together threads, discussing the specific migration impact of EU citizens’ twenty-first-century mobility. It is written in layperson’s language and, if read with chapter 1, will give a good idea of our evidence and arguments. The interested reader is invited to read further into the book for more detailed and extensively referenced content.

Chapter 3, by Anne White and Izabela Grabowska, discusses existing research on the impact of migration on sending countries, especially in CEE; refines further the concept of social remittances; and explains how an inside-out approach can reveal the mechanisms of how migration relates to social trends. Chapter 4, by Izabela Grabowska, shows how social remittances work in practice. Grabowska argues that workplaces are particularly important sites for diffusing social remittances; that in one significant respect, acquisition of skills and competences abroad, it is possible
to find data on the extent to which Polish society is changing thanks to migration; and that qualitative research in specific locations in Poland can illuminate the features of those individual return migrants who make a difference.

Chapter 5, by Paweł Kaczmarczyk, investigates labour market impacts of post-2004 migration from Poland. He argues that migration effects – to a large extent unexpectedly – are small or negligible in the short and medium term, on the national level. This is mostly due to structural conditions dating back to the early 1990s and, in particular, to a persistent oversupply of labour, which mitigates the effects of migration from Poland. However, the long-term impacts of contemporary Polish mobility might be substantial for the geographical distribution of the Polish population, as many working-age people from areas with limited job opportunities settle abroad. This raises questions about the transnational family ties which will continue to bind extended families across national borders.

Chapter 6, by Krystyna Slany, considers such family relations, showing how the continuing high value placed on family life by Poles in Poland is not undermined by Poles living abroad and how, in fact, transnational families maintain a strong sense of solidarity; how slow progress towards more sharing of roles within households in Poland is mirrored, and to a limited extent anticipated, among families abroad, especially in countries with strong gender equality programmes, such as Norway; and how female circular migrants add to the share of independently minded and self-confident women in conservative rural areas.

Chapters 7 and 8, by Anne White, consider how different aspects of livelihoods, lifestyles, culture and identity are changing in Poland and how migration contributes to such changes in different localities. She argues that migration-wrought change may happen more often in cities, where it meets less resistance, but that when it happens in small towns and among less well-educated sections of society, where other influences for change are fewer, it has more ‘value-added’. In chapter 9 White puts forward the concept of ‘Polish society abroad’ and argues that social change among Poles abroad is an intrinsic part of social change in Poland. Chapter 10 considers the impact of immigration on Poland. This was originally conceived as a short chapter on immigration as a prospect, but while White was writing this chapter, migration from Ukraine massively accelerated, and Poland suddenly became a ‘country of immigration’. Chapter 11 briefly reviews how we used the inside-out approach to create a more ‘transnational’ method for understanding social change in Poland. It
makes suggestions for applying the approach to other countries. The book concludes with a bibliography shared by all chapters.

Notes

1 Exceptions include Fanning and Munck (2011), an edited volume considering a broad range of immigration impacts on Ireland.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, ‘migration’ refers to international migration. However, we do in places consider international migration side by side with internal migration.