

RECEIVING GUESTS AT HOME BY NATIONALLY MIXED COUPLES: THE CASE OF POLISH FEMALES AND NORWEGIAN MALES

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Hospitality is an important part of intercultural relations and a way of managing social networks. When we take a comparative look at the Polish and Norwegian styles of hospitality, we can see how a society of few strong bonds and a society of many weak bonds are produced in everyday interactions. As Polish and Norwegian hospitality cultures are distinctly different, an interesting question is how nationally mixed couples prepare for a visit and entertain their guests at home.

In the light of our investigation, receiving guests at home is likely to make everyday situations of inter-cultural negotiations even more difficult to deal with than usual. During such visits, our interlocutors both expressed and creatively negotiated not only their interpersonal and intimate relationships, but also their identities. Some couples decided to solve possible problems in this area by avoiding inviting guests as frequently as they used to. Another strategy was to separate different categories of guests for different visits according to language and national criteria, which resulted in creating relatively isolated social networks for the man and the woman in a relationship. The third strategy that we identified was to adjust different hospitality models to different kinds of guests and various occasions. The Norwegian model was applied in the case of closer and more frequent guests, and the Polish one – for older family members and those who came less frequently.

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The empirical material of the study included seven joint in-depth interviews conducted in Poland and Norway, during which the couples were asked about their hospitality habits.

Keywords: hospitality, migration, joint in-depth interviews, relational sociology, sociology of everyday life, intimate relationships, social networks

INTRODUCTION: HOSPITALITY AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL NETWORK

Hospitality means opening the door of one's home to a person who does not live in it, and who is in a way a stranger. In social anthropology it is interpreted as a very important part of intercultural relations as it creates relations between inhabitants of a place and newcomers (Candea, da Col 2012; Pitt-Rivers 2012; Wagner 2012). Receiving guests at home is always an asymmetrical interaction: participants take temporary identities of hosts and guests and have their respective entitlements to the place of their meeting. Their membership in different cultural groups could be perceived in relation to different dimensions and scales, such as gender, age, class, circles of family and friends, lifestyle, region, religion, and nationality, which all constitute human identity and may in various ways overlap or compete with one another.

Relational sociology approach seems to be useful to grasp various issues connected with identity, nationality and social networks involved in the subject of hospitality. According to Harrison White (2008), relational sociology could inform and integrate empirical social research at the culture-networks nexus. The author understands social networks as informal and temporary patterns of order which emerge from general uncertainty and peoples' attempts to control it. Although uncertainty is a universal sociological phenomenon, in our research it is directly connected with migration processes, when social networks and identities change and cultural forms help to deal with potential difficulties. Jan Fuhse (2015) explains that relational sociology approaches 'cultural forms' as communication events and sequences, whereby meanings of social identities, social roles and categories, interpersonal ties (e.g. friendship and family) and relational expectations are of significant importance. All these cultural forms are defined and shaped during ongoing interactions and in relation to one another. Control attempts made by participants leave a trace in social space in the form of 'stories' which are told about their identities and relations to one another. As story-telling is an important kind of social activity, the stories remain subject to competing control projects of their tellers (Fuhse 2015: 18; Mandelbaum 2010).

Tammy Smith (2007) observes that categorical stories change and become more conciliatory when there are more interactions between groups. In intimate cross-national relationships national differences could be important for the relative identity of the parties, but are at the same time controlled by their efforts to create a joint identity of the couple. This probably makes their identity strategies more complex and dynamic than in other circumstances, and could significantly shape the character of their relationship.

Hospitality theories describe risks and potential disturbances to all participants involved in receiving guests at home because daily routines of both hosts and guests are temporarily irrelevant and have to be replaced by others. Some meta-rules of interaction could help to govern this kind of interaction and to transcend different habits and preferences. Still, some of the cultural differences are inbuilt in the hospitality logic and, as such, are sometimes intentionally performed and stressed in the course of interaction between hosts and guests (Bachórz 2016). Analysing identity processes connected with receiving guests at home by nationally mixed couples is relatively rare in both hospitality and migration studies because the differences in question are to be found within the host and guest parties rather than between them. There are situations when cultural differences between the host and guest rooted in the same national background are perceived as smaller than those between the hosts.

During a visit everyone is expected to work not only on the current interaction but also on long-standing relations and identities, both on individual and collective levels. A pair of hosts creates their joint identity as a hospitable couple and at the same time each participant is individually involved in the work on his or her own identity as a member of a social network. Against possible insufficiency of shared and taken-for-granted assumptions, mixed couples create their own procedures for making their everyday life ordinary through reflexive negotiations (Garfinkel 1967). For hospitality studies it is important that cross-national families consist not only of people living in a shared household, but also of some distant others who are present in their communication and sometimes visit them in person (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2014; Wojtyńska 2016). Although living abroad provides a good opportunity for visits from close family and friends, the presence of these 'distant others' possibly makes everyday life of the mixed couple even more difficult than usual. Indeed, when families are engaged in cross-border communication there is always a potential for misunderstanding. In this sense, the families may develop unique strategies for inter-cultural communication and define cultural differences between them in unprecedented ways. They take into account and solve the very details of everyday life. This turns relatively usual situations into events which are important for their cultural and social identities.

When the guests come from the home country of one of the hosts, mixed couples are likely to engage in the process of reflective negotiations together with them. Metaphorically, it could be said that in nationally mixed relationships one of the partners is at the same time a host of the household and a guest of the other national culture. We are convinced that such occasions are valuable cases for investigation of culture networks by social scientists.

Along the lines of constructivist theory, cultural differences are approached here as something which is perceived, oriented to and talked about by the participants, situated and performed in their different interactions, and changing in time. We have a number of questions to consider, definitely more than we are able to answer in this article, but we think that they are worth asking here, also in the context of further research. For the sake of clarity, we organized them in the following groups:

What do members of nationally mixed couples **define as (categorical) cultural differences** between them with regard to having guests at home? Can we find **asymmetries** in their way of managing cultural differences? What are cultural **alternatives** to nationality-related explanations of differences between members of couples when they refer to receiving guests at home? How are Polish and Norwegian **'hospitality cultures' inbuilt in the stories** of members of mixed couples?

How do expressions of cultural differences **vary in different hospitality situations**? How do participants manage to **merge**, effectively **negotiate or choose** between their **different expectations** and offers connected with these situations?

What helps couples to create a **mixed cultural identity**? What hinders the process? Is it recognized as their **common goal**? In their opinion, how do different hospitality practices help them to **build their social networks** and maintain their friendship and family ties? How do such practices work against this?

How do their hosts-guests encounters, which may cause possible tensions or conflicts, **shape their intimate relation**? What problems and solutions can we find in their stories? What are the interrelations between the competing actors and competing stories regarding control over situational uncertainty?

What do mixed couples do or want to do in order to **continue or change** hospitality practices in their homes?

Concerning different households (couples), what **(in)consistencies** are there between them on the level of cultural forms they recognize and talk about while reconstructing situations of receiving guests at home?

Our assumption based on preliminary observations and hospitality literature is that receiving guests at home can temporarily change relations within the

host couple. This could be the case because hosts open not only their homes and fridges, but also, to some extent, their intimate interrelationships. Receiving guests may mean loosening strong intimate ties between the couple in order to create a space for establishing or maintaining hospitable relationships with their guests. Consequently, this might be one of the greatest risks connected with letting outsiders in, which host couples need to protect themselves against.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The interviews with mixed couples are part of a longitudinal psychosociological project conducted in 2014–2016 in Poland and Norway². Considering that being hospitable is widely recognized as an important part of Polish national identity, the theme of hospitality brings together many important identity issues in this cultural context (Pisarek 2016). Since the whole project was focused on the trajectory of relationship and migration, the informants were asked about their perception of possible differences between Polish and Norwegian national culture in everyday life. We used both joint and individual in-depth interviews with a list of questions; the entire set of materials consists of interviews with forty-six Norwegian, Polish and mixed Norwegian-Polish couples. In most cases, a pair of interlocutors was interviewed in their home by two researchers (a female and a male). It is worth noting that research visits could be perceived in a way similar to receiving guests (Horolets 2016). Researchers are welcome by the hosts, get something to drink and are treated politely. On the other hand, they are also ‘bad’ or at least ‘difficult’ or ‘special’ guests, because they ask questions about hospitality and at the same time they can observe and assess it at the very place of their visit.

For the purposes of this article, we focused on seven mixed couples living in Poland (Gdańsk) and in Norway (Stavanger). There were the only nationally mixed couples in our sample. In order to conduct a longitudinal study, they were all visited five times in total. The material analysed in this paper comes mainly from the joint interviews conducted in 2016, when the couples were asked directly about hospitality. However, other stages of the study also provided a certain input to our knowledge about their relations and biographies. Our questions concerned such issues as the frequency, occasions and forms of receiving guests,

² All data comes from PAR Migration Navigator. The project WLB_GE: Socio-cultural and Psychological Predictors of Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality Cross-Cultural Comparison of Polish and Norwegian Families is funded by Norway Grants in the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme operated by the National Centre for Research and Development.

hospitality 'procedures', roles designed for hosts and guests, comparison between Polish and Norwegian forms of hospitality and inter-cultural hospitality. The collected material consists of 115 pages of interview transcripts relating to the hospitality topic. Members of the couples who took part in our study were or had been migrant residents for a different period of time. Some of them are also couples who moved from one country to another after some time. In our opinion, such diversity enables a thorough analysis of the issues under consideration (Kaufmann 1996). The recruitment process relied on the use of posters about our project in Stavanger and Gdańsk, as well as on different kinds of social networks, including those in the Polish Roman Catholic community and the Polish Roman Catholic Saturday School in Stavanger, with the snowball effect method applied subsequently.

The interviews were conducted by one of the authors (Magdalena Żadkowska) and interviewers from a Polish research agency. They made transcripts, notes and filled the interview chart after each interview. Then the interviews were analysed using MaxQda qualitative software. One of the authors (Dorota Rancew-Sikora) has an analytical background in discourse analysis and conversation analysis.

RESULTS: PLAYING THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCE WITHIN MIXED COUPLES AND THEIR GUESTS

During interviews with the couples we obtained different types of material to which we refer in our analysis. Firstly, some general interpretations of the national differences related to receiving guests, its relative importance in Poland and Norway, and its changes in time. These interpretations were made in more or less developed utterances of the participants when they talked about their own habits and the habits of their partners, their guests and hosts (when talking about going out). Interpretations were also produced jointly by both members of the couples. Sometimes their utterances took the form of short stories focused on particular events in which they had taken part and through which they had learnt about certain traditions. In addition, the informants regularly engaged in ad hoc conversations about what they think about and how they evaluate different practices and expectations connected with hospitality. Sometimes, as we will see in the following paragraphs, the members of a couple agreed in their stories and opinions. On other occasions, they more or less disagreed and negotiated with each other.

We begin the presentation of our results with the stories about Polish hospitality traditions and then proceed to focus on Norwegian habits. However, it needs to be observed that they were regularly referred to in comparison to each other, reflexively combined and mixed both on discursive and practical levels.

TALKING ABOUT POLISH HOSPITALITY

In our first example, a Polish female living in Norway with her Norwegian partner talks about the norms involved in hospitality culture.

Marcelina: [...] guests have right to eat as much as they want, and drink as much as they want and stay as long as they want, so we really shouldn't suggest that it's time to leave even if it's time to leave. Yeah, our rights and duties – our duty is to make our guests happy [laughter], give as much food and drink as they wish, talk to them, make them comfortable and our rights. It's our home so we can decide about limits – if somebody is going beyond the limit we can just stop it. [Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut]³

Marcelina specifies different rights of guests and duties of hosts, which include such elements as 'making the guests happy' by giving them food and drink, and providing comfortable seats and beds. In her opinion, the amount of food, drink, time and talk should be determined by the guests. The only right of a host is to stop the guest who goes beyond the limits. To find out what these limits could be, we should listen to Knut (below), who refers to the inappropriate behaviour of their friends' teenage son, taking care of the guests' small children and going to bed very late at night because of the guests' needs. In his words, the guests' need for sleep should prevail over those of the hosts', but at the same time he is ready to accept that different members of the guest and host groups take different decisions in this matter.

Knut: Our friends, they have a teenager the same age as our teenager and I feel it's appropriate that if teenager is not behaving, I'm the man of the house and I tell him in a friendly manner and I think that's important because all teenagers need a proper and clear adult people around them and also the small kids. We have some friends with small kids. It's important that we contribute and be like bonus adults around that kid, like/

Marcelina: Helping, taking care.

Knut: Helping, taking care. [...]

[Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina]

In spite of the fact that their utterances were clearly meant to be consistent with each other, in this fragment of a conversation between Marcelina and Knut we can observe a slight difference in their attitude to the needs of their guests.

³ Transcription symbols are provided in Annex.

This difference is essential for understanding the distinction between Polish and Norwegian ways of receiving guests, which will be discussed below. In short, the Polish pattern is more focused on numerous activities of the hosts, such as preparing the place for the guests, giving them enough food and drink, 'helping, taking care'. The Norwegian pattern concentrates more on letting the guests feel free to do what they wish and withholding the unnecessary activity of the hosts in order to make them happy.

The next fragment shows how the pattern of hospitality is realised in Magda and Rune's house, and how their descriptions relate to each other in a kind of negotiation.

**How do you prepare your house, your family, and yourself before a visit?
Can you describe a process of preparing everything?**

Magda: If it's like for dinner then I am making some food usually, we take care that everyone has a seat because it depends on how many people come. Last time was like seven – eight people, something like that. And the apartment is not that big but we have to think how to make people comfortable seated, on the floor as well. We clean a bit/

Rune: Yeah, we clean. I clean.

Magda: I cook [laughter].

Ok. That's ok. Do you prepare yourself in some way?

Magda: Yes, I- I always- I mean I don't dress some ball dress or something [laughter] but yeah I like to look nice, not in sweatpants.

And you Rune?

Rune: I wear a normal clothes, I take a shower. Nothing more than normal.

Magda: Once a week [laughter].

Ok. And what do you prepare to eat and to drink? I know that it depends on the occasion or the character but what kind of things are these things you prepare?

Magda: I- so- if it's like dinner I try to make something tasty and a lot, nothing fancy, I usually do something Mexican or Indian or something like that, so it is not fancy but tasty and a lot. But it is just friends going by, I always take care of some drinks and snacks, like that there is enough of wine or beer or small snacks like salami, tomatoes, olives or cheese. It is small but no one is- I don't like when people are hungry at my place. And you Rune – what do you do? You clean [laughter].

Rune: Yeah.

That's also important. And how long do preparations take?

Magda: It depends, not much long, I'm pretty quickly. I just have to think before and I always have something in a fridge or somewhere – in case of someone comes without further, before saying anything. Then I have like olives, bread and potatoes because I'm from Poland [laughter].

[Rune, Norwegian, 32 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway and Poland, 3,5 years in the relationship with Magda. Magda, Polish, 27 years old, higher education degree in-complete, living for 4,5 years in Norway, 4 years in the relationship with Rune. They plan to move to Norway.]

We can note here that both interlocutors respond to the questions asked by the researchers in a significantly different way. While Magda gives quite a detailed description of the preparations for the visit of their guests, Rune's answers are very brief. Their emotional and practical engagement in the whole event seems to be disparate. For Magda, making preparations is an important, multi-layered task which she treats personally. She understands 'being from Poland' as being 'just herself', a person who does not like it 'when people are hungry' at her place. Although she serves her guests Mexican or Indian food, she seems to fully accept the Polish model of hospitality which is based on hard work and which appears to form an important part of her identity. She likes this model and feels obliged to fulfil it in her life. For Rune, this pattern is relatively less important and seems to be imposed on him by Magda. His answer 'no more than normal' related to his clothes worn during the guests' visit sounds like a motto which sums up his attitude toward the whole event and occurs regularly in the interviews with other Norwegian interlocutors as well. Cleaning the house is his contribution to preparations for receiving guests but he does not look deeply involved and he apparently does not like it very much. He just understands the need to clean the house sometimes and thus accepts this duty before receiving guests as well.

What do you like about these preparations and what is difficult for you to do? What's like hard, you don't want to do this?

Magda: Nothing is hard. I mean I just choose not to do hard stuff. Plus I really like when people are, have the basic needs completed like food, bathroom, drinks – they are like very important for everyone.

That's true. So it's- there is nothing hard or difficult in these preparations?

Magda: No, I really enjoy it.

Rune: I mean I don't enjoy cleaning but it's ok, I'm the-. It's an excuse to clean when you have the guests over, so-

Magda: Yeah.

Rune: It's done more often as well, so- But I don't enjoy it.

[Rune, Norwegian, 32 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway and Poland, 3,5 years in the relationship with Magda. Magda, Polish, 27 years old, higher education degree in-complete, living for 4,5 years in Norway, 4 years in the relationship with Rune. They plan to move to Norway.]

In the following excerpt we can see how Bjorn, who is in an intimate relationship with a Polish woman, talks about Polish hospitality and how he reveals his critical stance toward this ‘Polish tradition’ by comparing it to its Norwegian counterpart.

Bjorn: I think that the Polish people are two times more of themselves into the meetings. Then in Norway it is like- it is more like to- just- come over and- it is (...) or her friend eat something simple. In Poland it is more like- you have to- you have to actually put yourself, you have to do- do hours and hours of work before you have guests. In Norway it is like just take some shower and put some plates on the table and- nacho chips. It is so easy. But in Poland you are more like- twelve dishes and- then you are getting to be satisfied. So. It is more tradition. We had like this one hundred years ago, it was the same in Norway. A hundred years ago. Before the wars.

[Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Marta.]

Both the content and the way of speaking are important for the analysis here. While Bjorn refers to the Norwegian style of receiving guests as ‘simple’ and ‘easy’, Polish hospitality is strange for him and makes him ‘sick’. In his opinion, it is based on too many constraints: there is too much food for guests, too much work for hosts and too much time devoted to preparations. He talks about ‘Polish people’ and we do not know if he means also Marta or maybe a particular person that he has met before. He seems to be somehow biased, contrasting Polish ‘twelve dishes’ with the Norwegian way: ‘some plates on the table and nacho chips’. In fact, twelve dishes is a symbol associated only with Christmas Eve supper in Polish Roman Catholic tradition and is not the number typically served at all occasions when guests are received. Preparing dinner for guests, especially during Christmas, is not unlikely in Norway either. There are also other signs of his exaggerating the burden of Polish traditions, for example when he repeats ‘hours and hours’ of work, and minimizes Norwegian efforts as ‘just’, ‘simple’, and ‘easy’. Bjorn apparently prioritizes the Norwegian pattern while at the same time associating the Polish one with Norway’s distant past (‘We had things like this a hundred years ago, it was the same in Norway. A hundred years ago, before the wars.’) Likewise, other interlocutors associate such traditions with the northern (poorer) or southern (more formal) parts of Norway.

So can we speak about different cultures of hospitality?

Marcelina: Yeah, it’s huge difference.

Knut: Yeah, it’s big difference. I would say it is a big difference.

Marcelina: But in Norway it is also different here and I experienced a huge difference in northern Norway. North of Norway is much closer to Poland. So their hospitality is much closer to Polish one. When we came there, I think it was 3 or 4 am, because it is a very long way. Knut's family, they are not rich people. Here are mostly rich people living but they are really actually poor people. But everything that they had in the fridge, they just took on the table, all the alcohols they have – it was middle of the night. Then they called the rest of family, everybody came, it was fantastic, it was really, really nice. Food was on the table all the time, they were all the time asking if we want something more.

Knut: Yeah, it was a totally different mindset. And it was my auntie and my uncle and they: "Do you have enough?"

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

The examples of Norwegian men who find it difficult to accept Polish hospitality traditions are not infrequent in our material. Quite on the contrary, similar remarks appear regularly in other interviews as well. In the next fragment, Bjorn substantiates his concept of Polish hospitality by providing a story about his participation in 'Marta's Polish parties'.

Bjorn: [...] But the of course I've been at Marta's Polish parties. For that some- meeting a lot of Polish people having like a Polish party with one hundred and fifty dishes on the table. Many time- when I go to a party I don't like to eat much. Like have something you know, like sandwich or, a little bit this or a little bit that, but in Poland it is like: 'eat, eat, EAT! You have to eat, you have to eat, you have to EAT! It is like: I DON'T WANT TO EAT! I would like to drink! No, no take some more you have to taste this, taste this!' And then suddenly there is a plate coming in front of you: you have to eat. And you feel so obligated to eat this food that you trying and trying you feel sicker and sicker and sicker and you try more vodka and more vodka and more vodka to fresh it out, but it doesn't help.

[Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Marta.]

According to hospitality rules listed by Marcelina at the beginning of this section, the guest should have the right to eat and drink as much as he or she wishes. However, Bjorn recalls that as a guest he experienced occasions when there was no space left for his own choices or decisions, and describes his strongly negative feelings about being forced to eat and drink too much. It

seems that Polish hosts tried to avoid the risk that their guest might not ask for food and drink during the visit and leave their home hungry, which by Polish standards is considered a shame for them.

Pressing a person to do or choose what he or she does not necessarily want may be understood in terms of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's distinction between two different forms of politeness (Brown, Levinson 1987). In their approach, 'positive politeness' means showing interest, respect and care to other people, while 'negative politeness' involves leaving them a space for their own decisions and activities. Jörg Zinken and Eva Ogiermann (2013) compare polite behaviour at the table in Polish and British families. As it turns out, Poles show much more positive and much less negative politeness than the British, with members of Polish families displaying signs of joint responsibility for one another, which also gives them the right to expect subordination from others, especially those with whom they have strong bonds. It can be concluded that too much care is considered impolite by the British, while not enough care is defined as impolite by Polish participants. It would seem that a similar variation is also the case in the Polish-Norwegian context. Knut's story below exemplifies what this could mean in practical terms when the guests are coming:

Knut: I often sleep, I have heavy sleeping hard but if I- if we are having guests coming at one, sometimes we don't have a proper breakfast as we often do- we have a proper breakfast. Sometimes we get up like at eight or nine and then the whole day is almost fucked up for me because we clean and make food and I don't get a proper breakfast to start the work with. And then I'm not a good team player. So what I'd like to do is to go to the garage and clean the car (...) take an apple or a carrot or some just get the blood run, I have to cheat a little bit. Because I know that my mood is also destroying the whole package you know and it's- So obviously you learn to tackle it and I learn to tackle myself when I'm like that but- yeah. You also get really- Sometimes when we are at this process, it's- The messages are coming very quickly without these friendly words in the front and that's sometimes a little bit hard to tackle and it needs to be done and if it is not done- She gets more angry, I don't want that and then I feel the need of changing rooms sometimes. Like when it is done, I got twenty four with the phone [laughter] and- the mood, the blood sugar, when things are rushed. [Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Thanks to this story we can find out how the problem of 'Polish hospitality tradition' shifts from the sphere of interaction between the hosts and their guests to the sphere of inner relations within a pair of hosts, where a lot of work is to

be done. In this domain ‘Polish tradition’ has a direct practical meaning because it involves extra duties for both the female and male hosts. Knut describes his unwillingness or inability to perform ‘team work’ connected with receiving guests in the household. He also mentions his attempts to escape and hide in the garage during the hardest stage of preparations and to control his negative body reactions and anger stemming from this situation. It should be noted that these contrasts are related not only to national but also gender issues, because similar masculine strategies of dealing with unwanted home duties were observed by Magdalena Żadkowska (2016) in entirely Polish social context. In the case of mixed Polish-Norwegian couples, both gender and national tendencies seem to overlap and mutually amplify each other, which in result could lead to some tensions or conflicts within the relationship.

In the following part, we can observe a short *ad hoc* conversation during which Knut and Marcelina creatively deal together with the difference they have recognized in their hospitality habits.

Marcelina: Who helps me? Knut helps me, my husband helps me and son helps, son- we are doing team job always when we are having guests.

Knut: I didn’t say that, but not only Marcelina of course. She is the managing director of the kitchen orchestra. It’s team work. We are sitting there and wow! It look so nice!

Marcelina: And trying everything.

Knut: Yeah, that’s beating, you know. I could say “Wow! What a wife! Wow! What a family!”. It doesn’t come by itself. You will never manage by yourself.

Marcelina: Of course.

Knut: You will never manage by yourself, right?

Marcelina: Yeah.

Knut: You would?

Marcelina: I wouldn’t

Knut: Yeah you would, yeah. [laughter] Dobrze. [Good].

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Knut and Marcelina engage in a kind of a linguistic game considering his participation in the ‘team job’ which he has just said that he is not good at. Knut makes some jokes, showing both irony about and appreciation of Marcelina’s role of ‘a managing director of the kitchen orchestra’. The differences between national cultures are understood here as differences between partners. We can see that

Polish standards of receiving guests constitute an important part of Marcelina's identity and that she attempts to introduce them in her household. These standards seem to be accepted by her Norwegian partner, although he does so with a certain emotional distance and some difficulty. It is worth noting the fact that the person with stricter standards takes the leading role in the household tends to be a rule not only in our interviews but also in other national/cultural contexts (Kaufmann 2001; Żadkowska 2016). It is interesting to see below how Knut 'tricks himself' in order to transform a potentially tense situation when he is required to do an undesirable job not only into his pride for Marcelina, but also into his own happy feelings, a chance for 'meditation' and a kind of 'social power':

Knut: Yeah, yeah, I like being a guest, (...) a host but I like having this fantastic wife that sometimes seems that she does like this [pointing gesture] and then... fifty dishes, clean house and [laughter] on first impression and it's just makes me feel wow, what a woman I have. As a guy-

Marcelina: But it's you who is cleaning, I just tell you what to do [laughter]

Knut: And then I am very happy standing, almost meditating and cleaning like standing two hours and getting my back hurt, it's perfectly fine because it feels so wo:w! it's a social power. I don't know but I like that and I don't like to be stressed to do something like "Knut, cut the carrots" [laughter] or time pressured. I'm not so efficient, I'm not so structured and technically good on making good. So if there is demand that I do something like "Knut, make salad". I can make a salad but then I think "How I'm gonna make it, I'd like to do it very good" and after I google it [laughter] so, yeah.

Marcelina: I think I like the most planning – planning what we will do, what will be for dinner, and (...).

Knut: Yeah, you write this list by hand.

Marcelina: And I really hate cleaning so that's why I'm just ordering it for my husband and he is doing it the most [laughter].

Knut: Yeah, I'm a little bit embarrassed to say but I like it, it's nice. I used to work as a cleaner in a hospital earlier actually. It's so mindfulness to it, I mean if you are just ... I am very glad, I'm very happy, I like this phrase that says that "It's not how you are having it, it's how are you taking it". I mean feeling up things right? So you can have a really bad time. It's not nice to have a mountain of dishes but if you put on some jazz or like look outside the window and like make it nice, it will be nice, you can trick yourself. So I am like cleaning. Not every type of cleaning. I don't like tidy, I don't like tidying but cleaning – I like that.

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

The emotional work (for the meaning of this term see Arlie Hochschild 1979) which is done by Knut, and which we could observe in the above examples, is not the only strategy of dealing with difficulties related to cultural and gender differences within an intimate couple. In another interview, the same standards which build the identity of the Polish host became the subject of change, as desired by both Sylwia and Nils, who agree that she is ‘too stressed about planning’.

What is difficult for you to do, before the visit. Cleaning yes? You said before?

Sylwia: Yea cleaning and a:: and maybe:- yea. It’s- The Nils maybe it’s not like me but I’m maybe a little bit too- too stressed, about also planning yea. What I would serve for dinner and stuff like that and Nils always, says that, we shouldn’t plan. We would- We will just take it, you now. Spontanic yea? Maybe we’ll go to restaurant or maybe we’ll have dinner and I would like to have it everything planned. What it would be for dinners, everyday and you know.

Nils: You know. I-

Sylwia: If we go somewhere or how to- how to plan that we will go to see something and then to come back an- and manage to people dinner and stuff like that. So, that’s not nice, that I’m stressed too much and try to plan, to-

Nils: Yeah but you know. When you have a plan, usually the plan, falls apart.

Sylwia: Yea.

Nils: So, better not have a plan.

Sylwia: Yea. [slight laughter]

Nils: That’s from (verge). Better not have a plan.

Sylwia: No:: So yeah.

[Sylwia – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for in Norway, 10 years in the relationship with Nils. Nils – Norwegian, 42 years old, higher education degree, living in Poland with 4 weeks long shifts away as a sailor, 10 years in the relationship with Sylwia.]

In this excerpt, Sylwia refers to Norwegian standards of having guests as ‘spontaneous’ and her own Polish standards as more problematic and causing stress. She says that she cannot change herself but at the same time displays her readiness to agree with her husband’s opinion. Nils determines the desirable direction of her change, despite the fact that they live in Poland. This provides a good example for explaining the process of dislocation of external differences and interpersonal tensions into the inner world of personal identity.

The last excerpt in this section demonstrates an example of how the clash between different expectations connected with different national cultures changed the position of a man in the social network and became an appreciated part of his

new identity as ‘half-Polish’. In his story Knut, who at first had hidden himself in the garage during a family dinner in his house, unexpectedly realized that not only had his absence been noticed, but also that his presence was essential for the guests. This experience turned out to be pivotal in shaping a part of his identity as a ‘half-Polish man of the house’, which he then began to appreciate.

Marcelina: I’m more focused on guests when they are here, if it’s about food or even alcohol – I am begging Knut do get wine if some guests have empty glass of wine etc. He is not looking into it, he is more into social stuff. And I’m bringing plates or asking him to do it, but he doesn’t realize that/

Knut: I think it is also connected with emphasis, this strong emphasis the Polish culture has comparing to the Norwegian culture. Because in the Norwegian culture it’s not so important. When people have an empty glass ‘so take yourself’. And I will never forget (...) everyone was- It was family dinner – Christmas or Easter. I was a little bit grumpy. Probably one of those mornings I didn’t get the proper breakfast so it was something. So I was honestly in the garage getting something but I was using the couple of minutes extra moving around some (...) just to- because I have to make it tidy instead of coming to our friends. I didn’t realize how important it was that the man of the house was there because they didn’t- I think they barely sat down and no one opened the bottle of alcohol, the bottle of wine because I was not in the house. And that maybe opened my eyes. OK. (...) wow! I’m the man of the house. You know. In Norwegian context they will say ‘oh, Knut is- He had a bad day at work’ [laughter]. And a big part of me loves that part. Being half Polish and also before you sit down on Wigilia, Christmas Eve, you have this small cracker and it’s sincere wishes to- to- and to- Oh, I love that, it’s so nice and yeah.

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

TALKING ABOUT NORWEGIAN HOSPITALITY

In our material, Norwegian hospitality culture is regularly associated with a relatively limited quantity of food and drink offered to guests during their visit at one’s home.

Bjorn: [...] If you invite some people, you don’t have to make seven dishes course every time. Nachos and chips it is completely fine.

Marta: This is the difference in the culture.

[Bjorn, Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Marta. Marta, Polish, 29 years old, higher education degree, living for 4,5 years in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Bjorn.]

Knut: In Norwegian- there is said that the social is not so emphasized, it's not so prepared, it's not so ritual, so then we could risk not getting dinner as we did a couple of times. And for a Norwegian style hosting us- they wouldn't see anything wrong with it. They will expect us to drive by McDonald's on a way home and they will then have dinner or you know.

Marcelina: or having the alcohol with us for example.

Knut: Yeah, yeah, having alcohol with us, our own alcohol, that's pretty important Norwegian thing. You wouldn't- You should bring your own alcohol when you are coming. So.

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Additionally, in a typical Norwegian home offers from the hosts tend to be made with some delay rather than immediately after the arrival of the guests.

Bjorn: it is more like- it is almost occasion you know, like- I call to my sister I say maybe you can come tomorrow? She says: yes, sure I am in home after five. So you will come? It just like we are talking, and talking and half an hour: ah, wait you would like some coffee? Yes sure.

[Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Marta.]

Marta: [...] I don't know when his family came to visit us so it was like: 'Oh, I will prepare the dinner or something like that'. 'No, no – take it easy, just coffee or something, cookies or something like that'. And here it is, coffee and cookies. Yes.

Bjorn: Not always cookies, just coffee.

Marta: Just coffee, yes and actually we visit your family few times that we got tea after one hour or coffee. It was like pity.

[Bjorn, Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Marta. Marta, Polish, 29 years old, higher education degree, living for 4,5 years in Norway, 2,5 year in the relationship with Bjorn.]

Sometimes our interlocutors emphasize that when guests need something during a visit in a Norwegian home, they themselves should undertake the activity to get what they want from the hosts or from their refrigerators.

Sylwia: Because I know that in Norway it's another rule and- they will give me a coffee and if I ask, then I will get it with milk. Because I drink only with milk. But (if not) they don't. So. Yea. So.

[Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for in Norway, 10 years in the relationship with Nils.]

Sylwia: [...] in Norwegian [culture] it's like, no::: When- when some colleagues are visiting, us, he is, yea. He is and doesn't ask it, if they want something to drink or, coffee or tea I have to be like:- y: so ask- ask, maybe they want to drink or something. So, that's a big difference. They don't care. Because they don't care- because I don't know if all Norwegian but at least Nils thinks that if they want to drink, they will ask. Yea. Yea.

[Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for in Norway, 10 years in the relationship with Nils.]

Bjorn: [...] my sister asked if we want something to drink, but you didn't want to and I asked to my brother in law: 'Do you have some beer?' He said: "Yeah is in the fridge'. Ok, so I just go get it, you know? He didn't ask me, I asked him. It is like when you are so close family or friends or something. If you want something – just ask.

[Norwegian, 24 years old, average education degree, living in Norway, 2,5 years in the relationship with Marta.]

Even when a guest wishes to have the second helping of food, he or she is expected to ask for it. It is not common for Norwegian hosts to serve their guests more food even if they have it ready. This is in sharp contrast to the Polish habit of repeatedly asking if anybody wants more food or drink and pressing the guests to eat as much as they possibly can.

Marcelina: [...] That was what was actually funny for me is that in Norwegian culture it's not natural to get second portion of food if you are getting dinner and for example you didn't get enough. In Poland you are just taking more from the table and here it's actually really not nice to do this so before you take it. You should ask if you can take one more portion of it or- That's like, I don't know, children [laughter].

Knut: It is social saying about food in Norway. It's if everyone has been eating and someone had a second portion and you should ask. That's true. I didn't think about it but yes, you should ask to have a second portion.

Marcelina: That's why Knut was doing it and when we had Polish guests everybody was looking at him [laughter]

Knut: [laughter]

Marcelina: "Can I have more tomatoes" [laughter]

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

A fridge seems to be an important symbolic appliance which regulates and informs what kind of hospitality is applied: Norwegian or Polish. In Norway, our interlocutors say, the food is put into the refrigerator after being served to the guests even when they are still at the table. It is expected that at least more familiar guests should take what they want from the fridge themselves, put in the alcohol they have brought and take the rest back after the end of their visit.

Knut: Yeah, yeah because in Norwegian- That's really interesting actually (...) when everybody had their food, and the dessert is the next, the food is going to fridge: 'Take care of the food, take care of the food'. That's what is said: 'take care of the food'!

Marcelina: But we had the Norwegian guests and we kept food on the table for few hours and it was often like: 'But maybe you should take this food to the fridge because it's laying so long here, you can't use it tomorrow' [laughter]

Knut: [laughter]

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Another important aspect of Norwegian hospitality is shown in a story told by Magda, who surprisingly had been given the keys to the house of her Norwegian host and had no opportunity to spend any time with him at all.

Magda: Well, it's like, I think it depend like in what region and how people know each other but I remember the situation when I was travelling in Norway like many many years ago and I was couchsurfing in Stavanger and I never met a guy and he gave me and my friend keys to his apartment and- because he was working and he really didn't have time to connect with us he just gave us keys. And although he didn't share alcohol or food with us, he was still like very open about his house: 'do whatever you want, you can listen to music, you can cook, whatever.' So in that matter Norwegians are much more open.

Rune: Yeah, that's what I meant. This- more, they make feel them like they can do whatever they want us to do in their home and you don't have to do as much as a host

[Rune, Norwegian, 32 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway and Poland, 3,5 years in the relationship with Magda. Magda, Polish, 27 years old, higher education degree in-complete, living for 4,5 years in Norway, 4 years in the relationship with Rune. They plan to move to Norway.]

Leaving the house to the guests is an extreme example of realising the pattern of negative politeness toward them. This is generally quite unlikely in Poland, where refusing to take care of the guests and not devoting enough time and attention to their presence tends to mean being impolite. In the context of Norwegian culture, the absence of the host and complete freedom given to the guests was a great surprise to Magda, but at the same time she appreciated the fact.

It is worth noting that when the Norwegian male informants were asked about what their guests liked at their home, they gave different answers than their female partners. These differences are presented in the two following fragments of the interviews:

What your guests like the most in your house?

Katarzyna: I have no idea.

Morten: In general?

Yes, unless you prefer to tell about something particular.

Morten: The view from here, I guess. Everybody always come next to the window. To look at/

At the city?

Morten: Yeah. At the forest, at the city. Even at the sea. A:::

Katarzyna: I have no idea. Really. Once my friend told that there is a good coffee in our home. I don't know.

[Morten, Norwegian, 34 years old, average education degree, living for 8 years in Poland, 4 years in the relationship with Katarzyna. Katarzyna, Polish, 30 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 4 years in the relationship with Morten. The excerpt translated from Polish.]

What your guests like the most at your home, what do you think?

Knut: I think they like the white house, the white walls, no, no- They are white. It makes everything feel so beautiful and clean and the whole house is from 1954 so I believe that they [like] life of the house.

Marcelina: What I heard from our friends – they don't feel stressed, they feel comfortable and do what they want, go to every room they want, grab some food, make them coffee – we are showing to our guest how to use the coffee machine, I think that's what they like the most.

Knut: I think they also like the view. You can see the fjord and- I think they like that.

Marcelina: Yeah, your father said that coming here is like coming to the other world.

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Answering the question concerning what their guests like at their home, Norwegian partners not only point at different things (such as the view, the history of the house contrasted to coffee and food mentioned by Polish women), but also draw on a different source of knowledge. It seems that only their Polish female partners really listen to and remember what the guests say about the hosts and their house, and that these opinions are directly connected with what the hosts did for them. This difference between the male and female perspectives could give us some insight into why the female hosts we interviewed care so much about all the preparations: it is because they care about the guests' assessments. In the conversation provided above, the interesting element is that reproducing compliments from their guests, Marcelina relates to the Norwegian rules of receiving them at home which she apparently has already learnt.

RECEIVING GUESTS WITHOUT CULTURAL BORDERS

Most of the examples provided in the previous sections demonstrate that participants perceive relatively sharp differences between Polish female and Norwegian male perspectives of hospitality models. Their rules were both expressed as general interpretations and confirmed by the stories about particular events. On the other hand, our interviews include a number of examples of couples who actively engage in the process of mitigating these differences and tend to refer to a variety of situations of receiving guests, their different level of willingness or ability to make some special preparations at a particular moment, and different kinds of guests, with divergent requirements connected with their age, gender, family status, national background, and relational closeness to the hosts. Depending on particular circumstances, their hospitality practices vary and the differences between the two national models gradually fade.

Typically, our informants say that more preparations are required in the case of visits from family members, particularly those who arrive from abroad and those of the older generation (e.g. parents and aunts); less effort is made for friends from their own age group who are relatively closer to them. When the guests come more frequently or stay longer, they are more involved in household duties. Thus, it could be the case that variability of occasions has a quantitative and dimensional rather than qualitative nature, as opposed to the differences which are bound to the cultural/national categories. In the following fragment we can see how Marcelina and Knut agree that the expectations of his Norwegian-British aunt are even more particular than those of their Polish guests, so they both prepare for her visit more carefully. Despite their national

differences, this experience places them in a position of joint identity vis-à-vis the demands of the visit from Knut's aunt. At the same time, however, they are interpreted in national terms.

Marcelina: But I think it's different for example if there are coming our closest friends, even if they are coming for dinner, we don't have to do anything – sometimes we are tired and just buying a pack of nachos and putting them in the oven and everyone is happy and taking the box of beer and we have nice time. And then together preparing like sleeping places etc. But for example like we will have in 2–3 weeks auntie of Knut is coming – then we have to prepare a proper dinner and everything should be- that would be a hard work.

Knut: She is a Norwegian-British so she has some standards and that's nice. And it's really nice when she is here, we are really happy.

[Marcelina – Polish, 36 years old, higher education degree, living for 3,5 years in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Knut. Knut – Norwegian, 34 years old, higher education degree, living in Norway, 3,5 years in the relationship with Marcelina.]

Our material includes one interview with a couple who generally talk less about differences between them connected with their nationalities or gender, and more about sharing an entirely consistent perspective and doing many things together. Monika and Mikael live in Norway and have been married for 8 years. In almost every answer they show their joint identity as a hospitable couple, which apparently is deeply rooted in their knowledge and skills. Monika has studied Scandinavian linguistics and culture, and Mikael has learnt to speak Polish fluently; the whole interview is conducted in this language. With reference to their model of receiving guests, they declare that they clean the house together, cook together, and treat their guests together. The preparation time in their household is relatively short and takes about one or two hours. The differences between their hospitality models vary depending on the occasion and their relationship with the guests, but this variation is, in their interpretation, quite independent from any cultural or national issues. The only explicitly expressed 'Polish' habit connected with receiving guests in their house is that they do not expect them to bring alcohol. Monika was our only informant saying that she finds such visits relaxing rather than tiring: the guests help her play with her child and take care of her dog, so she can just sit and enjoy her social life.

CONCLUSIONS: STRATEGIES OF DEALING WITH RECEIVING GUESTS AT HOME BY NATIONALLY MIXED COUPLES

As a result of our research, we have established that despite their diversity and particularity, events related to receiving guests at home are characterized by more systematic patterns connected with gender and nationality differences. During such visits, our interlocutors both expressed and creatively negotiated their identities. They maintained interpersonal ties with their intimate partners and the guests, making some normative references which subsequently shaped their mutual expectations. While members of both nationalities, Polish and Norwegian, recognized their cultures as open to guests, they oriented themselves towards positive or negative politeness, respectively (Brown, Levinson 1987).

It would seem that the cultural differences were directly connected with emotions. We found it evident that how a person felt about his or her model of receiving guests at home involved an implicit evaluation of more familiar patterns as better. What was perceived as 'strange' and 'surprising' was at the same time more difficult to practise and more often criticized as 'too much' or 'too little'. 'Obvious' and 'normal' habits connected with one's own cultural model were described as 'more spontaneous' and 'relaxed', and generally coincided with more positive assessments. The couples we interviewed turned out to be characterized by a relatively high compatibility in this area, and in only one case the couple shared their duties and expectations connected with receiving their guests absolutely equally. In other cases, dividing responsibilities was more problematic and required emotional work (Hochschild 1979).

Based on our data, we might predict that shaping different hospitality habits by nationally mixed couples could result in different ties and social networks they create. When we take a comparative look at Polish and Norwegian styles, we can see how a society of few strong bonds and a society of many weak bonds are produced in everyday interactions (Granovetter 1973). It is not entirely insignificant how much effort a person or a couple put into receiving guests. Large investments must lead to limiting the frequency of invitations and reducing unexpected visits, while smaller ones or none at all would probably form a much weaker base for high interpersonal expectations, mutual responsibility and collective obligations, but at the same time the application of this model allows participants to maintain bigger social network.

In the light of our investigation, receiving guests at home is likely to make everyday situations of inter-cultural negotiations even more difficult to deal with because it is more directly related to managing their social networks. Some

couples decided to solve possible problems in this area by avoiding inviting guests as frequently as they used to. Then, they excuse themselves by explaining that they live too far, they are pregnant or have a baby, they work hard or make important changes in life, and they are generally tired. Although they declared they would receive guests more frequently later on, this might be a kind of strategy to cope with problematic situations when their internal standards and intimate or social ties are at risk. Another strategy of dealing with potential problems is to separate different categories of guests for different visits according to language and national criteria, which results in creating relatively isolated social networks for the man and the woman in a relationship. In line with this strategy, they organize meetings with their family and friends during which the other member of the couple is physically, socially or emotionally absent. The third strategy that we have identified is to adjust different hospitality models, related to Polish or Norwegian type, to different kinds of guests and various occasions. The Norwegian model was applied in the case of closer and more frequent guests, and the Polish one – for older family members who come less frequently, often to celebrate Christmas, Easter or a birthday.

Finally, it is worth noting that the couples who participated in our study were relatively young and in the process of intensive biographical change. Their hospitality practices were included as only one of a number of aspects of their mixed lifestyles characterized by compromise. It seems that the couples in longer-term relationship were characterized by lower tendency to recognize differences within them in national terms. There are some data, however, confirming that the model of Polish hospitality discussed in this article is gradually becoming less popular even in Poland, where the younger generation tends to criticize and refuse to continue the hospitality practices of their parents (Skowrońska, Schmidt 2016).

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ANNEX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

bold – question of researcher

italics – a word spoken in other language

- self interruption

/ other participant's interruption, the point in the current speaker's speech where overlap by the other starts

: or :: – sound elongation, prior syllable is prolonged

underlined – accent or emphasis of volume

CAPITALS – strong emphasis

(...) impossible or doubtful transcription, an utterance which could not be clearly heard

[laughter] analyst's comment, features other than verbalization

[...] part of an utterance missing

[Norway] name of the country located directly under an excerpt of interview points at the place, where a speaker leaves and at the same time the interview was conducted