

## GENDERED FAMILY PRACTICES AND CULTURAL DIFFUSION IN BINATIONAL COUPLES OF POLISH MIGRANT WOMEN

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The article discusses family practices and gender relations in the interethnic couples of Polish women having foreign partners. While the theoretical framework engages with conceptualizations of family practice, binational coupledom, cultural diffusion and gender orders, the mix-methods methodological approach combines cases from three qualitative and thematically-linked research projects on Polish migration across three EU destination countries. We argue that spousal attitudes to gender orders shape the degree of cultural diffusion in interethnic couples formed by Polish women in Western Europe. In addition, we propose that gender orders of the spouses must not align with the ethnic belonging, but rather illuminate the pre-existing preferences for a traditional or egalitarian model. More broadly, we observe that women remain the key agents of sustaining or rejecting the Polish heritage and practices in the everyday life. In other words, the women determine the degree and shape of the intra-family cultural diffusion.

**Keywords:** binational marriages, dual-ethnicity couples, Polish migration, family practices, gender orders, cultural diffusion

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## INTRODUCTION

The main benefit of the post-2004 Polish migration scholarship becoming increasingly saturated by multitudinous projects' findings is that a much greater variety of mobility trajectories had been explored in recent studies (see e.g. White's 2016 review). The interethnic or binational relationships founded by Polish migrants – predominantly women – in Western Europe, constitute one of the topics gaining interest only recently. Simultaneously, while research responds to the challenges around family migrants, it is particularly the reunification/settlement and the intergenerational (i.e. child- and elderly-care) challenges (Krzyżowski 2013) that are tackled, mostly because they are of paramount importance for the policy and demography agendas. Consequently, the focus thus far has strongly been on the family practices observed in the couples where both spouses were Polish (see e.g. Muszel 2013; Pustulka, Ślusarczyk 2017). As a result, while the issues surrounding partnerships formed by two people of different cultural backgrounds have been addressed by the broader scholarship, also for the intra-European context – (e.g., Rother 2008; Gaspar 2009; Remmenick 2009; Haandrikman 2014), research on the Polish binational marriages and dual-ethnicity couples remains oriented on the influx of foreigners to Poland<sup>2</sup> (Brzozowska, Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014), rather than on the relationships with the destination states' nationals that are entered into by the Polish migrants (Brzozowska 2015: 26).

This paper is an exploratory attempt at teasing out some of the issues relevant for studying Poles in the so-called mixed, binational, or interethnic relationships abroad. The key objectives relate to the focus on the specificity within family practices (Morgan 1996), meaning what people “do” differently when they are in ethnically heterogeneous dyads. In our exploration, we combine interview data from the cases examined across three research projects in order to increase the scope and validity of the main themes pinpointed in the narratives. Further, while we do not negate that there exists a repertoire of different inter-ethnic relationships, we present here the narratives of Polish women who are in long-term relationships with foreign men, which corresponds to a more global model of West/North men partnering with East/South women (Remmenick 2009). We begin by outlining our conceptual framework which renders visible the emphasis on the role of gender orders for the intra-family practices of cultural diffusion.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2015 Polish Central Statistical Office's data, Polish women married 1920 foreign men, while 502 Polish men married foreigners the same year. This accounts for 2.47% and 0.65%, respectively, of all marriages in Poland that year.

In the analysis, we employ a gender lens to point out the key realms in which the divergent perspectives on the family practices can be noted. Similarly, we discuss the discrepancies within spousal gender roles in the women's country of origin (Poland) vis-à-vis the receiving societies (the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany) represented by male husbands/partners of the respondents.

## SITUATING BINATIONAL COUPLES IN THE BROADER LITERATURE

### FAMILY PRACTICE

Looking for a commitment in companionship – through marriage or long-term cohabitation – continues to be a pillar of how gendered social relations are organized (Jamieson 1998). Marriages belong to a category of the most durable and long-lasting social relations and are considered both a trait of personal stability, and a factor of social mobility (Brzozowska, Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014: 70). At the same time, the motivations of couples for 'getting together' in contemporary Europe are increasingly established on the grounds of 'falling in love', while social factors continue to impact whom we meet, and our cultures "constrain expressions of biologically-led desire" (Duck 2007: 1). A concept shedding light on this pattern is that of intimacy, for which Jamieson (1998) convincingly demonstrated that most people still aspired to being in long-term, stable (formalized) relationships. She specified that "relatively exclusive and sexually monogamous couple relationships remain the dominant ideal sought by most people as their key source of intimacy in adult life (Jamieson 2005: 199). Starting one's own family (i.e. family of procreation) also tops the hierarchy of values and life goals of the Polish youth (e.g. Slany 2002).

To demonstrate the contents of intimacy practices exhibited by Polish migrant women in their relationships with foreign men, we draw on British Family Studies and Morgan's concept of a "family practice" (1996). This elicits an understanding of a family as something that necessitates a continuous "doing" and requires negotiations between its members (Finch 2007). Doing family reflects the transformed nature of intimate relations, which increasingly operate on the basis of a 'rolling contract', as 'pure relationships' wherein "external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver (...and) trust can be mobilized only by a process of mutual disclosure (Giddens 1991: 6). Beside reproduction, coupledness is currently an individual and customizable project (Slany 2002: 53).

In this paper, we particularly focus on the family practices surrounding marriage and partnering, which entail “people’s identifications, understandings, feelings, values, interactions and activities that draw on the ideas [...], expectations and responsibilities that step from these” (McCarthy, Edwards 2011: 88). A specific realm of family/marital practices traced in the narratives of the Polish female migrant spouses of local majority men centres on gender orders and maintaining tradition.

## INTERMARRIAGES AND BINATIONAL COUPLES

We are interested here in a particular type of an intermarriage, which is distinguished on the basis of international mobility of one spouse and entails partners who have different cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, we analyse binational couples/marriages, sometimes also referred to as transnational, cross-border and, where applicable, dual-ethnicity couples, less typically also referred to as mixed couples (see e.g. Jaroszewska 2003; Brzozowska 2015: 7–8). An umbrella term of ‘global families’ can also be used to point out the emergence of the bi- or multi- or transnational kinship structure (Balzani 2006; Charsley 2012; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013), while the concept of a European intra-marriage (Gaspar 2009: 4) further demarcates the researched context. At any rate, these types of relationships are key social by-products of globalization and its facet of mass-mobility (Roca, Urmeneta 2013).

As an obverse of the world migration systems, a search for a spouse at the ‘international marital market’ (e.g. Kim 2010; Niedomysl et al. 2010) mirrors the axis of the global power. In particular, it “traces routes linking men from the rich countries of Western Europe, North America and Asia/Pacific with women from parts of the Caribbean, Latin America, Eastern Europe and South-East Asia” (Roca, Urmeneta 2013: 567). Studies conducted on bicultural marriages in the former regions expectedly demonstrated the prevalence of immigrant wives over minority husbands (Remmenick 2009). In Europe, Recchi and colleagues (2003) determined that almost one in three Europeans who moved between different member states indicated family or love as their rationale, and this tendency was stronger among women. Simultaneously, the increasing importance of the supranational context of partnering has been tied with globalization of everyday realities of consumption and choice, further marked by routinized transnational flows and daily engagement with information and communication technologies (Roca, Urmeneta 2013: 568). In sum, the greater accessibility of other cultures translated to a “larger, more amorphous marriage market (...) with a lack of

a clear geographical and socially circumscribed context” (Bulcroft et al. 1997). In fact, for Gaspar (2009), EU intra-marriage is the pillar of transnational families, which further represent tiles of informal European identity formation through citizenship practices “from below” (see also Haandrikman 2014).

This growing popularity notwithstanding, people in heterogamous relationships must, unlike ethnically endogamous couples, navigate ‘a meeting’ or ‘a clash’ of cultures, which becomes a starting point for the modification (Jodłowska-Herudzińska 2002: 173) of single-culture-driven norms and values regarding the process of doing intimacy acquired through one’s socialization (Hyman et al. 2008). Intermarriage may additionally be a cause for social isolation, loss of status and ostracism (Remmenick 2009). As individuals enter coupledness and intimate relations in the transnational, cross-border and international space, new questions can be posed about the negotiation of power and gender orders in the non-monocultural dyads (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013; Constable 1998). These commonly address initiative, choice, agency, and the impact of international unions on the notions of intimacy and love (Roca, Urmeneta 2013; Brzozowska 2015), though the arena of the “typical” (homonational) couples’ problems, like parenting choices, division of the household labour and finances, etc., do not escape binational couples (Remmenick 2009). When linked to mobility, binational marriages generally signal inclusion of foreigners into the inner-workings of the receiving society, and, as such, supply the migrant spouses with additional strategies of acquiring a ‘bridging’ social capital (Rother 2008; Gaspar 2009; Brzozowska, Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014). On the couple level, studies illuminate that intermarriages may be more difficult, yet also frequently constitute emotional communities of propinquity marked by symmetry and partnership (Jodłowska-Herudzińska 2002). Conversely, a certain challenge of researching mixed couples has been noted, as the interviewed spouses tend to reject a belief that they experience problems due to cultural differences (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013; Jaroszewska 2003). Studies dedicated to conflict-solving in intercultural setting also suggested that one partner – usually that representing a lower-status group and thus, typically, a woman – gradually shifts towards accommodating the local/majority culture perceived as superior (Remmenick 2009).

Roca and Urmeneta (2013: 678) argue that different contemporary types of interethnic or international couples are “the fruit of a deliberate search [rather] than a fortuitous encounter”. Similarly, according to Gaspar (2009), the post-Schengen era in Europe of the so called mobile *Eurostars*, who are markedly appreciative of the cultural diversity through travel and work (Favell 2008), is distinctly favourable for the rise of European mixed marriages (see also Haandrikman 2014). This way, a specific look at gender orders compliments the earlier claims that intermarriages generally decrease the rigidity of the social

structure, diminish social distances and weaken the strength of the inter-group divisive lines (Brzozowska, Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014: 70). The envisioned acceptance is still low in Poland, however, as only 51% of the respondents in the OBOP's (now TNS Polska) representative sample would be willing to approve of a foreign partner for their offspring, even though the scores were higher for younger cohorts (69%; Wiśniewski 2011: 229–230).

Going back to the European intra-marriages, Gaspar (2009) categorizes them into two types of (1) *free-mover/national stayer* coupling, and (2) *free mover/free mover* pair, depending on one-spousal or both-partners' migration upon union formation. For the former, a more denationalized coupledness is hypothesized, while the latter may be conducive to a higher integration and assimilation tendencies in the conjugal lifestyle (see also Rother 2008). Against this background, one can delineate two social forces directly related to gender orders and explicitly at play when people engage in long-term bi-cultural partnering. On the one hand, one witnesses traditional gender views and a desire to uphold the division of male and female roles as well as compliance with the patriarchal norms and values. This is elucidated in the European context, where scholars showcase high prevalence of transnational marriages of the second generation migrants who select spouses from their parents' homeland in order to ensure religiosity or traditional socialization and views (e.g. Charsley 2012; Haandrikman 2014). On the other hand, the so called masculinity crisis may engender alternative views and lead both men and women to search partners outside the person's standard "search field". Remmenick (2009) adds that one of the reasons for an out-group romantic search is the gender ideology that one adheres to in terms of their preference for certain masculine/feminine qualities of partners, "e.g. docile and appeasing demeanour of Asian women or high earning potential of Jewish men (...) that are ostensibly lacking among 'our own ilk'". This extends to migrant women who search for men of similar educational status and seek to gain autonomy, while challenging the traditional ideals of patriarchal control (Charsley 2012; Van Kerckem et al. 2013), as well as to become otherwise liberated from the cultural taboos and the conservative and/or oppressive culture they grew up in (Remmenick 2009). Along these lines, we conduct our analysis of the Polish women's gender strategies in intermarriages.

#### CULTURAL DIFFUSION AND GENDER ORDERS

Plüss argued that "gaining access to resources in different places, and thus experiencing multi-place social integration, can increase cultural hybridity – the mixing and matching of cultural elements with roots in different regions and places

in migrants' transnational social positioning" (2013: 7). Therefore, we draw on the interdisciplinary notion of cultural diffusion in the analysis of how people from one culture adopt elements of another culture (or cultures), as well as how this "mixing" occurs. Central stances of conceptualizing the idea of cultural diffusion in sociology pertain to the works of Tarde et al. (1903) and Rogers (1983). Both authors bring the human agency within the structural conditions to the fore (Grabowska et al. 2017). According to Tarde et al, any innovations constructed mainly by the elites, answer social or environmental changes. The elites have the power of convincing people to follow them and adopt the innovation in their lives. Beliefs, motives, desires and everything that is transferred from one individual to another, can be imitated. Tarde et al. (1903) defined three rules of imitation, namely that (1) imitation starts with the individual, (2) elites and other socially legitimated people (i.e. superiors) can convince those non-legitimated (inferiors) to adopt innovation, (3) socially current issues are easier to be adopted (Kinnunen 1996).

Rogers (1983: 19) frames cultural diffusion as a "process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas". In this classic approach, the invention takes centre-stage. People can diffuse the new idea, adopt it (adjusted to circumstances) or reject it, so this is not a simple imitation. However, there are some circumstances which have to take place for the innovation to be adopted:

- (1) it should be perceived as something that makes life easier, better, more effective;
- (2) it should be compatible with the existing values, past experiences and future needs;
- (3) it should not be too complicated;
- (4) adopters should have the possibility to test it;
- (5) it should be visible to others.

Based on these two conceptualizations, O'Reilly (2012) conceived a practice theory toolbox as the interconnection of agency and structure, while Emirbayer and Mische (1998) proposed a multilayer understanding of human agency in the process of social remitting. Against this backdrop, Grabowska et al. (2017: 35) proposed a conceptual model of social remitting and its modalities with human agency at the forefront. When a new practice, norm, value or model of social capital occurs (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010), the one who encounters it may resist the change or acquire it via imitation (Tarde et al. 1903) or innovation (Rogers 1983). The next step entails a transfer of the new feature onwards. Family, kin members, friends and others may again resist the change or follow

the agent in acquisition by imitation or innovation. At every step, an individual is ultimately the one to make a – conscious or unconscious – decision.

The model of how people handle innovation can be applied to the studies at the level of marriages, including the interethnic ones. It presumes that migrants adopt or forgo new practices, norms, ideas, and social capital (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010) offered by the host society represented by individuals – in the most immediate case: their intimate partners. In this sense, cultural diffusion can be connected with gender orders, which were analysed by Connell (1987) in a detailed fashion. In sum, the gender order is the relationship between different gender regimes or “the current state of play in the macro-politics of gender” (Connell 1987: 20). It reflects gender relations in a given institution (Bishop 2001). For Connell (1987), gender orders signify a three-pronged structure of labour, power and cathexis. In this model, the division of labour is determined by the organization of childcare and housework, and reflected in the labour market gender inequalities. Power relates to authority and control, hierarchies, sexual regulations and institutional and interpersonal violence. Finally, cathexis refers to ‘sexual social relationships’ or the emotional relationship between men and women (Bishop 2001).

Gender orders understood as structural expectations towards female and male roles, as well as intimate relations between partners, provide a good angle for investigating the subject of interethnic marriages, especially when it comes to stability and migratory flux upon the collision of two cultures. According to Connell (1987), there is a possibility of gender change, which we seek to examine through the prism of diffusion in family practices. Therefore, we situate the family practices in binational couples as the effect of imitation or rejection of the pulls from gender orders (in the sending versus receiving countries), under the premise of the socialization impact and the pan-European context of cultural diffusion.

#### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: LINKING SEVERAL STUDIES

According to Remmenick (2009: 3), “few sociologists and social anthropologists explored the internal dynamics of intercultural marriage from the standpoint of identity, power relations, and gender roles using qualitative or ethnographic methods”. This article contributes to overcoming this gap by relying on a mix-methods research (MMR) approach in the face of limited data (Mason 2006). The mix method has been widely accepted and implemented in social science studies during the last decades. It is assumed that triangulating results through an application of several methods may increase the results’ validity (Burke 1997;



Bazley 2004). In practice, MMR can also be understood as a way forward when exploration of the research problem is scattered rather than targeted (Mason 2006; Bazley 2004), and a secondary analysis of qualitative data is envisioned (Heaton 1998), as is the case in this analysis.

The research topic – binational coupledom – constitutes the thematic focus, and the article combines the data gathered across three different qualitative research projects in a secondary re-analysis, which is an established approach for gaining a wider perspective and determining general patterns. Referring to Mason's (2006) classification of MMR strategies, the study incorporates a parallel research design logic. All three datasets belong to standalone projects on Polish migration. Having three different datasets points to the use of the component design in the analysis (Greene and Caracelli 1997), specifically rooted in the complementarity approach. The results of one method's type/study are in essence enhanced, strengthened and clarified by the results of other projects and their corresponding methodology, ultimately allowing for a cumulative interpretation step (Mason 2006; Heaton 1998).

The presented studies are all centred on the Polish migration, particularly drawing on the data pertinent to “transnational family practices” (see e.g. Pustułka, Ślusarczyk 2017). On the one hand, the linking of the studies hinges upon a thematic similarity, and on the other – it is contingent to the aligned qualitative approaches largely reliant on the data collection techniques of in-depth interviewing techniques (see e.g. Pustułka, Trąbka 2017 for a similar approach). Drawing on Heaton's (1998) claim on the benefits of expanding the dataset to increase the internal validity of arguments on a particular thematic issue – in this case inter-ethnic/ mixed couples – we combine the data gathered in the three different studies: (S1) doctoral study by Paula Pustułka, (S2) the Transfam project, and (S3) the study on cultural diffusion through social remittances between Poland and the UK. In S1, the main goal was to reconstruct the process of being a mother in the foreign country, while the international MMR S2 examined the multi-sited/ transnational/ cross-border family practices among the Polish migrant families in Norway. Finally, the S3 set out to unveil whether social remittances were transmitted between Poland and the UK, as well as the types and contents of such remittances. In terms of further similarities, all three studies employed IDIs and varied methods of participant recruitment. The details of the projects are provided in the Table 1.

Although the studies did not intend to investigate interethnic marriages, the secondary analysis of the qualitative data based on Heaton's guidelines (1998) uncovered a number of cases that were eventually collated into a sufficient and saturated dataset of twelve cases.

Table 1.

Type/Name of the project	Data collection: country and dates	Respondents in inter-ethnic relationships	Total number of interviews
Doctoral Study <sup>a</sup> “Polish Mothers on the Move”	UK & Germany, 2011–2013	4 interviewees: 2 women married to German men, 2 married to British men	37
Transfam Project <sup>b</sup>	Norway 2014	5 interviews: 4 PL-NOR marriages with PL women; 1 PL woman with a man of a different (MENA) background	31
Cultural diffusion through social remittances between Poland and the UK <sup>c</sup>	UK & Poland, 2011–2014	3 interviews: 2 women with British partner, 1 woman married to British man	124

<sup>a</sup> Paula Pustulka’s PhD research was funded by the 125th Anniversary Research Scholarship at Bangor University (2010–2013) and supervised by Professor Howard Davis. Its resulting thesis *Polish mothers on the move – gendering parenting experiences of Poles raising children in Germany and the UK* was defended in 2014. Supplementary fieldwork funding was garnered through the DAAD and PON UJ London grants. The PON UJ grant called *Ambivalent Returns? Polish mothers tackling inter-generational family obligations during their temporary returns from the UK* was a summer project for which 2 women in inter-ethnic couples were interviewed.

<sup>b</sup> The research leading to these results has received funding from the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme operated by the National Centre for Research and Development under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014] in the frame of Project Contract No. Pol-Nor/197905/4/2013. The findings used here stem from Work Package-2 *Migrant families in Norway – Structure of power relations and negotiating values and norms in transnational families* research led by Magdalena Ślusarczyk. Paula Pustulka was a Researcher and temporary WP Leader for the Transfam project.

<sup>c</sup> The research leading to these results has received the funding from the National Science Centre in the project “*Cultural diffusion through social remittances between Poland and UK*” (Harmonia funding) and was conducted by international cooperation between Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw and University of Roehampton, London. Marta Buler is conducting secondary analyses of the data.

Source: Authors’ summary.

## COMPETING GENDER TENDENCIES IN INTERETHNIC MARRIAGES

As argued by migration scholars, there is no definite “arrow of progress” when it comes to gender and mobility issues (Kofman et al. 2000; Pessar, Mahler 2003). This is even more apparent when stories of relationships established on

love are recalled (Recchi et al. 2003). Emilia, who took a leave of absence from her job in Poland, initially came to Norway for one year to have an “adventure” while working as an au-pair. She did not want to stay abroad, not in the least in Norway which she perceived as cold and little appealing at the time. Conversely, she also claimed that – at the age of 27 – the trip was her “last chance” for making a life-altering change. Shortly after arriving, Emilia met her partner:

*“We realized that this was it. We decided very quickly that we would be together and we were thinking about [our relationship] very seriously right away. This was it and that was that, the end (laughs). So I was absolutely sure that I should take a risk [and stay] because it was serious” (Emilia, S2<sup>3</sup>).*

The increasing “pure relationship” (Giddens 1991) idea of a partnership notwithstanding, intermarriages are fascinating as far as negotiations of family practices are concerned. In broad terms, scholars argued that living in a more progressive society – in our case Western versus Eastern Europe – may contribute to emancipation, yet some contradictory evidence has also been put forward (Szczepanikova 2012; Muszel 2013). These two tendencies, which pull on foreign spouses in different directions, are exacerbated in interethnic marriages. First, the pressure to comply with the local ways of doing and an orientation towards the host society’s culture has been found to be hard to resist for spouses representing ethnic minority (Kim 2010; Remmenick 2009). Secondly, however, the international marital market axis suggests that men frequently seek women in areas with more traditional views, effectively attracting migrant women who are embedded in traditional gender orders and envisaged as reluctant towards adopting local norms of egalitarian lifestyles (Roca, Urmeneta 2013; Niedomysl et al. 2010). The data on Polish women analysed for the purpose of this article confirm these two parallel tendencies. Making Connell’s (1987) claim that gender orders may be more nuanced, it appears that the international marital market makes people seek those who appropriate the same structure. In somewhat simplified terms, while certain women identifying themselves with feminist ideals expand their partner-search to the West in order to fulfil their egalitarian desires, other, more “traditional”, women gladly take on the positions of homemakers that are contested by the local/Western women, but are conducive to their imaginations of how the gendered divisions of roles should be preserved as the best functional way of organizing family-life.

<sup>3</sup> For each respondent we provide a coded name and the derivation marker of a study for which they were interviewed.

## “TRADITIONAL” GENDER ORDER

It has to be noted that direct reflections on the matters related to the power and inequality structures in the women’s intimate relationships were rather rare. One example of unusual reflexivity came from Tola, who lives with her partner in Germany:

*“For my husband it is exotic that I enjoy cooking and put my career on hold [for children]. It’s not something he’s had in his past relationships and he sees it nowhere among his friends. Girls here are quite self-centred [...] and I think he did not want that [...] especially with his career being so demanding, he wanted someone more like his mum, traditional” (Tola, S1).*

Based on this quotation, we can see that the value-normative split between the women from the more gender-egalitarian and progressive West vis-à-vis their Eastern traditional counterparts has not disappeared. Conversely, it plays a significant role in the partner search in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gender orders derived from patriarchal socialization are not perceived as oppressive, but rather as something that women agree with. Other respondents supported this demarcation as well, for instance when Ela recalled her father-in-law’s reticence and distrust towards her:

*“Later, I have learnt about my father-in-law, who is very reserved and never shows any emotion, that he asked Robert if he was sure because maybe I wanted to use him, with me being foreign and all. He never said anything to me [...] but initially believed me to be a gold digger” (Ela, S2).*

Overcoming a stereotype of not being worthy sometimes results with women’s complete devotion to their spouses and making their needs and wishes inferior to those of their partners. In some cases, women continued to be focused on the Polish traditions but tended to forgo their career ambitions for the sake of performing the roles of supportive wives as full-time home-makers and mothers. Discussing everyday logistics, Mela pointed out that she seems to have joined a very similar family setting compared to the one she originated from. The gender roles are rather stringently divided between men and women:

*“[Home] is rather traditional. I do this... However, the husband is the one who cooks and he does it quite often and willingly. Lucky me. Especially the Sunday dinners. He is a ‘do it yourself’ type and [...] lately we renovated the bathroom and he likes doing all repairs there [...] Me, of course [I] do all the girlie duties: cleaning, cooking, ironing” (Mela, S3).*

The nature of the husband's support at home appears largely contained to one-off masculine projects. Still, it transpires that Mela generally draws satisfaction from this traditional arrangement with home-bound femininity, even though she also has a booming career in HR management:

*"From time to time I do stamp and say 'you should do more, I am also a full-time employee, you should help me'. Though, when he is willing to help, I drive him away and tell him 'go, I'll do this myself, I prefer to do this myself'. So [I] let it be" (Mela, S3).*

Gabrysia's case additionally illustrated a global trend, largely observed for the second-generation migrants searching spouses from their ancestral homelands (Charsley 2012). After divorcing her first husband, Gabrysia met her current spouse online. It turned out he left Poland in his childhood and grew up in Germany, where he worked in gastronomy. Gabrysia hinted that he could not find a suitable partner abroad, as he held very clearly traditional ideas about the domestic life. While their partnership is successful, Gabrysia has been relegated to full responsibility over household duties, and she cooks for the family even though her husband does exactly that for a living. She specified:

*"He is a great dad, but since he is working he cannot do as much as I have to... I do not earn money because I have to take care of [children], it's a vicious circle that makes it hard, someone has to work and provide and if I have to choose me or him, it has to be him" (Gabrysia, S1).*

Even in Norway, which is believed to have welfare solutions and gender regimes capable of changing the gender attitudes of the Polish men, longing for traditional arrangements could be observed (Pustułka, Ślusarczyk 2016). Having met her future husband in the international community in Amsterdam, Karolina reflected:

*"I think this was a natural match for us [regarding division of household labour]. It was that my husband was looking for a more homely woman, who cooks, cares, and so on. And I have this from my family of origin, I got it from home. My mother cooked, took care of practically everything at home, and I just took it over from her" (Karolina, S2).*

In the UK, Bogusia relied on her British husband's income when taking a break from her career as a successive corporate accountant:

*“I am really so happy to be home with my children – to be the one to take care of them every night, morning and evening.(...) I feel this time with them is an investment (...) in their sense of security, trust and being loved [...] Missing my job sometimes, [but] I still miss my daughter more [...]”* (Bogusia, S1).

Nevertheless, Bogusia is highly educated and considers herself an expat rather than a migrant. She revoked many aspects of her Polishness in her private life with rarely speaking Polish to her children, and very much subscribing to the British lifestyle. Bogusia is quite traditional in her desires to take care of home and the children, yet she fulfils these duties in a very local/majority-centred manner and openly challenges Polish patriarchy. Therefore, it may be argued that she ascertained more autonomy by marrying a more progressive man (Van Kerckem et al. 2013). In that sense, gender progress may be counterproductive to the maintenance of transnational identities, which are seen as imbued with patriarchy in the Polish context. Traditional socialization of the wife paired with the local welfare norms may lead to contestation of certain gender mainstreaming policies, like the obligatory father quota in the paternal leave imposed by Norwegian law. Ela, who has been married to a Norwegian military man for almost two decades, noted:

*“There are some equality [rules] about fathers having certain things, but I would never voluntarily give away any more weeks from my maternity leave. In our case Robert said that it was enough for him – four weeks or so, he did not require more, and I would have not [reassigned my time]”* (Ela, S2).

Note, however, that those are not clear-cut divisions, women were found to simultaneously rely on their traditional femininities and take advantage of the Western options to gain more intra-family equality. The distinction was exacerbated in family practices of the two realms, i.e. parenting and coupledom. In sum, there is an argument to be made about interethnic marriages potentially leading to women’s re-traditionalization due to aligning family practices with the pre-existing gender and national stereotypes, as well as the views about appropriate masculinity and femininity (Haandrikman 2014; Remmenick 2009).

#### MODERN GENDER ORDER

Conversely, in three cases – namely, the partnerships of Amelia, Helena and Emilia – there was evidence of a greater degree of equality as far as household chores and care duties were concerned. Two explanations of this pattern can

be found in the findings. For Emilia, the equality is rooted in pragmatism and the fact that the family had no relatives around, so they needed to be able to rely on each other:

*“We have an even division because we can only count on each other, it depends on [our working schedules], but when dad is at home he does everything in the household and with children. He cleans, cooks, goes to doctor appointments because our child has one, and so on. Maybe I spend more time here because I work close by, but overall we divide the workload very much” (Emilia, S2).*

Both Helena and Amelia were different in being very vocal about their feminist views and how it was “obvious” for their partners that they needed to contribute and enable their wives to work. The women attributed this behaviour to how men in the West are raised with the spirit of equality being a standard practice (Amelia, married to a German), and the general societal acceptance of the egalitarian model (Helena, married to a Norwegian). Especially Amelia had a clear view that she did not want to follow in her mother’s footsteps of being “a workhorse at home and at work”, and revealed that her past relationships with Polish men may have pushed her into an international search of a spouse:

*“I worshipped my mother for being so successful, but in time I also saw how completely exhausted she was all the time, this wasn’t right [...] Somehow I always split with my boyfriends [back in Poland] shortly after moving in together, because they were all supportive of my studies or work, but then expected me to wash their socks. And everyone around us would condone this. Seeing Frank clean was a really big deal [...] It is very important that my husband is a feminist” (Amelia, S1).*

Both of the models point to differently-mediated cultural diffusion processes. Upon making a choice of a foreign partner, women seem to have already subscribed to a particular gender order and expect their partners to match them. While the choices are very different, they are equally valid for the interviewed women, and, it transpires, have been made before entering a particular interethnic marriage.

#### CULTURAL DIFFUSION – A MOTHER’S CALL

Sustaining Polish traditions and habits, as well as declining them, was the women’s call in all investigated relationships, as mothers decided whether the cultural diffusion (Tarde 1903; Rogers 1983) was to take place or not. Supporting

the findings of Rother (2008) and Remmenick (2009), we show how Maryla has ceased to celebrate any traditions on her own, with the exception of exchanging Christmas wishes with her parents over Skype. She said:

*“We do not have the Christmas Eve supper... I have not decided. There was no occasion, I even work sometimes during the Christmas Eve. But I am thinking about this”* (Maryla, S3).

Maryla was prompted to dive into her husband’s culture, making it a primary reference point for raising her daughters. She resigned from the Polish cuisine as her husband did not like it, has not been to Poland in seven years as of the time of the interview, and no longer uses Polish in communicating with her children:

*“I had spoken Polish to them (...) when they were little. But when my older daughter was four, she started stammering. And the speech therapist advised to stop speaking Polish with her (...) I am the only Pole here, I had to use English when communicating with my husband (...) I did not go back to using Polish (...) They listen to me talk to my parents when we meet on Skype. (...) They would not manage to communicate [in Polish]. They do not understand the full sentences, just single words”* (Maryla, S3).

Maryla’s example shows that interethnic marriages are much more prone to the elsewhere described risks of a particularly successful integration and assimilation as a predicate for the disappearance of the links to Poland. These dangers primarily mean the loss of the language and the connection with ancestral motherlands for the second generation of migrant children (Remmenick 2009; Pustulka 2016). In this case we see a family where neither “mixing” nor “merging” of cultures occurs, and the diffusion is quite one-sidedly driven by women embracing “innovation” by imitating the British practices of their spouses. As in other cases, Maryla is the female agent of change (Grabowska et al. 2017). She does so because it may be simpler or just because she wants to have a British family. In accordance with Tarde et al.’s claim (1903), she is socially legitimated to decide what her family members should follow. With the passage of time, the family have become typically British, and a similar – though slightly weaker – process could be observed for Tola, who is step-by-step withdrawing from Polish traditions, visits home and language:

*“I was on a mission to learn the [German] language, so stopped using English and Polish. With a “mushy brain” after the baby was born, I couldn’t process several languages [...] Then I spoke Polish a little bit, now it varies [...] We*



*don't like Polish food, our tastes run more to Asian food, so last Christmas we just got take-out [...]. We go to Poland for SPA and lakes, but rather have my family visit here than go there” (Tola, S1).*

Conversely, in other interethnic partnerships, Polish women decided to sustain Polishness. With solidly grounded decisions and consistent practices, they successfully maintained some of the elements of their national identities, particularly in the realms of traditional celebrations and the language. Emilia's household was interesting in the sense that her partner had a Norwegian citizenship, but originated from the Middle East. Asked about how it came about that her children speak Polish well but have no knowledge of their father's native tongue, she said:

*“This depends on the mother. I believe mothers always emphasize it more. Perhaps there are some fathers who also care about it, but I have never met mixed marriages in the other direction [with a Polish man and foreign woman]” (Emilia, S2).*

The mother is the decision-maker and the *spiritus movens* of passing the Polish language to her children. This aligns with the earlier research on women/mothers as cultural capital brokers (Erel 2012), capable of drawing on binational resources for the betterment of their children's position in the future. With the exception of two women in the inter-ethnic couples, others believed it important to teach children Polish, even though the majority of them were not as successful with the task as the women in Polish-Polish couples (see e.g. Pustulka 2016). This operated similarly in the dimension of religiosity, whereas only a handful of women talked of beliefs, rather than of simple traditions. It was more typical for the inter-ethnic couples to rely on maternal choices and her side of the family religion-wise, especially since the majority of the foreign spouses were described as non-believers.

Besides religion and language choices, the family practices entangled between Polish and foreign ideas could be best observed in the context of major holidays. Displaying one's attitudes towards home traditions and the host country is undergirded by the quite noticeable differences between the local and ethnic ways of doing family during this particularly emotional and family-revolving period (Pustulka, Ślusarczyk 2016). Among our respondents in the interethnic marriages, Mela decided to combine the Polish tradition of Christmas Eve with the Christmas Day celebrated in the British fashion. Before organizing Christmas herself, she invited the husband to Poland so he could become accustomed with all the traditions.

*“This year I hosted my whole family, which was our big dream to have Polish-British Christmas. So the Eve was Polish, and the Christmas Day was British, with [my] husband’s family. It was really amazing. Twelve dishes and all...”* (Mela, S3).

There is no doubt that her Polish and British guests could have easily pointed out who was the innovator introducing two cultures to a single table. Mela operated in the given structure of where she lives now, yet encompassed also the traditions she was raised with (O’Reilly 2012). The cultural diffusion was shaped here by means of innovations in Rogers’ sense (1983). She successfully combined Polishness and Britishness in her own, original way. For several respondents, the Polish way of celebrating had a “less commercial” meaning than the British, German or Norwegian one, which they believed was tainted by “people thinking only about gifts” (Mela, S3) or “starting mid-November, by December 25<sup>th</sup> nobody remembers what it was about, throwing out Christmas trees begins, and we’re off to the next calendar event at all shopping centres” (Tola, S1). Women tended to be very much responsible for ensuring that traditions are followed:

*“I basically ignore local customs and do it ‘Polish all the way’, like only decorating the tree on the 24<sup>th</sup> (...), even though there’s a lot of work with cooking. There is a traditional meal, we go to Church and otherwise stay in, spend family time together”* (Gabrysia, S1).

In other families it appeared to be more relaxed:

*“We celebrate holidays and I take great care to have it traditional, even though my husband [secures] the tree. We have different religions, so we mostly do this for the children. Christmas is always according to my traditions. His holidays, well, he sometimes remembers that there is a holiday, but he’s a typical guy about it and I doesn’t know it too well, so [...] it’s less celebrated. But Christmas, yes, this is the real deal with Santa and everything. Either the family comes, or we go there to see the family in Poland, so it is really very traditional, always. Easter is less so – there is more vacation then, so we tend to take trips then”* (Emilia, S2).

*“We have a deal that if we’re in Norway, then we celebrate them in a Norwegian manner, but if we’re in Poland, then the holidays are typically Polish”* (Karolina, S2).

In the interethnic relationships, women operate as pronounced gate keepers and decision-makers with an almost total power over traditions, practices, norms etc. (see also Pustułka, Trąbka 2017; Pustułka, Ślusarczyk 2017). Women make choices to either sustain the home country traditions, to decline all of them, or to try to maintain and connect selected elements. What is important though, is the fact that women in a way manage the process of cultural diffusion (Tarde 1903; Rogers 1983) for their entire families. The diffusion only takes place if it reflects a desire of a woman-agent (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; O'Reilly 2012; Grabowska et al. 2017).

## DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK

The findings demonstrate that Polish women find themselves in the expected place on the international marital market (Roca, Urmeneta 2013; Kim 2010; Niedomysl et al. 2010), as they experience a type of social mobility by marrying men from more developed Western societies. At the same time, they increasingly have their own gender visions and demands, especially when they see themselves as Europeans (Gaspar 2009). In other words, while the encountered couples boast certain level of ethnic, cultural, and national heterogeneity, their partnerships must also be built on coming together. Within the intimate family lives, the pre-existing similarities can best be observed at the level of family practice (Morgan 1996), where negotiations and modifications emerge through cultural diffusion's innovations and imitation (Grabowska et al. 2016).

The two realms of cherishing traditions on the one hand, and a quest for equality on the other, create an evident paradox for women moving to the West in general, and those entering binational marriages in particular. The main tension stems from the fact that Polish women are framed as more traditional by their Western surroundings, while they may simultaneously seek to escape the stringent patriarchy underpinning gender orders in Poland. These two opposite needs are difficult to navigate in interethnic marriages, where partners are subjected not only to interpersonal gender orders' negotiations (Connell 1987), but also to intercultural ones. For some women that appeared in our studies, migration and intermarriage neither brought gender equality to the fore in their private lives, nor did it assist their professional integration and workforce success. Maryla, Tola, Ela and Gabrysia specifically discussed receiving only occasional help from their husbands with menial tasks, like collecting children from school or "ordering food". Yet, for the most part, they felt fulfilled in a traditionally construed coupledom. Further, it was clear that their careers – if at all existing

– were secondary to the professional attainment of their majority spouses, which may pose economic and self-identification challenges in the future. Therefore, the experiences are “classed” in a sense that professional women had more of a say in their families, with financial independence acting as a harness for intra-family power (see also Trąbka, Pustulka 2016). Bogusia, Mela, Emilia and Karolina had more drive and achieved corresponding successes in accomplishing gender-equal norms in their interethnic coupledness. This was particularly notable outside the households as they gave priority to their careers despite remaining heavily involved in household duties. Though our sample is small, it could be seen that the most equality characterized the two partnerships with spouses representing two cultures different from their actual place of residence, specifically in the cases of Emilia and Amelia.

All in all, it can be argued that being in the interethnic marriage requires either considerable modifications or even crafting one’s ethnic identity anew, either by being slowly pushed to do so, or by making a conscious choice about forgoing or somewhat relegating Polishness. Two patterns can generally be distinguished in the data. The first is when gender orders are understood in a traditional way and accordingly embraced both by a woman and her foreign spouse. Women in this scenario are agreeable to female roles of childrearing and home-making. The second scenario applies to women who emphasize gender equality and seek men with correspondingly progressive views on family life.

The final observation underlines the women’s role in sustaining or rejecting the Polish heritage and practices in everyday life in the context of an interethnic partnership. In this realm, we observe that it is in fact difficult to “succeed” in having both equality and dual-ethnic identity at home (see also Remmenick 2009). While the women who approve of traditional models tend to be allowed more freedom about infusing the local family life with the Polish culture, it seems less attainable and requiring much more effort for interethnic egalitarian partnerships. Still, in both settings, a differently directional cultural diffusion (Tarde 1903; Rogers 1983) may take place. At any rate, women make their decisions in the given structures (O’Reilly 2012) in accordance with what they think is best for their families. Under both scenarios, a Polish woman in a binational relationship becomes the “manager” and the agent of change (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Grabowska et al. 2017).

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