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## Re-thinking Fatherhood and Manhood among Polish Migrant Fathers in Norway

Being the biggest ethnic minority group in Norway, Poles not only dominate in the labour immigration, but also rank first on the list of family immigration to the country. At the same time, the lack of research on parenting and gender roles among intra-European migrant families may reflect that the Polish migrant families, who have migrated to Western Europe after 2004, are culturally assumed to be more similar to the host countries' populations. This article therefore aims at filling that gap by exploring the Polish migrant fathers' conceptualisations of fatherhood and manhood in the migratory context. This article scrutinises the ways Polish migrant fathers interpret the perceived changes in their parenting styles and practices after the emigration from Poland and settling with their families in Norway. It identifies and discusses three main theoretical categories, developed with the content analysis method: encountering work-life balance, re-evaluating family life, child and parenting, and reconquering manhood.

**Key words:** work-life balance, fatherhood, manhood, Polish migrants, Norway

### Introduction

With nearly 96,000 Polish immigrants residing in Norway as of 1 January 2016, Poles constitute the biggest national minority in the country, amounting to nearly 2% of the country's total population (SSB 2016). Similarly to other migrant groups, many Poles who migrated to Norway for work have eventually brought their families there and settled together. Thus, the Polish migrants do not only dominate in the labour migration flows to Norway, but they also do so with regard to the family immigration to the country. Hence, in 2014, the Polish migrant accounted for 16% (2,600 out of 16,200) of all family-related arrivals to Norway (SSB 2015).

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The UK being the key destination for Polish migrants after 2004, studies from there constitute the core of the research body on new Polish migrations. Generally, on the role of family in migration processes, Botterill (2013) argues that family plays ideological, affective and practical roles in shaping and supporting the Polish migrants' movements. By highlighting the multitude of ways in which families may be split, reunited, and reshaped as a result of migration, Ryan (2011) explores what is meant by 'a family' and how it may operate transnationally in the British-Polish context. Kilkey, Plomien, Perrons (2013) emphasize the importance of situated transnational analyses and find that the migrant men's fathering narratives, practices and projects are deeply embedded within the dominant framework of the gendered division of labour. White (2011) explores why so many Poles have emigrated since 2004, why more children migrate together with their families and how working-class migrant families in the West of England make decisions whether to stay or return to Poland. British schools and kindergartens, being important arenas where differences in the parenting styles of migrants come into light, have been studied in relation to the processes of adaptation, accommodation, negotiation and identity formation among the Polish migrant families in the UK (D'Angelo, Ryan, 2011).

Despite the steadily growing body of literature on the Polish migrations to the UK, the issue of parenting and childrearing in the immigration context has rarely been the focus of it. We argue that the Polish migrant families throughout Western Europe may in fact be positively discriminated for their noticeable 'whiteness', and, therefore, assumed to be culturally 'more similar' to the host country's native population. However, with about two million Polish migrants residing in other EU/EEA countries (Vargas-Silva 2012), most of whom have migrated and settled abroad only after the EU enlargement in 2004, the issue of parenting and integration among Polish migrants deserves to be studied in more detail.

## Aim

The aim of this article is to analyse the Polish fathers' conceptualisations of fatherhood and manhood after their emigration from Poland and settling with their families in Norway.

## Methods

### Setting

For the purposes of this research, fifteen individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with Polish fathers residing with their families in four different municipalities in Rogaland, a county in the Western region of Norway. Five

families resided in Stavanger, an urban municipality with a population of about 130,000 people and the fourth most populous municipality in Norway. Seven families lived in two, mainly rural, municipalities with the population between 11,000 and 25,000 inhabitants, in a close vicinity of a bigger city. Finally, the remaining three families resided in a mountainous municipality with a highly dispersed population of 9,000 inhabitants.

### Participants

A total of fifteen men were interviewed between May 2014 and February 2015. The main criteria for the informants' selection were: (1) to have both a Polish spouse and a child or children, and (2) to reside with their family in Norway. Given its qualitative approach, this study did not aim at making generalized conclusions, but rather at exploring different varieties of migrant men's conceptualisations of their parenting styles, manhood, and in general their experiences of integration in the new country. Therefore, the selection of informants aimed at creating a sample as diverse as possible.

### Informants' age and family composition

The informants' age varied from between 30 to 46 years of age, the average being 37 years. Six informants were in the group between 30–35 years of age, five between 36–41 years of age, and four aged 42 or older. All of the men were married. With regard to their spouses' age, it varied from between 23 to 45 years of age, the average being 34 years. The informants had on average 1.8 children. Thus, nine informants had two children, five had one child, and one had three children. As for their children's age, one informant had a baby younger than 1-year-old, six informants had kindergarten age children (1–5 years old), nine informants had school age children (6–18 years old), and one informant had a 19-years-old child. With regard to where their children were born, only five informants became fathers in Norway, whereas ten informants had their children born before the immigration to Norway.

### Length of stay in Norway and family migration

All informants came to Norway for work. As for the length of their stay in the country, five informants had lived in Norway for up to three years, six informants – between four and seven years, and four informants – for more than eight years. Four couples did not have children when moving to Norway. All of them came to Norway either together or with a difference of between 2 and 12 months. In addition, one couple was established in Norway, this is to say, the spouses met each other only after having migrated to Norway. Finally, ten couples moved to Norway together with the children. In three cases, the spouses came to Norway

at the same time, in other three – with a difference of between 6 and 12 months, and in four – with a log of between 2 and 4 years. In all the cases where there was a delay, it was the wife with the children who later joined the husband in Norway.

### Informants' education, profession and employment status

What concerns the informants' formal education, most of them had a vocational training relevant for the construction industry (e.g. carpenter, electrician, etc.). Five informants had a background in mechanical engineering and one had a higher education in engineering. With regard to their employment status in Norway, all but two informants worked as employees and held full-time permanent contracts. One informant ran his business in which he owned 50% of the joint venture, whereas another one was temporally laid off and received unemployment benefits. As for the informants' current profession, nine out of fifteen men worked in the construction industry, most of them in less qualified positions (e.g. brick layer, carpenter), but others doing more qualified work (e.g. crane operator). Three informants held high-skilled positions: an engineer, IT specialist, and a quality inspector in a shipyard. The remaining three informants worked in the car industry, specializing in car mechanics and automotive painting.

### Data collection

In order to gain the knowledge about informants' reflections on the studied topic, individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method of collecting qualitative data for this study. In comparison to other methods of qualitative research, individual interviews offer several advantages. Firstly, the effect of opinion formation may be less significant than in the case of focus-group interviews (Albrecht, Johnson, Walther 1993). Secondly, the interview setting can be more flexible compared to focus-group interviews. Thus, ten out of fifteen interviews in this study were conducted at the informants' homes, and the remaining five took place in public spaces, such as a kindergarten, a city's library, a shopping mall, and a children playground. We argue that having the possibility to be interviewed at one's home could provide an informant with a higher degree of comfort and confidence. Thirdly, a face-to-face conversation with a sole researcher could be experienced by the informants as more secure with regard to their private direct and indirect information safety. Hence, a higher degree of trust and honesty could be expected. Finally, if the interviewed informant is at the same time a subject in the given researched topic, as was the case in this research on fatherhood, the role of social cues is undisputedly crucial. Given that face-to-face interviews are characterized by synchronous communication in time and place, the informants' voice, intonation, and body language can provide the researcher with much more additional information on the studied topic. It was in particular useful and visible in the two interviews where the informants used jokes and

laughed when trying to answer the questions which, in the researcher's opinion, they did not have concrete answers to.

### The interview guide

The semi-structured interview guide contained twenty-six questions, grouped into seven sections: (1) basic information (name, age, profession, number and age of children), (2) introduction (questions related to weekday and weekend activities in his family), (3) the migration story (individual and family-related challenges faced upon immigration to Norway), (4) cherishing Polish identity (the use of mother tongue at home, maintaining contacts with family and friends in Poland, etc.), (5) observed differences (with regard to being a father, husband, and a man in Norway and in Poland), (6) parenting, and (7) future plans (individual and family-related). The interviews were conducted in Polish, the informants' first language. The length of the interviews varied between 16 and 46 minutes, lasting on average 30 minutes.

### Data analysis

Content analysis method (Burnard 1991) was suggested as the most suitable for the analysis of the interviews. The rationale behind it was to identify the main recurring topics in the informants' talks and analyse the qualitative data in a language (English) other than the one used for the interviews (Polish).

Initially, the interviews were simultaneously transcribed and translated from Polish to English in order to allow the project's non-Polish speaking researchers to participate in the data analysis. The translations were performed in a consistent manner by the same person who had conducted the interview (the author of this paper). Hence, it allowed the English translations to follow the original interviews in the most precise way. Thus, the translator wrote comments regarding the voice, intonation, and body language of the informants in the situations where it was crucial for keeping the English translations as close as possible to the original versions.

Next, three series of coding were performed in order to define codes, analytical subcategories, and categories. Firstly, initial coding was done on a sentence-by-sentence basis in a manner to ensure that the codes reflected the quotes most closely. Sentence-by-sentence coding was more desirable than line-by-line coding due to the peculiarities of the Polish language, where long complex sentences are more common than in English. In some cases complex sentences had to be split into two or more in order to keep the English translations explicitly comprehensive. Further, the initial codes were analysed and further coded with the focus on particular relations among the codes. Finally, the analysis of the focused codes helped identify a series of analytical categories with their corresponding sets of subcategories. The following section discusses the identified analytical categories.

## Findings

The analysis of qualitative data by means of the content analysis method yielded a series of analytical categories which characterize the transformations in family life and masculine identities experienced by this study's informants as a result of emigration to Norway. The key analytical categories comprise (1) *Encountering work-life balance* (with sub-categories such as *Having more free time*, *Earning enough*, and *Finding peace of mind*), (2) *Re-evaluating family life and parenting* (with sub-categories such as *Having more time for the family and children*, *Re-inventing fatherhood*, *Worries with regard to children's future identities and motivations*, and *Acknowledging children's right to choose*), and (3) *Reconquering manhood* (and related to it sub-categories, *Being able to support one's family*, *Reported job satisfaction*, and *Reluctance to changing jobs*). These analytical categories are discussed below.

### Encountering work-life balance

The three sub-categories discussed below, namely *Having more free time*, *Earning enough*, and *Finding peace of mind*, have been grouped under the analytical category of *Encountering work-life balance* as one of the outcomes of the informants' migration from Poland to Norway.

#### Having more free time

Having gained more leisure time as a result of migration from Poland to Norway seems to be a red thread present in all the interviews and, as can be seen further in this section, may account for many changes in the informants' family life. For example, Kris (in his early thirties, a father of one, two years in Norway) said he now has more free time for leisure:

Well, back in Poland I worked a lot. In Poland, for instance, I worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. In addition, I worked on Saturdays. Whereas here that [working] time is shorter, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. So I have more time for leisure – Kris.

#### Earning enough

Having more time for one's leisure can be explained in terms of, firstly, being subject to a stricter legal regulations of one's working hours in Norway, and, secondly, one's ability to earn sufficient money during normal working hours. Thus, almost all the informants reported working normal hours and not having the need to work overtime.

I don't have to rush [to run from one place to another]. I have peace at work. I know that it's such a security, you see. I don't have to work overtime at all in order

to support my family. So it is much better to have more time for the family – Jarek (in his early thirties, a father of one, seven years in Norway).

However, the trustworthiness of my informants with regard to this topic was in some cases doubted. Thus, it could be expected that some of them were fully aware of my being a stranger and feared that working overtime could be regarded by the researcher as equal to not having enough time for a family. For example, Karol (in his early thirties, a father of two, three years in Norway), whose wife did not work, said at some point of the interview that he does not have to work overtime:

(...) I work here as much as I did there [in another Western European country where they lived before]. I am not that greedy to have to work 15–20 hours. We have some work to be done, some assignments, and then we go home. I don't have to work overtime. I try to come home as soon as I can in order to have as much time with the kids as possible. For me, my children and their well-being are the most important – Karol.

However later, when discussing his working conditions, he said:

At my work, in one month one can work 37 hours overtime. Everything beyond is counted as flexible time [bank of hours] which can be later taken as time off – Karol.

When asked whether it happens that he earns flexitime, he confirmed that he does.

### Finding peace of mind

Some of my informants had the experience of running their own businesses when they lived in Poland. They reported feeling stressed most of the time and having very little time for their family and children. Many reported having achieved the so-called 'peace of mind' and reduced the levels of stress and the life pace as a result of moving to Norway:

Back in Poland, I was very stressed, because I ran my own business. During eight years I used to have my own company. Whereas here I am mentally relaxed when at work. I did not have to think and worry that I won't make the ends meet. Instead, I knew that every two weeks there was money coming to my [bank] account. Living here is less stressful – Kris.

Jan (in his early thirties, a father of three, five years in Norway) mentioned that having a permanent contract provided him with the feeling of peace of mind when living in Norway. In addition, he said that his family, being able to afford basically everything, does not have to worry about paying some unexpected bills:

(...) I have a permanent contract. And we have peace [of mind]. We can [afford] basically everything, and we don't have to worry that tomorrow we will not have enough to pay some bill. [On the contrary], we can live and function secure – Jan.



## Re-evaluating family life and parenting

The interviewed men eagerly discussed several issues related to their family life as well as their understandings of parenting in a new context. Whereas some of the aspects of their migratory experiences were largely perceived by them in a positive light (e.g. *Having more time for the family and children* and *Re-inventing fatherhood*), others seemed to be quite challenging (e.g. *Worries with regards to children's future identities and motivations*, and *Acknowledging children's right to choose*). These sub-categories are grouped under the analytical category *Re-evaluating family life and parenting*, and discussed below.

### Having more time for the family and children

The fact of achieving a better work-life balance appeared to have significant implications for the informants' family life in Norway. Thus, many of them reported having more time in Norway for their family, and in particular children, than when they lived in Poland.

For instance, Stefan (in his early thirties, a father of one, six years in Norway) believes that parents in Norway have more time for children. Even though he did not have children when he was in Poland, he said that his friends from Poland often tell him how difficult it is to have a family there, and it seems to be directly related to their working conditions and the opportunity to earn a decent living in Poland:

(...) I believe that here [in Norway] one has more time for children, because in Poland, what I know from my older friends... they constantly worry about money, money, money. And one knows that in Poland no one works eight hours as one does here [in Norway]. In Poland, unfortunately, one has to work 12–14 hours a day [in order to earn good living] – Stefan.

Jan reported having more time for himself in Norway than when his family lived in Poland. He suggested that it was due to the long working hours required to provide for the family:

What is good about it? [First and foremost] that we have more time for ourselves. For back in Poland we did not have a lot of such time because I worked long hours. (...) Sometimes I had to work 12 hours a day in order to provide for the family. [My] wife did not work in the meantime. Thus, it was not easy. Here we have more time for this. We have time for everything and, hence, we live much better – Jan.

Having gained more time for one's immediate family may not necessarily be the result of working less hours, but as well the result of losing a daily contact with one's extended family due to migration. Whereas losing the immediate contact with the extended family was regarded by some informants as a negative outcome of their migration to Norway, it appeared to be positively viewed by younger men



in terms of their ability to make independent choices. Such was the case of Jan, who became a father at the age of twenty-one, and who back in Poland used to live with his young wife and a child at his parents' place:

(...) surely, we have more freedom [now]. We make our plans on our own. No one interferes in it. Thus, the way we make our decisions defines our outcomes. So, we live for ourselves. No one interferes in our life. [No one tells us] what we can and what we cannot do. Thus, it is a positive side – Jan.

Similarly, Michał (in his mid-forties, a father of two, two years in Norway) suggested that his family's experience of migration has brought them closer to each other:

(...) one positive outcome of our emigration here to Norway, or wherever it would have been to, simply to another place, is that we have become closer to each other in the family. [Pause] in other words, we have more time for each other. More... I think... more... [pause, thinking] more time is dedicated to solving conflicts – Michał.

Interestingly, in Michał's case, the gained extra time for the family is regarded not exclusively in terms of doing some activities together, but rather as an opportunity to solve conflicts and misunderstandings:

Whereas in Poland many conflicts were ignored, the eyes were closed on them, and [I would simply say:] 'Enough! This is the way it should be!' 'The End. Full stop!' here instead we are able to come to a consensus, [and] discuss [issues] – Michał.

### Re-inventing fatherhood

When compared to his experience of being a father in Poland, Jan reported having a better contact with his children now in Norway. He was trying to explain that working so much back in Poland had left him very little time for the family:

First and foremost, [now] I have better contact with [my] children. For back in Poland, I did not have much of it, when I had to work so much in order to provide for the family, whereas now I have more time for them and they come to me. For example, [the youngest one] wants me to personally drive him/her to the kindergarten. So, yes, there is a difference, and it is very big – Jan.

Fatherhood, in general, seemed to be regarded by the Polish men in terms of responsibilities and obligations it entails. Thus, Karol said that having a family and a wife brings along obligations:

When one has no family and no wife, one has no obligations. When one gets a family and a wife, one gets obligations as well. One then knows that since one has that joy, one must support the family. So it is sort of a challenge for a person. One cannot have the same easy lifestyle anymore. Maybe later, I don't know... – Karol.

Karol's understanding of a family as a responsibility appeared to be mainly connected to his breadwinning role. Hence, he seemed to be keen on the idea that in order to be a *fulfilled* father, one has to be able to support his family so that the children do not lack anything:

For me, if you manage to support your family and take care of your children, then you are a fulfilled father. At least, this is how it seems to me. One is a 100% father when the children do not lack anything and have a good life – Karol.

Further, Bartek (in his mid-forties, a father of two, twelve years in Norway), shared that parenthood is difficult and said that he could not understand how some people want to have more children, because for him having two was more than enough. He admitted that he is looking forward towards when his children will become independent. Further, he said that dedicating one's whole life to his children made no sense to him.

#### Worries with regard to children's future identities and motivations

It seemed that some fathers, in particular those whose children were born in Norway and went to a Norwegian kindergarten, were concerned about their children's identity in the future. This was understood by them in particular in terms of the children's competing Polish and Norwegian identities. Thus, Stefan, a father of a two-year-old boy, appeared confused about his son's identity in the future. On the one hand, he seemed to be sure that his son will have Norwegian friends, and therefore, will 'need to be Norwegian'. On the other hand, having Polish parents and grandparents and other relatives in Poland meant that he should also feel Polish:

He must feel Polish. He must. He has Polish parents so he must be Polish. But he also needs to be Norwegian, because we count that if he stays here, he will be Norwegian. It does not mean he must only speak Polish and be a Pole, but he must not one day forget that he has a grandma and a grandpa, or an uncle in Poland – Stefan.

Similarly, Jarek seemed to doubt whether he spends enough quality time with the child. He seemed to be concerned that the time he spends with the child may not be enough to prevent his child from becoming more Norwegian than Polish, as the child spends eight hours a day in a Norwegian kindergarten:

(...) Whether I spend enough time with the child is a question for me. For [the child] spends eight hours a day in the kindergarten. So [I am asking] whether the time I spend with [the child] is enough to... ensure that [the child] does not become more Norwegian than Polish. Hence, I try a lot... – Jarek.

Further, fathers of younger children seemed to have a less clear idea of what they wish for their children and often failed to provide a concrete answer:

As a father, I'd wish the best for them [my children]. But right now it is difficult to say something [precisely]. When they go to school, then we will see. If we see that after attending the kindergarten they have adapted to Norway, then we will know what to do next. The time will show – Karol.

However, some of them appeared to be more preoccupied with their children's motivations and ambitions in the future. For instance, Stefan said he wished his child to get an education in order to have a good future, either in Norway or in Poland. He seemed, however, to doubt whether the Norwegian lifestyle is sufficiently stimulating for one's ambitions:

Well, the life here is stress-free. I am worried that it does not necessarily is good for one's future. I don't know what Norwegian friends he [his son] will end up with. Because he will for sure have Norwegian friends – Stefan.

Seeing the Norwegian youth as irresponsible and not serious about life was a theme that often recurred in the interviews with other informants.

One of the issues that seemed to worry Jarek was the level of schooling in Norway, and, according to him, the low expectations towards children. He suggested that low expectations in childhood may lead to low expectations in adulthood as well. Further, he referred to a child's freedom to do what it wants and described it as a lack of discipline. Accordingly, he seemed to believe that Norwegian parents have no control or influence over their children, and children can do anything they want. He elaborates further and mentions helpful parents as one of the domains where he sees differences between the Norwegian and the Polish families:

(...) one cannot demand [expect] anything from the child. For example, a parent may be working [doing something] whereas the child stands on the side without helping. And if the parent asks for help, the child may say no, because it is playing. As a result, those kids grow into similar adults – Jarek.

He seemed to be worried that such a lack of upbringing may have a serious impact on children when they become adults. He reported having heard that the Norwegian youth does not know what to do with their lives. According to him, it is due to living in an abundance of material things, such as new phones, tablets, and so on. He concluded that the Norwegian parents are too generous towards their children, which in its turn leads to lower ambitions among the youth.

#### Acknowledging children's right to choose

While the fathers of younger children seemed to be more worried about their children's identity in the future, those with teenage children were more eager to discuss their children's future career choices and the right to decide on their own.

For example, Michał, whose son was seventeen at the time of the interview, said that he considered his son to be smart enough to make smart decisions. Moreover, he allowed for the idea that his son will decide on his own where and what to study. He emphasized that what matters to him as a father, is to have good relations with his son and that both him and his wife will always support their son:

Well, what concerns [son's name], he wants to finish high school here and begin with higher education. Later, I believe, he will decide on his own where and in which direction he wants to work. We wish to have good relations and we will always be a support for him. He is quite smart and makes wise decisions – Michał.

At the same time, some fathers seemed to hesitate about either allowing their children to decide on their own or decide what they, as parents, considered best for them. For example, Paweł (in his early forties, a father of one, ten years in Norway), on the one hand, declared that he wished for his son what his son wishes for himself. On the other hand, he takes an active role in advising the son on the choice of his future career. While the son likes playing football and would like to go to a sports school, Paweł, as a father, believes, that it will not give him many opportunities. He seemed to wish that his son chose engineering and, with a noticeable satisfaction, reported him to be very ambitious:

I'd wish the best for him, what he wants for himself because he aims very high. I talked to him about his school. Now he goes to an engineering school, whereas he would rather like to go to a sports school. However, I found out that there are not that many opportunities after graduating from that sports school. (...) One can either teach at school or be a masseur after that school, whereas at this school one has many choices. One can continue and become an engineer. As for now, he considers becoming an engineer. So he is aiming high now. So, I am very glad and I support it – Paweł.

### Reconquering manhood through work

The interviewed Polish men explicitly referred to *Being able to support one's family*, *Reported job satisfaction*, and *Reluctance to changing jobs* as the key outcomes of their migration to Norway. These sub-categories seem to indicate a significant gain for their perceived manhood and fulfilment of the breadwinning role.

#### Being able to support one's family

Working, earning the living and supporting one's family appeared to be tightly related to the men's understanding of manhood. Thus, Michał believed that in the Polish families it is the man who has to guarantee the security to his family, even in the cases where a woman has the last word to say. He acknowledged that his idea was based on the people he knew, and those people, in his opinion, have

responsible attitudes towards life. As can be implied from the latter, Michał understands a man's responsibility as a provider for the family.

Moving to Norway made Radek (in his mid-thirties, a father of one, four years in Norway) feel 'a true man', as now he is confident about being able to support his family financially. However, it was not the case in Poland where he was earning the minimum wages in the construction industry. Being a true man, in his understanding, is about ensuring a good financial situation for one's family:

But as a typically true man, I have become one only here. Because in Poland I earned minimum as a construction worker. (...) Here I am satisfied... as a man – Radek.

### Reported job satisfaction

Another interesting finding of the fieldwork was to learn that most of the interviewed men reported being satisfied with their job, and not planning to change it in the nearest future. Many said that they liked their current job and that it brought them satisfaction and security:

What concerns changing job, as for now, I'd rather not do it. I know that I can get promoted at my work. But as for now I am very satisfied with my position and my work. I don't have such a need to change my job in the near future or get promoted, for I already have quite a high position. I also have many responsibilities related to my functions – Karol.

### Reluctance to changing jobs

Changing jobs may often imply living through uncertainty and being temporarily dependent on both the state's support and a wife's income. This could be observed in the family of Kris who at the time of the interview was unemployed and was receiving unemployment benefits. Since his wife works in shifts, and he does not work now, he is the one who prepares dinners. Moreover, he seemed to consider it normal that the one who stays home is responsible for cooking. Being on the social welfare and not working, he first implicitly and then openly says that he had become a housewife:

Now I have become [a housewife]. I've become a housewife – Kris.

Nevertheless, in order to reaffirm his manhood, he said that he wanted to return to work as soon as possible as, firstly, the amount of social assistance he received was not sufficient, and secondly, he did not like staying home in general.

I argue that the strong attachment to their current job and the reluctance to change it observed among the informants may indicate, among other things, their strong dependence on it with regard to fulfilling their breadwinner role and reconquering their manhood in a new, more gender equal, society.

## Discussion

### Lack of contact and the actual knowledge about the Norwegian families and gender roles

One of the interesting findings in the course of the fieldwork was a discovery that the interviewed men seemed often unable to see and name the differences between the Polish and the Norwegian societies with regard to being a man, a father, and a husband. Similarly, neither seemed they well aware about the differences between the Norwegian and the Polish women, or in general the Norwegian and the Polish families. Most of the differences reported by the informants referred to superficial aspects such as clothes and make-up. Interestingly enough, most of the men reported having and watching exclusively Polish TV, and some said they did not receive any information about the Norwegian society.

Kris, for example, when asked about the differences between the Polish and the Norwegian men, said it was difficult for him to say anything in this regard, as he did not meet Norwegian men often. He suggested that Norwegian men must be very similar to the Polish ones. Neither seemed he able to comment on the perceived differences between the Norwegian and the Polish women. He assumed that they must be the same. Making a typical macho-like joke to trivialize the topic, he suggested that the Polish women are prettier than the Norwegian ones.

Even Michał, who seemed to be very reflective on his and his family's new experiences in Norway, said that he rather could not observe what differs the Norwegian men from the Polish ones, despite most of his colleagues at work being Norwegian men. In his case, it could be accounted for a relatively short duration of his stay in Norway (a year and a half). Further, he reported not knowing how Norwegian families function and that he had not established such relations with the Norwegian that would allow him to learn more about their families.

Jarek seemed to believe that the father-child contact in Poland is not sufficient due to the fathers' need to work more, which leaves them less time to spend with children. He believed that the Norwegian men, on the contrary, spend more time with their children. When asked about the differences with regard to being a husband in Norway and in Poland, Jarek immediately mentioned gender equality in Norway. According to him, gender equality means sharing duties without differentiating between men and women's work.

However, Jarek's views on the Norwegian family life appeared to be somewhat distorted. Thus, he seemed to picture the Polish society as a patriarchal one, and the Norwegian – as matriarchal. Moreover, he reported women in Norway to rule and decide upon things in a family to a degree that they even manage a family budget. He said that the Norwegian society is too matriarchal and illustrated it by an example of the Norwegian dating. Thus, he seemed to believe that in Norway it is rather a woman who chooses her man, and not the other way round. He re-

ported the Norwegian men to be too shy and at the same time happy and thankful if picked by a woman.

Other fathers seemed to be unable to comment on the differences in being a father in Poland and in Norway, because they had not lived with their families in Poland. This was the case of Karol, whose both children were born outside Poland.

#### Rather dividing then sharing house chores and family responsibilities

It seemed that most of the informants decide on practical arrangements in their families taking into consideration their and their wives' work schedules and their Norwegian language skills. Thus, no significant gender-related trends in the couples' decisions about who takes children to and picks up from a kindergarten or school could be observed. This could be illustrated by the case of Kris: while his wife worked in shifts, at the time he was still employed, they took turns in delivering and picking up the child from a kindergarten; however, when he became unemployed, he began delivering and picking up the child from school himself.

When asked specifically whether they have different tasks at home, Jan confirmed that they rather divide than share their duties. He reported that while his wife prepares breakfast for the kids on the weekdays, he takes them by car to the nearest bus stop where they catch a bus to school. According to him, his wife picks up the children from school and kindergarten on her way back from work. He justified it by the fact that it is closer to her workplace, whereas he works in a different location and usually arrives home last.

The level of the Norwegian language seemed to play an important role with regard to which of the parents attends parents' meetings at school or in kindergarten. As a result, Polish mothers, and not fathers, in Norway tend to engage more in assisting their children in doing homework, especially in subjects that require a better level of the Norwegian language skills. Some fathers claimed to help their children do homework in subjects like mathematics where a high level of Norwegian is not crucial.

However, not all of the informants seemed to be able to reflect critically on the possible changes that happened in their families since they moved to Norway. Thus, Kris said that nothing had changed in his family after the emigration to Norway. Similarly, some fathers seemed to be less able to reflect on their general experiences of being fathers in the new context. Most of the informants, however, largely seemed to associate having their own family with assuming a greater responsibility in life.

#### Polish fatherhood in Norwegian vs. British immigration contexts

Parenting styles among Polish immigrants across Western Europe can to a certain extent reflect Poland's historical legacies and their own experiences as children under the communist regime (Ryndyk, Johannessen 2015). Thus, a Polish family



of that era stood at the top of the hierarchy of values in Poland (Bednarski 1987 in Botterill 2013, Buchowski 1996 in Botterill 2013) and is sometimes compared to 'a sanctuary in a hostile sea of social relations' (Buchowski 1996: 84 in Botterill 2013). Furthermore, as the upward social mobility in the communist Poland became unrealistic during one's lifespan, it turned into an aspiration spanning over generations. As a result, the Polish parents in the 1980s tended to be overprotective and highly demanding towards their children (Jerschina 1991), which can partly explain our informants' ambivalent attitudes towards the children's right to make their own choices of career.

However, while the historical legacies can partly explain the migrants' parenting styles, the role of host-country specific settings, including its welfare and labour market structure, should not be underestimated. Thus, drawing on the findings from the interviews with recent migrants from Poland to the UK, Kilkey, Plomien, Perrons (2013) emphasize the importance of situated transnational analyses and find that the migrant men's fathering narratives, practices, and projects are deeply embedded in the dominant framework of the gendered division of labour. Thus, the research has shown that the Polish migrant fathers, subject to high work pressure in the UK, might face obstacles in their attempt to spend enough time with their families, and in particular with their children (Kilkey, Plomien, Perrons 2013). As this paper has shown, it differs greatly from the Norwegian context where the Polish fathers in their great majority seem to have achieved a better work-life balance and improved their relations within the nuclear family.

Further, a generous welfare provision, including a wide supply of affordable early childcare facilities, may constitute a strong incentive for dual-income immigrant families. Thus, the affordability of childcare was reported to be a particular challenge for the dual-income Polish families living in London (Kilkey, Plomien, Perrons 2013). On the contrary, the municipalities in Norway are obliged to provide a place in state-subsidized childcare families for every child who reached the age of two. Hence, in our study, the spouses of all the men with the kindergarten age children worked either full- or part-time.

Apart from a few exceptions, the informants in this study reported their wives to be the ones in the family who speak better Norwegian than they do. This situation appears to be at odds with White's (2011) findings concerning the British context. Thus, she reported gender roles among her Polish interviewees to have become even more distinct as the Polish working husbands were more exposed to the British society than their unemployed wives and seemed to have acquired better English language skills (White 2011:153). It may thus hold true that the Polish women in Norway have better chances to be employed, as compared with the Polish women in the UK.

Such considerable discrepancies between the Polish migrant families residing in Norway and in the UK can suggest that the reported retreat to more traditional parenting styles or gender roles among the Polish migrant families in the UK may not necessarily be an indication of conflicting cultures (i.e. the Polish culture, seen

as more conservative, vs. the British culture, regarded as more liberal), but rather a reflection of the Polish migrant families' strategies to fit into the existing host-country's labour and welfare structure.

## Conclusions

Most of the men in this study reported their family life and the contact with children to have greatly improved after they had migrated from Poland to Norway. In addition, they seemed to have achieved a better work-life balance, improved the standard of living of their families, especially with regard to how much they could afford in the new country, and, in general, to have reaffirmed their sense of manhood due to better work opportunities.

With regard to their children, two patterns could be observed among the fathers with children in different age groups. Thus, while the fathers of kindergarten or early school age children seemed to be more preoccupied with their children's identity and motivations in the future, those with teenage children appeared to be confused about their attitudes towards the children's right to make independent choices which concerned, in particular, choosing their future careers.

When it comes to the distribution of house chores between the spouses, the interviewed men seemed to actively participate in sharing it with their wives, and many reported to share it equally. As in most cases the informants' wives were reported to speak better Norwegian, the mothers, and not the fathers, tended to both actively support their children in doing homework, and maintain the contact with kindergartens and schools. However, in most of the families, the chores appeared to be divided rather according to gender lines than equally shared. While cooking largely seemed to remain a primarily women's responsibility, men contributed mainly to cleaning, buying groceries, taking children to extracurricular activities, such as sports trainings, and other things. Notwithstanding, some men reported assisting their wives in cooking. Such a more or less equal, in terms of time and effort involved, but still clearly gendered division of household responsibilities among spouses can be accounted for the fact that in most of the families both spouses worked. Thus, the degree to which spouses participated in doing house chores seemed to be dependent on their working hours and being away from home.

Nevertheless, the interviewed men, despite having lived in Norway for many years, gave an impression of knowing very little about the Norwegian society in general, and the Norwegian family life in particular. As most of them reported having and watching mainly the Polish TV, their views on the Norwegian society in general, and the family life in Norway in particular, seemed to be rather anecdotal and influenced by the discussion taking place on the Polish internet forums.

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## Disclosure Statement

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