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# Recognizing the National Identity: Cultural Intimacy and the Polish Migration to Norway

## Abstract

### Recognising the National Identity: Cultural Intimacy and the Polish Migration to Norway

The article aims to explore the interdependencies between particular social and cultural imaginaries and the recognition of national identity among post-accession migrants living mobile lives between Poland and Norway. By introducing the context of two different kinds of habitus constructed by Polish migrants along the lines of social class belonging, I move further to analyze a wider, yet pervasive, interplay between national identity and its self and public recognition. Therefore, throughout the article, I draw on Michael Herzfeld's concepts of 'cultural intimacy' and the 'global hierarchy of value' in order to theorize ethnographic details and indicate how and in what ways certain Polish migrants are imagined and perceived as 'embarrassing' by other co-nationals.

**Keywords:** migration, national identity, cultural intimacy, power relations, the East–West divide, Poles in Norway.

## I, the one of *Polakkene*

In 2009–2011 I was collaborating with Polish migrants living mobile and transnational lives between Poland and Norway,<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork aimed to explore different strategies of transformation and reproduction of national identity in a migratory

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009 I was a visiting researcher (FSS and EEA Norway Grants) as part of the CULCOM project ("Cultural complexity in the new Norway") funded by the Research Council of Norway.

situation and included a multi-sited perspective (see Marcus 1995). I started with investigating migrants' identity strategies in Oslo. For three months, I lived with them, shared their mundane routines and observed their social and cultural practices. Soon enough, however, I have realized that in order to better understand their life-world, I need to move beyond the locality and follow migrants' routes and transnational connections. Thus, I also began to explore the Polish "site" of migration networks and while the need for in-depth engagements with real world situations remained my defining methodology, I also focused on the relations between "here" and "there" as well as the existing global regimes of social, cultural, political and economic matter.

My field collaborators came from a different social and cultural background and worked in various market sectors such as construction, housekeeping, health-care, corporate services. Some of them, after achieving initial goals, have decided to either settle in Norway or return to Poland, whilst others – pragmatically – continued to live intensive mobile lives. I have also worked with migrants, who one may call "undecided" and whose livelihood involved postponing the ultimate decision of staying or leaving, even if it entailed personal challenges. Furthermore, some of my field collaborators strongly identified themselves with "Polishness"; namely, others attempted to "reject" it by either contextually concealing "national visibility" or by simply perceiving it as a matter of secondary importance. In Norway, they lived and worked in Oslo, Drammen or Kristiansand, but their connections were often directed towards Polish cities of Poznań, Wrocław, Warsaw, or other smaller towns and villages.

There is something peculiar and yet very significant in conducting anthropological fieldwork among one's co-nationals living in a migratory situation, which cannot be simple understood in terms of employed research methods and theories. As an anthropologist of Polish background, living and working with Polish migrants, I found myself wondering who am I during this fieldwork? Am I a researcher or perhaps a migrant? How am I perceived by the Norwegians? Am I yet *another* Pole? And what about my co-nationals? Am I included as one of them (us)? Or perhaps, in their view, I am rather an outsider, despite the same national belonging? These obviously are the questions of identity, but apart from being only subjective dilemmas their also entail important elements of objectified cultural recognition. In case of migrants, to be recognised often means to be almost immediately categorized according to the existing essentialised images, usually, of national, ethnic or religious matter. Thus, it introduces a set of social and cultural representations as well as identity positioning driven by the power relations.

The significance of national recognition became evident for me in Wrocław, a city located in south-western Poland, where I met with Kasia, a young female migrant. At that time, her everyday life was intensively mobile and she found her-

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I was affiliated with the International Cultural Centre and Museum in Oslo (IKM) and collaborated with anthropologists from the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo.

self being “split” between Oslo, Warsaw and Wrocław. Kasia’s migration story begins with a decision to join her husband in Norway, where she initially took up a state-funded physiotherapy internship in one of Oslo’s hospitals. Simultaneously, however, she enrolled in a psychology course organized by a private university in Poland’s capital city of Warsaw. Wrocław, located 300 km southwest of Warsaw, is her hometown, which she visits quite often. Initially, our discussion concerned comparisons between the quality of life in Poland and Norway, and we have tried to enumerate the “pros and cons” of welfare systems as well as find some similarities between “us” and “them”. But during our conversation, the context of national stereotypes and auto-stereotypes was evoked and almost immediately, the figure of the Polish construction worker in Norway appeared, and came to dominate our discussion. Kasia told me: “but you know, in Norway, we call them *Polakkene*”, and when I asked her to elaborate on this, she added: “you know what I mean – a typical *robot*”. In this case, the term *Polakkene* in Norwegian is a definite form of the word “Poles” and the Polish word *robot* signifies a pejorative description of a manual worker (English *prole*).<sup>2</sup> What struck me the most was not only the terms she used, but especially Kasia’s positioning against other co-national migrants. Who is then “we” in her situational and relational statement? “We”, the Poles? Or perhaps even, “we” – the Norwegians? Is it merely a class distinction, or does she want to communicate something else? (cf. Pawlak 2015)

Interestingly enough, Kasia was not the only one, who emphasized a strong distinction while talking about co-nationals in Norway. Bartek, an architect working in the international architecture firm, with whom I collaborated in Oslo, also had similar identification strategies. In fact, the common attitude towards Polish construction workers in Norway was often depicted in terms of “embarrassment”, “shame” or “disgrace” and I must admit that I caught myself having quite similar feelings as Kasia and Bartek. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I moved in to a small rented flat in Tveita district (eastern part of Oslo), where I met Rafał, Andrzej and Paweł – Polish male construction workers, “known” for Kasia and Bartek as *Polakkene*. Rafał and Andrzej set up renovation companies in Norway, whilst Paweł was Rafał’s employee. Both, Rafał and Andrzej had families back in Poland and visited them quite often; as they kept telling me, ‘the ideal life consists of living in Poland, but working in Norway’. They were experienced migrants and had been previously working in Italy, Spain or the United States. That made them not only my invaluable field collaborators, but also guides, who directed me through all the migration practices and strategies. Therefore, even if I was an “apparent insider” (cf. Carling et al. 2013), I was immediately socialized as one of them (us), what luckily resulted in getting the access to migration network of exchange, reciprocity and trust. In addition, I could openly discuss any aspect of

<sup>2</sup> In Norway, the words *Polakk* (singular) and *Polakker* (plural) connote “a cheap immigrant labor” and “working class Poles”, but many Poles also use the word *Polakkene*, since its pronunciation sounds almost like the plural form of the noun *Polacy* in Polish.

their mobile and transnational lives and was given a permission to conduct a participant observation during their work at the construction sites. Obviously, such an arrangement was not an unidirectional one. Apart from helping Rafał, Andrzej and Paweł in daily activities that required language skills or assisting them in communication via social media, I was also expected to advertise their construction services among Norwegian colleagues. However, the more I have submerged in the life-world of Poles from Tveita, the less I wanted to be identified with them. I gradually started to feel “embarrassed” when discussing the “Polishness” with Norwegian friends or while having an inter-national chitchats at the local supermarket. Consequently, I attempted to conceal my national identity as it was in the case of performing a symbolic act of doing fieldnotes at the metro station just to show other commuters that despite coming back from the construction site and being covered with paint stains, I am not a *Polakker*, but rather a *participant observer*. The “embarrassment” was not driven merely by the social class distinctions or differences in cultural backgrounds. Rather, it was related to the elements of recognizing oneself as being *Polish*, thereby, internalizing the existing national imaginaries that constitute the sense of “cultural intimacy”.

In the following sections, I draw on Michael Herzfeld’s (2004; 2005) concepts of “cultural intimacy” and the “global hierarchy of value” in order to indicate the interconnections between national identity and its self and public recognition. By following Herzfeld’s understanding of the fieldwork, I first introduce and contextualize the ethnographic approach and analyze two different kinds of migrants’ habitus constructed along the line of social class belonging. The internal divisions reveal migrants’ different migratory strategies and bring in the context of recognizing the national identity. Next, I ground the ethnographic findings in a wider and comparative context of Polish post-accession migration in order to explain why and in what ways certain Polish migrants are recognised as “embarrassing” by other co-nationals. I conclude the article by summarizing the arguments and pointing out a sense of paradox that concerns contemporary migration phenomena in the enlarged Europe.

## The “Polishness” and the different kinds of transnational habitus

Poland’s accession to the European Union and Schengen Area have had a great impact on traditional conceptualisations of such categories as emigration, immigration and return in Polish migration scholarship. Migration was usually perceived as an unidirectional phenomenon involving people moving from sending to receiving country, which ending stage was integration into the host society. Such approach had crucial consequences for theoretical and practical understanding of migration by imposing “ethnic lenses” and methodological nationalism (cf. Wim-

mer, Glick Schiller 2003). Obviously, the research assumption about the congruence between the nation, the state and the society is flawed and misleading, just as conceptualizing them as “natural” ways of social organizations. However, the very category of the “national” incessantly plays a rather pervasive role in both, the public and the private spheres. In case of Polish migrants working across Europe, national identity also triggers off particular imaginaries and feelings, which introduce meanings that the (national) insiders do not want the (international) outsiders to “get to know”, but which at the same time compose a rather awkward familiarity of national belonging (Herzfeld 2013: 491).

Polish post-accession migration is already a well-recognised field of research presenting a diverse context of flows, frequencies and motives (see Burrell 2009; Engbersen et al. 2013; Favell 2008; Glorius et al. 2013; Wallace 2002). Polish migrants use their spatial mobility as a vehicle for adapting to the context of enlarged Europe, however, instead of relying merely on the transnational connections, many of them stay mobile as long as their pragmatic thinking and economic calculation suggest it. Hence, post-accession migration is often defined as “liquid” with the multiplicity of options, heterogeneous forms of attitudes and possibilities of being mobile (cf. Engbersen et al. 2010). Many Polish migrants across Europe, almost “settle in mobility”, which becomes their livelihood strategy.

As I have argued extensively elsewhere, national identity strongly intersects with social class, thereby producing a different social and cultural set of migration practices (see Pawlak 2015). However, in order to explore the significance of “cultural intimacy” in migrants’ lives, the analysis must be here recaptured and then extended to a wider and comparative context. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) work on habitus, distinction and lifestyles one may argue that an individual’s identity strategies and sociocultural practices are embedded in a wider set of constructed, yet simultaneously objectified and externalized, dispositions that are acquired during the life of the individual. In the case of migrants, such a set of sociocultural, economic and political dispositions must also be supplemented by transnational ties and connections as well as the process of socialization in a migratory situation (cf. Guarnizo 1997). The individual is simultaneously conscious and unconscious of following particular set of dispositions; the power of habitus lies in daily habits and routines of which individuals are unaware, rather than in the awareness of existing rules and principles. Different circumstances generate different kinds of habitus and sociocultural practices and lifestyles. The latter constitute systems of social meanings, which are distinctive and belong to particular groups (see Bourdieu 1984). The combination of the social position of migrant and the context of migration itself leads to the production of similarity within a specific habitus and, subsequently, to migratory practices that fit within the logic of this habitus (cf. Guarnizo 1997).

A common set of Polish migrants’ social and cultural practices in Norway includes a combination of pragmatic actions and integrational efforts, what results

in constructing a specific assemblage of essentialised understanding and practicing of “Polishness” and “Norwegianness”. My other field collaborator, also named Rafał, a warehouseman working for Norwegian construction company in Drammen exemplifies such habitus. We have met in his home village near Jelenia Góra in south-western Poland. Rafał’s migration story begins with him arriving to Norway alone and leaving the family in Poland. For the first year, he lived a back-and-forth transnational life trying to organize the living space in Norway and bring his family to Drammen, what he eventually did. At the time we met, Rafał was already reunited with the family and their main concern were the mortgage payments for a brand new house they have bought, just outside Drammen. This is a relatively common scenario for many Poles, who decide to settle in Norway. They continue to maintain transnational connections with their places of origin, however are not as mobile as some other co-nationals. Their lifestyle consists of “preserving” the “Polishness”, while “rooting” in the Norwegian social and cultural landscape. They are eager to learn the language and participate in the host culture, but at the same time, they want to remain Polish by sending children to “Polish Saturday schools” and becoming even more engaged in a political and economic situation in Poland. For some of them, as in Rafał’s case, migration to Norway is a sort of investment and an insurance for the future since they do not exclude the option of returning to Poland and benefitting from having two pensions.

However, apart from the above-mentioned migration lifestyle, there are also other, yet often neglected in the research, kinds of habitus constructed by Poles in Norway. I call them *polakkenism* and *cosmopolitanism* (see Pawlak 2015) and argue that exploring their meanings of national belonging in an ethnographic perspective might shed an interesting light on identity strategies and practices. Thus, already introduced Kasia and Bartek represent what in my opinion is – to paraphrase Michael Billig (1995) – a sort of “banal” *cosmopolitanism* (cf. Beck 2006: 40–44), whilst Andrzej, Rafał and Paweł construct the habitus of *polakkenism* driven chiefly by clear pragmatic choices, opportunities and economic calculation. As a result, for *Polakkene* there is no genuine need – except for work-related issues – to interact with Norwegian society, let alone a desire for any other deeper kind of integration. It is an “unacceptable” way of living migration life for *cosmopolitans*, who publicly refuse to be identified with such “Polishness”. On the contrary, *cosmopolitans* aim to blend in and integrate into Norwegian society and deliberately attempt to avoid being recognised as Polish nationals.

There is a sort of identification interplay between *polakkenism* and *cosmopolitanism* that echoes the existing imaginaries about “Polishness” in a migratory context. National identity seems to be a significant field of struggle filled with social and cultural strategies of its construction, negotiation and contestation. It serves as both, a meaningful template for identification with an imagined community as well as a vehicle for othering co-nationals. Therefore, when I spoke with Rafał

about his experiences of Norway and about the advantages and disadvantages of living mobile live, he replied:

Rafał: (...) You know, when I first came here, I don't know why, but I had this feeling that I'm in hospital. And wherever I'm in hospital I feel uncomfortable, I'm trying not to touch anything, because of bacteria or whatever. This was my reflection when I came here, and I felt like this for two weeks or so. It was odd, and I have to say, I feel better when I'm in Poland. And when I'm in Oslo longer than a month, it really gets my goat.

I: And why do you think is that?

Rafał: Don't know, just a general feeling. I prefer to be in Poland rather than here in Norway. I come here only when money runs out, or if job is at risk and I have to manage that (...) I feel more relaxed in Poland, I have money, don't have to think about job, I'm fully relaxed, you know. But on the other hand, I must say that in Poland I'm not as free as here, you know, my wife is always nagging and I'm under control. Here, I'm free and I can do whatever I want, so I think there are pros and cons of being either here or there.

Such a contradictory comment is not unusual among Polish migrants, especially among *Polakkene*. Poland is “home”, while Norway is “work”. However, residing permanently in just one place is not entirely satisfactory – the “best” option for Rafał is to stay mobile as long as it is possible and profitable.

On the other hand, during a conversation in one of Oslo's cafés, Bartek started to make some comparisons between Poland and Norway, and concluded with the following line:

Polish culture is generally very self-oriented and Poles, who go abroad have this natural tendency for cocooning and not giving away any secrets to others, to strangers (...). This cocooning, for example, you can find it in this thinking here among them [co-nationals – M.P.], that Polish food is the best (...) and also, there is this working on the black market, which lowers status of every Pole here. (...) Generally, all of this is inscribed in what really pisses me of in Poland and among Poles – no one talks about this cocooning, they only talk about Polish heroism and heroic emigration and that everyone has to be grateful for it. (...) Frankly, in Poland everything is just “pretended”, the government, the law (...) no one even tries to think that the law is for them, everybody *lives by one's wits*. The whole Poland is just a “pretending” country (...) and here is totally different.

Bartek's emotional comment about Poland and Polish migrants (to whom he refers using the pronoun “them”) mainly builds upon his experiences with his co-nationals in Norway. Obviously, he is not the one, who *lives by his wits*, and who practices “cocooning” and avoids interacting with Norwegians. Bartek “prefers” to be identified with “Norwegianness” to “Polishness”, especially when the latter keeps remind him of *polakkenism* and all the social and cultural imaginaries it entails. His *cosmopolitanism* is “banal” in the sense that it does not imply any substantial national identity transformations; rather, it involves merely celebrating mobility and cultural flux. However, the “banality” of the notion should also be understood here as a particular world-view, which ideologically is grounded in the existing hierarchies and power relations. Therefore, I argue that Bartek's *cosmopolitanism* is the embodiment of specific values that represent a sort of ration-

ality and modernization assumed to be an unidirectional process of “enhancing” social, cultural, political and economic realms after the fashion of contemporary neoliberal ideology (cf. Harvey 2009: 77–97).

The observable distinction between *polakkenism* and *cosmopolitanism* concerns social and cultural practices of everyday migratory life: from mundane activities, such as grocery shopping, to leisure time and personal relations with Norwegians. For example, *cosmopolitans* often avoid “Polish shops”, which offer national products like cottage cheese or *pierogi*. However, it is not a simple case of taste preferences and does not mean that *cosmopolitans* dislike “national food”; rather, it is a subjective act of contesting one’s national belonging in a migratory situation. Despite enjoying the proverbial “Polish sausage”, one may also attempt to conceal it in a public context. The point is that the existing essentialised imaginaries of a national matter are magnified and highlighted in a migratory situation as if the host society was a display of expected attitudes and values and any divergence from them might as well indicate one’s “not-belonging”. Therefore, *cosmopolitans* take Sunday hikes into the woods and attend various cultural events – “just like the Norwegians do” – not only because they enjoy these lovely activities, but also because they do not want to distinct themselves from the majority. In case of *polakkenism*, it is rather different since the idea of “living” in Poland and “working” in Norway narrows the scope of minority–majority relations. For its representatives, it is often of secondary importance to be engaged with any social and cultural activities aside the work-related ones (e.g., contracting new jobs). Thus, their day-to-day way of life is mostly limited to work at construction sites and relaxation among Polish fellow-workers.

Obviously, it is not a static polarization and there is definitely a room for the overlapping of the lifestyles as in the case of a “middle-ground” habitus I have mentioned at the beginning. Moreover, the “banality” of *cosmopolitanism* may also be observed among Polish construction workers in Norway, who in certain sense might even have more “cosmopolitan experiences” of this sort, then Bartek or Kasia. For example, during one of many conversations I had with Andrzej, he said:

You know, when you live in Poland, you somehow muddle through different situations; you work, you raise your children and so on. And this is automatic; you don’t even think about this. But when you go somewhere abroad, then all feels a little more complicated and you start to think about your roots and your belonging; you start to compare yourself, your behavior at work and so on, with others. And then this otherness appears and you notice that you are a little bit different, because every nation has its own lifestyle, its own manners, different customs, different food and so on. (...) I have worked and had contact with Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Peruvians, and they are completely different nations with their own traditions, which for me were kind of funny and kind of strange. Today, it is a normality for me, because I travel like this [i.e., am a migrant – M.P.] for almost twenty years; Rome, the States, and now Oslo; and then, you start to notice that each part of the world is slightly different.

Andrzej, like many others Polish construction workers, follows the economic opportunity and uses the mobility to move from one country to another. However, no matter where he is, Andrzej always perceives Poland as “home”, whilst each receiving country is rather a “work place”. There is no doubt that experiencing cultural differences by Polish construction workers moving across Europe has, to a lesser or greater extent, an impact on their world-views (cf. Datta 2009). Yet, what distinguishes Andrzej’s approach from Bartek’s, are the daily routines determined by different aims and livelihood strategies. Therefore, the example of *polakkenism* and *cosmopolitanism* is not an unambiguous divide, but rather a contextual point of departure, which apart from indicating different – class-driven – migratory strategies, implies also a significant role of recognizing one’s national identity in a migratory situation.

## Between representation and recognition: cultural intimacy and the East–West divide

The case of identity positioning against co-nationals is not unique and limited only to Poles in Norway. Similar process may be also observed among other Polish migrants living and working across Europe. In Ireland, for example, there is *Marian* (male given name; English *Marion*) or *Polusy* (plural; no translation), which both indicate the feeling of “embarrassment” directed towards co-nationals; in England, one finds *Polack* (instead of *Polak* – singular for Pole in Polish) or *Po-lacks* (plural) used as vehicles for identity positioning, whilst in Holland there are *Pools* (*Polish* in Dutch) entailing similar meanings. What seems to be symptomatic in all of these cases, is the transposition of social class distinction and its reproduction in a more essentialised form of national identity.

Michał Garapich (2008, 2012) introduces two concepts – the “emigration ideology” and the “myth of Polish conman” – which attempt to explain the national identity struggle among Poles living and working in the UK. To put it shortly, the “emigration ideology” includes a set of specific cultural meanings that has developed during the long history of Polish migration across the globe (see Garapich 2008). The main factors fueling Polish migration in the XIX and XX century concerned chiefly political reasons – romanticized uprisings, wars and communism – and produced an image of a migrating Pole as politically engaged freedom fighter (see Garapich 2008: 129). It was then preserved and maintained in Polish literature, arts and films and became a part of nationalistic discourse – a grand narrative – based on the moral values that justified “leaving the homeland” (cf. Galasińska, Horolets 2012). As Garapich argues (2008: 130), “being expelled by political reason connotes sacrifice and devotion to national case, whilst economic migration is rather perceived as manifestation of weakness, individual effort and

egoism". Although, the "emigration ideology" seems to explain a strong identity polarization between "old" (political) and "new" (economic) Polish migration, it cannot be deployed in the case of contemporary Polish post-accession migration (cf. Galasiński, Galasińska 2007). After all, for Poles the reasons for migrating are no longer political ones, but chiefly economic. That is why, Garapich (2012) introduces the "myth of the Polish conman" in order to understand the relations between cooperation and hostility among Poles in the UK. His main argument is that the nationalistic discourse homogenizes migrants' social and cultural differences (e.g., class distinction) and produces an essentialised "image of a Pole" in British society; hence, many Poles distinguish themselves and separate from the existing image by using the myth as a "powerful counter-response". As Garapich argues (2012: 39) to be identified as a Pole means to be "associated with low status characteristics – physical work, rural background, bad taste and the like. The myth, in essence, is an escape valve from rigid egalitarianism of the nationalistic concept of 'us'".

Garapich is right in pointing out the existing intersections between social class and national identity as well as their significance in case of public recognition. However, I would argue that the explanation of the identity struggle in the field of "Polishness" does not concern the static role of the myth *per se*, nor the already well-recognised assumption that nationalism tends to homogenize all the heterogeneity in the name of national coherence. Rather, it involves the meaningful context of juxtaposing the particularity of myth's social and cultural origins (including its meanings for the *insiders*) with the existing global imaginaries and hierarchies of values. Thereby, I argue that it is a context that creates ideological frictions, which "scratch" the surface of publicly displayed "Polishness" and introduce a powerful interdependencies between the public and intimate recognition.

The analytical traces here are "shame", "embarrassment" and "rueful self-recognition" which, according to Michael Herzfeld (2005: 6), are "the key markers of what cultural intimacy is all about". Since its development, the concept of "cultural intimacy" has already been widely followed, interestingly enhanced as well as constructively criticized while employed in different contexts and scenarios (see Kiossev 2002; Neofotistos 2010; Shryock 2004). Nevertheless, it is a useful vehicle for analyzing elements of "*practical* essentialism", which is a common aspect of communication processes, identity politics and national recognition (Herzfeld 2005: 26–32). However, such recognition, as well as the imaginaries that it entails and the feelings that it evokes, are by no means any implications of national determinism or conceptual bias, which would include the perception of the "national", the "social" and the "cultural" as interchangeable. Rather, it is a result of the pervasive nature of the omnipresent reification (both, public and individual) of the nation-state as a taken-for-granted form of social and cultural organization. It resides in the social poetics filled with "strategic or tactical deployments of ideal

types-stereotypes, laws and regulations, representations of culture, nostalgic folklore, class markers such as speech and dress” (Herzfeld 2005: 47). Yet, “cultural intimacy” is not a static element understood as unambiguous equivalent to national identity, nor does it conceal any perennial national traits. It is a contingent and historically embedded process, which exploration may shed a light on national identity dilemmas such as: “why certain features are deemed embarrassing at particular historical moments, and why ‘the West’ remains, if not the only external referent, a dominant one for the time being” (Herzfeld 2005: 47). After all, “cultural intimacy is, above all, familiarity with perceived social flaws that offer culturally persuasive explanations of apparent deviations from the public interest” (Herzfeld 2005: 9). Therefore, “cultural intimacy” gives the insiders a sense of belonging driven by “known and recognisable traits that not only define insiderhood but are also felt to be disapproved by powerful outsiders” (Herzfeld 2005: 132).

I argue that identity “embarrassment”, common among Polish migrants across Europe, originates not solely from the class distinctions, but also from the pervasive imaginaries embedded in the “global hierarchy of value”. During one of the participant observation, I went with Paweł to a construction site near our flat in Tveita. At that time, Paweł has been “working” in Norway and “living” in Poland for almost 7 years and often helped Rafał to supervise the ongoing works across Oslo. When we arrived to the proverbial “Norwegian porch”, Jurek – a male Pole in his forties from a village near Kraków – was already there, busy with renovation work. The three of us chatted about catholic church, Polish masses held in Oslo, the increasing number of Polish children baptisms in Norway and the “pros and cons” of being a migrant. At some point, I have noticed that Paweł uses a term *wariat* (similar meaning to English *loony*) to indicate those Polish migrants, who do their work in a “wrong” manner. Later, after the work, when we came back to our flat, I asked Paweł to explain in to me; while relaxing and watching Polish television, he said:

Paweł: (...) *Loonies!* Poles are *loonies!*

I: Yeah, but what do you mean? In what way they’re *loonies*?

Paweł: Poles always create problems for themselves, when they’re abroad. This is how it was, how it is, and how it will be. Pole is a *loony* and he creates even more *loonies*. You know, when one *loony* do the job, others look at him and say: “We have to keep up with him, otherwise they’ll fire us!”. It’s like this, cause’ the *loony* is working faster and faster. And you know, there are jobs that you can do in two days, but those *loonies* make everything done in one day.

It may be argued that Paweł’s uses the term *wariat* as a vehicle for criticizing a rather wider issue such as, for example, the hyper-flexible employment in the neoliberal labor market and the lack of work-life balance (cf. Friberg, Eldring 2013). Obviously, this interpretation might have some merits, particularly in case of Poles representing the “middle-ground” habitus, who usually are formally contracted and employed in various companies in Norway. However, in case of *Po-lakkene*, to be a *loony* rather means to be not familiar with the informal work

strategies that one needs to follow in order to prosper better. For the experienced *Polakkene*, such as Paweł, it is obvious that while being paid per hour, one needs to work slower just to prolong the paid working-hours. One also needs to know how to keep up appearances in the working place (e.g., construction site) so as not to be accused of idleness. I, myself, was a *loony* and had to be taught how to behave in a proper manner. For example, if I wanted to rest my legs during the work, I could not just sit, but rather I had to squat and always have some tool in my hands (or next to me). I was also told how to paint a wall to make it look as it needs another stroke and how to scrimp and save the building material, which may be re-used in other construction site. Additionally, whilst living in Tveita, I was also told the most efficient ways of “muddling through” the expensive cost of living in Oslo and got to know specific daily strategies, which included buying groceries only in selected stores and preparing a decent and tasty meal only with a few ingredients.

These and many other strategies deployed by *Polakkene* in the work place and everyday life in a migratory situations, recall Bartek’s comment on *living by one’s wits*, which is a rough translation of a nuanced Polish word *kombinować*, which he used several times during our conversation in order to position himself against essentialised co-nationals. It is rather difficult to give the precise definition of *kombinować* since its complex and culturally contextualized meaning resides somewhere between English idioms *living by one’s wits* and *wheeling and dealing*. For some, it may be understood as a sort of “swindling”, but it also shows migrants’ agency and the ability of dealing with a problem, finding solution and solving the difficulties, which one often faces while being a migrant. Thereby, *kombinować* is to deal with the existing (either problematic or not) situation by means of various *know-hows*; it includes assembling different wits and using them in a very pragmatic manner.

Importantly however, *kombinować* entails specific set of social and cultural meanings, which on the one hand, are well-recognised by the Poles, and on the other, bring a sense of collective ruefulness. What distinguishes the notion from Garapich’s “conman” – as well as from *living by one’s wits* and *wheeling and dealing* as such, which obviously are practiced by various people in different countries – is the fact that the Polish version does not exist in the social and cultural vacuum. *Kombinować* does not merely describe particular practices; rather, its meaning almost immediately harks back to the communism times in Poland. Therefore, it refers to the specific *know-how* that one needed to have in order to function and prosper under the difficult circumstances of the past regime. At that time, *kombinować* was not only a commonly accepted practice among Poles, but also a specific value that allowed people to “muddle through” the rather harsh reality (cf. Wedel 1986). Thus, *kombinować* meant to be acquired with knowledge, practices and agency that enabled people to “wheel and deal” within and against the corrupted system. However, things that once have been accepted, even ex-

pected and demanded, are no longer in the public acclaim. Today, it rather represents “backwardness”, “incongruousness” and the “lack of adaptability” to the contemporary political and economic situation. Thereby, *kombinować* is a constant reminder of Poland’s communist past and for many Poles it brings a sense of “embarrassment” while spotted in the contemporary eyes of international public. Obviously, *kombinować* cannot be understood as a static national trait. Its significance does not consist in practicing it or not, but rather in the very idea of knowing what does *kombinować* mean and being aware of its wider national connotations. In other words, *kombinować* may not be often practiced in a migratory situation, but it is nevertheless often used as a cultural marker in identity positioning and strategies among co-national migrants. It is an intimate trait for practical essentialization and valorization of mobile lives among Polish migrants.

The national “embarrassment” that is evoked by the notion of *kombinować* introduces also a significant element of a bigger picture, i.e., the “global hierarchy of value” (see Herzfeld 2004; 2005: 39–72; 2013: 493). Following Herzfeld, I argue that the idea of “global hierarchy of value” implies the existing and pervasive interplay between superiority (the West) and inferiority (the Rest), which in case of Poles is contextualized and reflected in a multilayer ideological context of the East–West divide. Needless to say, the East–West divide does not solely concern economic differences and inequalities, but also evokes particular social and cultural imaginaries, which often are perceived as “essential” and “required”. According to Herzfeld (2005: 42), “the idea of the West cannot be understood independently of its ramifications, internal and external, through global struggles for cultural and political dominance” as well as it cannot be detached from “a historiography that recognizes the mutability and mortality, not only of colonialism’s foot soldiers, but also of the grandiose ideas and cultural values that they were drafted to impose on the world”. As if the Western values – be it political, economic or educational and cultural – represent the idea of “being”, “behaving” and “thinking”, which should be followed by an individual and community in order to be (internationally) acknowledged. Therefore, it creates an ideological context of public perplexity and struggle vis-à-vis national identity since the “assumptions about what should be hidden from other countries flow from prior assumptions about cultural value – about what is proper, just, and elegant” (Herzfeld 2005: 43).

In Poland, the public discourse continues to be strongly embedded in the East–West divide, thereby, producing an almost omnipresent sense of (national) inferiority complex that is reflected in notions of “catching up with the West” and “looking European” (Herzfeld 2013: 493). It goes back to the political transition in Poland and the subsequent implementation of neoliberal capitalism in the 1990s, what resulted in polarizations at the state’s economic, political, social and cultural levels. The “unintended” consequences of neoliberal transformation in Poland are well explored by Michał Buchowski (2006) in his work on “stigmatizing a brother”. According to Buchowski (2006: 466–467) the strong polarizations in society

were rationalized and explained in the line of “domestic orientalism” where the Other was represented by co-nationals, who “failed” to adapt to the “new” and “just” reality. At that time, also the ideological and elitist notions of *homo sovieticus* (Tischner 1992) and “civilizational incompetence” (Sztompka 1993) have dominated the public sphere in Poland. They were (and still are) powerful vehicles for indicating one’s own flaws and even psychological maladjustment. Disguised as binary categories of *urban vs. rural*, *educated vs. uneducated*, *winners vs. losers*, they entail the “attributes deemed by the dominant culture as positive with the West, capitalism and progress, and those qualities regarded as negative with the East, communism and backwardness” (Buchowski 2006: 470; cf. Garapich 2013: 112–114).

The pervasive existence of the East–West divide in Polish public discourse may be observed in various domains and events long after the political and economic transition in Poland. For example, on the eve of Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, there was a big media and newspapers debate that evoked strong feelings of “embarrassment” directed towards some parts of Polish society (see Horolets 2006). It revealed the existing ideological valorizations of people’s lifestyles and ways of “thinking” and resulted in symbolic exclusion of some Poles from the “sphere of Europeanness” (Horolets 2006: 167). Interestingly enough, it was not driven solely by the economic conditions, but rather by cultural factors and the idea about the Western European countries as an essential point of reference. Therefore, once again, the public discourse became polarized between those, who “belong” and those, who “do not fit” the idea of an “adequate” national identity. Moreover, a recent example illustrates also an internal tension and trepidation in Poland triggered off by a strong “need of acceptance” on European level. In 2012, Poland and Ukraine co-hosted UEFA European Championship, what obviously brought about a full-throated debate in Polish public discourse. The forthcoming mega event was depicted as a national endeavor and each citizen should contribute to its success. What was interesting, however, was the rhetoric used in media and newspapers that included such generic claims as “We cannot embarrass ourselves!”, “We need to show them that we can do it!” or “It just has to be a success! Nothing else matters”. Therefore, the East–West divide in Poland plays a significant identification factor on various levels, including institutional policies, economic enterprises, educational skills and regulations or cultural values. In such cases, to be internationally praised, means to follow the “proper” rules and ideas introduced by the dominant Western culture. It is an interplay between superiority and inferiority, which obviously essentialises both of the figures in the existing divide – the West and the East. However, it is precisely a pervasive nature of essentialism, which has a significant impact on recognizing one’s own national identity as “embarrassing” or not.

Therefore, it brings us back to the argument about *cosmopolitanism* and *polak-kenism* and the notion of *kombinować*. The case of Polish post-accession migration

to Norway reveals the role of “cultural intimacy” in migrants’ identity strategies and significance of the existing imaginaries of global values. It is not only the case of intersectionality between national identity and social class, but also a context of valorizing one mobilities at the cost of others, which is embedded in the ideological imaginaries of the national, social and cultural matter. There is a strong sense of power relations within a group of Polish migrants, which originates from the East–West divide and is conveyed to everyday life occurrences. Thereby, *cosmopolitanism* is generally assumed to be the “right” and “proper” lifestyle of Polish migrants, whilst *polakkenism* is represented rather by those, who “lack” the ability to adapt to the expectations of the contemporary world. It seems that in a migratory situation, *cosmopolitans* appropriate a symbolic power, which gives them a self-imagined position to decide who, among other co-nationals, “fits” the idea of having “proper” values and behaving in a “proper” way. *Cosmopolitanism* is then considered to be a habitus that reflects the social and cultural practices “adequate” for the imagined idea of the West, whereas *polakkenism* is rather a lifestyle that “embarrasses” the national identity, because it evokes the recognisable by the “insiders” essentialised imaginaries of “backwardness” and “soviet past”, which are embodied in the notion of *kombinować*. For many Poles, it is the lifestyle of *cosmopolitanism* that should be displayed on the international screen; otherwise, the eyes of international public will spot our flaws and maladjustment and bring a sense of “embarrassment” on our-national-selves.

## Conclusions

The concept of “cultural intimacy” is an interesting vehicle for analyzing the role of essentialised national categories in the migratory context. It introduces more nuanced and dialectical aspect of identity politics, which may shed a different light on migrants’ transnational lives without lapsing into the methodological nationalism. After all, it shows the ways, in which the heterogeneous identities are being homogenized and then explained in terms of static national traits.

I have argued that in case of Polish migrants, the recognition of national identity often evokes a feeling of “embarrassment”, which implies the existing concerns for a “proper” public and international image. By introducing different kinds of migrants’ habitus and exploring their interrelations, I attempted to explain why and in what ways the lifestyle differences become a significant identity factor and start to dominate daily routines in a migratory situation. Thus, *cosmopolitan* migrants position themselves against co-nationals and assume that *polakkenism* is socially, culturally and morally inferior since it represents migratory “thinking” and “behaving”, which “do not fit” the ideologically imagined and essentialised West. Consequently, the lifestyle of *polakkenism* – usually expressed by one’s lacking the willingness to integrate, “cocooning” within the “Polishness”, and strate-

gically employing the notion of *kombinować* – triggers off the familiar cultural meanings, which for many Poles should rather be forgotten or concealed from the eyes of international public.

Interestingly, there is a sense of paradox in such ideological claims and valorizations. To be sure, the idea of “living” in Poland and merely “working” in Norway, Holland or the UK is relatively common among Polish post-accession migrants and often leads to the construction of habitus such as *polakkenism*. However, by using the spatial mobility and following pragmatic choices and economic opportunities, many Polish migrants, as the EU citizens, make the most of the given context of freedom of movement for workers. There is nothing “improper”, as *cosmopolitans* would suggest, in such migratory strategies and practices, especially since the existing official and neoliberal discourse in Europe presents the mobility of its citizens (and only their mobility) as a rather positive trait, almost synonymous to freedom, flexibility and change. Therefore, considering the case of Polish post-accession migration across Europe without “integrationism lenses”, it may be argued that, paradoxically, it is *polakkenism* and not *cosmopolitanism* that “fits” the idea of neoliberal ideology. Their constant movement between countries, work flexibility and diversification, as well as their agency and creativity, seem to be positive traits of a contemporary neoliberal entrepreneur. However, it also seems difficult to break with the East–West divide and all the ideological imaginaries that it entails.

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