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**CONSUMER TRICKS AND STRATEGIES  
AMONG POLISH MIGRANTS  
IN BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND**

This paper examines practices and strategies of consumption among Polish migrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Bridging theoretical perspectives on postmodernism, transnationalism and consumer society, the author discusses extent to which consumerism among Polish migrants can be seen as their way of integration with the local community in Northern Ireland. Focusing on conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption, this article explores the reasons why migrants take on the local consumption practices. Furthermore it examines migrants' attempts to increase their social status, and display wealth through their engagement in consumer culture. Next, differences in Polish and local consumption patterns are teased out. Following this, the author links consumerism among Polish migrants to their embeddedness in local, transnational and global spheres. This research adopts 30 in-depth interviews.

Keywords: migration, integration, identity, consumerism, transnationalism, material culture

The aim of this article is to examine and explore consumption strategies and practices among Polish migrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland as a way of expressing one's self. Currently Polish nationals are the largest ethnic minority community in Northern Ireland. Many of them have settled down and intend to stay permanently in Northern Ireland. This research draws on data collected in the urban context of Belfast. Belfast is a city traditionally divided between Protestant and Catholic communities. Following the Good Friday Agreement there have been attempts to build shared spaces within Belfast (Komarova and O'Dowd 2016; Svašek and Komarova 2018) and promote civic culture for diverse groups living in this city (Bryan 2017). Thus, Polish migrants find themselves within a very specific context of the post-conflict city.

While there is a large body of literature dealing with identities of Polish migrants in Northern Ireland (Bell 2015; Kempny 2010, 2016), and with the positioning of Polish migrants

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in the sectarian context of Northern Ireland (Kempny 2019), this paper will extend beyond this scope of inquiry by focusing on people's material lives and specifically on consumption patterns. This paper will seek to explore how consumption and identity intersect to construct and maintain people's conceptions of self. It will examine migrants' strategies to participate in local consumer society, showing both their embeddedness both in local consumer culture in Northern Ireland and cultural values they brought from their home country. Although Poland has also experienced a rise of consumer society in the recent years, this paper will focus on migrants' subjectivities and the way they perceive changes in themselves as a result of migration. It will draw on the findings of 30 in-depth interviews I conducted with Polish migrants in Belfast in 2018.

First, the paper will evaluate theoretical contributions of the postmodern paradigm into debates around material reality, consumerism, and identity. It will then review comparative studies on migrant consumption practices more broadly, and literature on Polish migrant consumer cultures more specifically. Following a brief overview of the methods used in this research, this paper will present the findings of my study.

## CONSUMPTION CULTURE

There has been burgeoning academic scholarship on the rise of the consumer society. Postmodern and late modernity perspectives are the most prevalent in these works. Theorists of late modernity note that that uncertainty, individualisation of societies and growing risk make the maintenance of identity quite problematic (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Castells 1997). Individuals are experiencing enormous social, economic, and political changes, which are making life unpredictable and unstable as the traditional linear life course patterns disappear. As a result our lives become fragmented and appear to consist of series of episodes rather than a single, consistent trajectory (Bauman 2000). Traditional elements of one's identity determined by one's kin group, ethnic group or nationality have withered away. In such a context, contemporary social theorists consider identity as a malleable and multidimensional entity. Identity-making often involves narrative and story-telling; it is seen as a reflexive project (Giddens 1991).

Bauman (1996) argues that identity has not simply become fragmented; it has ceased to form a stable base to such an extent that individuals can juggle their identities. He upholds that 'one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns' (1996: 19). In such a context a sense of identity in the modern world can only be created through choice. Seen from this angle, consumption practices provide individuals with meaning, purpose, and a way of constructing appropriate personal and social identities (Sullivan and Gershuny 2004). In this way consumption is considered as the primary means for people to become and display who they are. Miller argues that consumer goods allow individuals to build understanding of themselves and others, and they are actively used in social and individual self-creation (Miller 1987, 1998, 2010). Consumption helps people to construct their social worlds and find a credible place in them (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Jackson

2005). This is particularly important in these times of increased migration, where individuals need to recreate their lives in a new country, renegotiating their identities.

Individuals are active actors, who keep their life narrative going through consumption. Gabriel and Lang observe that people obtain material goods ‘not because of what things can do for us, but because of what things mean to us and what they say about us’ (2006: 47). Along the same lines of thought, in his discussion of lifestyles Giddens describes the everyday choices people make with regards to what to wear and eat, for example, as ‘decisions not only about how to act but how to be’ (1991: 81).

Although consumer cultures have become a global phenomenon, these are embedded in and emanate from a given local context. In this respect, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) highlight that consumption patterns reveal social and cultural values of a given society. From this perspective consumption practices are culturally contingent; for example, ‘a high ratio of consumption may be approved as generous, magnificent, and good in one culture, while in another the same behaviour may be called spendthrift, feckless, and bad’ (1979: 26). In a similar way, Wilk considers creolization of consumption patterns within global consumer culture as a result of diffusion of ‘structures of common difference’ (Wilk 1995: 118). The author examines how consumption patterns combine elements of the local and foreign consumption traditions through globalised institutional forms. This is an important point, as migrants may be considered as creating ‘third spaces’, negotiating and translating their cultural identities. Migrants’ consumption can be seen as operating on local, transnational, and global levels.

However a caveat is necessary. Given that consumption allows one to construct, reshape and express identities, it can be used both to generate inclusion as well as to increase exclusion; that is, ‘goods are neutral, their uses are social, [and they] can be used as fences or like bridges’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 12). This is an important aspect when considering migrant consumer cultures, as migrants may be included in as well as excluded from the local consumer society.

## CONSUMERISM AMONG OTHER MIGRANT GROUPS

Research on migrant groups and their consumption patterns offers interesting insights into the understanding of consumer cultures on a more global scale. Consumption has often been considered an important factor in negotiating boundaries of people’s ethnic identities in these studies. Many have focused on how identity construction through consumption expresses dominant and minority cultures (Ustuner and Holt 2007: 42). In the academic scholarship of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s consumption was seen as a part of acculturation strategy (Stayman and Dehpande 1989; Peñaloza 1994; Peñaloza and Gilly 1999) and bicultural identity formation (Ger and Ostegaard 1998; Oswald 1999; Lindridge et al. 2004). Peñaloza (1994) in her study on Mexican migrants in the US examines complex mechanisms of meaning-making in two distinct cultural contexts, challenging the idea of migrants’ assimilation. Instead she argues that migrants create multiple hybrid identities based on two sets of cultural references. Peñaloza shows how they become active customers on one hand while rejecting some of the consumption patterns on the other. Taking a postmodern perspective, Oswald (1998) noticed

that simultaneously with identity switching, Haitian migrants 'swap cultures by swapping goods' (Oswald 1999: 310).

Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard's study on consumerism among Greenlandic migrants in Denmark (2005) focuses on a reflexive nature of identity-making through consumption. Rejecting traditional acculturation models, assuming fixed identity positions, they examine construction of hybrid and fluid identities. Taking a more processual approach to identity construction, Lindrige, Hogg and Shah (2004) in their study on second-generation South Asian women in the UK point to a situational and contextually moulded character of consumption. In a similar way, Chytkova's (2011) study on Romanian women in Italy examines how the negotiation of gender roles of immigrant women is an important component of consumer acculturation. She examines the ways in which migrant women create hybrid gender identities, constrained by discourses in the home and host cultures.

This paper will draw on these studies, pointing at the hybrid and multidimensional nature of consumption practices among Polish migrants in Northern Ireland. It will examine and consolidate postmodern and transnational approaches to migrant consumer cultures. It will also point to the importance of intercultural bridging and cultural bonding in these exchanges.

## RESEARCH ON POLISH MIGRANTS

Research on Polish migrants' consumer cultures is framed within wider studies on materiality, transnationalism, and mobility (Burrell 2003, 2008, 2011, 2015; Burrell and Rabikowska 2009; Rabikowska 2010). For example Burrell examines how small-scale transnational practices are embedded in people's everyday lives, pointing to the important role of 'small reminders kept at home [...], photographs, ornaments and furnishings' (2003: 333). In a study on Polish ethnic food shops in the UK, Burrell and Rabikowska emphasise the crucial role of transnational links in maintaining ethnic identities of Polish migrants in the UK, as they alleviate the practical and emotional strain of migration (Burrell and Rabikowska 2009: 214). Elsewhere Rabikowska (2010) examines role of food preparation and food consumption in migrants' processes of homemaking.

Burrell's study on migrants' experiences of mobility and border crossing captures the complexity of ways in which migration is a 'highly materialised and emotional undertaking, and a real, tangible space in its own right' (2008: 353). While this paper specifically focuses on tactability and materiality of people's movement through non-places of European borderlands, there are certain interesting points relevant to this study. The author examines the flow of objects from Britain to Poland, emphasising the importance of brands and foreign origin in considering what makes these gifts attractive (compare also Burrell 2015). Burrell maintains that

Quintessentially 'English' goods especially seem to have developed a certain cachet; personal relationships are being increasingly nurtured with British-bought and branded goods (2008: 364).

This paper also explores how migrants merge their accounts of migration and ensuing economic success. I will come back to this later, when discussing the importance of branding

in migrants' consumption practices. I will also further expand on this argument by examining how this affects people's senses of identity and self-worth.

Other works by Kozłowska and Galasinska (2009), Rabikowska (2010), and McGhee et al. (2012) have tackled questions of consumption as a way of attaining normalcy in people's lives. Kozłowska and Galasinska (2009) and McGhee et al. (2012) frame Polish migration within a larger economic context in Poland, considering migration as a search for an improved standard of living and normalisation of people's livelihoods. Rabikowska argues that 'the West' has become an aspiration and a desired embodiment of normality for people living in Eastern Europe, while their everyday practices are oriented towards bridging the 'gap' between their own reality and that which is expected (2010: 292). These are very important points which I will also raise in this paper. However the authors do not consider in-depth how migrants' consumption patterns seem to integrate cultural practices from local communities in the UK with those of the migrants' home countries.

In her study on Polish migrants in Belfast, Kempny (2010) argues that some migrants increase their consumption as a result of constructing hybrid identities. She found that even though some of her informants may follow the local consumption patterns, they will pick and choose elements that are suitable for them. However, this constituted a part of a broader analysis of negotiating migrant identities. In what follows I will examine the emergence of consumer cultures as a consequence of migrants' integration within the local community. Integration is a process different from assimilation. While assimilation refers to people taking on the destination's country cultural practices, leaving their own culture behind, integration captures living in-between these two cultural systems, juggling dual identities. In relation to this I will show how migrants' consumption strategies capture their complex positioning on a multiplicity of different scales: local, transnational, and global. I will also discuss how migrants engage in conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption.

## METHODS

This study uses 30 open-ended interviews conducted with Polish migrants in Belfast in 2018. Twenty of my interviewees were familiar to me through my previous fieldwork in Belfast and I also used the snowball method, working outward from these initial contacts. The interviews evolved around a loosely structured set of themes which focused on the following areas: people's migration trajectories, their consumption patterns in Poland and Belfast, the changes they noticed in their consumption, and how they perceive the local consumption culture in relation to that of Polish migrants. My interviewees were aged between 20 and 50 years old and they came from diverse regions in Poland. I interviewed 13 males and 17 females, trying to maintain a gender balance. I also recruited research participants from different socio-economic backgrounds, with 11 of them being blue-collar workers and nine of them professionals.

My positionality in the field was complex and multistranded (Abu-Lughod 1993, 2000; Narayan 1993). I have discussed complexities inherent in studying members of the same ethnic group away from home at depth elsewhere (Kempny 2012). However it is worth

noting that on the whole as a native anthropologist I was an insider in my field of study. I had a tacit knowledge of cultural norms regarding consumption in the migrants' country of origin, which allowed understanding of the wider context of this research. I had also known most of my informants for over a decade and had a good rapport with them, which facilitated my re-entry to the field. The informants that I knew well were keen on participating in the interview. However, I had to be very cautious to avoid friendliness bias, and I framed questions that were open-ended. I probed the responses from the interviewees by adding follow-up questions or rephrasing questions already asked.

Another issue that became apparent in my study was that even though I was originally from Poland, there were other layers of identity that came to play in this research. Provided that the interviews dealt with migrant consumption practices, economic status was an important aspect of belonging that affected my insider/outsider status. As a researcher who has struggled financially, I found it difficult to relate to the wealthy migrants, who indulged themselves in conspicuous consumption. I felt that the gap between them and myself was large. To some extent this has equalled out uneven relationships in the field. Whereas I possessed greater cultural capital than some of my informants, their economic capital was much higher than mine. This created an interesting dynamic, where the migrants were boasting about their financial possessions to signify their economic status, which was higher than mine. This enabled me to gain rich insights into their material worlds. In the case of my informants who were not so well off, they knew that we were in the same boat and they were ready to discuss their practices of consumption and the goods they desired, perhaps more so than had I been a wealthy, well-established scholar.

The interviews were conducted in Polish. I conducted bottom-up content analysis in which data was thematically organized according to responses rather than pre-determined themes. The content was analysed during transcription and translation following the fieldwork.

## CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Many of my informants who have come to Belfast engage in conspicuous consumption. Veblen refers to conspicuous wastefulness (1899/1994), which becomes a primary status marker. This conspicuousness is of crucial importance in public displays of people's economic positions. In relation to this, branding is an important aspect of migrants' consumption practices. Branding plays a key role in pecuniary emulation, which is a means for people from lower social classes to attain greater social status. They emulate the high-status members of the society by consuming over-priced brands of goods and services perceived to be products of better quality, and thus of a higher social class. In this case, consumption practices should be seen as a meaning-making process through which people mark their status and standing in the society.

Migrants often desire to have the most popular car brands. Sebastian, a 42-year-old male who works at a local factory says, 'When I came here initially, I was walking, I then got myself a bike and then a Mercedes. It was an old one, a second hand one, but still a Mercedes'. When I asked him why it was important to him to have a Mercedes, he said 'I want

to feel that I finally can afford something outlandish It is nice to have such a phat car'. In Sebastian's discourse the brand seemed to stand for social advancement, as migrants settle down in a new country they keep climbing up the social meritocracy system from the very bottom to the top. A brand from this angle marks a person's social standing at any given time and often increases their feeling of self-worth. When I asked Sylwia, a 37-year-old stay-at-home mother, about her husband's choice of a Mercedes, she answered in a similar way: 'He got this car to drive it to Poland and boast in front of his father and brother. I think it's because he is looking for a kind of acceptance in their eyes. His father always told him that he wouldn't achieve anything in his life'. In these contexts, material capital has a potential of transforming into symbolic capital, which increases people's prestige or recognition by other members of society. This may be particularly important in the case of migrants who want to reinforce a positive image of self. Material possessions play an important role in presenting oneself, and standing out from the crowd. This is very much in line with Burrell's (2008) argument about a car as a metaphor for social mobility and status in male migrants' accounts. Ignatowicz (2011) has also observed one of the reasons for travelling home is to display one's new social status and show off the 'achievements' of migration.

Many Polish migrants would purchase car makes that are also popular in Poland, in this way bridging the gap between the UK and Poland. For example, Skoda is considered a popular make of car among Polish people, and one of the most popular cars in the UK. However some of my informants noted that it is a car manufactured in the Czech Republic. Radek, a 50-year-old male who works as a cleaner said, 'I remember that Skoda was very popular car that was even present in the communist regime. It has a Volkswagen engine. Skoda is associated with its predictability and reliability'. Many migrants who like to maintain their links with country of origin choose this particular car model. This is interesting as they show their belonging to the East European post-communist bloc while engaging in consumption in Northern Ireland. At the same time, they note that the locals also like Skodas, which brings them closer to the local community.

Another important area where brand is important is high technology. For example Lukasz, a 30-year-old Polish English software engineer confessed: 'I have a new 60-inch smart TV with wi-fi. I've also had two iPhones. I can afford to spend 600 pounds on a phone'. Lukasz came from a working-class family in Poland and he made his way to advance socially. Buying branded products allows him to display his possessions to the members of the local community, other Polish migrants, and family back home.

Alicja's case presents a slightly different example. Alicja, 44, and her husband, Aleksander, 45, have two Toyotas. They are quite well settled in the UK, although having been university-educated in Poland, they engage in work that is below their skill levels. Alicja works at a local call centre and Aleksander is a taxi driver. They try to find enjoyment in consumption practices. Alicja told me that she conceals this fact from her family in Poland: 'I don't want them to know that we have expensive cars. When I post on Facebook, I make sure they cannot see the posts revealing what I buy or own, because they wouldn't understand and they would criticise me'. This brings attention to the cultural dissonance that migrants may feel as the values dictated by a consumer society may clash with the more traditional value system in which they had been brought up in Poland.

Other examples of conspicuous consumption among migrants include designer clothes. Katarzyna, a 44 year-old female working as a support provider at a local hospital, is an example of a migrant who engages in conspicuous consumption of designer clothes. She said

I like to buy clothes from Karen Miller, Hugo Boss and Jimmy Choo. Many people notice straight away that I wear designer clothes. Here I have always received positive feedback regarding my clothing style. In Poland people are different – when they see an elegant looking woman they ask, ‘Why are you dressing up like this?’ They like leggings, a baseball hat and tennis shoes. Everyone looks the same and there is no problem with that.

Katarzyna is well-settled in the UK, has British citizenship and a mortgage. Her two daughters, aged 8 and 10, speak better English than Polish. She has assimilated into the Northern Irish consumer culture and draws fixed boundaries between herself and her compatriots in Poland. Whereas Alicja still maintains strong links with Poland, Katarzyna feels that she has closer links with the UK at the moment.

Conspicuous consumption also allows Polish migrants to feel included within the local society. This is particularly important in the case of second-generation migrants. In this vein, Katarzyna likes her children to integrate fully with the local society. She feels that it is important to get them toys that other children also have. She finds the Disney brand has a strong appeal among their children. She comments:

It’s your choice, you can spend 20 pounds for normal rollerblades, but you can also spend 80 because they have Disney characters from Frozen like Elsa, or Mickey Mouse. It is not about the rollerblades. The rollerblades are cheap. What’s most expensive are the icons. Amelia, my daughter would get anything that has a Frozen image on it, it must be Frozen. I buy this stuff because they ask for it. Everyone has Frozen so she wants it as well.

In a similar way, Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends is another important cultural icon that resonates with migrant children. Marta, a 37-year-old Polish-English interpreter, commented: ‘My son wants everything with Thomas and Friends. A scooter, clothes, and books. These things are costly. He has a cousin in Poland who is unable to afford them. We often buy Thomas and Friends stuff for him. The Polish version is Tomek Ciuchcia. Children love it’. Another important issue in this respect is that migrants become part of local society but also a wider global consumer culture that they may have felt excluded from when they were in Poland. As well, through sharing similar consumer goods with their family members in Poland, migrants are able to build stronger ties with them. Marta’s son speaks fluent English, and often mixes Polish and English words in sentences. His cousin and himself are separated by cultural barriers but also find themselves physically remote. However they can find a sense of enjoyment when they meet in Poland and talk about Tomek Ciuchcia/Thomas the Tank Engine. This example shows how the realms of global, local, and transnational in migrant consumption practices intersect in a myriad of ways. Global cultural icons become localised to the local cultures but they also become vehicles for strengthening transnational connections.

Another aspect of conspicuous consumption is that some migrants may also choose their home brands to impress their home fellows in Northern Ireland. For example, the



aforementioned Sylwia, who likes classy shoes, told me that she often buys Rylko and Wojas shoes, which are Polish brands. On the other hand, she notes that wearing 'exotic' shoes makes you 'stylish and classy'. In this context, the conspicuousness of the brand is directed mostly at other Polish migrants, who can appreciate it, but also at the local members of the community for whom the shoes in question may seem exotic.

This chapter shows how conspicuous consumption among migrants is an important tool in reinforcing their positive sense of self but more importantly a vehicle through which they can express their identities and belongings, which may be complex and multistranded. On one hand conspicuous consumption is a status marker through which migrants show how well they have done. On the other hand, it may serve as a way of reinforcing connections with the country of migration, as well as with the migrants' country of origin. In this context showing off ethnic products may give a sense of national pride and strengthen a sense of self. In other cases, as Katarzyna's case suggests, migrants may break away from the consumption practices back in their home country and assimilate into the local culture.

## INCONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Whereas some migrants engage in conspicuous consumption, among my informants I have also noticed another trend, namely engaging in inconspicuous consumption. This reflects the wider processes in a consumer society, a drive towards inconspicuous consumption, through which status can be marked (Eckhardt et al. 2015). Inconspicuousness refers to subtle branding signals, and it has been utilized by the very upper classes in the past. Eckhardt et al. (2015) show this is now becoming true for the masses as well. The rise of inconspicuous consumption in this respect suggests that luxury consumption does not necessarily have to mean conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, other forms of consumption are emerging, in particular accumulation of experiences rather than solid possessions (Weinberger 2017). In this section I will focus on experiential aspects of consumption, namely consuming services and foreign trips.

Travel and tourism are important forms of consumption behaviour in which Polish migrants like to partake. Horolets notes that migrants are 'mobile actors who choose their leisure patterns under multiple socio-economic, spatio-temporal and cultural practices' (2014: 8). This has also transpired from my research. Migrants' choices with regards to travel/vacationing vary and their motives for doing so may differ. For example Joanna is a 42-year-old mother of a 9-year-old girl. She is a law degree graduate in Poland but has been working at a call centre for a long time, and often in her narratives she has told me that being able to afford more compensates for this. She referred to her travels in the following way:

We came here to get something out of our money. We want to see the world, what a palm tree looks like, the sandy beaches and stuff. I am happy because finally we can afford things.

Tourism from this perspective can be seen as providing a sense of enjoyment in migrants' lives as they proactively seek novel and meaningful experiences. Going somewhere

on vacation allows mastering some space or situation and also provides migrants with the opportunity to speak about it later on. Often in this context tourism becomes a commodity dictated by the demands of tourist gaze. As Beata says: 'When I went to Egypt, Canary Islands and Argentina I indulged in eating at restaurants and buying souvenirs. I also had a camel ride and took a picture with a tango dancer'. Beata is a 33-year-old sociology graduate who works at a local shop in Belfast. Through her voyages, Beata seeks 'emotional recreation', pursuing activities and experiences which are not available in her everyday life. Memorable moments are at the heart of such pursuits. They are often captured as a sequence of photos often posted on social media and networking sites. They often play an important function in replacing identity with self-image. Beata has been updating her friends on her exotic trips by taking photos of herself and her husband with a selfie-stick. In a way, she has strived to create the self-image of a 'world citizen', engaging in cosmopolitan practices and embracing a multiplicity of cultures (Kempny 2010). Faucher (2014) in this respect notes that participation in social media allows individuals to build up social capital and display wealth. In this sense, inconspicuous consumption may lead to a conspicuous display of leisure, in particular because what is posted is hyperactive socialising with both members of Northern Irish societies and migrants' relatives back home. From this perspective, migrants' status markers are becoming dematerialised.

Foreign trips are treated as a form of cultural capital which broadens migrants' horizons as they are able to learn about a variety of places around the world. Equally, these travels may also serve as bonding social capital in which migrants forge transnational links with their country of origin. For example, Iwona, a 30-year-old female working at a local pharmaceutical company mentioned that she intended to do a museum tour in Poland, so that her daughter could learn about Polish history. Parents often like to keep their options open, and making sure their children are acculturated both to local and Polish culture is often a precaution taken in case they decide to return to Poland at some stage in their lives.

Another example of such inconspicuous consumption is consumption of various services, for example in relation to one's body and physical appearance. In this context the body becomes a central component in constructing and negotiating self-identities. The Polish migrant body within the customer culture of Northern Ireland turns into a site of endless choice and possibilities. An example of this is the use of tanning salons and manicures. These attempts to beautify oneself visibly share that migrants have done something they connect with leisure and affluence, but without the conspicuous connotations of Mercedes, Macs and iPhones. In the context of migration, these acts of inconspicuous consumption may acquire additional layers of complexity. For example, for Anna, a 20-year-old Sociology student, using tanning salons allows her to become physically similar to the members of the local community. She said, 'I came here as a teenager and I just want to mix with the others. You can see that in Northern Ireland girls wear much more make-up and are more tanned than in Poland. I want to mix with them. When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. My observations have shown that usually younger Polish girls tend to use tanning salons, whereas elder women would keep up with the Polish standards of beauty. In Ania's case inconspicuous consumption makes her feel more of an insider within the local culture.

On the other hand however, I observed the attempts of some women to stand out from the crowd by maintaining Polish standards of beauty. This relates to nail treatments. For example, Zofia, a 40-year-old female optometrist at a local eye clinic, told me that local manicure salons provide poorer quality services:

The locals do nails in a less meticulous way. The glue and enamel are of poorer quality. They also have different patterns, they're tacky. I go to a Polish lady who does them for me. I think that nails done by her are subtle but original.

By choosing a Polish nail salon Zofia strongly affirms where her sentiments lie. She draws rigid boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Secondly, Zofia's preference for a subtle colour for her nail polish further highlights how she tries to consolidate her social standing through her personal conduct following a set of rules that are inscrutable to outsiders. Zofia is well-settled in the UK and she was naturalised as a British national. Her strategy is different than Anna's. Whereas Anna tries to physically resemble the locals, Zofia feels well integrated in the local community and does not attempt to imitate the local fashion, as she feels at ease being 'different'. She has a strong attachment to her home country and travels frequently to Poland. From this point of view, the homeland may be embodied in materialities of migrants' lives through consumption practices not only in conspicuous ways, but in inconspicuous ways as well. That suggests that migrants who become members of the middle class may also be less likely to ostentatiously reinforce their sense of cultural difference.

Zuzia presents another interesting case of inconspicuous consumption. She is a 34-year-old Polish-English interpreter and has recently completed a diploma in translation. Like Zofia, she is well-settled in the UK and has a two year-old son and a husband. She is very keen on purchasing clothes from The GAP, but is reluctant to buy clothes with the GAP logo on them. She said 'I like to buy clothes at The GAP, some of them are really cool. I like fishing for sales. I first came across The GAP during my stay in the US. I always thought these were Western clothes. I was surprised when I came across them in Poland'. When I asked Zuzia about the GAP logo, she said 'I don't like to flash the brand. I like The GAP and I try to make myself more westernised, but I don't need people to know that I buy branded clothing'. Zuzia said she would feel uneasy engaging in conspicuous consumption, as she was brought up in a modest way. From this perspective, one can say that inconspicuous consumption may take on an additional dimension for migrants who were brought up in a communist regime, and buying branded products may evoke a feeling of cultural dissonance. Furthermore, Zuzia likes to buy amber jewellery from Poland. She commented 'the local jewellery is tacky, so I prefer to purchase it in Poland. In Poland it is also much cheaper. I often buy Baltic amber earrings when I visit'. Interestingly enough, in Poland amber is considered a precious gem, suggesting that Zuzia still maintains Polish ideas about what is valuable. When I asked Zuzia where she purchased her earrings, she mentioned APART, which is the largest jewellery producer in Poland, known for its original designs. She mentioned that she could not afford APART jewellery when she was in Poland and that migration enabled her to improve her material status. Zuzia presents a complex case, in which she juggles allegiances to the West and the East, and she provides an excellent example of culture swapping (Oswald 1999). Zuzia also told me that she had recently bought some amber jewellery at the Belfast Christmas market.

She mentioned that a Polish woman sells it regularly and has her own online company. This brings attention to the question of ethnic entrepreneurship and how products from migrant home regions may become a matter of public consumption (Waldinger et al. 1990). This also suggests that ethnic entrepreneurs are becoming included in the urban landscape of the multicultural city (Amin 2002, 2008; Neil 2004). This is particularly important in the context of Belfast, where attempts are being made to create civic spaces within a divided city (Bryan 2017).

Patterns of inconspicuous consumption, like those of conspicuous consumption, are complex. Inconspicuous consumption on one hand may be a strategy of acculturating to the local society, but equally it may be related to attempts to maintain one's own culture. In some cases, migrants engage in culture swapping, where their consumption practices span across transnational social fields. What distinguishes inconspicuous forms of consumption from ostentatious forms is that migrants who engage in inconspicuous consumption are often members of an aspiring middle class. In addition to this they are often well-settled in Northern Ireland and consumption for them is not as much an overt display of status as a way of life. These migrants are in this sense distinct from those who engage in conspicuous consumption, as the latter, often members of the working class, often feel disconnected from both the local and the Polish society.

## DIFFERENCES

Despite these visible attempts to increase consumption, all of my informants draw rigid lines between themselves and the local Northern Irish. They often emphasise the fact that Polish migrants need to save more money as they are unable to rely on family support networks in case they run into financial difficulties. For example, Katarzyna says:

If you take two families, mine and a local one which has the same income, despite everything we have a larger tendency to save up. We think logically. If something happens, no one will support us. I'd be happy to forget about money, to throw it around more easily, but we have to save it for a rainy day. Locals don't have as many worries as we do.

In the interviews migrants often link this propensity to save to differences between lifestyles in Poland and the UK. British people are often considered as more relaxed and stress-free. In comparison, Polish people tend to worry more. According to Marta, the British spend more money: 'Polish people are somehow used to saving, and it seems to me that British do not have this need at all. British people save little and lead a consumer lifestyle. It depends on the person but they live here from one salary to the next. I hear about people getting their wages, and then going out at the first weekend. They spend all their extra money then'.

In a similar way, Sylwia commented:

It's definitely the Polish attitude. Polish people always think 'Oh my god, what will happen tomorrow? What if I lose my job tomorrow?' I think that British people have a more relaxed attitude towards life. People live from day to day. If they lose their job they'll find another one. They don't have to worry about what tomorrow will bring. People from poorer countries have this attitude.

Interestingly enough, research on consumption patterns in Poland demonstrates something different. Contemporary Polish youth have admitted that they are more likely to engage in consumption and spend their wages, rather than to save money (CBOS 2003). It seems that migrants rely on their experiences of their past situation in Poland, pre-2004. They grew up in times of austerity and their propensity to save may be related to their upbringing in the post-communist transition period in Poland. Many migrants left Poland right after graduating, and they base their cultural resources on memories of how their parents lived. At the same time, the situation has been dynamically changing. Migrants who could not afford a decent life in Poland have left for abroad. However, since 2004 the Polish economy has been developing steadily. At the moment it is considered to be one of the most stable economies in Europe. Ania commented: 'Well, actually when I look at my friends in Poland, they also buy a lot of things. Times have changed.' Another reason why Polish migrants tend to save more is their uncertain situation in the British labour market. They often feel less privileged in comparison to their Northern Irish counterparts. Many of my informants highlighted that when it comes to job recruitment processes, they are subject to discrimination.

This section has shown how migrants become acculturated to the local consumer society whilst maintaining their propensity to save from their home country. This brings our attention to involvement of migrants in transnational structures and the process of creation of third spaces, where consumption practices are embedded both in the culture of migrants' country of origin and that of the receiving country. These consumption practices are constituted by the Polish migrant consumer cultures and are imagined and re-embedded in a multiplicity of ways.

## CONCLUSIONS

Polish migrants find their place in Northern Irish society and their means of integration through consuming (Jackson 2005). Miller argues that consumer goods allow individuals to build understanding of themselves and others, and they are actively used in social and individual self-creation (Miller, 1987, 1998a; 2010). This is particularly important in times of increased migration, where people need to recreate their social worlds in the country of immigration and to renegotiate their senses of self. Through consumption practices solid, porous, and imagined lines of one's identity are negotiated, crossed, and dissolved.

My research has found that Polish migrants' practices of consumption in Northern Ireland are complex and multifaceted. Whereas conspicuous consumption is common among members of different social classes and those with different language skills, inconspicuous consumption seems to predominate among migrants who are well-settled in the UK and are members of the aspirational middle class. Social class, length of stay in the UK, and the degree of integration with the Northern Irish society all intersect in a myriad of ways to shape migrants' consumption practices.

Consumption practices reflect where the migrants' complex loyalties lie: on one hand they may aspire to become fully fledged members of Northern Irish society and they often treat consumption as a way to increase their own and their children's social and cultural capital and to feel included. On the other hand, they may feel alienated from the mainstream

Northern Irish society and engage in conspicuous consumption to mark their economic status and display wealth to the local community. They may also want to prove to their families back home that they have advanced economically, showing the successes of migration. From this perspective some migrants aspire to consume local and Western globally recognised products as a result of acculturating themselves to the local consumer culture. At the same time, migrant consumption practices may span across transnational fields, where they engage in consumption of products from their home country. Seen from this angle, consumption practices of Polish migrants should then be considered as a multidimensional and multiscalar phenomenon which spills over local, transnational, and globalised spaces.

In their interviews, migrants put forth an identity narrative of “us versus them”. Us/ them, east/west, normal/deviant dichotomies are prevalent themes in the interviews. This is particularly visible in the attempts to draw rigid lines between consumption practices by the Northern Irish society and Polish migrants, the majority of them born under the communist regime. Although consumption has been on rise in Poland in recent years, migrants still often heavily rely on imagined rather than real patterns of consumerism from their country of origin.

Finally, it is worth noting that the recent COVID-19 pandemic raises new issues and concerns with respect to people’s consumption practices. The fact that migrants’ mobility may be constrained for a significant amount of time may have different implications for transnational connections that they forge with their countries of origin. Furthermore, a stalling economy may mean increasing rates of unemployment and lead to lower living standards, which may have a backlash effect on consumption patterns. In addition to this, new emerging consumption patterns such as zero waste, ecology, and minimalism (Mauch 2016) may add additional complexity to the picture, opening new avenues for future research.

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#### STRATEGIE KONSUMPCYJNE POLSKICH MIGRANTÓW W BELFAŚCIE W IRLANDII PÓLNOECNEJ

Artykuł rozważa praktyki i strategie konsumpcyjne wśród migrantów polskich w Belfaście w Irlandii Północnej. Nawiązując do teorii postmodernizmu, transnacionalizmu i społeczeństwa konsumpcyjnego, autorka rozpatruje, do jakiego stopnia praktyki konsumpcyjne wśród migrantów polskich mogą być postrzegane jako proces integracyjny ze społeczeństwem północnoirlandzkim. Skupiając uwagę na konsumpcji na pokaz (*conspicuous consumption*) i nieostentacyjnej (*inconspicuous consumption*), autorka rozważa powody, dla których migranci przejmują lokalne praktyki konsumpcyjne. Ponadto, artykuł podejmuje tematykę konsumpcji jako sposobu podkreślania statusu społecznego wśród migrantów polskich. Autorka wskazuje także na różnice między praktykami konsumpcyjnymi Polaków i obywateli Irlandii Północnej. Zwraca uwagę na umiejscowienie migrantów w lokalnych, transnarodowych i globalnych strukturach społeczno-kulturowych. Artykuł opiera się na analizie trzydziestu wywiadów jakościowych.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość, integracja, migracja, konsumpcja, transnarodowość

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