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## FAMILY GENDER ROLES AND FAMILY GENDER RELATIONS OF POLISH MIGRANTS IN IRELAND AFTER 2004

Some sources<sup>1</sup> in 2006 stated that as many as four million Poles had left the country in the two years following the EU accession (Kłós 2006), mainly going to the UK, Ireland and Germany. The main motivation for this migration was for economic reasons. Transnational reality has become a part of the migration experience of women and men, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. It became a part of their family life. When someone migrates to a new country his or her family life might be affected by this fact in a variety of ways. Thomas Cooke (2006: 2) noted that, “migration and the family are interdependent because a change in one nearly always involves a change in the other”. There may be some benefits from the move, but there are also costs. The consequences often differ for different members of a family. There is a need to develop a better understanding of family relationships that both shape and are shaped by migration (Kofman 2004). Moreover, as Pribilsky noticed, family studies require increased focus on the specific patterns for men's and women's transnational migration and their reaction to it within the context of their families (Pribilsky 2004).

The questions that lie at the root of the research results and conclusions presented in this article were: How do gender role beliefs and gender relations affect transnational family migration? And how are gender role beliefs and gender relations affected by transnational family migration? By answering these questions I also wanted to shed the light on possible gender transitions, its direction, the circumstances in which it takes place, and the possible social and familial consequences of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Following the data of B. Kłós (2006), Polish media estimated that 2-4 million Poles left the country between 2004 and 2006, while Ministry of Labor and Social Policy-660 thousand, The Catholic Church-1 million, Polish experts-1,2 million, Report ECA (European Citizens Action Service)-1,12 million.

So, my intention was to focus on transnational family migration<sup>2</sup> as neither a degradation nor an improvement to women's or men's social roles, but rather as a process of shaping transnational family life and restructuring gender relations. I also wanted to examine the other side of the coin and to determine how beliefs about family gender roles and family gender relations shape transnational migration patterns. My main expectations towards the result of my empirical research assumed transnational family migration processes (migration decisions, transnational family separation as well as reunification) would be shaped by gender roles and family gender relations due to specific Polish cultural and religious traditions in which these gender roles and family relations have been formulated. At the same time, inspired by the literature on the topic (for example Morokvasic 2007) and the specific cultural and religious Polish context, I expected that family gender roles and family gender relations within the family, especially parenting roles, would hardly be challenged permanently by transnational family migration.

The gender perspective in my study has been driven by a statement that gender is a common concept describing both the family and migration; family has been acknowledged as a gendered unit (Kimmel 2000) and migration as a gendered process where people migrate from and enter into “gendered and stratified societies” (Piper 2008:1). Patterns of migration, as well as other circumstances such as political; migration law regulations, economical; labour or non-labour migration, social and cultural background may vary for different groups of migrants. Nevertheless, “gender is likely to be a fundamental dividing line between the way that immigrants construct and experience an immigrant or trans-national identity” (Moch, 2005:102). Therefore, the perception of migration processes as gendered has gradually emerged and has been followed by a number of studies on the topic (for example: Morokvasic 2007, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 1999, 2003, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, Kofman *et al.*, 2000, Kofman 1999, Pessar 1999, Pessar and Mahler 2003, Parreñas 2009, Piper 2008, White 2011, Kraler *et al.*, 2011, Małek 2011). The general assumption in this study is that since women and men are likely to experience migration in different ways, then gender should be treated as a central theme of migration studies (Pessar and Mahler 2003). However, this general and universal statement is

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<sup>2</sup> Transnational families are defined as “families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders.” (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3)

not corroborated by the consistent research results related to the question of how gender has been shaped by migration, in which directions, and what is the character of these possible changes. Just to mention only two opposite examples where on the one hand Mirjana Morokvasic argues that “international migrants albeit women and men in different ways, tend to *use* the traditional gender order and *rely* on it for their own purposes, if they don’t challenge or question it” (Morokvasic 2007: 71, emphasis in original), while Nicola Piper advocates that “On the other hand, these cross-border movements – whether by women/men on their own or jointly with their spouses – have the potential to reconfigure gender relations and power inequalities. Migration can provide new opportunities for women and men to improve their lives, escape oppressive social relations, and support those who are left behind.” (Piper 2005:1).

In order to achieve the main goals of my study I decided to follow transnational family migration processes from the very first step, which means from migration decisions, through transnational family separation until family reunification in the host country. In order to do so in an organized way I decided to differentiate three stages of transnational family migration: pre-transnational family stage, transnational family stage and post-transnational family stage. The research results presented above allow me to prove that the suitability of these three stages for my study has been empirically confirmed. Each of the stages is characterized by the specific processes and family relations which are determined to a large extent by the gender roles and gender beliefs of people who were engaged in the transnational family migration.

## METHODS AND THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

When investigating transnational family life, I follow the life-cycle perspective and I use anthropological and feminist methodological approaches. It gives me a chance to trace and study the difficult to measure, complex, and dynamic nature of family roles and relations over transnational migration time. It allows me also to be sensitive and alert to all kinds of circumstances which may directly or indirectly influence my research process and outcome. By using qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and life-story interviews, I have a chance to discover not only the motivations and feelings which lay behind the individual actions but also to try to suggest general patterns. Another factor which leads my research towards an

anthropological approach when studying transnational family migration is the lack of family research from a micro-level perspective. As Adrian Favell (2008) claims when writing about new East-West migration patterns within the EU: “Less has been done on the micro, ethnographic level: on the lives, experiences, networks and social forms that this new migration in Europe has taken. Fresh research is called for on the ‘human face’ of this migration” (Favell 2008:702).

I focus my research mostly on experience of married couples of Polish nationality in Ireland with or without children. However, I also take into account single parents and couples who constitute a stable relationship (cohabitants) with or without children who, similar to married couples, have experienced no less than one year of family migration.

Typically for qualitative research, there was selected a small sample of informants according to criteria, that allowed to collect diverse, rich and extensive data which would be typologically indicative and explanatory. I used a method called snowball sampling (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003:94). Several starting points for the recruitment of research participants were obtained through personal contacts, including colleagues, friends, neighbours, and other acquaintances. Personal network facilitated access to further potential respondents because the researcher and participant have people in common. There were 45 interviews conducted in total with married or cohabitating Polish male and female migrants in Ireland. A large amount of my interviews were conducted between the end of September 2009 and 8 of March 2010. All interviews took place in Dublin or in the neighbourhood. The respondents follow the characteristic pattern of the recent transnational migration from Poland to Ireland, which involves mostly young people in their 20s and 30s. Therefore, none of the migrant respondents was more than 45 years old, while the youngest one was 25. Most of them originally come from small towns or villages in Poland.

It turned out that the majority of my respondents support a rather traditional gender arrangement, if not completely then at least partially. The traditional perception of family roles, especially the role of the mother, is noticeably more popular among couples with children than among single Poles or couples without children. Nevertheless, my research indicates that despite traditional gender beliefs some structural conditions lead some couples to negotiate a more equal division of paid and unpaid work. Specifically, couples with lower levels of education in order to

make ends meet or save as much money as possible in a short amount of time adopt different gender beliefs to the traditional division of housework. So, these kinds of traditional gender beliefs do not exclude the professional work of women in a situation of financial need but at the same time do not exempt them from taking care of family and home. So, mainly due to family financial needs, and despite of their rather traditional gender beliefs, most of my respondents practice the mixed model of gender arrangements, where both the man and the woman engage in paid work (part-time or full-time) and care is developed as a specific task and allocated mostly to women.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

The article presents the content analysis and results of qualitative research conducted for my PhD dissertation. It is important to stress that due to the multidimensional character of the phenomenon and the limited space for this article I had to restrain from presenting particular examples of case studies, its nuances or individual quotations. For the same reasons, the subject is limited to the basic gender roles of women and men within the family such as: husband/wife and mother/father. Therefore, the content of this article presents only general and selected research results and conclusions which are discussed broader and in detail in my doctoral thesis.

## PRE-TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY STAGE

The “discourse that defines migration” is embedded in how migrants define and understand gender roles (Malkin, 2004:77). The family migration decision is usually an outcome of a combination of rationally calculated elements and gender beliefs-based arguments. The predominance of the first ones or the second ones is dependent upon the gender beliefs shared by the spouses; if they cultivate a more traditional family gender arrangement, then gender-based arguments dominate when making a decision who, when and for how long will migrate; if the couple share more liberal family gender beliefs, then they value economically rational arguments more when making decisions about migration. The predominance of gender-based arguments

does not exclude the existence of economically rational arguments, however they are of secondary importance.

Since families with children tend to have more traditional gender beliefs than childless couples, the migration decisions of the former are less based on an economical calculation and more on gender beliefs than the migration decisions of the latter. This is probably due to the fact that for obvious reasons the migration decision of childless couples, unlike those of couples with children, is not shaped in any way by their parental roles.

Often gender based and at the same time economically irrational the family migration decisions are made on the basis of the common assumption that men will be more resourceful, even if they do not have any previous migration experience, or they do not speak the language. Many female respondents who followed their husbands prioritized their husband's endeavours over their other family members' endeavours, including their own, when making decision about migration. In my research sample eight women out of nineteen who followed their husbands, gave up their own paid job in order to join their husband who had migrated first<sup>3</sup>. Even when women do not entirely accept their husband's idea of migration, they support the male's sense of his breadwinning responsibilities and despite anxieties associated with transnational family separation, they eventually do not protest against a husband's migration. This pattern reflected the legitimacy of husbands' authority to act autonomously derived from traditional gender role beliefs. The migration of men is driven by a sense of responsibility for the financial well-being of their families, and it is often seen as a chance to fulfil their traditionally perceived male duties. While migrating women are usually driven by the dramatic family financial need and their desire to improve the family situation. The migration of women, particularly of mothers, is at the cost of their sense of female duties towards family, so is only when spouses do not see any other option that it is possible.

Analysis of the interviews clearly indicates that motherhood and the course of children's lives to a large extent determines female migration. Small children as well as dependent elderly family members increase women's care responsibilities. Therefore, I have observed, that the presence of children reduces the female intention for migration. At the same time this factor

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<sup>3</sup> 11 did not have to sacrifice their professional career because they were solely housewives (5) or lost their jobs before the decision and were unemployed (6).

increases the migration intentions of men because of increased financial family needs. This pattern is actually independent from the respondents' age, education and place of living. While men migrate for the sake of the family, women stay behind for the children' sake, (infantocentrism). So, the role of mother and motherhood is crucial to the family migration decision making process. Women are less likely to initiate migration when they have small children, and often delay movement until children are older. Also in the case of older children distant mothering was also often a dilemma for my female respondents. Similar beliefs have also been noted in Anne White's (2011:93) research on Poles migrating to the UK. She observed that parents of children under 20 were particularly likely to agree that it is better if it is the father who migrates. Some 85,3% of respondents in Anne White's research (2011:94) agreed that "mothers of small children should not leave their children and husbands to work abroad" and 56,5% claimed that mothers should not migrate without their children even if their children are teenagers already.

Similarly to Rebecca Raijman *et al.*, (2003) and Anne White (2011), I noticed that in order to gain at least a partial social legitimacy, decrease their sense of guilt and to feel justified in their own eyes, transnational mothers need to satisfy two conditions; they have to act in the best interests of the family (justified economical needs) and they have to ensure the best possible care for their children during their absence, usually female relatives; mothers or sisters of the respondents or female relatives of the husband.

The mothers' statement in my research reflect not only how strong traditional beliefs about the role of the mother are, but also that they are seen as something natural and unquestionable. They shape female life choices, including to a large extent decisions about migration. Moreover, other social roles, including fatherhood, are considered to be of secondary importance in relation to maternity.

Importantly, there are also conditions in which migration decisions within traditional families become more rational and less gender-based. Although most of my respondents, regardless of their gender beliefs, admitted that migration was a way to improve their life conditions and support a better future for their children, there was also a group of informants who declared that migration was the only solution for the financial troubles which they had experienced at the moment of their migration decision. In such families, as the above example of

Beata's family migration shows, economic calculation of potential gains and losses and social capital of each of the spouses (mostly social networks and a profession) were determining factors in their migration decisions, regardless of individual family members' gender beliefs. It also turned out that the gender aspect was irrelevant in the case of family migration networks, however in the case of more distant social networks these were more gender-dependent.

The migration decision of one family member is usually associated with a high level of uncertainty, fear and hope of all of the family members. Those fears are also to some extent gendered. Migrant men tend to be worried about the potential failure to fulfil the role of family breadwinner, while women more often than men expressed their concern about the well-being of family left behind, and how migration would affect their family life; children's' emotional stability, and contentment in marriage. At the same time, all migrants hoped to improve the economic situation of their families, and ensure a better future for their children.

#### TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY STAGE

Transnational family stage relates to the time when family members live separated from each other yet foster family ties across national borders (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). Differences in the experiences of individual family members during transnational family separation are rooted in the gender of a migrant and his/her partner/spouses who remained in the home country.

Social demands directed toward migrant women are often mutually contradictory; on the one hand they are expected to be fully engaged in earning money and sending remittances to the family left behind, and on the other hand there are strict social expectations derived from their family roles, especially from the role of the mother. They are often criticized for having left their children to migrate. As a result of separation as well as social pressure, migrant mothers feel guilty and responsible for possible negative consequences which the separation may have on their children.

Although they realise that the fulfilment of the social expectations and requirements of the migrant mother is impossible, at the same time they consider these social expectations to be equitable. This contradiction between their beliefs and their situation makes Polish female



migrants feel even more frustrated and guilty for leaving their children. Consequently, they try to justify their migration, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. So, firstly, they tend to emphasize the financial coercion behind their migration. They imply that their migration was not entirely their choice but sort of an economic compulsion. Secondly, migration is seen as dedication to their children, in order to support a better future for them.

Unlike migrant women, whose greatest concern was related to the family left behind and its emotional well-being, male attention and concern were directed more towards their own migrant situation and their migration aim. Their perception of their role within the family in the context of migration, including the role of the father, was mostly associated with insurance of material comfort for the family. So, they elevated their bread-winning role above the emotional needs of their children which was justified by the gender belief that a father's absence is less damaging to their children than a mother's absence, since mother are traditionally seen as the primary care-givers.

Challenges associated with transnational family separation also apply to those family members who remained in the home country. The life of a single mother or a single father, a grass widower or a grass widow, even if it is only a temporary situation due to transnational family migration, requires from them new skills and new ways of coping with everyday problems.

A woman, who remained in the home country during the transnational family stage, often suffered from the added work load and responsibilities resulting from their husband's emigration. Sometimes additional responsibilities meant dealing alone with duties which were usually performed by their husbands prior to their migration or shared by the couple, such as tasks associated with bringing up children. Additional tasks were sometimes perceived to small extent as a source of new-found self-confidence. Unlike transnational migrant women, the wives who stayed in Poland were at least partially dependent on money earned by their migrant husbands. In this sense, the migration of their husbands strengthened their traditional family gender arrangement. Although migrant women often see their migration situation as a kind of mission and dedication to the family- what also allowed them think of themselves as modern martyrs they usually gain financial independence and an increase in their self-esteem. While women who stayed in Poland often perceived the transnational family stage as a time of

stagnation, time of waiting, and eventually a time of preparation for the move and reunification in Ireland.

The transnational life of men whose wives migrated first, as well as the life of migrant men was also associated with new challenges and responsibilities linked to housework which had previously been performed by their wives. Nevertheless, this experience was perceived by most of them as only temporary and exceptional. It was necessitated by the situation in which they found themselves and their families and it hardly changed their approach toward the gender-based arrangement of housework duties. Mika Toyota *et al.* (2007:160) noted that the reversed gender roles caused by the migration of one of the spouses related to daily responsibilities, are very often regarded both by women and men as “shaky”, *ad hoc* and only temporary. The assumption about the inconstancy of the gender change in an exceptional situation consolidates a traditionally established gender arrangement.

The different experiences of the transnational family migration of women and men is also associated with a gendered perception of adultery. The potential infidelity of migrant wives or wives who remained in Poland, is less socially acceptable than the infidelity of their husbands. This arises from the family gender role traditionally ascribed to women as an idealized image of the devoted wife and mother fully dedicated to the children. So, while the adultery of men is seen as a potential danger for the marriage, the adultery of a woman poses a threat to the entire family and a violation of the female role within the family. Usually one year of separation was seen by my respondents as maximum period of time which was still “safe” for the quality of family and marriage relations.

Transnational family separation was often associated with a sense of the temporariness of the migration which was often associated with a self-alienation of migrants and acceptance of a quality of life in order to save as much money as possible in a short period of time. This sense of the temporariness of the migration situation together with other factors such as feelings of loneliness, the experience of migration uncertainty related to the new environment as well as greater financial resources than in Poland, sometimes causes problems with alcohol or drugs. The sense of temporariness as well as a sense of a suspension of physical and emotional participation in family life was more often experienced by migrants than their family members who remained in Poland, and more often by migrant men than by migrant women. This is

probably due to traditionally there being the greater emotional involvement of women than men in family life which clearly comes from the female caring role in the family.

#### POST-TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY STAGE

The literature and my research analysis suggest that family reunification is not a one-time event. Rather, it is a process of reintegration of family members into the family environment. Transnational family reunification is both a joyful and stressful family event. It is preceded by fears and hopes as well as the careful preparation of both migrants in Ireland and their family members in Poland. "Inspection visits" are a common practice for migrant's wives in order to check before their move whether the place which has been chosen by their husbands would be appropriate for the whole family. For most of the respondents family reunification was associated with the hope of beginning a "normal life" in the host country. The idea of a "normal life" was usually associated by respondents with the lack of financial problems and the presence of the closest family members; spouse and children. Especially for many male migrants, family reunification and "normal life" meant returning to the family gender work arrangement in the way it was prior to the migration. Family reunification was also associated with the re-establishment of his family roles; the role of father and husband, in which his direct fulfilment of was in practice suspended to some extent because of the transnational family separation. So, although all transnational family members usually missed each other and looked forward to family reunification, once they eventually reunified their family they faced problems with the re-establishment of family relations and assimilation into new family life, not to mention the new social and cultural environment and a new language.

My analysis suggests that at least in the beginning of their migration experience, just after reunification in the host country, most Polish females who followed their husbands to Ireland are likely to be tied-movers and stay unemployed, financially dependent on their husbands and separated from their family and friends in Poland. So they are deprived of the support they used to have in Poland. Many of them hardly speak English or their English knowledge is not sufficient to find a job that would satisfy their aspirations and qualifications. Despite their job experience in Poland or/ and graduate-level of education, they face a significant degree of

deskilling and disqualification in the job market in Ireland. Polish women who migrate as tied-movers, and without skills and resources that would facilitate their life and integration in Ireland, are far more dependent on their husbands in the host country than they were before migration. Migration has deprived them of contacts with people; family and friends, who composed their everyday social life. It has thrown them into an unfamiliar social environment where they have neither friends nor know the language.

Thus, the results of my research and the literature (for instance Hiromi and Gillian 2011) suggest that the decision about who migrates first seems to have consequences reflected in the consolidation or changes in family gender relations not only during the transnational family stage but also after transnational family reunification. "If arriving first is advantageous, perhaps in terms of gaining a head start on adaptation to a new society, or allowing the hoarding or controlling of knowledge and resources, then the gendered pattern in which husbands arrive before their wives may support a domestic environment in which resources and access to those resources are gendered and possibly contested" (Hiromi and Gillian 2011: 539). In this situation, Polish female tied-movers tend to focus all their interests on their families and find the main source of self-fulfilment, self-esteem and aspirations in performing their traditional family roles, at least until they find a job. This is a way in which these women protect their gender-based identity.

Nevertheless, many of my female respondents who were dependent on their partners and the family in Poland, became financially independent once they migrated and found a job. This was often seen as a direct result of migration and it was often a first step for the change of a migrant's psychophysical well-being and, for some women, also life's priorities. Regardless of job status, the financial independence and the perception of the Irish job market as a relatively predictable and receptive one, was a source of increased self-confidence among Polish migrant women and often encouraged them to change their approaches to life to more self-interested attitudes than before migration. This pattern is consistent with what has been noticed by Anna Triandafyllidou (2006:237): "Clearly the migration experience contributes in both material and emotional ways in changing the role of women in their families and their own understanding of who they are and what they want to achieve in their lives".

However, despite the fact that my female interviewees often declared that their self-confidence and self-esteem increased after they had arrived in Ireland and found a job there, at the same time the significant change in the division of household duties between them and their male partners did not happen. I also found little indication that couples re-negotiated their responsibilities. They gain more self-confidence, however at the same time they remain faithful to the traditional family values, especially the role of a mother. Although some women claimed that their husbands started helping more around the house, it became clear that the male tasks in the home which constituted help, only comprised a minimal degree of change. So, the greater financial independence of women does not necessarily mean more egalitarian or equal division of housework. A husbands' housework contributions do not follow "logical" rules of economic exchange. Surprisingly, it turned out that in the case of some women the lack of change in their daily housework was a result of their own conscious choice. The newly gained sense of independence and increased sense of freedom over their life choices did not cause them to change the traditional gender arrangement of housework duties in their families. One of my female respondent explained this situation by stressing that in Ireland she has the emotional comfort to do what she wants to do, not what she has to. She agreed that her rather traditional role of a mother and a wife was a result of her own choice, not as something that was imposed on her from above, without her acceptance, not compulsory any more.

However, my research results suggest that some traditionally perceived female duties, especially those linked to motherhood for Polish women in Ireland are usually more time consuming and energy absorbing than it could have been in Poland. Many mothers with whom I talked to declared that before their migration they could have counted on some support for mothering and child-care activities. The work which in Poland was often partially shared by female relatives, in Ireland migrant women have to take entirely on their own shoulders. In other words, in practice migration made their role of mother more traditional than it could have been in Poland. Nevertheless, all migrant mothers with whom I talked highly valued the traditional role of the mother but at the same time they were highly organized, up-to-date and decisive household managers. They also re-create a sort of domestic matriarchy abroad which gives them a sense of power within the family. Paradoxically, the necessity of handling activities linked to their traditional family gender roles is favourable to the faster integration of Polish women than

Polish men. For example child care makes migrant women more connected with local authorities such as kindergartens, schools, and social services, than their partners. As a result women become more familiar with the host country's culture, customs and language than men. Additionally, female networks help women to overcome daily challenges resulting from their everyday duties as wives and mothers, for example the exchange information about the school system in Ireland.

As mentioned already above, migration sometimes provides the opportunity to re-think and to look at the relationship from a different perspective. The lack of social pressure and the sense of independence sometimes makes migrants thinking about the conditions of their family relationship.

The shift in the gender power balance within the family usually causes marriage problem if it is not accepted by one of the spouses. Similar to Rebecca Elmhirst' observation in Indonesia (2007), I have noticed that the link between a man providing for his family (for women and children) and 'masculine' identity is also powerful and enduring among Polish transnational families in Ireland. Judith Butler has also acknowledged that gendered performances are „not finally dissociable from the ways in which material life is organized” (Butler, 2004: 214), and the general “cultural function of masculine identity is to motivate men to work” (Connell, 1995: 33).

Many of my male informants stressed that earning money was generally deemed to be central to a man's self-esteem and to his role as head of the family. The experience of transnational migration hardly changed their perceived gender roles, even if some of them experienced unemployment and a shift in the bread-winning position within the family. The maladjustment of men's' gender beliefs to the changing gender arrangement in their families caused even higher levels of frustration among my male respondents. The significant change in family gender roles, for example the reversal of a family breadwinner role, causes in some families considerable instability. When the husband maintains a patriarchal ideology, a significant improvement in the wife's financial efficiency leads to increased conflicts between the couple. Women who attempted to alter the way in which the gender arrangement was constructed in their marriages prior migration, usually met with passivity or opposition from their husbands. Additionally, female professional development and her higher financial

contribution to the family budget is perceived by men as a source of humiliation and degradation of his traditional position in the family. While this counter-traditional gender situation between the spouses also results in women doing even more housework and being more supportive to her husband than before migration, men react with aggression and even lower engagement in housework in order to keep their deceptive sense of being in a dominant position within the family. This pattern is consistent with the “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) theory; the more a husband is dependent on his wife economically, the less housework he does. Most likely this is his way to reassert his masculinity. So, the inability to reconcile a new family gender situation; on the one hand women's newly gained independence, and on the other hand the loss of the traditional male dominance, leads to conflict between spouses. The woman felt undervalued and overburdened by responsibilities, while the man felt lost in the new reality and frustrated by the decrease in his individual sense of masculinity. As the examples in my study show, eventually this kind of gender conflict is a main factor or one of the most important ones which even leads to marriage dissolution.

One can raise the question as to whether the changes and the processes that have occurred in the families of my respondents are the result of the migration or maybe the same experiences are also shared by the wider population of Poles in Poland. The examples in my study show that possible alterations in gender power and family gender relations within migrant families occurred following migration and are determined by factors which are closely linked to the migration process, such as better social and job opportunities in the host country, new social and cultural environment and lack of social and family pressure to preserve unsatisfactory relations.

Firstly, as one of my respondents indicated, the limited job market in Poland and low salaries “*let people survive but not live at the decent level*” (Beata, 42) which meant that Polish women often felt dependent on their husbands. In Ireland, even low-paid job gave my female respondents financial independence. These economic re-arrangements within the migrant family-relative increase in women's and the decrease in men's economic contributions to the family-signify a vast change in the female sense of independence within the family. Women became more autonomous and assertive. This change is followed by a change in power relations between spouses (however, as mentioned above, not necessarily resulted in a change in the arrangement

of household duties), especially in those cases where prior to migration, women did not have an income, or earned only a supplementary income.

Secondly, the literature indicates (for example Darvishpour 1999, 2002) that usually migration to more liberal areas or countries than the sending country encourages the liberalization process, especially among women. Although the liberalization trend in Europe is noticeable in some aspects also in Poland the statistics<sup>4</sup> suggest also that the gender beliefs of Poles are still more traditional than citizens of other European countries, including Ireland. Therefore, migration of Poles to Ireland can also be associated with the process of the liberalization of the gender beliefs of Polish women. Even though none of my respondents indicated the cultural and social environment of the host country as having any impact on their attitude to their marriage or gender, I have observed that migrants who plan to settle permanently in the host country, and more often women than men, tend to strive for faster assimilation with the social environment of the host country and get rid of the stigma attached to being a stranger. This leads to, even if often unconsciously, a change in migrants' life attitudes and behaviour.

And thirdly, my research results suggest that in Poland the social pressure of the patriarchal majority, family members and friends make people sustain family relationships, including marriage relations, in which they are not entirely satisfied. Migration brings the freedom to be rid of this social pressure and to assess family relationships independently and according to individual subjective criteria and beliefs.

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