

'White Dress, Guests and Presents': Polish Migrant Families' Practice of First Communion and Negotiation of Catholic Identities in Wales

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This article examines how migration to Wales modifies Polish Catholic families' religious practices. It focuses on how the First Communion ceremony is performed. Within the Polish migrant community I witnessed three distinct ways of arranging this. Some families travelled to Poland to their parish churches of origin. Of those who celebrated it in Wales, some did so in a Polish church, others in their children's Catholic school's church. These choices had different effects. Holding First Communion in Poland confirmed children's Polish identity and home-country bonds. It exemplified both the fluidity of the families' intra-European migration experience and the strength of transnational networking. Holding it in the local Polish parish reinforced both families' and childrens' identification as Polish Catholics. In the school's church, it strengthened migrant families' negotiations of belonging and their children's integration into the Welsh locality. Mothers' active involvement in all settings led some to contest Polish religious customs and revealed emerging identifications related to children's wellbeing and belonging. Unlike arrangements traditional in Poland, families' religious practices in Wales seem to have become more individual, less collective.

Keywords: Polish migrants; Wales; mothers; Catholic identity; First Communion ritual

Introduction

In this age of migration, migrants' religious affiliations help our understanding of their integration processes and interactions with local populations (Saunders, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Snyder 2016). As experiences vary according to gender (Ryan and Vacchelli 2013a), the intersections of religion, gender and migration are crucial for understanding children's religious upbringing.

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Recently, interest has developed in Muslim communities' and families' religious practices. The issues discussed include mothering through Islam (Ryan and Vacchelli 2013b), Dutch Muslim parents' post-migration religious transmission (Maliepaard and Lubbers 2012) and Muslim upbringing in Britain (Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan and Otri 2013). In Catholicism, however, the intersection of gender, religion and migration is under-researched.

This article, therefore, discusses Roman Catholicism's intersection with parental faith-transmission to young children, in the context of recent Polish family migration to Britain. Specifically, how migrant families organise their children's First Communion raises several questions:

- Has migration changed families' religious practices? If so, in what ways?
- Is the Polish Catholic habitus reproduced, negotiated, rejected or individualised?
- What are the gender roles in the process?
- To what extent does religious affiliation impact on Polish families' integration into local Welsh communities?

European Union enlargement in 2004 caused unprecedented economic migration to Britain. Although initially characterised by fluidity and unpredictability (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007), over the last decade Polish economic migrants increasingly exercised freedom of agency under EU citizenship rights (Fihel and Kaczmarczyk 2009). In this same period, Polish economic migration has been much researched. White (2010) studied family migration for economic improvement and Ryan (2009) and Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara (2009) researched social networks in relation to migration decisions. Studies exclusively on Polish families with children focus on education and language. These include Sales, Ryan, Lopez, Rodrigues and D'Angelo (2008) on adults' perceptions of children in London primary-schools. Children's education is considered a factor influencing permanent settlement decisions. Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2007) identified the 'better future' motive for family migration; they found 'stayers' chose long-term settlement for 'their children's future'. Studies on Polish families' settlement processes identified social barriers. In Scotland, Sime and McArthur (2008) researched Polish children's access to services; Moskal (2010) and Moskal and Sime (2016) examined their schooling, home relations, language problems and belonging. In another study, Moskal (2011) focused on transnationalism and the role of family in the migration process, while Trevena (2012) investigated schools' roles in 'new' Polish migrants' integration in Britain.

Although the importance of Catholic identity is commonly acknowledged in studies on Poles, this area is much less researched. In the UK, Poles typically manifest Catholicism by church attendance. Two years after EU enlargement, The Guardian reported that one third of the 400 000 Polish immigrants in Britain are practicing Catholics (Bates 2006). Although there are no reliable surveys, recently the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales considered that 10 per cent go to mass weekly (cited in Mąkosa 2015). Since 2004, Polish Roman Catholic leaders insist that migrants seek Polish parishes and priests instead of attending English-speaking services (Ecumenical News International 2008). For this, they utilise the post-war Polish diaspora networks established within Catholic parishes (Garapich 2008) and Saturday schools (Podhorodecka 2009). Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Krotofil (2010) consider the Polish-language masses give collective support and provide an anchor for those Poles struggling to fit into British multiculturalism and religious diversity. As the Roman Catholic Church system spans across European borders, it provides a framework of continuity. Polish and British Roman Catholic habitus and religious practice, however, differ (I use Bourdieu's [1977: 72] definition of habitus as a structuring mechanism: 'the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations'). Poles seem to prefer attending Polish-speaking services and exhibit strong attachments to Polish Catholicism's mixture of nationalistic patriotism and religion. As Trzebiatowska's (2010) research in Scotland shows, this causes mismatches between their expectations and those of local Catholic priests and parishioners. Consequently, although Poles see Catholicism and whiteness as assets for acceptance in Britain (Garapich 2008;

Kohn 2007), differences between Polish and British practice may hinder integration into local Catholic communities.

Although Polish pupil numbers in British schools are increasing and religion's role in public life and religious education has become increasingly topical (Hemming 2015), Polish families' and children's Catholic affiliation has not attracted much attention. Exceptions include Trzebiatowska (2010) investigating practices in Scottish Catholic congregations and Małkosa (2015) looking at the provision of, and access to, religious education in England and Wales in state-run and Catholic schools, Polish Saturday Schools and Polish Catholic Mission parishes. These studies confirm Catholic identity's pivotal role for newly arrived Poles and show the variety of opportunities – besides enrolment into Catholic schools – which parents have to access religious education for their children.

This article addresses this under-researched area. It is based on a one-year ethnographic study in several educational and religious settings in Wales, investigating Polish families' religious practices, negotiations or renegotiations of Catholic identities, and gender roles in children's upbringing. In particular, this study observed the first cohort of post-enlargement Polish Catholic parents' strategies for performing the First Communion ritual in Wales. In the context of family relocation, this article looks at the intersections between religion and Polish nationality, raising questions on whether Poles' Catholic affiliation and religious-identity re/negotiation impact on their integration into Welsh communities and British society as a whole.

Before discussing the theoretical concepts underpinning this paper, I summarise how Poland's religious background relates to the Welsh context.

Religion and religious education in Poland and Britain

In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church strongly impacts on family life. With 95 per cent of the population being Catholics, Catholic values are embedded in Polish society (Mach 2000). These perpetuate the traditional 'Polish Mother' stereotype. To Heinen and Wator (2006: 206), 'the mother is an incarnation of cultural and religious values; she sacrifices herself for both the fatherland and her family, in silence and without expecting anything in return, except symbolic recognition'. Borowik (2010) considers that the post-1989 political and economic transformations barely changed attitudes about religion: religiosity remains based on intertwined national and Catholic identity, supported by the continuity of church practices, Mother Mary cult, traditional social structure and paucity of social security. Although the privatisation of religion is progressing, paradoxically 'it co-exists with a strong social expression of institutional, church-based religiousness' (Borowik 2010: 271). Currently, this 'marriage of religion and politics' (Leszczyńska and Zielińska 2016: 12) remains problematic: the Church's political involvement in women's rights and gender-equality issues is unmistakably visible. In 1991, religion classes became compulsory in public schools and children's upbringing and socialisation into Catholicism remain unquestioned (Zielińska and Zwierzdzyński 2013).

Britain has a long tradition of religious pluralism and, together with late-modern society's individualisation processes, religiosity patterns are changing (Giddens 2002); this includes questioning parental religious teachings, ethnic traditions, religious institutions, belief and practice. As family socialisation into religion appears crucial for inter-generational religious transmission, Scourfield et al. (2013: 10) consider its failure partly attributable to contemporary secularisation processes. Woodhead (2014), however, disputes religion's declining social significance: although churchgoers' numbers decrease, the demand for faith schools is huge. Despite declining church attendance in Britain, religion remains important. Davie (2013) calls this 'believing without belonging'. The choice of school is one way in which parents socialise children into religion. As Britain respects parental rights to religious faith and language (UN 1989), parents bring up their children as they wish.

Regarding the provision of religious education, there are crucial differences between Britain and Poland. Mąkosa (2015: 186) observes that ‘religious education in Poland is of a strictly confessional nature and is referred to as “school catechesis”’. In the UK, state-run community schools teach about Christianity and other religions in society, whereas Catholic schools provide ‘some form of pre-evangelisation and evangelisation aimed at inspiring students’ interest in religious life and making them familiar with the basic notions of Christianity’ (Mąkosa 2015: 188). Polish parents find the state-run schools’ liberal and multicultural approach unfamiliar; the Polish educational system is closer to their values and way of bringing up children. Consequently, they frequently choose Catholic schools, wherever accessible (Podhorodecka 2009).

Arriving in Britain, new migrant families do not automatically belong to the Polish diaspora –Polonia in the UK is far from being a monolithic form. Galasińska (2010) identified three distinctive waves of Polish immigration to the UK: post-war immigrants and post-1989 and post-EU-enlargement migrants. She (2010: 949) found that ‘all groups are emotionally involved in inter-group relations, they negotiate their way of dealing with other Poles and sometimes struggle to cope with different versions of Polishness abroad’. Researching post-war Poles in the UK, Temple and Koterba (2009) found that generational belonging and migration period differentiated the language they used. Fomina (2009) found that those possessing cultural capital intentionally distance themselves from their compatriots in order to bridge the gap with local English people: some experience class or inter-generational tensions, some even avoid all association with Poles. Podhorodecka (2009: 4) notes some discrepancies between the tradition of teaching in *Macierz Polska* (the Association of Polish Supplementary Schools) and new (post-accession migrant) parents’ expectations. All this suggests the existence of tensions between the UK’s old and new Polonia members.

The context of Wales

Wales is a small nation of under three million people, economically disadvantaged compared to England, so less attractive as a migrant work destination. By March 2008, there were over 21 000 Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) registrations in Wales, two-thirds being from Poland (Home Office 2008). Besides cities, Poles are visible in towns with production-line factories (e.g. Llanelli and Merthyr) to which British agencies recruit them. Although new Eastern European migrants tend to settle in well-established ethnic enclaves, Llanelli – a small town in West Wales – demonstrates how work creates new Polish enclaves (Thompson, Chambers and Doleczek 2010). The 2011 Census recorded 546 000 Polish-speakers in England and Wales – in Wales alone, the most common main language after English and Welsh is Polish, with 17 001 speakers (ONS 2011).

A Welsh school census report (ESTYN 2009) showed that, by 2008, over 1 100 Polish children were in Welsh schools – almost three-quarters of all pupils from all 12 EU accession states. In the school year of this research (2010–2011), 1 334 Polish children were in Welsh schools: 774 in primary and 569 in secondary schools; of these, 318 (41 per cent) primary and 271 (48 per cent) secondary pupils attended Catholic schools. Consequently, almost half of all Polish schoolchildren in Wales were receiving Catholic education (SDWG 2011).

Identity, family, gender and religiousness in migration contexts

This paper addresses the identity concept within the context of postmodernity and globalisation debates (Bauman 2001; Castles and Miller 2009; Paleczny 2008). ‘Religious identity’ can encompass a broad range of attitudes, beliefs and practices within both the family and the religious community. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) consider that inherited religion may provide a primary source of immigrants’ identity. Although religious iden-

tity correlates family religious beliefs and practices (Smyth 2009), exactly how parents influence their children's religiosity is still debated and even less is known about how gender differences affect religious transmission.

The literature on the sociology of religion recognises that, in the Christian West, women are more religious than men and older people are more involved in religious practices than younger ones (Davie 2013). Older women are especially considered to be the generational transmitters of values and religion. A survey in six European countries found that mothers were generally more involved in religious practice than fathers although, amongst Muslims, both fathers and mothers were involved in their children's faith formation (Smyth 2009). Within the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his appreciation of grandmothing and addressed grandmothers' educational tasks in his Papal Blessing (Shaw 2012). While the Religious Transmission Thesis may see children as passive, the New Childhood Perspective recognises children's involvement in constructing their own identities, including religious identities (Connolly 2007). Children's awareness of religious affiliation can manifest itself very early on. In Northern Ireland, Connolly, Smith and Kelly (2002) found that some three-years-olds were able to distinguish Catholics from Protestants.

In this article, I define the participants' religious identity as self-identification with Catholicism's religious traditions. I look specifically into religious-group membership and participation in religious events like churchgoing and the First Communion ritual. The act of migrating from Poland to the UK seems to be a point of departure – a defining point for religious identity re-negotiations. For religiosity, I use Borowik's (2010: 263–264) definition:

By religiosity I will here understand the various forms and meanings in which is manifested the basic, subjective conviction that human life has a sense other than biological existence. Meanings are either culturally inherited or acquired in individual quests; they are expressible beliefs about the nature of man and the world, about purpose and destiny, moral principle, usually called doctrine, about worldview or ideology. Forms are actions that stem from beliefs; they are expressed in holding and displaying an attachment to symbols, in attendance in worship, in membership in a community.

My analysis focuses predominantly on family and community practices, particularly the meanings underlying mothers' decision-making regarding their children's First Communion ritual and Church membership.

One distinctive characteristic of contemporary migration is the feminisation of both migration and labour (OECD 2010). Standing (2011) observes that migration circumstances make women carry a 'triple burden': work, child-care and relative-care. He records the multitasking pressure on women: short-notice availability for precarious out-of-home jobs and child-care. Transnational lives add cross-border care as a further burden. As Baldassar and Merla (2014: 12) note, this involves extended family members in complex inter-activities and takes various forms: 'hands-on', 'caring-for' and 'caring-about'.

Research on women's agency in transnational religious contexts explores potential changes in religiosity. Post-migration experiences may increase religious practice, as it does for Polish migrant women in Rome (Malek 2008) or secularise attitudes (Voicu 2009). In Iceland, Polish female migrants' new life contexts triggered critical reflection on sacredness, leading to individual rather than institutional religiosity (Koralewska 2016). Interweaving spirituality and reproductive factors, such varied experiences exemplify religiosity's complexity (Woodhead 2007). Women can actively reinterpret religious tradition. In contemporary America, Avishai (2010: 48) considers that even conservative religions can be a source of new identity, not a deprivation of women's free choice. Such positive aspects of females' position within conservative religions, however, depends on cultural expectations. The structures and realities of their lives curtail their ability to adapt religious practices. In this context, I explore how Roman Catholic Polish migrant mothers manage religious change – in the methods section below, I explain their special role in this research.

Methods

This paper draws on ESRC-funded doctoral research with a group of 27 Polish-born children aged 8–12 and their families, who migrated to Wales in or after 2004; all had lived between one and five years in Wales. This study researched children's identity negotiations, including Polish Catholic family practices' impacts thereon. Employing the 'New' Sociology of Childhood perspective (Prout 2005), it was located within transnational and mobile childhood debates (Ní Laoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrrell and White 2010). It acknowledged family as a major source of these middle-childhood children's identifications (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, and Davies 2006). To best suit the holistic exploration of transnational childhoods, an ethnographic design was chosen (Punch 2007). Valuing children's participation, it utilised child-centred perspectives, subjective accounts and their own work (Greene and Hill 2005).

Fieldwork

The study was conducted in an urban area of Wales. Fieldwork was undertaken from September 2010 to July 2011 in two schools, and supplemented by participant observation sessions in two Catholic churches and Polish community gatherings mostly in the Polish Club. One school setting was a state-maintained Roman Catholic primary, St Luke's, located in the most ethnically diverse part of town. Its pupils speak 21 different home languages, with Poles the biggest minority-language group at 15 per cent. From this school, ten girls and four boys from years 4, 5 and 6, aged 8–11, participated in the research. The second institution was a Polish Saturday School where, on Saturdays, nearly 60 (mostly) primary-school-age children learn the Polish language and history and the Catholic religion. From among them, six girls and seven boys aged 8–12 took part. Observations were also undertaken in two Roman Catholic churches. The first, St Luke's, is attended by children from three Catholic schools in the area. The liturgy for primary-school children takes place during the 10am Sunday mass. The second was a Polish parish church in another ethnically diverse area of town. The Saturday evening mass and 11am Sunday mass are both in Polish. The church has two Polish priests. Before entering any research settings to undertake observations and generate data with their children, I obtained consent from all the parents. For the institutions' approvals, I wrote letters describing my research aims and ethical considerations. I also placed announcements in church porches. The priests in both parishes permitted me to undertake participant observation during masses.

Data

This research design allowed me to collect data on families' and children's lives and religious practices in Wales. Observations were recorded in field notes. Reconstruction of the field was predominantly in Polish, as participants used their first language throughout. Participant observation sessions totalled 101 days (409 hours) in the field. For generating data on families' religious practices, time spent at the Polish church, within the Polish community, at the Polish Club and during social events at St Luke's community hall proved particularly fruitful. In both schools, I also conducted focus groups and interviews with children, parents, school staff, priests and Polish community members, together with six individual interviews with parents and two group interviews with mothers. Additionally, the ethnographic design helped me to explore environments and life-space in home neighbourhoods, as it generated non-recorded 'walking conversations' with mothers, fathers and other family members – mostly grandmothers and aunts – on the way to and from parking, school, after-school activities, shops and church. Family questionnaires gathered information about household characteristics, parental education and employment.

Overall, the researched families' motives for migration were economic. They came to Wales from both villages and big cities in all regions of Poland. Of the study's 27 children, 22 had both parents in Wales and five, only single mothers. The parents' ages ranged from 25 to 45 years. Many (especially mothers) were educated to, or above, Polish *Matura* level (equivalent to three A-levels). In Wales, however, they performed low-skilled jobs, confirming the findings of Dustmann, Frattini and Preston (2007) on new migrants' employment in the UK. Out of 27 households, only five mothers said they were 'housewives' and not in employment. In 22 households both parents' (or single mothers') employment was outside the home.

The children themselves generated visual data: charts, drawings, diaries, collectively drawn maps, videos and over 500 photographs. Information on their experiences includes that gathered from their 'Important events in my life', 'My three wishes', 'My home' and 'Important places I visit' charts. From the data, the children appear thoroughly immersed in their families' religious practices. Some children's responses strikingly reveal how a Catholic upbringing impacts their identities. For example, among eight-year-olds, Marta named her 'best friend' as 'Jesus' and Alicja's 'Three wishes' included 'more pilgrimages'. During our interview Alicja described her family's pilgrimages to Częstochowa sanctuary every August: 'I was there even in my mother's womb'. Clearly, some families' religious practice is stronger than others, so may make stronger impacts on individual children's identities. As I observed, the effect of Catholic symbols seems to depend on a child's gender and individual characteristics. Girls were more prone than boys, for example, to talk about First Communion clothing. Attendance at mass, the frequency of exposure to religious experiences and being at a Catholic school further increase children's social contacts within the Catholic environment, though this particularly depends on the intensity of the parental engagement in Catholic rituals.

Most of these children clearly self-identified as Catholics. In my study's card-choice exercise, 16 children chose the Catholic identity label as important. In their 'Important events in my life' charts, most children marked Catholic sacraments: 'I was baptised', 'I had my First Communion' or both. These accorded equal importance to their 'First Communion' as to 'coming to Wales/England' (many confused Wales with England) or 'starting school'. Occurring at the age of eight, however, First Communion was more recent, which possibly influenced their prioritisation. In 'Important photos', one boy presented his First Communion '*Pamiątka Pierwszej Komunii Świętej*' (devotional picture) and three children produced photographs of their church. In the 'Important places I visit' and 'My favourite things to do' charts, 11 children marked church as a place they visit or go to on Sundays.

Gender roles in this research

In my ethnographic study with migrant children and their parents, in order to ensure the equal involvement of both I sent letters to each child's household asking for parental consent. Early on in the research, however, the mothers emerged as the predominant 'front-line officers' for contacts with school, church and community. This evidenced the division of labour traditional in Polish families. Although I met and conversed with the fathers regularly in all research settings, the most recorded data are from female participants – mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins and girlfriends. Data analysis, interview transcripts, field notes and my research-diary entries further this gender imbalance. Although my positionality as a female researcher and teacher partly explains this, the data materialise Polish presumptions of culturally ascribed female roles in child-care and domesticity. The issue of First Communion also evidenced this gender bias, as it was predominantly the mothers who voiced, reflected, shared and recalled memories of this event.

To analyse this volume of data, I employed grounded theory and thematic analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). With regards to validity and reliability, although some Polish families hold different cultural values, this group appears typical of others I have visited; nevertheless, in Wales, they seem representative of

families throughout Britain, whose children are brought up in similar circumstances – exposed to collective national and religious identities.

Celebrating the First Communion

In the several educational and religious settings studied, I observed religious practice evolving and adapting to accommodate migration circumstances. The importance that families accord to the First Communion became clear early on: it represents a milestone in a Catholic family's life. From September, eight-year-old children attended First Communion preparation classes at the Polish Club and parents had meetings at church. As migration inevitably modifies the social aspects of this ceremony, the interaction of inherited religious tradition and individualised family religious habitus determine its form. The parents had three distinct alternatives: in Poland in their church parishes of origin, in Wales in a Polish parish or in their children's Catholic school's church. Which they choose affects, and is affected by, how children are socialised into the Catholic religion and negotiate their religious identities. These three strategies reflect Polish families' transnational multiple belongings. This conforms to Anthias' (2002: 500) observation that 'the migrant is dynamically placed in three locales and their intersection: the society of migration, the homeland and the migrant group'. This was confirmed in my participant observation and the mothers' narratives which showed how, whilst adhering to their religious heritage, families create new transnational practices and negotiate their identities.

Celebrating the First Communion in Poland

For their children's First Communion, some families travel to Poland to their parishes of origin. This exemplifies both the fluidity of the families' intra-European migration experience and the strength of transnational networks. Parental post-experience narratives emphasise the distinctiveness of the traditional Polish communion as a whole-family and community affair that boosts the ritual's meaning and importance. When I interviewed mothers in the Polish Club, one described the family celebration in Poland with obvious enthusiasm:

The priest gave me the letter confirming that my daughter attended First Communion preparation classes here. But our priest in my parish knows everything, because he knows us and we were on the list there. So she already has everything waiting for her in Poland, my sister bought her a white dress, gloves, a white bag, a religious medal (medalik), a little prayer book, a candle, everything. No, no, only the shoes I bought here. [...] We're going to Poland on Saturday but my sister has already organised everything. A few months ago she booked the restaurant there; you know you have to do it months in advance: everybody wants to go when the family is big. We have sent her money for that. I come from a family of five, so many people come for communion: two of my brothers with their families and three of us, I mean sisters and a godmother and godfather with their families, my parents and my husband's, it's lots of people, and of course the children. The restaurant reception is for 40 people. At church the ceremony starts at 10 so finishes at noon, then photos at church, so we booked dinner at 1 o'clock; we shouldn't be late there. Then we will have supper as well at the restaurant (excited). You know, my daughter, she doesn't even imagine how it would be to have her First Communion in Poland: lots of presents, lots of guests.... Yes, she knows about the presents (laughing). You know we will not save on that, it is just once in her lifetime. But... I'm only sad that she won't stay in Poland for the 'White Week' (Biały tydzień) and won't go with these children to Częstochowa monastery as we have to come back to Wales immediately afterwards, as my husband has only 10 days' holiday.

The Catholic Church spans national boundaries so, despite living in Wales for four years, this mother declares that her family's religious affiliation is in Poland – 'our priest in my parish' knows everything about their migration: he received a report from the Polish parish priest in Wales. Far from feeling detached from her homeland, she still belongs to her old parish in Poland and wants her daughter to have her First Communion there. As she is physically absent from Poland, however, her sister takes on the organising role. As this mother explains, the ritual of First Communion in Poland had been planned well ahead and substantial monetary resources have been allocated for the day itself. Her phrase 'guests and presents' reoccurred many times in other participants' narratives, implying the commonality of the celebration. As she stresses, for a Catholic child this way of celebrating is a memorable 'once in a lifetime' experience which will be treasured and recorded in photos and devotional presents. It is also evident that children expect and are excited about presents and money.

This mother's use of the phrase 'she doesn't even imagine...' relates to the child's special experience on that day. Children are on display during the liturgy (Orsi 2004). This display, however, extends beyond the sacrament and religious experience to the impressive family and church gathering. The children feel special because they are in the spotlight – given special attention, admired, photographed and given presents. This commercialised aspect of the First Communion celebration in Poland is present throughout the data. For example, the 'White dress' has strong symbolic value – special dresses increase the children's visibility. Combined with the show's exceptionality, this puts heavy pressure on parents to spend lavishly on the celebration. Additionally, parents have to buy many sacrament-specific accessories for their children, like candles, religious medals, etc.

In Poland, the First Communion is celebrated primarily on a family level but usually exceeds family and time boundaries. It is a whole-community affair and the ritual is prolonged by church and school organisations. Before the event, the parents are expected to attend meetings and pay for presents and church decoration. After it, the children's attendance at evening masses during the 'White Week' in May is obligatory. Many schools arrange daytrips to the Sanctuary of the Black Madonna in Częstochowa. The mass and collective experience may be repeated in June during the Corpus Christi procession, when First Communion girls in white dresses and boys in suits join local parish processions down the streets. Then, the following year, there will be the anniversary of their First Communion when they attend church with the candles blessed at the previous year's celebration.

As this mother told me, her childhood memories make her familiar with all these associated celebrations, as this is the old tradition in Poland. Mothers recall their own Polish church memories and the importance of 'white dress, guests and presents'. For her generation, the sacrament was incorporated into the whole-life tableau of memories, e.g. the framed souvenir picture from the person's First Communion (*Pamiątka Pierwszej Komunii Świętej*) was kept on display for many years. She is very emotionally involved and regrets that her daughter's religious ritual will be cut short as the family must return to Wales due to work. She feels that, because of migration, her daughter's ritual is incomplete. In Poland, all the associated events are important and written into the script of being a Catholic, hence fully Polish, child.

She, like two other mothers to whom I spoke about First Communion in Poland, constructed it as a major step in their children's life and stressed the importance of it being experienced in Poland. However, one mother admitted that intergenerational family pressure influenced her decision to travel to Poland: 'My mother said that she would organise everything so we didn't want to argue about that – at the end of the day it's for her only granddaughter'. These narratives show how mothers in Wales adhere to their religious heritage but create new transnational practice. I now describe how the Polish ceremony differs from that in a Polish-speaking parish in Wales.

First Communion in a Polish parish in Wales

Many families chose not to travel to Poland for their children's First Communion. These, however, did not entirely lose the experience of a Polish ceremony.

The 20 children taking their First Communion in Wales were prepared for several months at Saturday School. Some of them attend Catholic schools; others go to various state-run community schools, which their families chose due to their precarious employment, temporary accommodation, indecisiveness about the duration of their stay, lack of social-network advice and, especially, unfamiliarity with the education system when they had arrived in Wales (WAG 2008). As one mother said: 'When I came I didn't know nor think about school but in a year she was five. We sent her to the nearest school. But I'll change it for Catholic in secondary'. Similarly, one boy's parents moved him to a Catholic school after a year in a community school. This postponed his Communion in the Polish parish, which affected him strongly. As 'Important events in my life', he wrote, 'I had my Communion later, when I was eleven'.

In this parish, the First Communion was celebrated in April not in May, the typical month for Polish confirmations. A Saturday School religious teacher described this experience:

We didn't have many rehearsals: just the day before, on Friday, and Communion was on Saturday afternoon. Children were singing, somehow. It's all very different when you compare with Poland. First, is the church decoration, here it's very poor. Second, children are singing much more in Poland. And third, in Poland the church is overcrowded and here the church is empty. In Poland you can see girls wearing white dresses and everybody walking to church. Here they get into the car and go away, there's a lack of family spirit. Here, there isn't any atmosphere, nothing, you only go to church and that's it! (...) At my church in Poland the church is blaring, people are singing at full volume, bursting with energy, here without any life. (...) The First Communion souvenirs I always buy in Częstochowa. The parents were satisfied this year; they liked the rosary, little prayers books and candles I bought. We always take a group photograph with candles in front of the altar.

Despite the great effort made to transplant the First Communion's religious habitus from Poland to Wales, the scarcity of invited guests left the church feeling empty, compromising the 'solemnity' of the moment. The teachers followed the same curriculum (although shorter) and bought devotional souvenirs in Częstochowa (helped by parents' frequent travel to Poland). Nevertheless, the result fell far short of how the celebration looks and feels in Poland.

Additionally, the parents challenged some aspects of the celebration and associated power structures. As one mother described it, in Poland religious teachers usually have a decisive voice about the children's clothing, souvenirs and flowers for church decoration. In Wales, however, the parents were unwilling to pay for church decoration. Having already bought the 'parish present', they did not want to spend any more. To organise the celebration in Wales, parents must accommodate its demands with their scanty migrant resources: little money and limited accommodation for family members coming over from Poland. I witnessed attempts to enforce families' church attendance. For example, at the Sunday mass following First Communion, the Polish priest counted only half the children present. His sermon cited this as an inappropriate parental attitude to children's upbringing. Similarly, one teacher's judgment on a mother exemplifies the pressure put on parents to attend Sunday mass: 'She said they go to Welsh [Catholic] church masses but I know they don't. Sometimes children themselves say that they don't go to church or that their mothers work on Sundays'. Another teacher expressed similar sentiments: 'Some parents don't attend any of the masses, neither in the Welsh [Catholic] nor the Polish church'. Such comments suggest that the church's control over families' religious practices is

weakening. Additionally, the less authoritative tone which the priests use in Welsh Catholic parishes emboldens some parents to contest their inherited habitus. Some, for instance, expressed resentment when comparing practices in Polish-speaking masses with those in English-speaking ones. After the latter, the priest shakes hands with parishioners in the church doorway. Polish masses lack this friendly gesture. All this is evidence that the mobility that characterises migration may increase parents' independent agency in their religious practice.

Conversely, the choice of setting strengthened families' identification as Polish Catholics. As I observed, the priest starts every mass with: 'We especially welcome our countrymen, who came from our motherland'. This is a constant reminder of people being newcomers who are embraced by the Polish church. Consequently, this Polish parish fulfills its role as an 'anchor' for this migrant community (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2018; Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Krotofil 2010). It remains attractive for parents who want to pass Catholicism on to their children.

Unlike the group which Trzebiatowska (2010) studied in Scotland, parents in this Welsh study do not automatically adhere to the stereotypical image constructed for them as Polish Catholics. Due to their mobility and transnational practices, their religious habitus can no longer be taken for granted. Furthermore, this Welsh context required some modifications to how the First Communion was celebrated, frustrating attempts to replicate its Polish form. This appeared to cause some tension and disappointment, especially by comparison to practices in Poland.

First Communion at an English-speaking Welsh parish

Choosing to have the sacrament of First Communion in St Luke's English-speaking parish church appears a natural consequence of having chosen a Catholic school for their children in the first place. First Communion preparation is incorporated into the school curriculum. Most parents share the view that 'it is better when the child goes with her class at school'. St Luke's mothers' narratives commonly state that being with 'other children' (their English-speaking classmates) is to their children's benefit. Their rationale is two-fold: this lets the children feel part of their peer-group, and they belong in the school's Catholic parish.

I witnessed the First Communion mass at St Luke's church. There were three Polish girls in the group of over 20 children from the school.

Sunday Mass at 2 pm. In front of the church I spotted some of the parents from school. I entered the church. I did not notice anything special, apart from more people than on an ordinary children's Sunday mass. I immediately saw the headteacher who greeted me, as usual, in Polish: Jak się masz? (How are you?) Then, standing in front of the altar, he told us which hymn we will start with and when to clap. The church was slowly filling up. I could see many teachers and teaching assistants from St Luke's. I joined the Polish assistant. (...) When the congregation started singing the entrance hymn: 'The spirit lives to set us free', the group of children started walking, one after another, through the church. Girls were wearing white dresses and many had veils. Boys were in suits. I noticed that the three Polish girls were not wearing veils, but had professionally done hair. (...) When the hymn: 'This is my body' started, the children, one by one, with their parents went to the altar to take the holy wafer from the priest (Field notes 12 June 2011).

The atmosphere in this church was festive but resembled that of a normal Sunday. As usual, the congregation seemed very familiar with the headteacher. He and his teachers and assistants have the role of linking the school and the church, thus embedding the one within the other: a uniting experience for children. The Polish community was well represented in the congregation, not only by families of First Communion girls but also

by other Polish families from the school and former students. Like all the other First Communion children, the three Polish girls looked and felt special: excited, happy to be in the spotlight and admired in their beautiful outfits. The only visual difference was that Polish girls do not wear veils. By regular participation in parish life, these girls are familiar with how the mass is organised in Wales. For example, First Communion children sit together with their parents (in Poland, they sit in a group and are supervised by their religious teachers).

I asked some mothers how the First Communion experience differed between Poland and Wales. One particularly appreciated how Welsh Catholicism is practiced. She described the experience of inviting her daughter's father (whom she had divorced) from Poland.

In Poland many things would not be possible for me as a single mother. I wouldn't know how to do it, but here it was different. Her father came for one week, stayed with us at my flat. It was good, my daughter was so happy. I feel that we passed the exam as parents.

She feels that Poland's norms would preclude certain behaviours, e.g. letting her ex-husband stay with her. For her it is a liberating experience: you do not need to be a married couple to care for your child. She values the Welsh parish's practices because, unlike in Poland, she does not feel stigmatised for being a single mother. Her new transnational way of life and increased self-esteem made her feel secure enough to invite him.

Another mother talked about how stress-free the atmosphere felt. She compared this celebration to those in Poland:

I didn't feel it was very special from other masses I attended, like Christmas Carol singing or the end of the school year mass. Yes, there were some rehearsals before that Sunday. But there weren't any strict rules about the clothes children have to wear. For example, I remember girls were wearing very different dresses, either long or short, and boys various suits, and everybody seems to be very relaxed about it. In Poland, as a parent, you have to go for church meetings, on strict dates. If you don't go you're in trouble, while here this is much more relaxed.

Another also made comparisons, primarily about her son's religious experience:

I'm glad that my son had the communion at St Luke's. Here is modesty. Here in the church, children can better concentrate on the sacrament, not on all these circumstances/otoczka, like in Poland. No guests, so not all the hassle with food and invitations. Here after church it was just us and my parents. Nobody else.

Her preference for 'modesty' and rejection of the 'circumstances' related to the traditional Polish way of celebration highlights the differences between First Communion practices in Polish and Welsh Catholic churches. She focuses on the sacrament as the core of the day, not the festive social side. She constructs the experience as stripped of the non-religious additions that she negatively associates with Polish celebrations. She spurned inviting 'guests' – referring negatively to the main theme running through most participants' narratives: 'white dress, guests and presents'.

Although her view differs from those who prefer to celebrate in a bigger family group, it echoes other mothers' concerns about the difficulties associated with providing for family members invited from Poland. Children are always excited when these kin visit them. From an adult's perspective, however, short-stay visitors for this occasion, often elderly grandparents or Godparents, cause stress. They may not understand the

reality of migration life, so easily disrupt everyday school and work routines. One mother described such a visit:

My mother-in-law was complaining; she didn't understand any English so at church it was hard for her. Then next day we had to go to work; she didn't go anywhere on her own, only with me. It was a strain on her and on me. She was simply bored; she cooked and then... the only thing she could do was to watch [Polish] television.

The English-language service and participation in an unfamiliar church environment may alienate elderly guests – the most commonly invited of whom are grandmothers. Their presence, however, is generally highly appreciated, despite the cultural mismatches their visit may cause. Their attendance at the First Communion ritual ensures that the Catholic religion is passed on to the children as an inter-generational continuity. However, first and foremost, as I witnessed, grandmother's visits are a source of immense joy for the children.

Polish families at St Luke's

How does the considerable size of the Polish community that formed around St Luke's impact on its members' integration into Welsh society?

The concentration of Polish children at St Luke's is largely due to Polish social networking activities. Prevalent amongst parental narratives is the issue of utilising social capital – e.g. knowing people ('We worked together and she told me about the school'), family chain migration ('Now my brother's children are also at the school') or convenience due to bypassing the language barrier (e.g. having Polish-speaking assistance and translation). St Luke's enjoys 'a good school' reputation in the Polish community. Its headteacher emphasises the school's Catholic inclusion ethos and that 'the word "Catholic" means universal'. This message may be particularly appealing to newly arrived Polish migrant families. The St Luke's setting reassures parents with its familiar Catholic symbolism – Jesus on the cross, Mother Mary, a portrait of John Paul II. Catholicism's visual symbolic language does not require English to be spoken in order to understand. Furthermore, in line with her support-teacher responsibilities, the Polish assistant actively establishes relationships between the school, the church and the Polish community. Many parents recognise and value this 'Home, School and Church' triad from their own upbringing in Poland. St Luke's daily school life is embedded in Catholic practice. Religious rituals build a cohesive school community and a sense of belonging (Hemming 2011: 59).

In this school, Polish children form a visible national group. This collective identity reinforces their embedment into school and parish life. The headteacher considers that the Polish identity is well incorporated into the school's English-speaking parish's practice:

I was in church on Sunday and I saw the Polish families there. The children were not only following the service by reading in English but also at the end of the service meeting there was the Polish community and talking in their home language, Polish. For them to be secure in both ways is a great thing, for me as a member of this community, to see.

The Polish group therefore fits well into the schools' promotion of inclusion and celebration of diversity. This I witnessed when the Day of Nationalities was celebrated at church and when Poles represented the school at the European Day of Languages. In such ways, Polish national identity is embedded into Welsh Catholic institutional arrangements.

On the other hand, attachments are built differently when Polish-language use reinforces Polish nationality and Polish Catholicism, and Catholicism is performed in the way it is in Poland. This distinguishes the ‘Polish group’ from other parishioners. Additionally, twice in the school year, the Polish assistant and several mothers take the children straight from school to church to pray in a traditionally Polish mode: ‘*Różaniec*’ in October and ‘*Majówka*’ in May. Such national-identity exclusiveness is particularly conspicuous in Polish patriotism and Catholicism. One Saturday evening, close to the anniversary of John Paul II becoming Pope (16 October 1978), the Polish assistant organised Rosary Prayers (*Tajemnice Różańca*). More than 20 primary- and secondary-school children and their mothers attended.

In this situation, the construction of ‘different’ religious identities is largely due to the way in which Polish mothers practice prayers. Orsi (2004: 102) sees the role of prayers as ‘making and substantiating the religious world adults and children constituted and inhabited together’. In this particular context, the way in which children are disciplined to pray in a particular way on national occasions reproduces ethnic, linguistic and national belonging. However, although strengthening the Polish-speaking community, this fusion of nationalism and Catholicism exacerbates otherness. Discussing community cohesion, Hemming (2011: 64) noted that some religious communities’ practices are potentially excluding. Although Polish families build connections with English-speaking members of the congregation through their children’s activities at St Luke’s, Polish mothers’ specific religious practice may send self-exclusion messages. In St Luke’s church community, however, social events for Polish families in the church hall increase the opportunities to extend their social networks. I attended two: *Andrzejki* (St Andrew’s Day, 30 November) and *Ostatki* (before the start of Lent). Everybody brought food; some children performed. St Luke’s headteacher, canteen staff and both Polish and English-speaking parish priests came. Not one parishioner did.

Conclusions

This paper describes Polish migrant families’ religious practices and Catholic-identity negotiations when residing in Wales. Although all the families studied were committed to passing on their religion to their children, the migration situation required them to practice Catholicism in new ways.

For their children’s First Communion, for instance, ‘White dress, guests and presents’ – an easily identifiable symbol of Polish Catholic ritual – emerged as a significant theme in parents’, children’s and teachers’ narratives. This phrase is also symbolically significant, as all participants could locate themselves by positively relating to it, contesting it, placing themselves outside the experience or even devaluing it. Unavoidably, however, migration modified how families organised their First Communion religious and social practices. Some travelled to Poland to their church parishes of origin. Some celebrated it in Wales: either in a Polish parish or in their children’s school parish. Individual preferences over where, how and when to celebrate this ritual highlighted Catholic identity and Polish nationality intersections and priority tensions. Also, the related religious identity negotiations appeared to have some impact on belonging in and integration into their local Welsh communities.

This choice of holding the event in Poland exemplifies both the fluidity of these families’ intra-European migration experience and the strength of transnational networking. Parental post-experience narratives emphasised the distinctiveness of the traditional Polish communion as a whole-family and community affair, which boosts the ritual’s meaning and importance. However, Polish identity and Catholic habitus reproduction are rooted not only in migrants’ transnational practices but also in their participation in Polish diaspora life in Wales. Although some found celebrating First Communion in the Polish parish in Wales disappointing compared with the celebration in Poland, this actually strengthened both the families’ and the children’s identification as Polish Catholics. The Polish parish – and club – proved to be additional identity ‘anchors’ and

platforms for social networking. However, that some parents negotiated and modified the Polish version of First Communion suggests that the migration situation can change parent–church power relations.

Parents who celebrated the First Communion in a Welsh parish believed that this eased their negotiations of belonging and integration into their locality. It also, however, led some to criticise and contest traditional Polish religious customs. For them, Welsh Catholic practice appeared better suited to their needs. Unlike the traditional way of performing the First Communion in Poland, in Wales their involvement in this ritual seems to have become more individually independent, less collectively subservient. Besides having more autonomy in choosing where, how and when to have the First Communion, migration required its form to be modified. This freedom to change the previously rigid has given families more decisive individualised voices. Consequently, their identities are evolving from Polish Catholic collectivism towards individualisation, so substantiating Bauman’s (2001) thesis of identification in an age of migration. This raises questions about how the long-established Polish parishes should change, both to accommodate new migrants’ needs and to harmonise the Polish Catholic habitus with British context.

The new cohort of Polish migrants show some evidence of departing from the ‘core’ values of language and religion which the old postwar diaspora was proud to preserve. Nonetheless, these new transnational families’ communication with Poland by Internet and Skype helps to keep these alive. Although secular British society is changing families’ lifestyles, this group shows no evidence of disconnecting from Catholicism. Instead, my findings indicate that belonging to their church anchors them in a changing world, thus confirming Paleczny’s (2008) observations.

Additionally, my research data confirmed presumptions of culturally ascribed female roles in child-care and religious practices. Women activated transnational and family networks to organise the ritual and grandmothers willingly accepted their role as inter-generational transmitters of values and religion. Despite their migration to Wales, the women in this study still conform to the traditional ‘Polish Mother’ stereotype. Nonetheless, some mothers appeared to reinterpret religious tradition and re/negotiate their families’ Catholic identities. One particularly striking form of Polish religious identity negotiation was seen in St Luke’s English-speaking church. On the one hand, all mothers value their children’s integration into peer groups, school and community above their distinctively separate Polish Catholic identity; however, on the other, some tried to incorporate the traditional Polish Catholic habitus into universal Catholicism. These national prayers and celebrations reinforce Polish Catholicism, nationalism and language; such practices fluctuate across the delicate inclusion–exclusion line.

This study reveals the importance which Polish families accord to their children’s religious upbringing and to Catholic ritual. Having been conducted only in one area of Wales, however, it cannot claim to be representative of all Poles in Britain. Another limitation is that it only investigates the practice of Catholicism on the family level and not what Catholic faith means to either parents or children. By focusing on families with a short migration history, however, it does help to identify the critical points at which young children’s socialisation into Catholicism becomes established in this unfamiliar Welsh context and provides a starting point for comparisons with Polish migrant behaviour elsewhere in Britain.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers and the editorial board of CEEMR for their comments on a previous version of this article.

Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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How to cite this article: Kaczmarek-Day A. (2018). ‘White Dress, Guests and Presents’: Polish Migrant Families’ Practice of First Communion and Negotiation of Catholic Identities in Wales. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, 13 June, doi: 10.17467/ceemr.2018.03.