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Religious behaviors as a form of cultural identification. The case of Polish circular migrants in Iceland

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The problem under investigation in this text is the role of religious celebrations and practices in the mobile livelihoods of Polish circular migrants in Iceland. The phenomenon is discussed on the basis of qualitative research conducted among the migrants. The study participants are 18 men who work in a 2/2 rotation system for an Icelandic company. The basic findings of the case study analysis show that religious holidays and celebrations are important points of reference in circular migrants' work calendar as they help to arrange their schedule to meet work and family responsibilities. They go through Sunday rituals like they do at home. Living their lives according to the Polish Catholic calendar migrants celebrate their national identities and better understand their relation to the host society even if their migration is not a permanent one. The implications of the study are also that religious celebrations have great social and cultural significance for circular migrants.

Keywords: circular migration, labour migration, rotation system, religious celebrations, cultural identification

Introduction

This text draws on research conducted in 2018 with Polish circular migrants employed in a rotation system in an Icelandic company. The primary objective of the research was to depict migrants' everyday lives in two localities and understand how these men, and their families, adapt physically, and emotionally to living apart and in be-

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tween two places[2]. Among many important threads in migrants' stories about their lives in mobility the one concerning religious celebrations and practices unexpectedly ran through a majority of narratives, calling for individual attention. Since religion helps to interpret the world in which people function, and to adjust to it (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2004), these threads are discussed here more thoroughly. The aim of this article is to present the religious behaviors of circular migrants and the role of religious celebrations in their mobile lives. The text is structured as follows: in the introduction a literature review on migration and religion is presented and also the relation of Roman Catholicism to Polish national identity. This is followed by a short history of Poland-to-Iceland migration and basic characteristics of circular migration and work rotation system. Then, information about the study is introduced including the research method and sampling procedure. In the case study analysis of circular migrants' religious behaviors and practices I present ways of celebrating Sunday during their stay in Iceland, as well as Polish religious holidays, usually in Poland. This is followed by a presentation of migrant's attitudes towards celebrating Icelandic holidays. In the last section of the article the results of the case study analysis are discussed. The perspective of men's religious behaviors introduces more details and explanations to the general picture of stability in mobile lives of circular migrants. Bearing in mind that there is still a small number of research devoted to this aspect of migration, and the fact that the available research shows results for long term or even settled migrants, this text is intended to indicate another perspective – that of circular migrants.

1. Migration and religion

Migration scholars are unanimous about the fact that religion and its effects on migrants' activity in the host country have not received their full attention till this day. National identification, economic integration, political commitment, education, social mobility and the trajectories of the next generations are still examined more thoroughly than religious identification of people who enter the new country (Kivisto 2014; Foner, Alba 2008). Also sociology of religion has been mildly interested in migration (Van Tubergen 2006). Information about migrants' religious affiliation and practice comes mainly from a country's census data as well as from research carried out by single scholars, supplemented by surveys of public opinion, attitudes, and values. However, due to different methodologies and a relative data scarcity, it is difficult for sociologists of religion to reflect on the specific nature of the phenomenon.

[2] The research is discussed thoroughly in Dziekońska, M. 2020. 'This Is a Country To Earn and Return': Polish Migrants' Circular Migration to Iceland. Nordic Journal of Migration Research, X(X), pp. 1–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.414 Forthcoming.

To date, research on migration and religion has mainly concentrated on the role religion plays in migrants' lives along with the factors which determine the growth or weakening of migrants' religious practice and faith. One of the more important, if not the most important role of migrants' religious practice is to affirm or strengthen their ethnic identity. This is done in socially acceptable forms, usually throughout religious institutions which help transfer and reproduce important aspects of their own culture in their native language. Religion mediates and tolerates differences and may foster assimilation (Foner, Alba 2008) – it is easier to accept ethnic differences for people who share common faith (Warner 1997). This is important for both migrants and the host society. However, religious affiliation can also be a "barrier" to migrants' integration into the host society, especially if migrants belong to a religious minority (Connor, Koenig 2013). As a barier, religion may foster migrants' forming closed circles and consolidating a familiar cultural model (Lisak 2015), which may lead to separation from the host society, even from people who belong to the same religion.

Migrants' religious behaviors, their decisions to follow religious practices in the new place are influenced by a number of factors. Staying in a little known country is already a strong experience and may affect one's relation to faith and religion in two ways. In the face of difficulties and challenges, and with no family or friends close by, an even stronger need for support may arise. This is when migrants (re) discover a spiritual connection to God, and migration in this way turns into a theologizing experience for them (Smith 1978). The same circumstances can also make migrants take opposite attitudes – feeling alone with their problems, they may loose hope and faith, and migration will be a traumatizing experience for them (Hirschman 2004). Religious diversity of the host country does not help one to deepen their faith and commitment either. A wide range of denominational groups distract attention and increase sensitivity to their influence which may weaken migrants' faith and religious participation and suggest alternative ways of satisfying spiritual needs (Massey, Higgins 2011). Among the factors that may determine the level of migrants' involvement in spiritual practices are socio-demographic variables: age, sex, education, marital status, employment (Connor 2008; Van Tubergen 2006; Hirschman 2004), rural background, length of stay abroad (Connor, Koening 2013), commitment to spiritual life in the country of origin prior to migration (Myers 2000). Out of all these variables, participation in religious practices is most often positively correlated with having children in the country of migration. Other analyzed aspects of migrants' religiosity focus on church attendance, prayer and subjective religiosity (Van Tubergen, Sindradottir 2011), or the effect of migrants' religious involvement on their migration. Location-specific religious capital, the religious assets which are unique to one's current residence, are more valuable at home than they would be after migration and as they may be difficult to transfer or replace in another country, they may however deter the decision to migrate (Myers 2000:760). Researchers

also concentrate on how migrants use religious practices to stay connected to their communities at home and /or create alternative allegiances and places of belonging (Levit 2003: 851)[3].

2. Roman Catholicism and Polish national identity

A combination of historical events has made religion a firm foundation for Poles' national identity. Whenever the country's borders shifted, or during the Second World War, or in the years of communist rule, the Catholic Church was the place where Poles gathered to pray, speak their native language and openly resist current regime. Participation in religious events via mass rituals strengthened a sense of connection with the nation and became a component of national identification: "being Roman Catholic became a token of the Polish national identity" (Marody, Mandes 2017: 233). Naturally, religion was often the only thing that migrating Poles could rely on since their first attempts to look for a better future outside their motherland. Pioneers of Polish transatlantic migration in the 19th century, mainly peasants from either of the three partitions, did not identify themselves as Polish but they referred to geographical location or the local parish for that purpose (Erdmans 1998:23). Their three cults "God, soil, and fatherland" (Wloszczewski 1945:144) were the basis of their identity not only at home but abroad as well. Polish language and Roman Catholicism helped preserve this identity (Erdmans 1998; Lopata 1986) and became a part of national heritage. Being a Catholic, and, in some way being a practicing Catholic, was a cultural norm (Mariański 2014:17). This norm is closely related to the phenomenon of cultural religion – religion which resides in the culture but requires no active worship or participation (Demerath III 2000:136). Today even among those who define themselves as non-religious there are Poles who maintain their relation with church religiosity (Lisak 2009). According to the Polish Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) since the end of 1990s 90% of surveyed Poles have invariably considered themselves as believers (92% –97%), and 3% – 8% as non-believers, and about one in ten declared they believed in God with absolute certainty. When it comes to religious practices, in the years 2005–2013 the percentage of respondents practicing regularly, at least once a week, dropped (from 58% to 50%), but the percentage of those who do not participate in religious practices increased (from 9% to 13 %); more people admitted they did not attend religious services on a regular basis (from 33% to 37%). The level of declared faith and frequency of religious practices has not changed much in Poland since 2012. About one in two adult Poles attends religious practice regularly, at least once a week, while every eighth does not practice religion

[3] This is discussed in Dziekońska, M. (2020), *Życie religijne Polaków w walijskiej parafii w doświadczeniach polskiego księdza misjonarza*, in: Zemło, M. (red). *Małe Miasta. Duchowość kanoniczna*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, p. 497–520.

at all (Boguszewski 2018). Similar results, referring to the same time period, were reported by the Central Statistical Office (GUS 2018)[4]. These data also place Poland among the leading European countries by virtue of the level of religiosity: in 2018 Poland was the 8th most religious out of 34 European countries and ranked first in terms of worship attendance – 61% of respondents declared they attended worship services at least monthly (PEW 2018). Over the past 20 years these rates have slightly decreased for Poland, and secularization is a fact, but the pace of change is slow, and Poles still identify themselves as Catholics (Marody, Mandes 2017; Mariański 2013). They still recognize religion as an integral component of their national identification and source of values, rituals and meaning; and migrating Poles are no exception. Migrants understand that even better when they look for anchors in their new environment, and identity resources are easiest to find in religion (Lisak 2015).

3. Poland-to-Iceland migration

At the end of the first quarter of 2020 the population of Iceland was 366,130 and foreign citizens constituted 13.9% of the country's population. Poland was the country of origin for 820 out of 2 620 foreign immigrants (Statistic Iceland 2020) who came to Iceland during that time, which makes for 31% of foreign citizens in this period. Poles constitute the largest diaspora on the island. The Statistical Bureau of Iceland noted that on 1 January 2019 there were overall 19 210 people born in Poland living in Iceland whereas almost ten years earlier (in 2009) there were 11 611 Poles, and in 1999 only 1 137 people born in Poland lived in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2019 b); in 2018 alone, 3 797 Poles arrived in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2019a). Contemporary Polish migration to Iceland has a relatively short history so, naturally, there is no 'old' versus 'new' immigration (Raczyński 2013; Budyta-Budzyńska 2016). By this feature it is different from Polish migration to other countries. Anna Wojtyńska (2011: 31–36) identifies four main periods in the history of Polish migration to Iceland. (I) By the end of 1980's individual people registered as born in Poland arrived in Iceland; there were 16 persons in 1974, 28 persons in 1980, and 73 persons in 1985. (II) The country's economic growth in 1990's resulted in need for more workers, mainly in the construction and fishing industries – Icelandic women who worked in fishing villages, headed for towns to find employment not related to fishing, leaving their jobs vacant (Skaptadóttir 2011; Budyta-Budzyńska 2016). The years between 1989–2006 are characterized by fast growth in Poland-to-Iceland migration. Migrants responded to the labour market demand but almost always took

[4] In 2018 the religiosity rates for Poles have remained unchanged since 2015 – almost 81% were considered as believers and 3% as non-believers; about 70% of people prayed once a week or more often, and half of the Polish population participated in masses or services at least once a week; about 66% of Poles felt connection with their parish church or religious community.

jobs that migrants usually do, low payed and of low social prestige. Their migration was based on recently formed migration networks, and recruitment by agencies offering jobs to Poles, mainly in the fishing and building industry; where work permits were still required. (III) In May 2006, the Icelandic job market was opened to new EU members, and as a result, many Polish migrants arrived in this wave. No work permit was needed; migrants searched mainly for jobs in the construction or food industry, tourism and social care. In 2006 alone there were 3 629 Poles in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2019 b). (IV) The World Financial Crisis, which hit Iceland in 2008, also affected Polish migration – many Poles lost their jobs. Some decided to return to Poland but many chose to wait the crisis out in Iceland. In 2008 the number of Polish migrants in Iceland amounted to 10 540 people and in 2012 the number was 9 262 people (Statistics Iceland b). Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska (2016) identifies also a fifth period (V), which began in 2012 when the island's economy started to recover from the crisis and migration inflow from Poland began to rise again. In 2012, after three years of net migration from Poland leveled at a negative value, a positive net migration rate of 3191 people occurred in 2017 (Statistic Iceland 2019a).

The contemporary Polonia in Iceland is characterized as young, mobile and well educated (Wojtyńska 2011; Raczyński 2013). According to the MIRRA/CIRRA[5] (2010) survey conducted among Polish labour migrants in Reykjavik, a majority of the surveyed group completed some type of vocational education, many held a university degree: B.A (9%) and M.A (10 %); a majority came directly from Poland (87%) with no preceding migration experience (Thorarinsdottir, Wojtyńska 2011). Leaving Poland they had a plan to stay in Iceland no longer than a year or a few – just enough to earn some money and return home – but they often stayed longer. Plans to return home also stopped Poles from entering into close relationships with individuals from the host society. Those who did not want to settle in Iceland chose to maintain contacts mainly with other Poles there, follow Polish customs and surround themselves with Polish culture – also by means of electronic media and transnational communication with family and friends at home (Raczyński 2013).

3.1. Circular migration and rotation system

The simplest definition of circular migration would be that it entails "repetition of legal migration by the same person between two or more countries" (EMN 2011: 14). Circular migrants regularly leave their homes to stay abroad for a set limit of time. They circulate between the two countries as long as foreign employers offer more than migrants are offered at home, and they stop when the offer abroad is no longer beneficial. They start migrating when it becomes more beneficial again (Duany

[5] Miðstöð InnflytjendaRannsókna ReykjavíkurAkademíunni/Center for Immigration Research Reykjavik Academy

2002: 356). However, scholars emphasize that it is difficult to provide a clear-cut definition of "circular migration" (Skeldon 2012) as perfect, repeated back and forth movement rarely takes place in real life. Other terms, such as "temporary migration" or "return migration" share common features with circulation i.e. set limit of time abroad and the return home. Return, as such, implies the intention of settlement, nevertheless, migrants may decide to start a new migration after some time. Anne White points out that in the circular migration pattern there are moments of irregular breaks between a stay in the country of origin and destination, when migrants "fail to achieve a satisfactory livelihood in either country" (2016:155). For this reason the term "repeated migration" would be more appropriate to apply in order to include those cases. There is also no unanimity on the definition of circular migration across the EU Member States. In the light of contemporary migration studies and migration policies" circular migration shares many common points with other migration types regarding: political and geographical conditions, seasonality, legality and the length of stay, permanency of settlement, policy and economic needs of the sending and receiving country, or rules for employing foreign workforce e.g. special programs based on workers exchange or the rotation system (EMN 2011: 23–28). Taking this into account, "circular migration" seems a convenient and flexible term to apply, as long as repeated movement takes place, not associated with permanent settlement.

Circular migration is gaining recognition as beneficial to all involved, "a triple win" (EMN 2011), as it is to satisfy the labor needs of both the host country and the sending country (UNESCO 2008: 46). The third beneficiary is the migrant himself and obviously his family. For the latter, male circular migration is clearly an optimal solution compared to permanent settlement in the host country. It helps reduce the time spent apart, as well as the emotional costs of separation (Dustmann, Görlach 2016). Taking into account that the purchasing power of foreign currency is far greater at home than abroad migrants intend to stay mobile as long as possible in order to maintain and/or constantly improve the standard of living at home at possibly the lowest emotional costs. Mirjana Morokvasic (2004:11) calls these migrants "settled in mobility", explaining that migration "becomes their lifestyle, their leaving home and going away, paradoxically, a strategy of staying at home, and, thus, an alternative to emigration".

In the short history of Poland-to-Iceland migration there is no mention of circular migration to work, based on a rotation system of employment. The system itself is not a new solution on the labour market – business, services and industry have applied it in the USA and Europe (Glickman, Brown 1974; Kindler 2011). It concerns both the number of work hours a day and the number of days a week that an individual works before they have time off. Employment may be organized either by the employee or by the employer. For example in migration networks, in a self-organized rotation system one migrant replaces another migrant who returns home (e.g. female domestic

workers). In the employee organized rotation system employment is arranged into sequences of duties, rest time between duties, and days off. For instance in the construction industry, as in the studied group, working in a rotation system (2/2) includes 2 weeks of work in Iceland and 2 weeks off in Poland; other rotation frequencies are also possible but less common. The Icelandic employer who hires workers on a rotation basis sets the length of work time and free time, and this schedule is known to an employee in advance. What distinguishes this system from temporary, seasonal patterns of employment is the permanent contract. Therefore, such rotation system offers regularity and predictability to migrants and their families and thus seems to be the best example of perfect circular migration, and a workable solution to those who chose migration as their way of life.

4. Method

4.1. Research design and sampling

The text presents the results of qualitative research in a group of Polish male circular migrants in Iceland. The interviews took place in July 2018, at a campsite where men stay in Iceland during one work shift (two weeks); they were conducted after work hours, in the men's rooms at the camp. The interviews were conducted by Mateusz, a key informant, a migrant and member of the Polish team. He is trusted and respected by his mates, he speaks English well, he helps them with any problems. The main reason why he was asked to conduct the interviews was that the migrants were reluctant and distrustful of the research itself and would not like to talk about their lives to anybody from outside their group. Mateusz was instructed on how to perform the task. He followed the interview questionnaire, but he also asked additional questions concerning the men's everyday reality in Iceland/Poland and explained the context of some answers, which, if left alone, would not be actually clear for an outsider like the author herself. Some of the men's answers, however, were not probed for more details, probably because for the interviewer, as "an insider", these answers were self-evident and needed no further explanation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with consent of the informants. Taking into account the research problems set in the study, a qualitative method was applied. It allowed space for the respondents' comments and observations which helped to understand their decisions, actions, plans. The interview questionnaire was semi structured; there were 19 open questions relating to the following issues: migrants' lives prior to their work abroad in rotation resulting in circular migration between Poland and Iceland; motivations behind this decision; the characteristics of migrants' lives in Iceland and in Poland (when they return); the consequences of the decision for all involved, and especially for the relationship between spouses; their future plans.

4.2. Participants

The group consisted of 18 respondents, ranging in age from 23 to 64 years (the median age was 33,5 years). A majority of the migrants obtained vocational education including basic vocational (8), technical college (4), general secondary (5); one migrant held a university degree (B. A.). The informants came from six regions in Poland: 8 men lived in villages, 4 men lived in towns, 6 men lived in big cities (with a population over 100 thousand inhabitants). All the men were legally employed in Iceland under a permanent contract. A majority of them were married (14 men), two men were in a relationship; six migrants did not have children. In the group of fathers (12) one respondent had one child, nine migrants had two children, two men had three children. Most of the children were in early school and pre-school age. Four migrants had adult children some of whom already had their own families.

4.3. Background information

As this text concentrates on a selected aspect of circular migration – migrants' religious behaviors – basic characteristics of their lives between two countries are presented to provide context for the case study analysis of religious behaviors and practices.

All the men who participated in the study work in a rotation system which is the basis of their circular migration between Poland and Iceland. Under the system, the worker crews live in a base camp, which is their temporary settlement, and work in special locations, far from the camp. They call the system "two-on-two" (2/2) because they work in twelve-hour shifts, two weeks in Iceland, and have two weeks off in Poland. A majority of the researched group (14) already had the experience of international migration prior to their migration to Iceland and knew all the downsides of temporary employment on different labour markets. Therefore, the possibility of getting a stable, permanent job based on a rotation system was gladly received by the migrants themselves and by their wives.

During their stay in Iceland the men's days are organized around work duties. They have little free time, which they spend preparing for another day at work (cooking, little cleaning, relaxing), talking on the phone with their wives in Poland or chatting with other men from their team. The only day off is Sunday, which breaks the routine of these two weeks. Men like their work in Iceland, they are glad they can speak Polish there and stay in a homogenous group of fellow countrymen. After their shift is over they come back to Poland for two weeks. Their time in Poland is filled with certain activities, such as special food preparations, or trip arrangements, but there are also moments which have a special meaning for the whole family. Whenever it is possible, they are arranged according to the men's work schedule so that the family can be together and celebrate.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge the Polish models of fatherhood (based primarily on responsibility for economic provisions for the family) and

motherhood (based on forging emotional bonds and taking care of children). In this context men undertaking circular migration for work play their roles of bread winners in the first place. However, physical distance allows for adopting another perspective on their family roles – a good husband and father not only provides for the family's financial status but is also there for them when they need him. During their temporary absence from home these men take care to maintain emotional ties with their family, usually by means of electronic media/phone conversation. Taking advantage of their employment scheme they try to be present in Poland and when special occasions take place such as traditional, religious holidays or private family celebrations. Thus, regular contact between the spouses and with children, as well as mutual emotional support, help to cope with difficulties and arrange family roles to work for their needs (Danilewicz 2010). All in all, migrants are satisfied with this rotation pattern of employment. They, and their wives, appreciate circular migration for the financial safety, stability and predictability it has introduced to their family lives and they want it to last.

5. Research results

Sociologists examine various social forms of faith, which do not include such aspects of religiosity that refer to the personal meeting between man and God. Sociologists thus can define the religious consciousness of a believer only through how it is expressed by verbal and non-verbal statements, as well as examine the socio-cultural conditions for accepting religious teaching (Mariański 2014: 26). The presented research results were obtained in the course of sociological research, so, naturally, direct questions about frequency of prayer and the migrants' personal relation with God or meaning of religion in their lives were not asked as these were believed to be too intimate. For the purpose of sociological analysis such elements were chosen which appeared the most clear and adequate in the main research, and at the same time were best presented by the respondents, i.e. celebrating Sunday and religious holidays, as well as participation in Icelandic celebrations. Taking this into account, the analysis concentrates on ways of celebrating religious occasions along with their role in the everyday lives of circular migrants.

5.1. Celebrating Sunday

Sunday is a holy day for Catholics. According to the Third Commandment of the Decalogue Catholics sanctify Sunday and rest from work or unnecessary service on this day. The Church imposes on members of the congregation to participate in Holy Mass on Sundays and other required holy days, and those who voluntarily neglect this obligation commit a mortal sin (Mariański 2013). During the migrants' entire two-week stay in Iceland there is only one Sunday. It is also the only day off from work. Out of the 18 men, only four openly admit that they attend Mass on Sunday and

three say that they do not. It is difficult to decide how many of them really participate in church service on that day because, for some reasons, most of them, when describing their Sunday in Iceland, do not mention going or not going to church. They are rather reluctant to talk about it. This could mean that the motivations to attend Mass on that day result from both: internal beliefs or habits, as well as external circumstances, such as the behavior of other group members on that day, or that they want to feel like in Poland, where going to church on Sunday is still practiced. Some respondents said that it was only a habit, part of their upbringing. This, however, does not mean that they had no spiritual needs.

Near the base camp where the research participants lived there is a church in which some Sunday masses are celebrated in Polish, at specially appointed times (a Polish priest rents the church for this purpose). The researched men often attend the Mass there, but they also like to attend the Sunday Mass celebrated in the Polish parish, situated a several dozen kilometers away from the base camp. The Icelandic employer responded to the men's need by providing them with transportation means – the men use the company van to get to church, the same that takes them to constructions sites on a daily basis. Although only four of the informants declared following this religious ritual on Sunday there are always more than these four men in that van, usually there are more than half of their crew. The men always go to the morning Mass – as they do in Poland. In the Catholic Church in Iceland, in a Polish parish, Masses are held according to the Polish order, and celebrated in Polish. As the men say, they are no different from those in Poland. Other Poles who live in Iceland also come to church on Sunday so, for the migrants, this is an opportunity to stay for a while in a place that presents the hallmarks of Polishness: the Polish language, the order of the Mass, Polish families with children. Raised in Catholic tradition these men naturally want to be in such place on Sunday. On their return from church the men join those who remained at the camp site and they can all celebrate this day by resting from unnecessary work. They do the same things they do in Poland on that day: this is an opportunity to spend time together at the campsite – in Poland they visit or host family and friends, in Iceland – they join their families via Skype or phone. They prepare Polish Sunday broth (rosół) and other "festive" food, go out for a walk, read books, browse the Internet. For these reasons Sunday, when lived according to religious rituals and patterns transferred from Poland, including the most important i.e. church attendance, plays a vital role in their everyday lives in Iceland, as it allows them to cheat space and forget that they are not physically at home.

5.2. Celebrating religious holidays

Another social manifestation of migrants' religious behavior is in the way they celebrate religious holidays. In the studied group, having a family was, in most of the cases, connected with celebrating such occasions at home – in Poland, and this is

the most desirable way of spending this time. Two-thirds of the group said they had always returned home for Christmas – except for one man they were all married, and only two men did not have children. When asked about spending holidays (pol. święta) abroad, they answered with quite noticeable irritation in their voices, they were even surprised with this question because the thought about spending holidays somewhere else had never crossed their minds – it was self-evident – it has always been in Poland, with their families. The most frequent answers were similar to these two:

> "It would not be fun if I stayed here. I would go anyway, and buy a ticket on my own, I wouldn't even ask anybody's permission." (Interview 6)

> "I spend every Christmas in Poland. Every single one. It was not even once that I stayed abroad, and I also spend New Year in Poland." (Interview 1)

Of key importance for further analysis is how the men understand the word "holiday" (święto). It is clear from the context of their statements that when they say "holidays" they mean Christmas (they call it "gwiazdka"). This holiday has special meaning for them because this is the time when they unite with their families, in Poland. They gladly talk about it, especially about the so-called magic of Polish Christmas and the preparations traditionally associated with Christmas Eve: the smells of unique dishes, the flavors, the live Christmas trees, family meetings, and all the traditional Polish customs (presents, carolling, Midnight Mass). Men are utterly convinced that there is no better Christmas than in Poland. Many shared the opinion that it is important to go back to Poland for Christmas.

The men's answers were less unanimous when they were asked about other Polish religious holidays. Almost half of them (8 people) had the experience of spending this time abroad, some also mentioned other countries of their previous international migrations. The life of a labour migrant is concentrated around work, as this is the driving force behind their migration, and taking breaks from the work routine is a costly thing. It would be perfect if celebrations fit in this schedule. As they explain, „Christmas is a worldwide holiday" (Interview 15) which greatly facilitates the decision to take a break from work duties and spend this time with family in Poland. But the men had to rationalize their decisions concerning coming home to celebrate other religious holidays. Some stayed abroad because it was not the right moment for return or they blamed their financial situation for that: "I didn't come to Poland because, I don't exactly remember why, but it was all about money – I must have been short of money or something and I just didn't come" (Interview 7). Some say that work duties stopped them from coming home for that occasion: "I happened to spend holidays abroad a few times because there was the closing of the project, or I simply couldn't make it" (Interview 14). In addition to their work duties, other circumstances in the destination country may also be of great significance for this decision, such as the way the country's residents celebrate such occasions, if they

celebrate them at all, or how other migrants behave in this regard: „nobody returned to Poland, so I couldn't come back, and I stayed" (Interview 4), says a man who chose to spend Easter abroad because others did so. These words may suggest that men apparently devoted less attention to spending other religious holidays in Poland. However, most of those who did not return home on these occasions tried to spend this time like they would in Poland, some also invited their wives and children. This way, even while being in a foreign country, they could still celebrate their own culture and preserve their cultural identity.

The informants never clearly stated what really guided them to decide how they spend religious occasions. Their motivations can be external – raised in Catholic tradition they simply follow it, or by the example of Christmas, it is easier for them to celebrate when everybody else is celebrating. But their motivations can also result from their individual choices – the Icelandic boss never asked anyone to stay at work during religious holidays (Interview 9). Those who did must have had their own reasons.

5.3. Celebrating Icelandic holidays

Icelanders profess the Lutheran faith[6], however, they do not consider their own nation as deeply religious – despite the fact that a majority of the island's inhabitants declare church affiliation (in 2015 – 80% and in 1998 – 94%) only 1–2% are engaged in regular religious practices (Budyta-Budzyńska 2016: 64). The most important religious holidays in Iceland are Christmas and Easter. Icelandic non-religious holidays and national holidays include: the Independence Day, gay pride parades, the First Day of Summer, Culture Night or end-of-summer concerts; there are also private occasions like name's day and corporate events (Nowicka 2011).

During their stays in Iceland some migrants had occasions to watch Icelandic celebrations, but generally they do not have many such opportunities because they are either busy at work or their shift is over, and they are in Poland. All of the men confessed that they were not interested in festivals and customs of the Icelanders and did not attach any importance to them. They also did not distinguish between particular holidays. They generally perceive holidays as "our" – Polish and "theirs" – Icelandic. There are two reasons for that: firstly, as Poles, they simply do not feel obliged to celebrate holidays which are not their own. Moreover, Polish culture, with its religious tradition, gains new meaning for them when contrasted with the Icelandic one. Looking at Icelandic culture through the prism of its celebrations and traditions, as well as other cultural symbols, different from the Polish ones, they only strengthen the feeling of superiority of their own culture, they come to appreciate it, take pride in it: "you can't compare it, their church is nothing like ours" (Interview 2) says one

[6] The officially established, Christian church in Iceland is The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland (the National Church).

of the migrants, but many formulated similar opinions. This is also the reason why fathers would not like to raise their children in Iceland and a great majority of the group would not like to move to Iceland. Moreover, they seem unlikely to change their minds about it.

Secondly, they believe that Icelanders – the Icelandic employer and the inhabitants of the town where they work, do not expect them to celebrate their occasions. Contrarily, men understand that their construction work is expected to stop on such days so that they do not disturb the celebration. However, for migrants, these days also differ from other days in that their workday is shorter than normal, but they still go to work. The Icelandic festive time clearly does not relate to them: "We celebrate Icelandic holidays at work. It has not happened yet that we would have a day off then. There is always something that needs to be done." (Interview 17). This is how they realize they are excluded from participating in their hosts' special time, but they accept it. They choose to spend extra free time at their base camp, in isolation from the host society and integrating within their own group. In this way, rituals associated with celebrating holidays become a tool in the hands of both migrants and the Icelanders. They help them both to isolate from one another as well as consolidate and protect their own national identities. Repeated participation in well-known Polish celebrations helps migrants retain their own cultural patterns and maintain their Polish identity, and contact with another culture, by contrast, strengthens this identity. The men are aware that their stay in Iceland will last two weeks and although in rotation system this makes it fifty percent of the year, their attitudes towards celebrating holidays and religious festivals reflect that throughout this stay they still belong to Poland one hundred percent of this time.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of migrants' answers proves that religious behavior and celebrations are an important part of lives lived between two locations, and demonstrates their great social and cultural power. Migrants, brought up in Polish families, reproduce traditional family roles – this is why they are the breadwinners and their wives are stay-at-home mothers. This is the traditional Polish family model, anchored in Polish culture in which Catholic religion still plays a vital role. For Poles, practicing religion is, in a way, a cultural norm (Mariański, 2014) and migrants conform to it by means of religious rituals and celebrating religious holidays. The study shows that, above all, this has also practical implications in their lives regularly separated by migration.

Religious behaviors and celebrations create structure and provide a framework for everyday life in two ways. First, they regulate migrants' stay abroad including the sequence of activities traditionally attributed to Sunday – the most important day of the week for a Catholic. Not all men openly admitted their position on

Sunday Mass attendance, but whether they participate in it or not they all follow the rituals traditionally associated with spending this day in Poland. Through these enactments, they also assert their membership in their community of origin (Levit 2003: 861). Second, religious holidays are points of reference in circular migrants' year calendar – those who want to spend them with their families in Poland will arrange their shifts at work in Iceland according to Polish Catholic calendar. In this way, circular migration gains advantage over temporary or permanent migration in this respect because it allows for meeting personal and family needs without disturbing employment fluidity.

Active performance of religious celebrations brings the concept of migrants' identity to the forum. Such celebrations assign a meaning to lives in mobility, allow migrants to interpret their migration experience and by the same token strengthen their individual identities. Moreover, religious celebrations, as inseparable components of Polish culture, connect migrants to the culture of their own nation and make them more aware of their national identity, especially that the context of the host society's culture allows them to see their own traditions clearly (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2004). Icelandic celebrations and rituals give Polish migrants the idea of who they are definitely not. Through performing specific religious behaviors, migrants see themselves as Polish, but more precisely, as members of their own local communities where they were raised and taught to preserve traditions. Therefore, through these acts they identify with the tradition and culture of their region first and then with the broader Polish national culture. Their religious capital is location-specific and it needs to be noted that sources of location-specific religious capital are not easily replaced and cannot be transported (Myers 2000). This is why men want to plan their shifts according to the schedule that allows space for going back home for Christmas – this is the most beautiful religious holiday when spent in Poland. Those who happened to spend it outside their homes realized how much they belonged to their homes in Poland.

Religion can also be seen as a site for the articulation of migrants' relationship to the host society (Alba, Raboteau, De Wind 2008: 4). The men in the studied group have an outsider status: literally – as they live outside the town, in a special base camp, and emotionally – they feel they do not belong there, they choose to repeatedly come and go rather than to settle. Their religious behaviors build a bridge to Poland but a barrier to Iceland, because they deepen the men's isolation from the host society and in a way build a sort of defensive wall from the world outside the campsite. The migrants do not participate in Icelandic holidays and celebrations but they follow the Polish ones. By means of embodied ritual (Warner 1997) they stay connected to Poland, and to one another but also keep their immediate environment homogeneous and impenetrable for strangers. For some respondents, it is even an opportunity to explicitly manifest their otherness, and the belief in superiority of their own culture over the culture of the host country (Budyta-Budzyńska 2017:44). For others it is

a hidden pattern of their own national culture which they (re)discovered only in the situation of confrontation, intended or not, with explicit patterns of Icelandic culture.

The qualitative nature of the study, the small number of the study participants and their different socio-demographic characteristics do not allow to draw conclusions for such features as age, education or place of residence in Poland. The only feature that the researched group has in common in relation to religious practices is being a father. It is also the only common element with other studies (Van Tubergen 2006; Connor 2008; Myers 2000; Massey, Higgins Espinoza 2011), although it should be emphasized that these studies relate to migrants who raise their children in the country of migration. This is not the case of circular migrants-parents because their children stay at home. For the same reasons, conclusions from previous studies on migration and religion are also difficult to apply in the case of circular migration. Yet, the presented study analysis shows that religious behavior is not irrelevant in this case. Circular migrants live lives regularly embedded in two different worlds, and religious rituals and celebrations seem to be among a few stable elements which bring structure and meaning to these lives.

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