

# MIXED MARRIAGES IN A SUPER-DIVERSE SOCIETY. THE CASE OF POLISH-BRITISH COUPLES IN THE CITIES OF THE WEST MIDLANDS

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Intermarriage has been argued to be a key indicator of migrants' integration into the host society. However, relatively little is known about the experiences of what many forms of intermarriage entail in a super-diverse context. In this paper, I problematise and further investigate the assumed link between intermarriage and the cultural, identificational and interactive dimensions of social integration of Polish migrants in Britain. The analysis is based on the results of a qualitative research project conducted among Polish migrants in Birmingham and surrounding towns of the West Midlands, where Poles represent the third most numerous non-UK-born population. The data collected in the course of this research suggests that there are three main patterns of interactive integration of Polish intermarried migrants: (1) the classical path of acculturation and integration, (2) inverse integration, and (3) the more pluralistic cosmopolitan mode.

**Keywords:** intermarriage, mixed marriages, integration, Polish migrants, diversity, United Kingdom

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## INTRODUCTION

Intermarriage has been of great interest to scholars from many different disciplines, as it has been argued to signal a lessening of social and cultural distance and therefore to be one of the most important indicators for revealing and exploring the scope of boundaries that constitute societal structure (Merton 1941; Davis 1941). As Kalmijn (1998: 397) pointed out, mixed unions are a relevant subject because of their inherent dynamic that leads to a decrease in ethno-cultural distinctiveness in the future generations. He argued that the scope of intermarriages not only reflects current boundaries between groups within society, but also bears the potential of cultural and socioeconomic change which is in line with the strong but still speculative assumption that the children of mixed marriages are less likely to identify with a single group (Song 2015; Song 2016). Thus intermarriage is said to contribute to the softening of negative attitudes, prejudice and stereotypes against the outgroup (Törnngren, Irastorza, and Song 2016). Moreover, the subject has a central place in the studies referring to the integration process of newcomers and different minorities, as intermarriage has traditionally been theorised as the litmus test of assimilation into mainstream society (Warner and Srole 1945; Kennedy 1944; Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003).

With increasing migration worldwide, the possibilities for individuals to form mixed unions have been expanded, resulting in the emergence of global, transnational marriage markets (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2007). Consequently, mixed unions across national, ethnic, racial, cultural as well as religious borders are becoming more common (Rodríguez-García 2015). However, since contemporary Western societies are becoming more multicultural, and even super-diverse (Vertovec 2007), not only in terms of ethnicity, but also with respect to variables such as income, occupational types and education as well as immigration status, rights, and entitlements, it is not always evident who integrates whom and to what.

Even though recent literature has exhibited an increasing interest in the study of mixed unions, relatively little is known about the experiences of what many forms of intermarriage entail in the super-diverse context. Discussion of intermarriage in the UK has largely focused on the South Asian groups, identified in survey data as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. The literature on mixed marriages in Britain can be broadly categorised into three overlapping streams: (1) the demographic patterns of intermarriage, (2) intermarriage and migration, and (3) intermarriage and social and economic integration. The first line of research has a relatively long tradition of descriptive studies (Coleman

1985; Coleman 1992; Coleman 1994; Jones 1982; Jones 1984; Berrington 1994) and in examining the formation and dissolution of mixed marriages (Muttarak 2010; Muttarak and Heath 2010) with the aim of deepening our understanding of the factors that influence the spread and stability of intermarriage (Feng et al. 2012; Hannemann and Kulu 2015). The second stream questions how migration policies can affect marriage migration patterns and practices (Charsley et al. 2012; Wray 2006), as well as investigating the role of transnational networks on the formation of mixed unions (Ballard 1990; Ballard 2003; Balzani 2006; Gardner 2006; Dale and Ahmed 2011; Charsley and Shaw 2006; Charsley 2007; Charsley 2012; Charsley 2013; Shaw and Charsley 2006; Shaw 2001). Finally, the third stream explores the correlation between intermarriage and migrants' integration into the host society (Robinson 1982; Peach 2005; Voas 2009).

Although the dynamics of mixed marriages in Britain have been examined, the topic of intermarriage of various streams of newer migration from the European Union, and particularly from Poland as the most significant sending country, has not been covered in the recent literature. Migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK since 2004 has attracted a considerable amount of academic attention focused on migration motivations and strategies, work, living standards and quality of life, social networks and transnational practices as well as family migration<sup>2</sup> (Burrell 2010; White 2016). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, until recently the issue of integration of intermarried migrants from Poland in Britain has not been addressed in the literature. The aim of this paper is to fill this gap and to shed some light on this important topic by investigating the nexus between intermarriage and integration of Polish migrants.

Before going any further, some explanation must be given concerning the choice of terminology used in the article, as a wide variety of descriptors exists in the literature on unions between different social units. More specifically, usage of terms depends on the academic disciplines and the character of contextual boundaries delimiting groups (Törngren, Irastorza, and Song 2016). Therefore, such terms as "exogamy", "heterogamy", "intermarriage" and "conjugal mixedness" are used, as well as many descriptors such as "binational", "cross-national", "cross-border", "international", "transnational", "mixed", "mixed-race", "mixed-ancestry", "interethnic", "interracial", "intercultural", "cross-cultural", and "interfaith". Some of these notions seem to be strongly determined by international migration (e.g. "cross-border", "international", "transnational"), while others shift the focus away from geographical mobility. It is also worth

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<sup>2</sup> Including research on children's experiences of intra-EU migration and the identities of Polish children in the UK. For more, see the special issue of Central and Eastern European Migration Review Vol. 5, No. 1, 2016.

noting that various dimensions of differences or commonalities between a couple may overlap. Therefore, in this article two general terms are used interchangeably: “mixed marriages”<sup>3</sup> and “intermarriage”, which is a well-established concept in the literature. Both terms refer to a union (both legal marriage and civil partnership that allows same-sex couples to obtain essentially the same rights and responsibilities as civil marriages, i.e. property rights, next-of-kin rights in hospitals and others as well as tax exemption) between a Polish migrant and a British-born person (including people with different ethnic and racial origin). The sample was limited to heterosexual couples.

This article draws on data from qualitative research projects with recent Polish migrants to explore the link between intermarriage and integration. Before I present the results, I first briefly discuss the relevance of intermarriage and its place in the current assimilation and integration theory. I then describe the methodological approach and research context. This is followed by a presentation of the main findings. Because space limitations do not allow a full discussion of all aspects of migrants’ incorporation into the host society, the article focuses on cultural, identificational, and interactive dimensions of social integration understood as an interactive and mutual process of inclusion of immigrants in the institutions and relationships of the host society (Bosswick and Heckmann 2006). The paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings as well as further challenges in studies of intermarriage.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS – INTERMARRIAGE AS AN INDICATOR OF INTEGRATION

The idea of intermarriage as an indicator of the social distance between groups is well rooted in the canonical assimilation literature (Warner and Srole 1945) especially prominent in the American tradition of scholarship. According to the “straight-line assimilation theory”, over time and across generations the descendants of immigrants will become more similar in norms, values, behaviours, and other characteristics. Furthermore, the classical assimilation

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<sup>3</sup> The term “mixed marriages” has recently been contested as a social construct drawing on a preconception of groups as being monocultural or monoracial entities with distinct boundaries (Rodríguez-García 2015: 11). For more see Song 2015; Song 2016. Recently the term “mixedness” has become more prevalent as it has been argued that the concept is more encompassing and complex (Edwards et al. 2012) and can better reflect the inherent social inequality that mixed unions entail (Collet 2015).

theory, formulated by the Chicago School sociologists, perceived intermarriage as a key stage in the assimilation process since it implies a decline in group boundaries. In this tradition, Gordon (1964) separated the assimilation concept into seven stages, developing a linear model and an explicit link between intermarriage and integration. First comes “acculturation” (i.e. learning the language and daily customs of the host society, including values and norms), followed by “structural assimilation” (large-scale entrance of minorities into cliques, clubs and institutions in the host society), which results in “marital assimilation”, also called “amalgamation”. Consequently, widespread intermarriage will lead to “identification assimilation”, followed by the absence of prejudice, then discrimination, and finally value conflict (“civic assimilation”).

More recently in the “new assimilation theory” developed by Alba and Nee (2003), intermarriage has also been regarded as the litmus test for integration, reflecting decreasing social distance. As a result, the mainstream will be remade and become more heterogeneous while weakening the social, ethnic or racial boundaries between minority and majority groups (Alba and Foner 2015). In the United States, among the descendants of immigrants of European origin the high rates of intermarriage with the white majority were in line with the assumptions of this model (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Pagnini and Morgan 1990; Qian and Lichter 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007). Nevertheless, the still relatively low rate of intermarriage between the black and the white population provides a counter-example. Moreover, recent studies not only from the United States (Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2015) but also from Britain show that a high level of intermarriage is not always correlated with improved socioeconomic integration (Muttarak and Heath 2010; Muttarak 2010). Conversely, there are groups presenting low rates of intermarriage despite having attained significant levels of socioeconomic assimilation (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1997).

Therefore, a number of scholars have questioned the straightforward link between mixed marriage and integration (Marcson 1950; Bastide 1961; Safi and Rogers 2008; Collet 2015; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015; Rodríguez-García, Solana-Solana, and Lubbers 2016; Song 2009; Törngren, Irastorza, and Song 2016), emphasising the complexity and multidirectional nature of this relationship as well as methodological difficulties. Intermarriage is constrained by a variety of factors and arises from the interplay between three social forces: (1) the preferences of individuals for certain socioeconomic or cultural resources and characteristics in a spouse, (2) the influence of the social group of which they are members (i.e. third parties prevent exogamy by group identification and by group sanction), and (3) the constraints of the marriage market in which they

are searching for a spouse, such as the size, geography,<sup>4</sup> and gender balance of the groups (Kalmijn 1998: 398).

A possible framework for understanding the divergent intermarriage patterns and integration of recent migrant groups and their descendants can be provided by the theory of “segmented assimilation” developed by Portes and Zhou (1993). The theory draws attention to the structural and contextual barriers as well as cultural obstacles in the integration process, emphasising the interplay between the characteristics of the co-ethnic community and the societal context in which second generations migrants find themselves. In other words, Portes and Zhou examine into what sector of society a particular group assimilates. As a result, they described three main patterns of integration: (1) the classical path of acculturation and integration into the white middle class, (2) permanent poverty and downwards assimilation into the underclass, and (3) successful socioeconomic integration accompanied by strong community solidarity (Portes and Zhou 1993: 82).

When applied to the issue of intermarriage, this theoretical framework highlights that the relationship between intermarriage and integration is segmented. Moreover, the rates of mixed marriages can reflect ethnically stratified social structures, as there are still hierarchical preferences in the ethnic, racial and religious origins of a potential partner (Lucassen and Laarman 2012; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015). Despite the fact that this three-part path integration model cannot be applied directly to Britain (Peach 2005; Muttarak and Heath 2010; Song 2010) due to the different colonial background and slavery tradition, it can be useful for intermarriage research in a super-diverse context.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The empirical data used in this paper was gathered between April and June 2016 in the fieldwork research<sup>5</sup> with 25 Polish migrants in Birmingham, the second-largest urban area in the UK, and surrounding towns of the West Midlands

<sup>4</sup> For more about the positive effect of racial, ethnic, and occupational heterogeneity on the respective types of intermarriage see publications on Blau’s theory of social structure (Blau 1977; Blau, Beeker, and Fitzpatrick 1984; Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982).

<sup>5</sup> The work leading to this article received funding from the Polish National Science Centre under grant agreement 2014/13/N/HS6/03770. The completion of the entire project (*Mixed marriages and “gender asymmetry”. Patterns of integration and socioeconomic mobility of immigrants in Poland and the United Kingdom*) also included 46 narrative interviews conducted between September 2015 and May 2016 in Poland with Ukrainian migrants in exogamous unions (heterosexual marriages and common in law relationship formed by a foreign-born migrant and a Polish-born citizen).

including Wolverhampton, Dudley and Walsall. The region was chosen because of the numerous<sup>6</sup> and diverse population of post-accession Polish migrants (in terms not only of their socio-economic characteristics, but also of the type of migration) as well as its extraordinary nature of super diversity (including areas of prosperity and high deprivation and exclusion shaped by class dynamics and migration as well as a higher than average percentage of large, well-organised but also scattered minority ethnic groups and at the same time lower than average white ethnic).

Individual In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with migrants married to a British-born person (including people with different ethnic and racial origin) constituted the main part of the study. The interviewees constitute a diversified group in terms of age (varying from 25 to 44 at the moment of interview), education, current and previous occupation and employment status, region of Poland as well as size of the place of origin. The respondents were selected using personal connections, advertisements and contacts with different migrant associations in the West Midlands.

The interlocutors were asked to speak about their lives prior to migration, their migration histories, the changes in their lives over time as well as their current lives in Britain, focusing on specific topics and events, namely migration, marriage to a British-born person, social integration and socioeconomic mobility. After this unstructured conversation, visual tools were employed. At the beginning of this part, charts with five different types of social stratification system were presented to the interviewees, who were asked to choose the best diagrams illustrating social structure in Poland (before their migration to the UK and at the time of the research) and in Britain (just after their arrival to the UK and at the time of the research). They were also prompted to score their and their closest family positions on the chosen diagrams. Then, structured interviews around the indicated positions took place. The interviews were followed by a questionnaire gathering socio-demographic data. All the interviews were conducted in Polish by the author, recorded in their entirety, fully transcribed, and analysed with the use of open coding with Atlas.ti software (version 7) for qualitative data analysis. The names I use in the article are all pseudonyms, in order to ensure the participants' anonymity.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the national census in England and Wales of 2011, Poles (52,499) represent the third most numerous non-UK born population in the West Midlands, after residents born in India (99,717) and Pakistan (88,636). In terms of passports held, residents with Polish passports were the most numerous group (of those residents that held only a non-UK passport), with 49,974 residents holding a Polish passport in 2011.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT – INTERMARRIAGE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

The 2011 census showed that the population in England and Wales has become more ethnically diverse and all minority groups have increased in number since the previous census in 2001 (Office for National Statistics 2012). Apart from various streams of post-war migration from colonies or Commonwealth countries and newer migration from the European Union after its enlargement, one of the most notable drivers of population change is the growing rates of intermarriage, and the children born from these mixed unions.

Ethnicity is not recorded when marriages are registered. The best data on intermarriage in Britain therefore comes from a census of the population.<sup>7</sup> The main drawback of the census for studying intermarriage is usage of aggregate measures of “inter-ethnic” relationships, defined by the ONS (2014) as a relationship between people living in a couple who are married, in a civil partnership, or cohabiting, and in which each partner identifies with an ethnic group different from the other partner within any of the 18 ethnic group classifications<sup>8</sup> used in the census. Nevertheless, it can be misleading that it employs the term “inter-ethnic”, but virtually uses broad pan-ethnic (regardless of specific ethnic and racial ancestry as well as language) or racial categories such as “white” or “black”. The use of these terms is especially problematic as it precludes capturing diversities within those groups.

In 2011 nearly 9 per cent of the population (2.3 million) who were living as part of a couple were in an interethnic relationship, which means that the rate rose by two percentage points between 2001 and 2011 (Office for National Statistics 2014). People from the “Mixed/Multiple” ethnic groups (who identified themselves with a mixed or multiple ethnicity) were the most likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship (85 per cent), followed by “White Irish” (71 per cent), “Other Black” (62 per cent) and Gypsy or Irish Travellers (50 per cent). However, the high rate of intermarriage reported for “Mixed” people as a whole

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<sup>7</sup> Sample surveys generally have too few respondents to give reliable information on this topic. It is also impossible to use data collected by the International Passenger Survey, a continuous survey conducted at all major UK air, sea and tunnel ports, as it provides estimates for all UK residents (also Polish-born) who travelled abroad to get married.

<sup>8</sup> The classification encompasses: “White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British”; “Irish”; “Gypsy or Irish Traveller”; “Other White”; “White and Black Caribbean”; “White and Black African”; “White and Asian”; “Other Mixed”; “Indian”; “Pakistani”; “Bangladeshi”; “Chinese”; “Other Asian”; “African”; “Caribbean”; “Other Black”; “Arab”; “Other ethnic group”.

presents a rather misleading picture, as it does not capture any instances of ethnic or racial overlap (Song 2015: 100).

Interestingly, “White British” (4 per cent) were least likely to be in inter-ethnic relationships, followed by Bangladeshi (7 per cent), Pakistani (9 per cent) and Indian (12 per cent), showing the role of religion, cultural tradition and patrilineal family as factors that influence the propensity to intermarry. Nevertheless, of all people in inter-ethnic relationships, 40 per cent (933,000 people) included someone who was “White British”, as this group still constitutes the majority in England and Wales (81 per cent of the overall population), while the most common pattern was relationships between “Other White” and “White British” (16 per cent or 366,000 people).

It is also worth mentioning that the category “Other White” is made up of numerous groups including more recent migrants (for example 84 per cent of this group were born outside of the UK), largely from Poland (the second largest group of non-UK born residents increased by 0.5 million, which means a nine-fold increase between 2001 and 2011 up to 1 per cent of all residents in England and Wales) and other European countries. This highly varied group saw the largest growth overall of all ethnic groups between 2001 and 2011, with an increase of 1.1 million, meaning that the rate rose by 1.8 percentage points, becoming the second largest ethnic group in England and Wales (4.4 per cent of the overall population or 2.5 million), mainly due to the significant post-accession migration.

According to figures from the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics 2014), the pattern of inter-ethnic relationships was similar for men and women across the aggregate ethnic groups. In the case of “Other White”, 45 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men were in an inter-ethnic relationship (the biggest differences were found with the Chinese group, where women were twice as likely (39 per cent) to be in mixed unions as men (20 per cent)). Unfortunately, we are not able to pursue this important issue within aggregate ethnic groups using the available census dataset.

However, data from the population register provided by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) relating to marriages contracted in Poland between a Polish resident and a person who lived abroad before matrimony indicates that Polish women are more likely than Polish men to marry foreigners. As for a foreign groom, the main sending countries were the United Kingdom and Germany – countries that constitute destinations for Polish migrants rather than typical origin countries for migrants settled in Poland. Therefore, it is highly probable that mixed marriages contracted with a man residing in the United Kingdom and Germany concerned mostly Polish migrants who registered their foreign marriages in Poland (Kaczmarczyk 2015).

## EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN INTERMARRIAGE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

New concepts of integration underline the multidimensional character of this process, for example the theoretical framework by Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) structured around four basic forms of social integration. They are distinguished as follows: (1) structural integration, in which the acquisition of rights and the access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society (i.e. the economy and labour market, education and qualification systems, the housing system, welfare state institutions, and full political citizenship) are taken into consideration, (2) cultural integration, i.e. the process by which an individual acquires the knowledge, cultural standards and core competencies of the new culture and society, (3) interactive integration, which means the acceptance and inclusion of migrants in the primary relationships and social networks of the host society, and (4) identificational integration, referring to a feeling of belonging to a dominant society. Because space limitations do not allow a full discussion of all aspects of migrants' incorporation into the host society, in the two sub-sections below, I explore the cultural and identificational as well as interactive dimensions (although in practice often blurred) of social integration, understood as an interactive and mutual process of inclusion of immigrants in the institutions and relationships of the host society (Bosswick and Heckmann 2006: 10).

### CULTURAL AND IDENTIFICATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF INTEGRATION

Language acquisition is thought to be a key factor for migrants' integration, as it enables them to access the core institutions of the host society and participate in all aspects of a local community's daily life. In the context of Polish post-accession migration to the West Midlands, it is worth noting that according to the 2011 national census, Polish (13 per cent) was the second most widely spoken main language other than English (after Panjabi, spoken by 17 per cent of residents) in the region. Therefore, some interviewees admitted that they speak English only at home with spouses and children as well as their partner's family and friends. As explained by Bartek, who has lived in Britain since 2005 and has therefore observed the phenomenon of influx and settlement of post-accession Polish migrants to the UK almost since the beginning of the EU expansion:

*Nowadays, I speak English only at home. I go to work and Poles are everywhere. Back in the day, it was easier [to learn English] because people [were asking you about something]... there were a whole lot of tuition-free as well as paid colleges. At work most employees were English people, not migrants... When you went to a bank, you had to deal with the matter yourself or go with somebody who spoke English. Nowadays, you just say "excuse me, I would like to talk with someone in Polish" and a Polish-born bank employee comes to you right away. So the situation was quite different. There were no Polish schools, there was nothing... And now there are Polish shops, everything... There is a second Poland here (35-year-old man married to a British-born woman with Caribbean roots, with a 7-year-old child).*

The above quotation illustrates that Polish migrants nowadays can deal with living in the UK without an advanced knowledge of English as they are surrounded by other Poles whom they can ask for help, or can be assisted by interpreters provided on request. It is also noteworthy that lower language proficiency coincides with lower socioeconomic position in the host society and more precarious work conditions as well as very intense work hours, all of which may result in limited opportunities for engaging in language training (Rodríguez-García et al. 2015). Therefore, the interviewees working in the secondary job sector in Britain and at the same time with a low pre-migratory level of English indicated that their British-born partners and their close family had influenced their language proficiency. Even migrants with a high level of English (i.e. English graduates or people who after a few years of living in Britain were working as interpreters) emphasised that their British-born spouses and partners had a positive impact on language acquisition through daily practice and provided help in understanding regional accents and dialects of English (i.e. Brummie, used in the West Midlands).

Furthermore, the British-born spouses and partners of Polish migrants facilitated their linguistic integration by proofreading their CVs and cover letters or helping them to prepare for job interviews, which is strictly linked with migrants' structural integration. Another form of linguistic help refers to formal education of migrants in Britain. For instance, 36-year-old Edyta, who has been working as an interpreter for a few years, admitted that without her husband's support she would not have dared to start studying at the university because of the language barrier, in particular the difficult vocabulary of a field of study that was completely new for her.

The interview narratives also revealed that Polish migrants tend to benefit from their relationship with a British person in broader terms, including the

gender role aspect of partner choice, as the interviewed women made positive assessments of their relationship with English men in terms of more equal conceptions of gender roles. Moreover, native partners act as cultural brokers who facilitate the border crossing from one culture to another and the process of learning new scripts of behaviour and cultural standards (i.e. the British work culture emphasised by the interviewees as well as rules of courtesy, kindness and tolerance of British society, seen as its core values).

However, it would be misleading to assume that Polish migrants perceive the host society as an undifferentiated monolithic English culture and entity. Rather, they view it as a stratified society in which a variety of ethnic and race (often linked with religion) subcultures coexist. As intermarriage is often entangled with social class, and migrants may acquire slightly different cultural standards and codes while integrating into different segments of the host society (Portes and Zhou 1993). Lidka, for instance, had broken up with a Pole after six years of relationship and started a family with an Englishman, integrating into white working-class culture. She pointed out how being intermarried had expanded her cultural horizons and rooted her in British culture and society:

*I felt that with him [her British-born partner] my personal development is possible. Besides, he is an Englishman so he's been able to help me with the language. I also crossed a barrier not crossed by everyone. It was a definite plus, like somebody ticked the "her attractiveness" box. I think that English people go out with foreign girls also because they want to confirm their attractiveness that they have got a different girl. And you have to put more effort into a relationship with a foreigner than with a native. [...] I'm very happy that my partner is not from Poland. I would not like to have a Polish partner. [...] I'm happy with it because I'm more rooted in this culture. I watch English television. I know what is happening around me and this is what I missed [in my previous relationship with a Pole]. From daily newspapers I know how they speak about Brexit and if I don't understand something, he [the partner] explains it to me. So this is a normal life. I recognise English actors, TV shows and I don't even watch them, I know that they are broadcast. I live a normal life as it should be. Here you can meet Polish couples who don't watch English television and who don't know what is happening around them. They live here, earn money. They have even got a house here but they are not rooted in this English life, normal life as it should be with all those aspects (31-year-old woman married to an Englishman, with a 3-year-old child).*

In the interview, Lidka stressed that before meeting her partner she did not encounter many English people as she had been working and living in social locations where she was more likely to come into contact with other Polish

migrants rather than native-born English people. Moreover, she evaluated her relationship with a Briton as a chance for understanding British culture and society better, thus the above excerpt illustrates the acculturation attitude of intermarried migrants who valued the knowledge of English language and cultural scripts of the host society.

On the other hand, we should emphasise that most of the interviewees were attached to the Polish language and culture, which is in line with arguments regarding the bidirectional nature of integration (Bosswick and Heckmann 2006). Attachment to the Polish language and culture manifested itself in encouraging their children to attend Polish Saturday Schools, their food practices, and in the celebration of religious festivals such as Christmas or Easter, which also had a strong cultural dimension. Therefore, intermarriage with a British-born person neither necessarily indicates the loss of the migrant's ethnic identity nor is directly related to the identification with the mainstream society, as was suggested by the classical assimilation theory (Gordon 1964). This is illustrated in the following quotation, in which Bartek elaborates on the lack of a feeling of belonging to Britain and his efforts to foster ethnic identity in his son by encouraging him to learn Polish and participate in Polish community events:

*Sometimes I get fed up with life here... I don't know what to call it. Unfortunately, it's not my country. I am not at home. And my 7-year-old son knows that he is not an Englishman. I convince him that he is not an Englishman. You know, he is half Polish. He takes part in Polish events like Independence Day, performances at school or Children's Days organised by Polish Saturday schools (35-year-old man married to a British-born woman with Caribbean roots, with a 7-year-old child).*

Polish migrants construct and negotiate their ethnic identity in relation not only to the majority group but also to a wide range of other ethnic and religious groups (Ryan 2010). Some of the interviewees (not only married to people with different ethnic origin) valued intercultural contacts with other migrants and members of minority ethnic groups. However, most of them admitted that they first encountered increased cultural, ethnic and religious diversity when they crossed the border into the UK, as they come from what is still a highly homogenous society. The research revealed rather polarised reactions of Polish intermarried migrants towards this diversity, as has also been noted in previous studies on Polish migrants in the UK (Siara 2009; Gawlewicz 2015; Eade, Drinkwater, and Garapich 2006; Ryan 2010; Datta 2009). While some interviewees embraced the ethnic and religious plurality of Birmingham and the surrounding towns of the

West Midlands, other admitted to feeling less comfortable, or even in danger, with living in such a diverse place in terms of the ethnicity, race, religion and social status of their residents. One of the respondents, Maciek, who after arrival had been living in a company-owned flat in one of the Birmingham boroughs with the highest proportion of Pakistani residents, described his encounter with diversity referring to a sense of fear and heightened racial awareness due to his social “visibility” as a white man. Finally, as a consequence of encountering difference and his marriage with a woman of Bengali origin, he managed to develop neutral attitudes towards minority groups:

*I moved to the UK from Poland eleven years ago but mentally I wasn't ready for it [accommodation in ethnically diverse district] as I ended up in an unknown environment. All the more so as I had a completely different image of England in my head... like you know, from advertisements, television or press. But the reality was different. And guess what? Now I don't think that district was more dangerous than others in Birmingham. But it was the feeling that you are strange, you are the only white guy among thousands of people with dark or other complexions. And it was scary. But nowadays it doesn't bother me at all. As I said, my wife is of Bengali origin (42-year-old man married to a British-born woman of Bengali origin, with an 8-year-old child).*

In a similar vein, another interviewee, Bartek, quoted previously in this paper, referred to wariness towards ethnic minority groups, in particular Muslims of various nationalities. He compared the relatively homogeneous Polish society, regarded as a desirable state of affairs, with the super-diverse British environment, linking ethnic and religious diversity to the sense of danger in the city, in particular the continual threat of terrorist attacks. As a white, European and Christian man he implied a cultural distance from other minorities, even though he was intermarried to a black woman with Caribbean roots. Hence, intermarriage does not ensure a decrease in ethnic and racial prejudice toward all minority groups of the host society. These new patterns of prejudices strongly linked with the religion of “others” rather reflect socio-ethnically stratified social structures (Rodríguez-García, Solana-Solana, and Lubbers 2016), and are used by migrants in the identity construction process. This is illustrated in the following quotation, in which Sylwia explains that she has never dated any men from ethnic or racial minorities, and elaborates on her intercultural contacts with Britons:

*I think that my mum is happy that of course my partner is not a black man, because she told me... or somebody for example from Pakistan, a Pakistani. It made me laugh but it's not my cup of tea. These people are not... I've never*

*came into contact with them. I mean, I have acquaintances. For example, I have a colleague who is mixed-race and he is a DJ and another one is also mixed from parents from Pakistan... no sorry, from India, his mother is from India and his father is English but you know, this guy is very cool (34-year-old woman in late pregnancy married to an Englishman).*

This excerpt exemplifies what we can call hierarchical preferences in the ethnic, racial and religious origins of a potential partner. The quotation demonstrates that Sylwia's predominantly positive encounter with people originating from minority groups does not appear to influence her attitude towards the whole group, eroding ethno-racial prejudices. Rather she justifies her contacts with people of mixed origin, adding information about the virtues of her acquaintances. Thus, in this stratified and segmented context within which integration takes place, whether in racial, ethnic, religious or economic terms, mixed unions can help in understanding the intercultural dynamics of super-diverse societies.

## INTERACTIVE INTEGRATION

Intermarriage is traditionally considered as a key indicator of social acceptance and inclusion of migrants in their primary relationships, i.e. family and friendship. It is also said to contribute to the softening of negative attitudes, prejudice and stereotypes against the outgroup and to harmonise differences. But does intermarriage really signal true social acceptance by spouses' families? The research revealed that it does not guarantee a warm welcome and social acceptance of Polish migrants. This is reflected in the two significant quotations below. They show that negative familial attitudes expressed towards intermarriage may exist in different directions:

*His mother was worried because he didn't have a girlfriend from here... no, he had a girlfriend, an Englishwoman, when he was twenty years old. Then all the time he had girlfriends who were not English. Our family situation and previous relationships are very similar so it's not a problem. But his mother was worried that we had nothing in common and nothing to talk about so she was worried to some extent. Besides, his brother always goes out with Indian women. So his mother was afraid that her grandchildren would not speak English. [...] But finally we met and now we like each other very much (29-year-old woman married to an Englishman, without children).*

*Ula: For sure there was a cultural barrier. He is of Pakistani origin. And his late father, as he died five years ago, he wasn't happy about it [our marriage] and to be honest I never met him but it wasn't an obstacle for us. So we had a small wedding reception here and a wedding Polish-style in Poland. We had a unilateral marriage in a Catholic church in Poland and then a wedding reception in a restaurant so it was the real wedding.*

*Interviewer: And what about his family? Did they come to this wedding?*

*Ula: No, they didn't. You know what it looks like with Polish alcohol... It would be a shock for his family. So he decided to keep like this – his family had their party here with my brothers and in Poland there was a party for my family (35-year-old woman married to a British-born man of Pakistani origin, with two children).*

Both respondents experienced initial negative attitudes and family opposition to mixing, but in different forms, from a frosty reception to refusal to accept the foreign partner by the father-in-law. The first excerpt comes from an interview with Marta, who maintained a three-year long-distance relationship with her current partner before she moved to the UK. In the interview, Marta emphasised her mother-in-law's "English manners", which she defined as an intersecting combination of politeness and distancing. However, the initial prejudices that had arisen from the fear of the cultural distance and potential language barrier disappeared due to Marta's efforts to get to know each other and maintain contact on a frequent basis.

The second excerpt comes from Ula, who elaborates on the families' reactions to her relationship with a British-born man of Pakistani origin. She explained that what was most difficult for both sides was the religious difference, especially with respect to the upbringing of children. Hence, before the wedding the couple decided that their children would be baptised, and if they had a son he would be circumcised. Despite negotiation and flexibility, Ula's father-in-law refused to accept her as a new family member. He neither came to the wedding nor met her and her Polish family.

Based on the analysis of intermarried Polish migrants' position in the primary relationships and their social networks, three main patterns of interactive integration can be distinguished: (1) the classical path of acculturation and integration into the dominant society, (2) inverse integration, and (3) a more pluralistic cosmopolitan mode.

The first path can be characterised by migrants' orientation towards contacts with (middle-class as well as working-class) British-born people and concentration on the accumulation of bridging capital. While some of the interviewees had pre-existing personal relations with Britons, in other cases these contacts consisted

of a British-born partner (i.e. his or her family members as well as friends and acquaintances). For instance, Monika, a young graduate who came to study in the UK, tried to establish networks through the university and social media, but did not seek out Polish people in particular. When asked about her circle of friends and acquaintances, Monika elaborated on her strategy of avoiding other Poles in the West Midlands, as she was afraid of ghettoisation limiting the range of available networks and the opportunities to learn English:

*English people, I would say that basically 100% [of my friends are] English people. I wanted to keep away from the Polish community because I noticed that they have no contact with English people, with local life. What's more, I noticed that those people don't speak English very well. [...] At the beginning, everything revolves around my school. Actually, there was nothing else to do. I had no friends. So basically I was focused on painting and drawing. Actually, my life changed when I met my husband. He introduced me to all his friends and I started to hang around with them. Before that, I had no clue where there were pubs or that kind of place (26-year-old woman married to an Englishman, without children).*

This was far from unique in this group of respondents, even in the case of migrants whose migration had been facilitated by pre-existing Polish social networks. However, intermarried Poles maintained their strong ethnic identity and tried to use Polish as a resource, for example, facilitating their professional activity (i.e. working as translators or interpreters). Moreover, some of them attended mother and toddler playgroups within established Polish community centres, and then later on encouraged their children to learn Polish.<sup>9</sup>

The second mode can be called “inverse integration”, as British-born spouses integrate into the sociocultural world of the migrant, as was also demonstrated by several previous studies on intermarriage (Rodríguez-García et al. 2015; Collet 2015). The couple remain in close touch with the migrant’s country of origin and culture, for instance via regular visits to Poland or even the British-born spouses attending Polish language courses. Interestingly, the interviewees differentiated between their close circle of co-ethnics and the more generalised population of Polish migrants (see also Ryan et al. 2008; Garapich 2012). They regarded the “ethnic community” with wariness, emphasising that Poles do not cooperate and cannot be trusted once abroad due to gossiping, mischievous practices and breaking social and economic norms of cooperation. At the same

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<sup>9</sup> The issue of supporting bilingualism has already received some attention (see Zechenter 2015).

time, they pointed out that their own circles of a limited number of relatives and Polish friends were very trustworthy. This is demonstrated in the narrative of Martyna, who reinforced limited but strong relations with Polish friends:

*Martyna: I moved out of this flat rented with other Poles and to be honest I've somewhat separated from Polish people. I had only chosen people with whom I was talking. And then I moved in with an Englishman. At the beginning, the relationship is the most important thing, not meetings with friends. It's obvious. But later we started meeting up with my trusted friends and so far we've maintained a relationship with them, with Poles... very often with Poles.*

*Interviewer: And what about his friends?*

*Martyna: They, I mean the English people don't maintain relationships like we do. We keep in touch with only one English married couple but we rarely meet up with them, like maybe once every two months. But they don't meet at home or for a barbecue with friends like we do (33-year-old woman married to an Englishman, with two children).*

In the interview Martyna explained that in spite of having members of her close family in Britain, she and her partner had established quasi-family ties with other Polish migrants, for instance celebrating different religious and family festivals together. Martyna had been in a relationship with an Englishman for eight years at the time of the interview. Nevertheless, she found it difficult to make friends with British people, which may reflect social marginalisation because of her position within the working class in Britain and her nationality.

The last path of interactive integration distinguished can be characterised as a pluralistic cosmopolitan mode, as some intermarried (not only to people of different ethnic origin) Polish migrants developed wider social networks than encompassing British-born people or members of the Polish community in the UK. The interviewees from this group were very open towards other people and cultures of British ethnic minorities and other international migrants. They gained knowledge and familiarity with other cultures through employment within ethnically diverse workplaces, schools and free-time practices, i.e. engaging in cultural consumption or sport activities, not always under the conditions of class belonging (see also Datta 2009). For instance, Asia established friendships with people from a diverse range of backgrounds through sport courses:

*My best friend here is a Polish girl married to a foreigner. We have a really mixed circle of friends, including German, French, Czech and English people. Girls from France, Germany, the Czech Republic and England are my close friends. We joke that we've formed a group of typical European women (33-year-old woman, divorced from a Lebanese migrant, married to an Englishman, without children).*

Certainly, the qualitative research does not allow for reliable generalisation, and it does not refer to the overall migratory experience of intermarried migrants. However, it shows that they may face integration challenges in the host society even after entering primary relationships with Britons following divergent integration paths.

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In line with other research on intermarriage (Safi and Rogers 2008; Song 2009; Collet 2015; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015), the study presented in the article found that mixed unions do not have a uniform significance for the weakening of social boundaries as they do not necessarily serve to erode prejudices towards other groups associated with ethnic origin, religion, socioeconomic position and phenotype of potential partners. Moreover, the relationship between intermarriage and social integration of migrants is complex and multifaceted. Intermarriage may facilitate cultural and interactive integration. Nevertheless, the link between mixed unions and the identificational dimension of migrants' integration is disputable.

The data collected in the course of this research suggests that we can distinguish three main patterns of interactive integration of intermarried migrants: (1) the classical path of acculturation and integration, when migrants tend to blend into the dominant culture and society, trying to establish relations with English people, (2) inverse integration, which means that migrants remain firmly embedded within their national spaces, reinforcing relations with a limited circle of co-ethnics, while the native-born partners become oriented towards the migrants' sociocultural world, and (3) a more pluralistic cosmopolitan mode, characterised by an attitude towards opening up and engaging with members of ethnic minorities and other migrants.

However, the research gives rise to a number of questions which call for further investigation taking into account the intersection of gender, ethnic, racial, religious and socioeconomic factors. Furthermore, the emergence of super-diversity poses new challenges for studies of intermarriages, as they should include new patterns of inequality, prejudice and segregation as well as new forms of cosmopolitanism and creolisation (Vertovec 2007). Therefore, future studies on intermarriage should conceptualise it in quite broad terms including same-sex partnership and examining the potentially different implications of varying forms of mixed marriages. In particular, religion becomes an increasingly important social variable due to the fact that the main boundary of note in Britain and Europe concerns Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus "interfaith" unions deserve more attention in future research. The question of how intermarriage is shaped by educational attainment and class also requires further empirical study.

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