Understanding Migrant Masculinities through a Spatially Intersectional Lens

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Abstract
This article analyzes migrant narratives on masculinity through an intersectional perspective that is sensitive to spatial aspects. Drawing on research with migrants in Berlin and Munich in Germany, we unpack how (self-identified) Polish men in these cities negotiate their gender identities vis-à-vis other people whom they perceive as ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual others. We address how their social and ethnic backgrounds shape their narratives on foreign masculinities and femininities at the intersection of ethnicity and gender. In particular, we draw attention to how these negotiations are entangled with local discourses over the presence and visibility of various immigrant groups and cosmopolitan queer communities in the cities. The intersectional approach helps us to formulate how masculine identities change within the context of migration.

Keywords
migration, hybrid masculinity, intersectionality, Europe, hegemonic masculinity

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Introduction

Across Europe, concerns with gender relations and the role of men for maintaining the status quo or contributing to more equality overlap with prejudice toward immigrants, especially from countries perceived as culturally distant. Fear of violence toward women from (non-White) migrant men, female migrant family members’ possibly poorer educational outcomes and lower labor market participation, and social conflicts over gender relations are at the heart of the recent public debates (Scheibelhofer 2017; Wojnicka and Pustułka 2019). It is assumed that migrants’ (in particular Muslims migrants’) attitudes deviate from those of nonmigrants; in turn, migrants are placed outside the supposedly more tolerant and egalitarian majority society (Fassin 2010). These debates constitute the context of our article.

The scholarly discourses largely mirror these concerns in how they focus on ethnic identity or religiosity as factors influencing (male) migrants’ attitudes toward gender equality and LGBTQ+ people. For example, there is growing evidence on male and female migrants’ changing perceptions of the role/equality of women or nonheterosexual persons in society (Röder and Mühlau 2014). However, research on Eastern Europeans is still relatively rare and tends to see this group as homogenic, which leads to single them all (regardless of gender, background, origin, etc.) out as homophobic (Kulpa 2014). This article provides a more nuanced understanding of this group of male migrants.

We base our argument on a case study of Polish migrant men in Berlin and Munich in Germany. We selected a subsample of interviews with all of the 18 men in these 2 cities from a larger set of interviews with 60 Poles in England (London, Birmingham) and 60 Poles in Germany (Berlin, Munich) conducted in three waves between April 2014 and April 2016. Focusing narrations of Polish male migrants this article adds to our understanding of Eastern European migrant masculinities, and how these are entangled in hierarchies of ethnicity and sexuality in Europe. With our analysis of narrations of Polish male migrants in Germany we add to closing the gap in scholarship, which so far only insufficiently addressed white immigrants’ ideas of masculinity in relation to not only other (non-White) immigrant but also (White) nonimmigrant men.

We approach migrant masculinities from an intersectional perspective, which considers how ethnicity and sexuality are entangled in the ideas on “real men” and gender relations. Thereby, we are sensitive to localized relations of power. We make use of the notion of “surface” (Bech 2014) to show how masculinities are constructed in gazing at others—strangers—in urban public spaces. The two cities—Berlin and Munich—create contexts of the visibility of non-normative masculinities and femininities, which contrast the research participants’ cities of origin in Poland. They also frame the comparisons by interviewed men, which facilitate taking a particular position toward other bodies. Space is thus relevant in the narrations in symbolic and geographic sense as location of ethnic and sexual hierarchies establish who has rights to be visible in the city.
Our analytical strategy is to unravel the two key dimensions of difference—ethnicity and sexuality—which appear closely entangled in the narrations of Polish male migrants on other masculinities. This analytical move allows us to highlight how Polish migrants position themselves in relation to German men and women and their sexualized identities, and Muslim men and women gender identities.

We discuss in concluding section of the article how our research participants create difference and commonality in complicated negotiations of distance and proximity to other masculinities, and how the hierarchizations processes are reiterated in mens’ narratives. In the cases discussed in this article, Poles distance themselves from Muslims to signal proximity to Germans but we identify a hybrid form of migrant masculinity, which is nonlinear and not fixed, and which needs to be understood in the context of migration, geopolitics of sexual nationalism, as well as local struggles for the rights to city.

**Migrant Masculinities: A New Field of Studies and Its Blind Spots**

For a long time, migration scholarship largely ignored how gender shapes patterns of movement and settlement, and men’s mobility was perceived as quasi “natural” (Kofman et al. 2000). Interest in gender in the last two decades, however, has meant an increased interest in female migration (Charsley and Wray 2015). At the same time, migrant masculinities remained largely unaddressed in the literature (Wojnicka 2020). This situation created a paradox where migrant men are concurrently over-researched as “normative” migrants, and yet persistently understudied due to the universalization and singularity of the male migrant experience (Charsley and Wray 2015). Only recently have male experiences of migration emerged as an explicit interest (Charsley and Wray 2015; Donaldson et al. 2009; Sarti and Scrinzi 2010; Wojnicka and Pustułka 2017, 2019).

Common to this field of research is to address how migration creates situations that disturb notions of gender, class, and race. Accordingly, scholars view migrant masculinities as fluid, fractured, contested, emerging, and contextualized. They address how male migrants cope with diverging norms of masculinity between their country of origin and destination, and how gender relations reproduce or alter in migration. In relation to labor, scholars scrutinize in particular racialization processes and how they impact migrant male subjectivities. Yet, there is still not enough research focused on masculinity negotiations that are deeply rooted in the clash with different forms of gender and sexual identities, which are more prevalent in the host societies. Moreover, while non-White migrant masculinities have been at the center of attention (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), white migrant men and their self-positioning in the gender hierarchies, shaped by ethical background, nationality, class and sexuality, remain underresearched and therefore will be explored in this article.
Polish Male Migrants as a Subject of Study

Similar themes guide engagements with Polish male migrants (Fiałkowska 2019b). Poles have become one of the most mobile groups in Europe. In particular since the accession of Poland to the European Union on May 1, 2004, and after most of the EU-countries opened their labor markets to Poles, migration from Poland to other EU countries increased from some 750,000 in 2004 to slightly over 2 million in 2018. The UK and Germany are main destinations for Poles, with some 700,000 migrants residing in each of these countries at the end of 2018 (GUS 2019). As Poles have become the largest or among the largest single ethnic/national groups in the UK, Germany, and other European countries there is good reason for increased scholarly interest in them.

The majority of studies on Polish male migrants concerns family relations and fathering narratives and practices. As Kilkey, Plomien, and Perrons (2013) demonstrate, migration challenges the idea of male parenting as reduced to the breadwinning function (also Pustułka, Struzik, and Ślusarczyk [2015] on Poles in Norway). These authors do not see a new dominant form of performing “migrant fatherhood” emerging; instead, “old” transgenerational patterns of fatherhood based on a breadwinner role model continue, and they are extended by new ones. Traditional fatherhood is firmly embedded in larger historical (Palenga-Möllenbeck and Lutz 2016) and current economic (Palenga-Möllenbeck 2016) contexts in countries sending and receiving male migrants. Cultural and social class patterns, for example, impact the acceptance of new male roles as household workers, or men’s absence from families “left behind” (Fiałkowska 2019a).

In the context of racialized hierarchies of the labor market in the UK, Datta (2008) analyzed the performances of traditional masculinities by Polish construction workers. Their work—construction or renovation of private houses—serves them to position themselves as distinct from the British men who buy their services. As Datta (2008) shows, masculinity and ethnicity interact in these complex negotiations of migrant identities, as certain features such as versatility, emotionality, and intellect are assigned both to a certain type of masculinity as well as ethnicity. Similarly, Pustułka and Bell (2017, 140) stress that male Polish migrants in Norway benefit from their whiteness while maintaining traditional, hegemonic forms of masculinity. Also, Nowicka and Krzyzowski (2017) draw attention to gender differences in social distance of Polish (male) migrants in Germany and the UK to other ethnic and sexual groups. These men, irrespective of their level of education, are twice as likely as women to reject Muslims, Sinti, and Roma people, and gay men and lesbian women in different social roles: as a nanny/babysitter or teacher to their child, a partner to someone from the immediate family.

The last body of work makes an important step toward scrutinizing transformations of migrant masculinity not only within the men’s own biography (intergenerational transmission of norms and values) or vis-à-vis their family, peers and society of origin (transnational negotiations) but also vis-à-vis other migrants. Thus, it draws
our attention to how transformations of masculinity are embedded in complex racial and classed hierarchies that stretch transnationally (Nowicka 2018).

A Spatially Intersectional Approach to Migrant Masculinities

We believe that two theoretical approaches are helpful in engagement with migrant masculinities. First, Connell’s hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) is a good point of departure. Hegemonic masculinity theory, despite coming under some criticism over the years (Beasley 2008) enables us to capture the power dynamics among different groups of men that may represent and perform hegemonic, complicit and marginalized masculinities that resonate in sexually and ethnically diverse societies. Yet, as Christensen and Jensen (2014, 68) notice, Connell’s work includes relatively little systematic theoretical conceptualization of the interplay of class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

In this respect, the intersectionality debate lends us a useful lens to analyze migrant masculinities. The most important dimensions in contemporary societies are gender, race, class, ability, and age. Given the heritage of this approach in feminist struggles for equality, men are often assumed to be the ones holding privileged positions and power over women. Yet masculine identities are equally an outcome of intersections of gender and national belonging (Fiałkowska 2019b). Studying masculinities from an intersectional perspective helps to address elite or marginal positions that men belonging to different ethnic groups may take (Childs and Hughes 2018).

Our take on intersectionality, driven by our empirical material, focuses on these dimensions of difference, which were constructed and highlighted or hidden (cf. Doane 1997) in narrations of Poles in Germany. Here, we find Bech’s (2014) notion of “surface” useful. It expresses how masculinities are constructed in gazing at others—strangers—in urban public spaces. As urban encounters are superficial and fleeting, it is the “surface” of the other—aestheticize and sexualized, and, we would add, ethnicized—which becomes a subject of evaluation. Our research participants usually do not “know” others; but they see them, and they project their ideal of masculinity on them. The notion of “surface” also implies a distance (Bech 2014, 21). The dimensions of distance and proximity we identified are sexuality (Surface I) and ethnicity (Surface II). While we distinguish them analytically, these two dimensions are irreducible in construction of migrant masculinity, thereby (dominant) ethnicity is largely silenced out in the participants’ narrations on others’ nonheteronormative sexuality (Surface I), but not the other way round (Surface II).

In the context of migration, we consider it essential to add another dimension to the intersectional approach, that of is space. Space has long been central to thinking of gender, in the sense of gendered (and often racialized) territories and intersections of space and embodiment (Berg and Longhurst 2003). Here, we are inspired by Anthias’ (2008) concept of translocational positionalities, by which she means that identities are located both socially (intersectionally) and locally (geographically).
Gender hierarchies, class, and spatial belonging are closely entangled in migrant masculinities (Wojnicka and Pustułka 2017). Space matters twofold in our case study: as urban space and the question whose body can be a visible part of it, and as the European symbolic space of belonging.

**Methodology**

This article draws on the TRANSFORmIG project, a longitudinal qualitative study among Polish migrants in German (Berlin and Munich) and British (London and Birmingham) cities. These cities were selected for their ethnic makeup, size of Polish community, and local approaches to diversity. By selecting emigrants from Poland’s largest cities, we believe we have avoided studying the “acculturation shock” related to transitions from rural to urban areas. As life spaces, cities are essentially a world of strangers (Lofland 1985). They are considered more progressive, accommodating different kinds of difference, sexual and ethnic alike.

From the main sample, we selected a subsample of interviews with all male Polish migrants in Munich and Berlin. Nine interviews were conducted in 2014 in Munich; four of these participants were reinterviewed in 2015, and one also in 2016. In Berlin, nine interviews were conducted in the first wave, five of these men were reinterviewed in the second, and two in the third. Our data corps thus consists of 14 transcriptions from Munich and 16 from Berlin. While we do compare the cities, we remain sensitive to any significant differences in patterns of narration between the two cities, which we address then in the discussion of the findings.

Interview guides varied slightly between the waves; in every way, we asked the same questions related to the participants’ social networks and social support they receive from network members. We focused on migrants’ perceptions of the city they live in and interethnic encounters, migrants’ biographies, with emphasis on educational and career trajectories, as well as class belonging and on leisure. Our analysis for the purpose of this article does not differentiate between waves. If more than one interview was conducted with a participant, we analyze all interviews with this person jointly (cross-case analysis).

On average, our selected participants were 34 years old; the oldest participant was of age 60 (in Munich), and the two were of age 50 (one in Berlin, and one in Munich). The youngest participant in Berlin was 22 years old, in Munich 23 years old. They all had been residents of Munich or Berlin for minimum of 7 months and a maximum of 10 years. We interviewed two students and two self-employed and two unemployed persons. Eight people have completed higher education (BA, MA, or PhD level), and only one person had completed vocational training. Three men described themselves as single, one a single father, one had adult children who live separately, and five live with a partner and children. Two men identified themselves in interview as homosexual. All participants describe their religion as Christian, but their religiosity was not an explicit subject of the narrations.
We conducted a narrative analysis of gender and masculinity dimensions in the narratives of research participants. By employing a narrative analysis, we were able to explore interconnections and socially constructed understandings of migrant men’s own and others’ masculinities and gender hierarchies.

**Findings**

We have organized our findings with the help of the notion of “surface” (Bech 2014). We first distinguish two kinds of surfaces—the first refers to aestheticized and sexualized others, and the second to aestheticized and ethnicized others. In the first type of narrations ethnicity is silenced out. In the second, nonheteronormativity is silenced out. Both involve a racialized gaze, but we believe that by analytically disentangling these two types of surfaces we can deepen the understanding of how sexuality and (hierarchies of) ethnicity are intertwined to feed the hierarchies of masculinities.

Both types of surfaces emerge in the context of the cities of origin of the migrants, and Berlin and Munich as the places where they currently live. In terms of their ethnic and religious diversity, Polish and German cities differ significantly. In total, 34.5% of Berliners, for example, have migration backgrounds, and in Munich this is 43%. The five largest immigrant groups in Munich are from Turkey, Croatia, Italy, Greece, and Austria. In Berlin the largest groups are of Turkish, Polish, Arab, or ex-USSR origin. The number of Poles in Munich is estimated at 21,000 while in Berlin 114,000. In comparison, Warsaw, Poland’s capital and the largest city (slightly bigger than Munich), reopening to the world, with a growing population and internationalization of the local economy, and with the largest foreign population, is home to 37,981 foreigners, 2.13% of the city’s population.

Munich is generally considered a conservative but LGBTQ+ friendly city with many queer events and a large annual pride festival. Berlin’s Schöneberg district was known for its queer culture as early as during the Weimar Republic, and it revived in the 1970s. Thanks to low rents and a bohemian atmosphere in the wake of a student and squatter movement, queer infrastructures also emerged in the neighboring district of Kreuzberg. The visibility of non-normative masculinities and femininities in these two cities creates a context in which our research participants narrate about other genders in the city. In contrast, LGBTQ+ rights first became politically visible in Poland only after EU accession in May 2004 (O’Dwyer 2010). However, the rights of sexual minorities to participate in public life regularly comes under attack, both rhetorical and physical. The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), ruling between 2005 and 2007 and since 2015, has singled out non-heterosexuality as antithetical to Polish culture (Ayoub and Bauman 2019; O’Dwyer 2018). Pride in many Polish cities are regularly met with heavy contra-demonstrations and physical violence from religiously and nationalist motivated groups.
Surface I: Sexualized Other Masculinities

We have identified two main narratives in which participants frame their sensations around gazing at sexualized others in public that are strongly linked to masculinity narratives. We discuss them in detail for “[…] enactments of sexual prejudice and inequality remain key components of masculinity” (Diefendorf and Bridges 2020, 233).

We call the first frame “conditional permissiveness.” It emerges in the context of perceived “higher” visibility of non-heterosexuality in public spaces in Berlin and Munich, as compared to cities in Poland. Some of our research participants assured us that they do not have any problems with the visible presence of non-heterosexual people in public. Thereby they stress their own sexuality is stable and strong and not at risk in confrontation with other sexualities. They declare their support for rights of LGBTQ+ people, including same-sex marriages, as well as their right to display their sexuality in public and thus present their own masculinity as modern, open, and tolerant. Some frame it as a “joke” that thanks to some men being interested in men only, there is fewer competitors around to get a heterosexual woman, thereby reasserting their own heterosexual masculinity as corresponding to the social norm. They also say they do not feel surprised or shocked by different types of performances and sexual expressions. Dominik (40 y.o., lives in Munich, higher education, family with children) says:

When I see a transvestite, or transsexual person, I don’t know, a so-called woman with a beard, this is not a sight that is shocking to me. Sometimes I meet a woman, she is very well-made up, but I can see that she has an Adam’s apple. In my opinion, if you don’t harm other people, do not violently impose your views and norms on others, there is nothing to be concerned about.

Dominik alludes to the Austrian artist known as Conchita Wurst, who gained international popularity for winning the Eurovision Song Contest in 2014. She established herself as a LGBTQ+ icon. On stage she often appeared in feminine clothes, long hair, and a beard. “You” in this quotation refers to non-heterosexual people and points to their obligation toward the rest of the society to adapt to the majority’s norms. Dominik accepts the visible presence of queer people as long as a queer way of being is not imposed on others. Interestingly, this imposition is linked to violence. His tolerant stance is thus conditional, and one-directional. He also tries to “detect” a person’s “true” gender despite their performance and suggests he can indeed establish it.

A comparison between Germany and Poland as two different settings is an explicit theme in the interviews, but the participants restrain from personalizing them and do not discuss how their own opinion changed in migration. In these comparisons, Polish society is framed as much less tolerant than German. Our participants notice that in Poland people pay increased and negative attention to
sexual difference, while in Germany people focus rather on person’s personality and treat one’s sexuality as a matter of personal choice. They consider this “normality” and stress they can identify more with the German stance than with the Polish. Some participants consider the cultural distance between Poland and Germany as slowly diminishing and forecasted that sooner or later Polish people will adapt the “German way” of approaching sexual diversity and close “the civilizational gap,” which is often implied in public as well as scholarly debates on homophobia in western and eastern Europe.

The second frame we identified could be described as “selective acceptance.” It is selective because the participants approve of some but not all types of visible sexuality in public space. In particular, they are more likely to accept lesbian sexuality than different forms of male queerness, which signals their sense of gender hierarchies that are not endangered by non-normative female sexualities but might be challenged by male queerness (comp. Diefendorf and Bridges 2020). Their declarations of acceptance of their sexualities include a “but,” and usually follow the same pattern (“I have nothing against non-heterosexuals, but . . .”). Iwo’s narration best illustrates this frame:

Gay men, lesbians . . . This is what I think. I don’t mind other people having different sexual preferences, but they must not express them. I don’t feel comfortable with it, it irritates me. Recently I saw two men, two students, young lads, they were on a date and at some point, started to canoodle in front of me . . . It was distasteful, I don’t like it. And I am a bit disgusted by gay men. Lesbian women do not bother me on the other hand at all . . . This is so distasteful, I understand that they are different, I know one needs to understand this, but they should not manifest it in public. (Iwo, 60 y.o., lives in Munich, secondary education, adult children in Poland)

Iwo’s narration is a good example of the modern homophobia that conditions the acceptance of gay men to their invisibility in public space (Morrison and Morrison 2002). Some of our participants distance themselves from gay people by adding that they do not have gay friends. Our participants are aware of low social acceptance of their views on homosexuality in Germany, and signal that they speak freely about their disgust only within a group of closest friends who share their opinions.

The participants also differentiate between more or less acceptable types of behaviors. For example, they consider any expressions of sexual desire in public as inappropriate, for sexuality is a private issue and needs to remain hidden. Similarly, they declare their support of equal rights for LGBTQ+ people but disapprove of “public activism.” This includes Pride parades organized in different cities as the most visible form of struggle for equal rights, which they describe as excessive, unnecessary, and irritating.

Interestingly, the two participants describing themselves as gay share this view. They justify their opinion with a lack of necessity for this kind of activism, as LGBTQ+ people in Germany already enjoy extensive rights. Comparing Germany
to Poland, they are also sceptical of legalizing same-sex marriages in Poland, for this would even increase homophobic reactions there. As Wiktor (33 y.o., lives in Berlin, higher education, in relationship, child) says, his own decision to move to Germany was driven by his desire to freely express his sexuality. He felt he could not be gay and free to display his identity in public space in Poland. In Germany, Wiktor says, his own body performances in public space changed as well.

The two frames are not mutually exclusive, and they intersect. They help to construct their own masculinity vis-à-vis sexualized surfaces of non-heterosexual people and their performances. They rely on interplay of exposure and hiding, closeness and distance to those “others” whose rights to being are reduced to rights of free expression in public. Research participants’ own, heterosexual masculinity thereby has an unquestioned right to appear in public as the most normative, the only “natural” and fully appropriate way of expressing male gender identity, which is one of the most prevalent characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and an expression of the homophobic masculinity that includes heterosexuality and excludes other forms of sexual expressions (Connell 1995; Diefendorf and Bridges 2020).

**Surface II: Ethnicized Other Masculinities**

In most of the interviews our research participants refer to those whom they identify as Muslim men as representatives of a foreign culture. In their views their culture is foreign for it includes values that are incompatible with the European ones. Those Muslim men are portrayed as those who do not accept equality of women and men, and treat women in a disrespectful way, as Eryk describes:

(...) the point is that the neighbours of my uncle, they were Muslims, and the point is that a female neighbour, she was a Muslim as well, and you know, she graduated from a university, she was well educated, worked in a bank and was in a friendly relationship with my aunt. But since she married a Turkish man, she has started to wear a headscarf, she stopped working and she hasn’t been allowed to contact other people. Instead, she stayed at home, was taking care of the household, and then I don’t know, maybe she had kids, maybe not. So, let’s say I would not wish something like that to happen to my daughter. (22 y.o., lives in Berlin, student, in relationship, no children)

This narration reproduces anti-Muslim stereotypes, which imagine Muslim women as imperilled, sentenced to stay at home, and absent from public space (Abu-Kughod 2013). This and similar narrations also include assumptions on Muslim (migrant) masculinity as dangerous, uncivilized and incapable of adapting to western European norms (Scheibelhofer 2017). Women need to be protected from entering intimate relationships with such men. This masculinity is “protective” and relational to imagined western, white European masculinity represented by Polish men, and to imagined female figures that are innocent but naïve and vulnerable. In particular, “our” women—sisters, daughters, as well as simply all Polish women—
are in need of protection. Daniel (48 y.o., lives in Berlin, higher education, family with children) says:

My child is a female, and they [Muslim men] maintain [sic] that genders are unequal, and women are underprivileged. I have an issue with Muslims. A Muslim woman [as a partner] to a boy? Useless . . . ( . . . ) I wouldn’t like to see a situation when she imposes her values on my [male] child ( . . . ) I would like to add that I don’t understand the Quran, to me there is stuff written there that is hard to comprehend, discriminatory, weird.

As Nowicka and Krzyzowski (2017) notice, such narrations are not exclusive to men but rather indicate a geopolitical, ethno-Christian and Islamophobic discourse; the male and female research participants they interviewed share the idea of Muslim masculinity as a threat to gender equality, albeit Polish women, in particular those with higher education, consider Polish religiosity as similarly oppressive as Islam.

Some participants attempted at painting a more nuanced picture of Muslims, thereby establishing a geopolitical hierarchy between different countries. For example, they claimed women in the United Arab Emirates are treated better than women in Saudi Arabia. In turn, not all Muslim men are equally discriminative toward women, or there is a radical Muslim minority not representative of all Muslims. Similarly, they also acknowledged that Muslim migrants in Europe are capable of assimilating. The figure of “assimilated” Muslims disagrees with stereotypes dominant in Poland, and some participants admitted that their own “old” perceptions were “wrong,” because they were shaped by the media and not direct encounters. Finally, some participants confronted Polish and Muslim masculinity, of which Dominik’s narration is most representative:

I will only say that I wished Polish men had a drinking style like Muslims. I observe it here, at a party, who orders what. I get a beer, because I don’t get drunk, I drink only for the taste, from time to time. But at a typical Polish party you NEED to get wasted. Here it is different.

Interestingly, Muslim masculinity is by default heterosexual. The participants narrate about Muslim men only as family members, or husbands to be. Muslim men seemingly cannot possibly be gay, which fits the narrative of archaic Islam and its difference from Europe (cf. El-Tayeb 2012). By default, also, homosexual and trans people (comp. Surface I) do not have any ethnicity in the narrations we collected, which suggests that their ethnicity is perceived as German, as majorities’ ethnicity tends to be invisible (Fassin 2014). This (self-)situates Polish migrants’ male performances on the top of masculine hierarchy and confirms their aspiration to the hegemonic form of masculinity (Howson 2014).

Our research participants also explicitly narrate about men whom they identify as “German,” and whose masculinity they construct as dissimilar to the Polish. Unlike
Muslim masculinity, however, German masculinity is presented as “harmless” or even “too civilized,” having some feminine features. German men pay (exaggerated) attention to their looks. They tend to avoid confrontations and conflicts in direct encounters:

So, you know, in Poland, when another bloke says: “listen, you fucked it up” or “just get out of here, or I’ll punch you,” then I know what will happen and that I might be beaten up, right? And here, a German guy will tell you “fine, fine, it’s all good.” And the next day, you get sued. (Dariusz, 34 y.o., lives in Munich, higher education, family with children)

Furthermore, German men are seen as not chivalrous enough, unlike Polish men who demonstrate “respect” toward women and other vulnerable people (elderly). They recall situations on a bus or a train when they give a seat to a woman, or when they let a woman go first through the door. It is good example of how chivalrous protector masculinity performs in the public urban space and depends on the other, bad, violent, aggressive (Muslim) or the weak and feminized (German) other (Young 2003). While ethnicization occurs on the juxtaposition of “White” and “non-White” masculinities it is also employed in relations between “White” groups. It suggests us that the Polish “broken whiteness” (Lukinmaa 2019, 245) aspires to the German hegemonic “Whiteness” and that negotiations of masculinity may focus physical strength and chivalry instead of explicit reference to ethnicity.

Finally, ethnicized surfaces can also be female, Polish, German or other. Polish women tend to be put on the top of a hierarchy, as “most beautiful” but in fact also the most accessible (Siara 2014). Others—Muslim, Arab, Turks—are by default unattractive, as Iwo tells us:

I like good looking women, who care about their appearance. It does not mean heavy make-up; it just has to be evident that a woman cares...I’ve been here four years already, there are plenty of Turkish ladies here, but I haven’t seen a single pretty Turkish woman. When one is young and could even be pretty, she destroys everything with the make-up, or strong perfumes, so she does not attract me, she even repels me. No. Women from Yugoslavia are the same.

Dominik notices, though, that “I see Muslim women here, who look like Polish women. Blond hair, blue eyes,” which confounds the stereotypes about their look. Still, Muslim women tend to be rather invisible to our participants, at least in the public space. It is instead the binary Polish-German scheme that the respondents use to construct their masculinity. German women are depicted as exaggerating their sexual liberty, being too emancipated, in the sense that they do not agree to traditional gender relations, and thus reject traditional masculinities. They seem not to appreciate Polish men’s chivalry and tend to initiate male–female interactions, which sets them apart from Polish women, as Dariusz explains:
these German women here, but even Polish girls who grew up here, comparing them to women in Poland, they are more, I would say, wanton, but I guess this is insulting in a way. What I mean is that they don’t care about the opinions of other people when it comes to their sexual choices and I would say they are slyer than Polish women. Because Polish girls get pregnant when they are 20, 21, 22. German women have learned that, I don’t know, maybe they learned it as children, or somewhere else, that, first fun, then career, and later maybe a family, or something like this.11

In turn our participants reveal that Polish men might find it difficult to start a relationship with a German woman. They may find Polish men less attractive, or at least they are more demanding, not only in respect to gender equality but also in respect to men’s physical attractiveness or economic situation. As Eryk explains, “German girls expect men to be outspoken” and foreigners, like him, might not be skilled enough for them (comp. Siara [2014] on Polish men in the UK).

Concluding Discussion

Critical masculinity studies have conceptualized masculinity as social position (Connell 1995). Masculinity is an effect of configurations of power relations between the constructed categories of men and women, but also between men (Connell 1995). As Christensen and Jensen (2014) remind us, the concept of hegemonic masculinity needs also to be understood not as just “having a position” but as “position taking,” which is an open process for men strive up to hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 838). In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is also aspirational (Howson 2014).

In the narratives we collected, the aspirational masculinity of Polish migrants is constructed at intersections of ethnicity and sexuality. The interviewed Polish men in Germany position themselves vis-à-vis masculinities that they perceive as German and as Muslim. The Muslim masculinity is constructed as heterosexual, conservative, if not archaic, repressive to women, and incompatible with European values, in particular the commitment to gender equality. Polish men activate their protective masculinity (Wojnicka 2020) for the sake of women, in particular Polish women. In this context protective masculinity, based on the domination of men over women (and children), where physical power is used as both a source of protection and as a tool sustaining male domination, is seen as a specific form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) understood as “men’s patriarchal dominance over women” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and is in fact utilized by men in order to protect their power and privilege (and resources). It defines the masculinity mostly in terms of providing financial and physical protection to dependent women (and children), who, in exchange, need to recognize and accept the authority of the protector. However, a woman might be denied protection after she rejects the authority of a man and, for example, divorces him. Such a notion of masculinity
is often connected to chivalry (Young 2003) and might be recognized not only in intimate relations but also on the macrolevel. In this particular context, their own sisters and daughters, whose right to lead self-driven, emancipated lives, they acknowledge, need to be protected from this kind of foreign masculinity. In stereotyping Muslim men as foreign, Polish men signal their genuine Europeanness and their right to be in Germany and in Europe, but they also attempt to discursively align with the hegemonic masculinity of the German majority. But as hegemonic masculinity might also be progressive, accepting Muslims as immigrants (or as queer), Polish men might also align with German masculinity in how they distance themselves from their “Polish” (homophobic and anti-Muslim) identity. Either of these positions toward Muslims may serve the same strategy.

The German masculinity is at the same time the one that the Polish migrant men both distance themselves from and aspire to. On the one hand distancing happens along the category of sexuality. Non-heterosexual men in urban spaces are objects of gazing, as their sexuality stands out. It is implicit that these men are neither Muslim nor Polish, and their gender identities are placed on a lower level of social hierarchies than Polish migrant heterosexual masculinity. Their right to be in the city’s public space is not questioned, but conditional. They need to keep a distance, not exaggerate, not impose their masculinity on others. On the other hand, distancing happens in relation to femininity. German heterosexual masculinity is deficient: German men are not “manly” enough, weak and unchivalrous, and yet socially better placed: well-off, modern, “civilized” and “fully white.” Polish migrant masculinity is repealed by it but also attracted, distancing from it but also aspiring to it.

Yet German men are considered more attractive to women because of their hegemonic class position. They possess skills and resources that Polish migrant men do not have. Even if, however, cannot keep up with this hegemonic masculinity at this end, they line up with it in how they stress their own modern orientation toward gender equality and the rights of LGBTQ+ people. In this way, they also resist the discourses that place them, migrants from Eastern Europe, as homophobic and backward.

Such an aspirational version of a hegemonic masculinity appears as hybrid as well, for it involves identity based on progressive as well as traditional attitudes typical of a protective masculinity (Wojnicka 2020), sustaining and at the same time breaking with existing gender and ethnic hierarchies (Trąbka and Wojnicka 2017). This hybridity needs to be addressed in the context of migration. Migration (here specifically from Poland to Germany) is insofar relevant to the negotiations of masculinity as it enables liberalization from old schemes as well as encounters with unfamiliar ethnic, religious and sexual diversity, and therefore shapes masculinity in a unique and significant manner. In turn, some of the research participants could verify their stereotypes, perpetuated by Polish media, toward nonheterosexuals, Germans, or Muslims. However, some felt rather assured in their old judgements, and their old masculine identity.
The spatially sensitive approach draws our attention to three spatial contexts. First, by establishing comparisons between Germany and Poland, our participants highlight the continued importance of their socialization and transnational ties to Poland. Masculinity in this context is the one negotiated between what was, what is now, and how it could be and should be: how it was to be a man in Poland (in particular, a gay man in Poland); how it feels now differently to what it was, and how it should be according to the old and new frames of reference (for example, is physical violence the right way to solve conflicts? Should one let a woman go through the door first?), and how it could become if one stays in Germany for good (possibly becoming more “feminine”).

Second, migrant masculinity emerges within a large geopolitical context in which Eastern Europeans are subject to othering as the European homophobic Other in the emerging discourses of homoinclusive European nationhood (Kulpa 2014, 431). In this national sexual discourse, Eastern Europeans do not appear as a threat to modernity as Islam does, and their homophobia appears “curable” (Kulpa 2014, 440). Male Polish migrants present similar views: one day, Poland will become like the West of Europe in how it respects the rights of gay and queer people to live their lives freely and publicly as they wish.

Third, migrant masculinity is placed in the local contexts of Berlin and Munich, both cities facing the challenges of gentrification and immigration. The othering of Muslims and the othering of queer communities both hint toward the struggles over who has right to the city. Seen as rich (double income, no children), gay men are in a double sense “guilty” of gentrifying and thus pushing “normal people” out of central neighborhoods: they can afford the best housing, and their (vivid, bohemian) culture is a magnet to the next affluent, also foreign (Western European, US American, Canadian) generation of gentrifiers. Usually, an immigrant Muslim community is antagonistic toward these “gentrifiers,” in particular in Berlin where they occupy the same neighborhoods (Kosnick 2015). In this constellation, Polish immigrants’ positioning is ambivalent, as critical of queer (visible) presence in the city, but also sharing the white majority’s anti-Muslim sentiments. Their masculinity reflects these ambivalences but might also become a political position in claiming their rights to the city.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The authors disclose the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. This publication was made possible by funding from the European Research Council (grant number 313369) awarded to Dr. Magdalena Nowicka.
Notes
1. All research participants self-identified as Polish and male.
2. Rationale behind the selection of cities is described in various project’s publications, for example Nowicka and Krzyzowski (2017).
3. The project used a combination of purposeful sampling techniques.
4. Based on their self-identification.
5. This includes foreigners and German citizens of migrant descendence.
6. All data for Munich from https://www.muenchen.info/soz/pub/pdf/602_Integrationsbericht_2017.pdfhttps://www.muenchen.de/rathaus/Stadtinfos/Statistik/Bev-lkerung/Bevberlsungsbestand.html
7. All data for Berlin from https://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/publikationen/stat_berichte/2019/01-05-00_2018h02_BE.pdf
8. Same-sex marriages are controversial in Poland as well as in Germany. According to Eurobarometer 2019 “Eurobarometer on Discrimination 2019: The social acceptance of LGBTI people in the EU”, 45% of respondents in Poland are for and 50% are against legislation allowing same-sex marriage; in Germany 84% respondents support same-sex marriages. 2017 Germany introduced a law enabling same-sex marriages; before, legal partnerships were possible. Poland does not allow either of these forms of formalizing relationships of same gender people.
9. Interestingly, her performance received 7 points from German voters, and 0 from Polish (out of possible 12). Only Poland and Belarus awarded 0 points to Conchita Wurst.
10. Lisiak made similar observations (2017) in respect to Polish migrant women in the UK and Germany. They also construct their motherhood and feminity in relation to white British or Germans but neglect non-White and immigrant women. Possibly, Muslim women are associated with domestic sphere.
11. Interestingly, Dariusz constructs a stereotype of Polish women marrying and becoming mothers very early. In fact, the average age for Polish women to have her first child is 27, and in large cities like Warsaw it is 33.

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