

Polish hip hop at home and abroad: return migration in the work of Taco Hemingway

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Biography

Kamila Rymajdo received a Creative Writing PhD from Kingston University. Previously she studied English Language and Literature at the University of Manchester, where she also completed an MA. She has published on music, literature and cinema in journals such as *Popular Music* (Cambridge University Press), *Popular Music History* (Equinox) and edited collections *Contemporary Cinema and Ideology* (Routledge), *Heading North* (Palgrave Macmillan) and *Popular Music in the Post-Digital Age* (Bloomsbury). As a journalist, she writes for music and popular culture magazines including *Mixmag*, *Dazed* and *Vice*.

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Abstract

Taco Hemingway is one of Poland's most popular rappers, becoming the first Polish artist to be streamed a billion times on Spotify. Often described as a fresh voice in the Polish hip hop scene, Hemingway also offers a new perspective due to his status as a return migrant, having lived in the United Kingdom. As such, this article positions Hemingway's output in the context of migration studies and specifically, the impact migration has on sending countries. Through Hemingway's music, it examines the various stages of migration, from experiences abroad to return and circular migration, while also appraising Hemingway's work within the context of social remittances – the impact that return migrants have on stayers. It also posits that Hemingway's oeuvre represents the failure of the "Grand Narrative" of Polish migration, as well as the dissatisfaction return migrants can feel upon return, choosing ultimately to go back to the country to which they emigrated.

Keywords: Hip hop, Polish hip hop, migration, social remittances

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Introduction

Polish rapper Taco Hemingway follows in the footsteps of many return migrants in Poland, who have used their experiences abroad to create a new life back home, from workers who set up their own businesses to film directors such as Jerzy Skolimowski, Andrzej Żuławski and Roman Polański, who have made career-defining movies upon returning to Poland. Despite this, return migration is an under-researched topic, with many scholars pointing out that migration research tends to focus on the receiving country and economic impact. This is especially the case when it comes to migration within the European Union. There is also little research on stayers in sending countries, and the impact that both, migration, and also return migrants have on their lives. The recent research that does exist draws on Peggy Levitt's (1998) concept of social remittances, about how attitudes and ideas travel back and forth between sending and receiving countries. This paper will draw on Levitt and others, to read Taco Hemingway's work within the context of migration, tracing in it the various stages of leaving and return. It will posit that social remittances resulting from Hemingway's migration, have had an impact on his critics and fans alike, discernible as they are through the success of his music, which exists within the sphere of two of the most popular genres amongst young people in Poland, rap and pop (Kukołowicz 2019). Moreover, as rap is a type of music which is increasingly not only recognised by cultural institutions, but also utilised as a vehicle for Polish collective memory, it suggests that Hemingway has the potential to influence how post-accession migration is remembered in Poland.

Migration from Poland

Poland has a long history of migration, with all strata of society leaving across different times in history. From royals to soldiers, missionaries and artists, and also common people such as farmers, merchants, traders and craftsmen, people left for good reason. War, hunger, epidemics and persecution, all drove people to leave, as did a desire to improve living standards, though scholars usually group Polish migrants into two categories: political and economic (Davies 1981: 275, Davies 1984: 193). The Industrial Revolution and its accompanying demographic explosion was also the precursor to mass migration, as work had to be sought further and further from home. Destinations such as Germany, France and North and South America proved viable for many Poles. By 1939, "some 195,000 Poles had settled permanently in Brazil: some 450,000 in France, some 250,000 in Canada, some 1.5 million in the USA, and over 2 million in Germany," (Davies 1981: 279). However, migration was not always permanent, especially for those who left family and property behind. Indeed, mass labour migration came to a halt with the outbreak of WWI. In turn, WWII was a period of compulsory mass migration, when Polish citizens were taken from German-occupied areas for forced labour in the Reich and to the USSR (Davies 1981: 286).

Many notable literary, artistic, scientific and political figures were migrants: Adam Mickiewicz, considered Poland's greatest poet, spent five years exiled in central Russia, after being active in the struggle to win independence for his home region, which had been partitioned by Russia in the late eighteenth century. He spent most of the rest of his life in France, where he created his most famous works. Juliusz Słowacki, who alongside Adam Mickiewicz and Zygmunt Krasiński, is considered one of the "Three Bards" of Polish Romantic literature, also left Poland after the defeat of the November 1830 Uprising, settling in Paris. It was also the reason that Joachim Lelewel, author of "For our freedom and yours" (one of the unofficial mottos of Poland, originating from a banner commemorating the Decembrist revolt), left Poland.

The Great Emigration, as the emigration of thousands of Poles, especially from the political and cultural elites after the failure of the November Uprising, came to be known, has had a great impact on Polish identity and culture. Indeed, the idea that both individual and national freedom must be achieved was particularly forcefully expressed in the works of Polish Romantic writers in exile, who continue to be celebrated, taught on school curriculums and referenced by artists across the board. For example, Polish cinema continues the Romantic tradition, with tragic hero protagonists who fail but fight on, such as the soldier Maciek in Andrzej Wajda's *Popiół i diament (Ashes and Diamonds)*. Polish musicians too reference the Great Emigration. For example, Czesław Niemen, one of the most important Polish singer-songwriters and rock balladeers of the twentieth century, pays homage to Juliusz Słowacki and poet Cyprian Norwid, who also left during the Great Emigration, on albums such as his 1978 *Idée Fixe*, released with his band Aerolit.

Because of all the above-mentioned figures, other prominent emigres such as composer Fryderyk Chopin, physicist Marie Skłodowska-Curie and novelist Joseph Conrad (J.K. Korzeniowski), the many intellectuals who left during WWII and did not return (Dziewankowski 1977: 244) as well as "Jewish intellectuals expelled in 1968 and the highly educated two-million strong 'Solidarity' emigration of the 1980s," (White, Grabowska, Kaczmarczyk and Slany 2018: 17), there has come to be "a tradition of elite exile that makes it easy to understand framings of the post-2004 wave of highly educated Poles to the United Kingdom and Ireland as a tragic brain drain," (White *et al.* 2018: 17). However, Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, made migration a more positive and less permanent strategy for many who left. Indeed, "Poland's EU accession opened doors to better work, at lower personal cost, and to combining work and travel for adventure," (White *et al.* 2018: 18), attracting both migrants from larger cities, and those from more rural areas where unemployment was high. As a result, in many European counties such as the United Kingdom, Norway and Iceland, Poles became the dominant ethnic minority population. Here, and elsewhere in the European Union, circular and temporary economic migration predominated. "Okólski (2001) coined the term 'incomplete migration' for migrants who earned a living abroad but 'lived' in Poland, where their families remained and to which they frequently returned," (Okólski, quoted in White *et al.* 2018: 17). In turn, "Many migrants, feeling that they had feet in two countries, began to acquire a sense of dual belonging," (White *et al.* 2018: 19). This identity is further complicated by the fact that some Poles emigrate to different places throughout their lifetime.

Social remittances and other effects of migration in Poland

Hemingway's work will be discussed within the context of migration impacts on sending countries, which can be economic, social and cultural. One way these impacts have been described is as "social remittances". These, according to Peggy Levitt, who coined the term in her paper "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion", are the norms, practices, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities (1998: 927; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 3). She argues that they are an important aspect of migration to study because they "travel through identifiable pathways to specific audiences, policymakers and planner certain kinds of information to particular groups with positive results," (Levitt 1998: 927). But, as she writes in her follow-up paper co-authored with Deepak Lamba-Nieves, most research on social remittances focuses on how economic remittances affect social outcomes. That knowledge and skills are also transferred, is under-investigated (2011: 4).

Levitt poses that social remittances occur when migrants return to their home countries or when stayers visit their migrant friends and family members, as well as through other means of communication, such as through letters and telephone calls (Levitt 1998: 936). They can be transmitted by both individuals and organisations, or individuals acting on behalf of organisations, as well as through more informal social networks (Levitt 1998: 936; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 2). As such, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves posit that social remittances are often circular: “What migrants bring and continue to receive from their homelands affects their experiences in the countries where they settle. This, in turn, affects what they send back to non-migrants who either disregard or adopt these ideas and behaviours, transforming them in the process, and eventually re-remitting them back to migrants who adopt and transform them once again,” (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 3). However, Levitt writes that social remittance transmission differs from other types of global culture dissemination, in that it is identifiable, while it is more difficult to track how global cultures emerge and diffuse (Levitt 1998: 937).

Jarvinen-Alenius *et al.* (2010) write that the effects of social remittances can be found in three spheres: family life, work, and politics (Jarvinen-Alenius *et al.*, quoted in Krzyżowski 2016: 74) while “Goldring (2004) disaggregated three types of economic remittances, including family, collective or community-based, and investment remittances,” (Goldring, quoted in Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 13). Meanwhile, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves posit that “social remittances can scale up from local-level impacts to affect regional and national change and scale out to affect other domains of practice,” (2011: 1). In turn, Grabowska argues that “social remittances are a potentially transformative and ‘stabilising’ element in social change,” (2018: 69), while adding that they “can help to consolidate change which is already taking place for other reasons” (2018: 69). Moreover, they are “a useful lens through which to observe processes of social change occurring in different societies simultaneously,” (2018: 68). But, as argued by White, “In a globalising world, migration cannot be the only determinant of social change,” and “it makes sense to consider how stayers lives are already changing, and how social remittances might contribute to those changes alongside other channels of influence,” (2016: 66). This is a point echoed by Levitt herself, who says that “macrolevel global flows precede and ease the way for social remittance transmission,” (Levitt 1998: 937).

Levitt argues that there are various factors which increase the probability, and heighten the intensity and longevity of social remittances. These include the ease of travel of communication, migrants’ and their receiving country’s role in the sending country’s economy and the social and political marginalisation of migrants in their new countries (Levitt 1998: 928). In turn, Krzyżowski’s research into social remittances transferred through social networks suggests that the level of transmission depends on the country where migrants have travelled to and the length of their stay, and the kind of social networks they are part of, ascribing greater social remittance transfer to countries where migrants have more heterogeneous networks. For example, he found his survey respondents from Berlin to have the most heterogeneous networks, compared to those in London and Birmingham, which translated as migrants from the researched cities in Germany having “a great deal more knowledge on the functioning of German society and their new competencies than migrants from London and Birmingham,” (Krzyżowski 2016: 82). As such, he concluded that “possessing networks of ethnically diverse people facilitates the acquisition of new cultural and social competencies,” (2016: 85) and “Migrant network heterogeneity thus significantly facilitates new knowledge acquisition,” (2016: 85).

When it comes to Poland, social remittance transmission has been occurring “(1) through direct, accidental, spontaneous contacts between migrants, return migrants and non-migrants, often resembling gossip (‘someone said to someone else’); (2) through observations of migrants’ behaviour and practices upon visits and after return; and (3) through conscious activities by migrants directed to achieve the transmission of social remittances,” (Grabowska 2018: 83). Moreover, “Successful social remitting was particularly likely if there was a close match between the site where they had acquired social remittances in the destination country, and the place where they tried to diffuse them in Poland,” (2018: 85). For example, Grabowska found that places like the workplace, were well suited to the transfer of social remittances, and could offer the right context to transmit a variety of remittances. She argued, “a single workplace in the local sending community can act as a site to transfer hard and soft skills and to transmit attitudes to diversity, gender relations and raising children,” (2018: 88).

But other research has also found the home to be a site of much social remittance in Poland. For example, “social workers in Lublin Region – well placed to observe the households of poorer local residents – opined that ‘not only do they become more open to foreign cultures (especially food and customs) but also after they return both they and people around them become more tolerant towards difference,’” (Kawczyńska-Butrym, Ogryzko-Wiewiórska and Butrym, quoted in White 2018: 167). Indeed, “Ahmadov and Sasse, discussing 22 in-depth interviews in Oxfordshire comment that ‘the perception of a norm of tolerance in the UK and comparisons with a less open and still less diverse society in Poland is mentioned in almost every interview, leading the interviewees to conclude that the experience of migration has made them more “open”, “tolerant”, and “less critical of others”’,” (Ahmadov and Sasse, quoted in White 2018: 168).

Polish hip hop, nationalism and the failure to make an impact abroad

Hip hop arrived in Poland in the 1980s, via recordings of American rappers, with the first Polish musicians to incorporate rapping, sampling and scratching into their music coming from the Polish punk scene (Szarecki 2019: 155). However, Polish hip hop proper came into being in the 1990s, emerging from the socio-economic context at the time, whereby certain strata of society became marginalised by the country’s transition from communism to capitalism. Young people from tower block housing estates (*blokowisko*), alongside former state farm workers and peasants, were among the first to suffer (Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 9) this transformation. Hip hop made by them was created after gangsta rap, with lyrical themes of drugs, crime and hopelessness. This is because the Polish scene was forming around the same time as this Golden Age of hip hop, and also because gangsta rap was characterised by themes of inequality, which Polish rappers identified with (Miszczynski and Tomaszewski 2017: 150). The first rapper to gain popularity was Liroy, whose success was decried in the mainstream media (Szarecki 2019: 156), while his commercialism was condemned by others in the scene, with the song ‘Anty’ by Atak Spawacza featuring Peja, making history as the first “diss” track in Polish hip hop (Szarecki 2019: 156).

Polish rap, and specifically *uliczny* hip hop (street hip hop) was not popular in the first instance, because, amongst other things, the transformation to capitalism was an optimistic time. “‘Street hip-hop’ did not fit this social context, unlike the light-hearted, cheerful, and optimistic disco polo,” writes Polish hip hop scholar Pasternak-Mazur (2009: 9). As a result, and coupled with its aesthetics bringing to mind criminality, hip hop was an underground, rather than popular music genre. All this changed in the late 1990s. “Disillusionment with capitalism, a significant slowing of the economy, and a growing unemployment rate that reached almost 20 percent at the beginning of the new century, created a new social context,”

(Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 9). Writing about social inequality, violence, corruption and police brutality, rappers such as Warsaw's Hemp Gru, Molesta, Pezet, Warszawski Deszcz (with Tede), WWO, ZIP Skład and DJ 600 V, as well as Poznań's Slums Attack, Nagły Atak Spawacza and Gural finally gained popular appeal, particularly among recent graduates, who, despite their education, could not make their mark due to the ongoing economic recession (Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 9-10). Interestingly, these narratives "were authored not only by rappers from families whose social and economic status was diminished after 1989, but also by those whose parents benefited from the new economic order and political changes," (Majewski 2018: 5).

Thereafter Polish hip hop diverged, with a new cohort of rappers who shunned gangsta rap inspirations and turned to local producers, Polish language and subject matter. This, suggests Artur Szarecki, was because although Polish rap was born of genuine love for American music, and a desire to imitate it, "it was plagued by anxieties about turning into an inferior duplicate," (2019: 159). Journalists hailed the turn as "intelligent hip hop", with groups and artists such as Paktofonika, Eldo (with his group Grammatik), Fisz and O.S.T.R. becoming the leading names in this subgenre. This period also marked the professionalisation of the scene, with the launch of hip hop magazines, websites and radio stations, specialising in showcasing rap sounds. It was also a time when rappers and critics alike, tried to find coherence in the scene. As such, two narratives emerged. The first is the aforementioned *uliczny* hip hop, springing from the *blokerski*, i.e. frustrated young men, who came of age during Poland's transition to capitalism (Szarecki 2019: 156), and the other "involves the reception of hip hop through the works of nineteenth-century poets, in particular those who became pivotal to the formation of national consciousness, positioning rappers as heirs to the Polish literary tradition," (Szarecki 2019: 156).

It perhaps comes as little surprise then, that during the early 2000s Polish rap "began to be used as a tool of a pop-nationalist education to (re)construct the Polish collective memory," (Majewski 2018: 6). For example, the National Center for Culture (NCK), commissioned Peja to rap the Invocation from Adam Mickiewicz's national epic, *Pan Tadeusz (Master Thaddeus)* (Szarecki 2019: 161). In time, such institutions began to "sponsor rap songs devoted to a specifically construed vision of the national past," (Majewski 2018: 6), with the patriotic turn proving very popular. Songs such as 'Patriota' ('Patriot') by Ziperka or 'Kochana Polsko' ('Dear Poland') by O.S.T.R. became big hits. Rappers also manifested their patriotism in other ways: wearing the colours of the Polish flag or "by the self-identification claimed in narratives such as 'I, a Pole' as opposed to 'them,' who are usually 'government pigs,' or elites," (Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 13). Indeed, "Standing in opposition to the pro-European and pro-market intelligentsia, hip hop gave voice to various fears and anxieties that accompanied regime transition and Poland's entry into the EU. It adapted values and symbols that were deeply rooted in Polish tradition but were questioned by the new, liberal elites as burdens rather than assets in the ongoing transformations," (Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 15). In time, "patriotic rap" as it came to be known, "started to be promoted by right-wing political parties and their dependent media... nationalist organizations, Catholic Church and a growing number of state and local government institutions typically involved in championing nationalistic attitudes," (Majewski 2018: 7). When PiS (Law and Justice) came to power in 2015, rap also found a place in state owned media.

There were other developments in Polish rap during this time, that were not nationalistic and political, however. In the early 2000s, a subgenre called hip-hopolo emerged from attempts to commercialise the scene. "Commonly associated with the label UMC Records and its

artists—18L, Ascetoholix, 52 Dębiec, Owal, or Mezo—who grew out of street hip-hop,” (Pasternak-Mazur 2009: 16), these acts rapped about partying, girls and luxury brands, gaining popularity with the support of large record companies and the mainstream media, who appreciated the lack of taboo subject matter in the songs (Kleyff 2014: 18). Derided by hardcore hip hop fans as selling out, hip-hopolo artists were largely responding to the decline in sales resulting from the rise of MP3s and illegal internet downloads. While the subgenre enjoyed some popularity, it quickly faded, while Polish hip hop proper went back underground until the 2010s, when the scene began to enjoy a rebirth, with new business models focused on selling merchandise and the return of several big hip hop acts (Kleyff 2014: 20).

Since Poland’s accession to the EU and free movement resulting in mass migration to countries such as the United Kingdom, Polish rap has also found popularity abroad, with “heritage act” Polish rappers in demand for tours catering to the post-accession diaspora. This has also created a sub-scene of Polish rappers living in the host countries, or those who are of mixed-heritage, making and performing music which draws from both countries and cultures, such as the UK Polish grime scene (Rymajdo 2016, Rymajdo 2019). But, much like other types of Polish music, with the exception of classical, jazz (Mazierska 2019; Rymajdo 2019) and metal, Polish rap has found little commercial or critical interest abroad, outside of Polish diaspora communities. There are also few Polish rappers who have extensively collaborated with artists from abroad.

Taco Hemingway and the millennial generation

While there is continuity of Polish hip hop’s previous incarnations within Taco Hemingway’s oeuvre, not least the fact that his music can be described as “intelligent hip hop”, Taco Hemingway and his successors such as Mata represent a new turn in the genre, away from nationalism but also the materialistic aspirations of hip-hopolo, with a distinct, unashamedly middle-class voice. It is different to the contemporary “intelligent hip hop” as represented by artists such as Webber and Łona however, as it also seems to appeal to the very people it is criticising. Indeed, Hemingway has been singled out by scholars as a rapper whose oeuvre holds a mirror up to the shortcomings of Polish millennials (Kołodziejczak and Smoter 2018) as a generation who is materialistic, ambivalent and constantly searching for new experiences, while at the same time, Hemingway has self-described himself as a rapper for the generation who has nothing to say (Taco Hemingway 2016a). Moreover, plenty about him aligns with this generation, not least his beginnings in precarious short-term contract employment.

Born Filip Szcześniak in Cairo, Egypt in 1990, Hemingway lived in China as a young child but spent his formative years in Warsaw. He moved to London to study anthropology at University College London in 2012. Hemingway released his first mixtape, the English language *Who killed JFK* in 2011 under the moniker Foodvillain. A year later, he changed his stage name to Taco Hemingway (which was his moniker on the FIFA video game) and released an EP titled *Young Hems*. Finding little success with these projects, Hemingway switched to rapping in his native Polish with the release of his third EP, 2014’s *Trójkąt warszawski* (*Warsaw triangle*). The EP’s success led to him signing with the hip hop label Asphalt Records, with who he released his next project, 2015’s *Umowa o dzieło* (*Contract work*). In 2016, Taco’s third Polish language EP, *Wosk* (*Wax*), as well as his first studio album, *Marmur* (*Marble*), were released. In 2017, his fifth EP, *Szprycer* (*Spritzer*), became a commercial success, selling 30,000 copies. In April 2018, Taco collaborated with Polish rapper Quebonafide in recording and releasing *Soma 0,5 mg*, which went platinum, also

releasing LP *Café Belga* and EP *Flagey* the same year. In 2020, he released two LPs within one week of each other, first *Jarmark (Fair)*, then *Europa (Europe)*. Although not as commercially successful as some of his previous works, the albums still did well. *Jarmark (Fair)* was the eighth best-selling album in Poland in 2020, while *Europa (Europe)* took ninth place.

Often collaborating with schoolfriend Rumak on the music for his projects, Hemingway started his career rapping over simple beats and samples, with his early style compared to that of poetry reciting rather than rapping. As he progressed in his career, Hemingway began experimenting, incorporating elements of trap, electronic music and pop, into his productions, with critics noting that he had the potential to be a crossover artist (Stackiewicz 2016). Indeed, with Hemingway beginning to sing as well as rap, and using Autotune from *Szprycer (Spritzer)* onwards, his releases became more melodic. In turn, features, such as frequent collaboration with Artur Rojek, former guitarist and lead singer of the Polish alternative rock group Myslovitz, have also pushed Hemingway into new musical territory in his more recent works such as *Jarmark (Fair)*. However, it is for his lyricism, which is often structured around a single overarching narrative, that Hemingway has received the most praise. He has been nominated in the hip hop/R&B album of the year category at the Fryderyk music awards four times, for his albums *Umowa o dzieło (Contract work)*, *Marmur (Marble)*, *Szprycer (Spritzer)* and *Jarmark (Fair)* respectively, winning awards for *Umowa o dzieło (Contract work)* and *Szprycer (Spritzer)*. In 2021, he won for “song of the year”, for his politicised ‘Polskie Tango’ (‘Polish Tango’), from *Jarmark (Fair)*. Moreover, he is the first Polish artist to reach a billion streams on Spotify (Korycka 2021). As of 2018, Hemingway lives in London with his girlfriend Iga Lis (Baliński and Strowski 2019).

Circular migration and the failure of the “Grand Narrative”

Although, as described above, Polish migration has a long history, Aleksandra Galasińska and Anna Horolets argue that “the currently pertinent representations of migrations have been petrified in the periods of the Cold War and the transformation between 1989 and 2004,” (2012: 128). They assert that it was in these two periods that “the cultural meanings of migration were negotiated in private and semi-public spheres and formed the ‘grand narrative’ of economic migration,” (2012: 128). Characterised by valour and success achieved abroad, the narrative has its roots in the defeat of the 1831 uprising against the Russian Empire’s occupation of Poland, when a large wave of intelligentsia fled to France (Galasińska 2010: 940). However, Galasiński and Galasińska (2007) emphasize that the narrative, as it has been understood more recently, concentrates exclusively on what can be achieved by a migrant while silencing the question of how it can be achieved (Galasiński and Galasińska, quoted in Galasińska and Anna Horolets 2021: 128). As such, “During many years in communist Poland, it was not that important how one earned one’s money as long as one earned it. Becoming rich, no matter how, was part and parcel of opposing the political system of communist ‘equality’ and to rebel against the authorities in a very personal way,” (2021: 128). As a result, “Hegemonic narratives about the success of migration hid – or at least softened – the part of the narrative that dealt with undignified work and the poor living conditions of migrants in the receiving country,” (2021: 128).

Hemingway’s initial return to Poland and the release of his first Polish language EP can be likened to post-2004 migrants who, faced with “a degree of social and economic exclusion which does not seem to be found among nationals from southern European countries (Spain, Italy and Portugal),” (Sabater 2015: 227) and “the humiliation resulting from social and professional degradation,” (Galasińska and Horolets 2012: 131), are left with feelings of

betrayal by the promise of the “Grand Narrative” and shame at an inability to fulfil it for themselves. Indeed, in his 2014 Polish debut *Trójkąt warszawski* (*Warsaw triangle*) Hemingway begins his longstanding trope of a wandering loser as he ruminates on a love triangle of which he is the wounded party, spending his days and nights chasing a lost love who has turned her attention to another man – Piotr. Taco’s protagonist takes his heartbreak to the streets of Warsaw, where he drinks his pain away across various bars and nightclubs, in Uber taxis and on trams, and indeed, pacing the city’s pavements. On ‘Marsz, marsz’ (‘March, march’), Hemingway not only alludes to wandering via the song’s title, but the track itself is concerned with the protagonist visiting venues only to find his ex already gone, which seems a strong metaphor for a migrant who has failed to find what he was looking for in his destination country, therefore, failing to fulfil the “Grand Narrative”. That Hemingway’s hero is a loser is also underlined by samples used, such as the snippet of dialogue from the 1957 documentary film *Paragraf Zero* (*Paragraph Zero*) by Włodzimierz Borowik, which detailed such issues as social pathologies, hooliganism and prostitution. With the use of this sample, it seems that Hemingway is suggesting his protagonist belongs to this ilk of people. He seems to confirm such as reading with other samples, such as dialogue from the 1970 film *“Konsul” i inni* (*“Konsul” and others*) (dir. Krzysztof Gradowski), which portrays the real-life swindler Czesław Śliwa.

In turn, Piotr, the competitor in the love triangle, while criticised by the protagonist for his materialism, is still undeniably “better off” than Hemingway’s hero, not only because he gets the girl, but also by virtue of seemingly never leaving Poland. Indeed, Piotr can be read as a metaphor for the Poles who chose not to abandon their country, and thus, have come out on top. This trope continues on the song ‘900729’, where Hemingway also alludes to being behind his countrymen, complaining that whilst his friends are becoming businessmen, he has not yet achieved anything; while they are “civilised”, he is still “wild”. He explains that their maturity is evident in how they dress and behave. For example, he lists how they have swapped their Vans trainers for leather boots, while noting the way they talk has also changed: in their new vocabulary, “siki” (“piss”) has been replaced by “mocz” (“urine”) (Taco Hemingway 2014). He continues with this theme on *Marmur* (*Marble*)’s ‘Żywot’ (‘Life’), describing that his schoolfriend has settled down and has a child, he is still walking around with a quart of alcohol in his pocket and again on the same album ‘Świat jest WFem’ (‘The world is like PE’), where he likens the Polish hip hop scene to a football team, where he is perennially the new teammate or the one on the bench, thus not on the same level as his peers.

The subject of a loser in love is again explored on Hemingway’s second EP *Umowa o dzieło* (*Contract work*), released in 2015. For example, on ‘A mówiłem ci’ (‘I told you so’), the protagonist picks up a girl only to be ditched for a man of better means (communicated via the rival’s expensive Armani suit and the Japanese alcohol, sake, that he is drinking). He is also a loser in other ways. On opening track ‘Od zera’ (‘From zero’), Hemingway reveals his hero is a precarious worker, as also underlined by the EP’s title, which alludes to working on an adhoc or freelance basis. But the track’s title suggests having to start from scratch, again communicating that those who have left Poland and return, must start from the beginning. One could also deduce such a feeling from the album’s sonic lack of progression from *Trójkąt warszawski* (*Warsaw triangle*); it is as if Hemingway is stuck in the “beginner” phase of his career, and either scared or unable to progress. That this pervasive sense of failure and a “back to the start” mentality is the result of a failed migration is suggested as the protagonist admits he has just returned from the United Kingdom, where he had spent a year: “Oddycham Wisłą. Wcześniej rok nad Tamizą,” (“I breathe the Vistula River, a year ago it

was the Thames,") (Taco Hemingway 2015), he raps on 'Od zera' ('From zero'). His precarious status is again underlined on '6 zer' ('6 zeros'), where he admits to accepting bank transfers from his mother and having to economise by switching beer brands from the foreign Grolsch to the Polish Łomża.

The failure of migrating to the United Kingdom is alluded to or discussed across several other tracks in Hemingway's oeuvre. For example, *Marmur (Marble)*'s title can be read as a nod to migrant Polish Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid, who wrote the poem 'Marmur – biały' ('White marble'), a love letter to Greece, but who lived an impoverished life in Paris. Indeed, Hemingway namechecks Norwid again on *Europa (Europe)*'s 'Luxembourg', comparing himself to the poet (as well as Norbi, a 1990s Polish hip-hopolo artist) with the lyrics, "pól Norbi, pół Norwid," ("Half Norbi, half Norwid,") (Taco Hemingway 2020b). The theme continues on *Marmur (Marble)*'s 'Żywot' ('Life'), i.e. Hemingway's life story. Here, the rapper recollects moving to London, where he found his studies unsatisfactory and the city hostile, while also admitting that his friends have deemed his English-language music, recorded with borrowed money, as inferior to his Polish texts. In turn, on *Europa (Europe)* Hemingway discusses living in London with little means, for example, referencing the yellow label "reduced" stickers at supermarkets on his track 'Sztylet' ('Dagger').

Meanwhile, *Marmur (Marble)*'s focus on the duality of the protagonist, characterised as both, two sides to Hemingway, but also as two different characters within the plot of the album, can be likened to the "incomplete migrants" who work in one place but live in another (White *et al.* 2018: 17). Here, the Hemingway we have gotten to know over the course of the previous releases meets his alter ego, i.e. his ambition. Characterised as crass and greedy, he can be read as the next incarnation of the kind of Pole Hemingway has described to us before, as in the character of Piotr. While devoid of the qualities Hemingway has extolled previously as dear to him – intellectualism over materialism, for example – this alter ego is nevertheless seemingly more successful than the Hemingway protagonist we have gotten to know (communicated via references to his being focused on money-making, such as described on 'Ślepe sumy' ('Summing up blind')), thus suggesting that those who stay in Poland, have more ambition, drive and ultimately success. Indeed, this is underlined on last track 'To by było na tyle' ('That's it for now'), where the alter ego reveals himself as Hemingway's other half and suggests that his qualities are the ones that have gotten Hemingway where he is today: "Gdyby nie ja pewnie do dziś stałbyś w przejściu, No albo siedział z twarzą w dłoniach ciągle na backstage'u," ("If it weren't for me, you'd still be on the come-up, perennially backstage,") (Taco Hemingway, 2016b).

Disappointing return

In their chapter detailing migration from and to Poland since EU accession, Anne White *et al.* write that after 1989 there was no permanent return wave amongst Polish migrants. "Some Polish émigrés experimented with return to Poland but often decided not to settle," (2018: 20). Indeed, "For some returnees, the experience of trying to resettle in Poland persuades them that home is in the foreign country, and they engage in 'double return': a second return, but this time to the foreign country, for which they have begun to feel homesick," (2018: 20). Hemingway's later material fits this description of migrant, as he is continually on a quest to escape Poland, following his initial return. This thematic trope begins with the 2016 EP *Wosk (Wax)*, where Hemingway describes cruising around Brussels in his mother's car on track 'BXL', but becomes the leading subject matter of most of his output, continuing on *Marmur (Marble)*. Here, the protagonist escapes Warsaw to the seaside town of Sopot.

The first signs of the protagonist of *Marmur* (*Marble*) being someone who wants to escape Poland is the fact that he has kept a specific version of Poland in his mind, and is unable to reconcile the changes that he sees have taken place since he initially left. This is particularly the case amongst post-war migrants, who practice “restorative nostalgia”, i.e. attempt a transhistorical reconstruction of a lost home (Boym 2001: 41). Hemingway’s much younger protagonist seems just as offended by the landmarks of progress as such migrants often are. For example, on the track ‘Żyrandol’ (‘Chandelier’) he finds himself far more at home amongst the archaic architecture of the hotel, than the modern shops outside. This longing for a long-gone Poland is continued via references, such as the line “*Moje oczy i ten miszmasz są jak Pawlak i Kargul,*” (“My eyes and this mishmash are like Pawlak and Kargul,” (Taco Hemingway, 2016b), a nod to PRL-era film *Sami swoi* (*Our Folks*, 1967) by Sylwester Chęciński, but also the album’s overall narrative, focused as it is on pulling Hemingway out of his current reality, signalled via the hotel porter banning him from using his mobile phone. Mobile phones and similar technology such as tablets and e-books are again criticised on the album’s ‘Świejące prostokąty’ (‘Glowing rectangles’), where the protagonist declares that he misses a time before such gadgets were a part of everyday life: “*A ja tęsknie za czasem w którym nikt mych myśli nie przerywał,*” (“I long for a time when no one interrupted my thoughts,”); “*Chciałbym zepsuć te świejące prostokąty, kiedyś tańczyliśmy,*” (“I’d like to destroy these glowing rectangles, we used to dance,”) (Taco Hemingway, 2016b). In turn, on ‘Deszcz na betonie’ (‘Rain on concrete’), he admits that life has changed since he started rapping in Polish, but adds that now is the time to leave, and he will see his listener, metaphorically, on his next record. The sentiment finds its echo on the video for the song, whose animation is a series of stills, with the camera moving across them, conveying a sense of motion. Motion is also conveyed more straightforwardly: we see the protagonist travelling on a train, as he returns from the Tricity to Warsaw.

The theme of being disillusioned with and attempting to escape continues on 2018’s *Café Belga*. On the opening track of the same name, Hemingway compares himself to Polish emigrant writer Witold Gombrowicz, who was a staunch anti-nationalist and criticised class roles in Polish society and culture. Benjamin Bandosz (2022) asserts that Hemingway aligns himself with Gombrowicz by self-reflexively critiquing Polish hip hop’s masculinity and patriotism, mirroring Gombrowicz’s critical engagement with Polish Romanticism’s cultural legacy, which led to Polish identity being associated with the partitions and struggle against foreign oppressors (Bandosz 2022: 25). Furthermore, Bandosz asserts that “*Café Belga* exemplifies an (im)maturation in the style of Gombrowicz by adopting his playful and irreverent attitude toward truth, fiction, and identity,” (Bandosz 22: 33). Citing an interview which bookends the tracks, where the interviewer ponders whether he is talking to the “real” Taco Hemingway, i.e. Filip Szcześniak, or his persona as a rapper, Bandosz asserts that Hemingway “signals his intention to experiment through the artificiality of his rap persona and to reconfigure his relationship to Polish hip hop,” (Bandosz 2022: 33).

I would argue that this at times confusing duality can also be likened to post-2004 migrants, who, thanks to “transnational practices” such as phoning, Skyping and frequent visits, often feel that they are in both their migration country and Poland, at the same time (White *et al.* 2018: 19). The feeling of being in-between two places is even articulated by Hemingway seemingly journeying through time, as on the track ‘2031’, where the rapper imagines himself past his prime, after reaching the peak of his career in the year 2021. The track ends with Hemingway ruminating on his future son receiving royalties from albums which became popular again after his death, only to wake up from this “dream” back in 2018. Visually, this is a theme that can also be gleaned from the few music videos that Hemingway has featured

in, notably with fellow Polish rapper Quebonafide. Sets and costumes in their visuals for songs ‘Tamagotchi’ and ‘Kryptowaluty’ (‘Cryptocurrencies’), released under their joint moniker Taconafide are styled in 1980s and 90s fashions, giving the impression of time travel.

Released as a bonus EP to the physical release of *Café Belga, Flagey*, whose title refers to the Place Eugène Flagey, a square in the Brussels municipality of Ixelles where Café Belga is situated, Hemingway continues some of the same themes of isolation, depression and disillusionment with fame. For example, on ‘Pokédex’, he once again says he does not turn up to receive “stupid awards” and cautions that being a rapper is his secondary profession to being “a writer who will one day awaken the nation”: “*Zawsze pamiętaj, raper to Fifięgo drugi zawód, Pierwszy to pisarz, który kiedyś tu obudzi naród,*” (Taco Hemingway, 2018). He doubles down on this assessment of himself, saying that since he is not a rapper, he does not want to associate with any fellow hip hop artists, while also declaring that he will likely retire by the year’s end. By then, he hopes, he will be a legend like [American rapper] Nas and [British rapper] Skepta. Once again, he also expresses his dissatisfaction with his career, rapping: “*Nie chcę mieć fanów, nie chcę być sławny, Nie jestem gwiazdą, na sławę nie jestem lasy,*” (“I don’t want fans, I don’t want to be famous, I’m not a star, fame’s not for me,” (Taco Hemingway, 2018), while declaring that all he wants is to escape to Asia with his girl.

On 2020’s *Europa (Europe)* Hemingway is further along on his “escape” journey, conveyed by the stylistic choice of a diary, which situates the protagonist on the road, driving through Europe. It is also an album much more critical of Poland and Hemingway’s life there. Indeed, he reprises the long-favoured trope of being pursued by paparazzi on ‘Sztylet’ (‘Dagger’) and ‘Ortalion’ (‘Nylon’), but meets this thorn in his side with an aggression not seen before. On ‘Sztylet’ (‘Dagger’) he raps about assaulting a paparazzi photographer, the next time his photo is taken: “*Nie mam już siły, Kiedy zobaczę tego paparazzi, to będę go bił,*” (“I’ve run out of patience, the next time I see a paparazzi, I’m beating him up,”) (Taco Hemingway, 2020b). In turn, on ‘Ortalion’ (‘Nylon’) he notes that he is happiest when he is travelling through Europe as a tourist with his girlfriend, where he gets his freedom by being anonymous. But this album also goes further than others, in also expressing his dissatisfaction at becoming a rapper, as Hemingway ruminates on wanting to be “something more” on the track ‘Na Paryskie Getto Pada Deszcz’ (‘It’s Raining on a Paris Ghetto’), describing how becoming a novelist or even writing his will, would be more favourable to penning rhymes.

This ongoing preoccupation with the negative aspects of his career, such as being recognised and followed by paparazzi, as well as boredom with his own artistry, suggests a feeling of disappointment at not having made it as a rapper in the United Kingdom, where potentially his career might have played out differently. Indeed, on a guest verse on Mata’s 2021 ‘Kurtz’ from the album *Młody Mateczak (Young Student)* Hemingway bitterly declares that when he was Mata’s age he wanted to be a world-famous rapper, recounting trying to make it in the United Kingdom and failing. He admits that the experience broke his heart and made him question pursuing this lifepath. That Hemingway would have preferred to have made it in the United Kingdom (and thus having a chance to become an internationally renowned artist as someone who raps in English) is supported by the fact that the rappers he does feel an affinity for or would like to be like, are British, American and Canadian ones. Indeed, aside from the abovementioned comparisons to Nas and Skepta, his discography is full of references to rappers such as Biggie Smalls, Tupac Shakur, MF DOOM, Kendrick Lamar and Drake while on ‘Kurtz’ he compares himself to [American rapper] Kanye West, decrying that at

Hemingway's then age of thirty-two West had already written his critically acclaimed *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*.

While dreams of being as big as Nas, Kanye West or Skepta seem dead, as the name of Hemingway's 2022 tour suggests, he might have at least achieved his mission of escaping Poland. Titled "Pocztówka z Polski Tour" ("Postcard from Poland Tour"), a play on the title of his 2019 album *Pocztówka z WWA, Lato '19* (*Postcard from Warsaw, Summer '19*), it implies he has left Poland for good, via the insinuation he is a tourist, writing postcards from places he is now just visiting, rather than living in.

Social remittances and criticism of Poland

While for most of his career Hemingway has riled against calls for him to make music that engages with Polish politics, rapping on 'Wosk' ('Wax') that he is "the voice of a generation who has nothing to say": "*Jestem głosem pokolenia, które nie ma nic do powiedzenia,*" (Taco Hemingway, 2016a) and that while he hears calls for him to be more political, he would rather rap about himself: "*Ktoś wywołał mnie, bym pisał teksty polityczne, Nie, dziękuję, Wolę pisać o sobie,*" (Taco Hemingway, 2016a), on 2020 album *Jarmark* (*Fair*) he changed tack. Hemingway's approach on this record can be described as possessing elements of all three methods of migrants attempting to influence politics back home from afar, as described by Kapur (2008). According to him, "migrants reshape politics through three channels of departure, return and involvement from afar changing the balance of power among different social groups, championing or thwarting policy initiatives, and weakening or strengthening political institutions," (Kapur, quoted in Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 6).

Attempting to change the power structure amongst social groups can be described as the mission of tracks such as 'Łańcuch I: Kiosk' ('Chain 1: Kiosk'), where Hemingway describes xenophobia towards immigrants, especially those from Ukraine. He does this via vignette about an Uber passenger, who he reveals does not trust drivers with names such as Sasha and Dimitri. This trope is continued on the second part of this trilogy of tracks titled 'Łańcuch' ('Chain'), where the passenger tells the driver to "go back to Moscow", when he ends up stuck in a traffic jam, directed towards it via his GPS. The driver is abused again by his next passenger, who gives him a one-star review, upon a language miscommunication. Elsewhere on the album, Hemingway presents an unhappy marriage, where the female protagonist is driven to self-harm, as a result of the physical abuse of her husband. One could read this particular passage as a criticism of the powerful Catholic Church in Poland, and the resulting social stigma of divorce. Indeed, throughout his oeuvre but also on *Jarmark* (*Fair*), Hemingway declares himself an atheist, thus suggesting he has no respect for the Church. A sample from the 2002 Marek Kotowski film *Dzień świra* (*Day of the Wacko*) in 'Polskie Tango' ('Polish Tango') can also be read as reiteration of Hemingway's atheism given that its words are "I don't believe in anything," though its inclusion is more likely a commentary on the intelligentsia's loss of social position following the fall of communism, given that the film's plot centres around the frustrations of a badly-paid schoolteacher with literary aspirations.

Thwarting policy initiatives can also be said to be the aim of 'Polskie Tango' ('Polish Tango'), which was the lead single and took direct aim at the ruling right-wing party, PiS (Law and Justice). Hemingway described Poland under their regime as one ruled by a propaganda of fear, whilst suggesting that the party has bribed Poland's citizens into supporting them via handouts. This criticism is achieved via a comparison of Poland to Santa Claus by bringing to the listener's attention the fact that Poland's flag has the same colours as

depictions of the fictional Christmas character. Indeed, it seems that Hemingway is likening the PiS 500+ benefit [a form of child support equivalent to 500 PLN monthly per child, similar to German Kinderwelt], to that of Santa Claus giving out gifts, which in turn, suggests that Poles are *like* children. i.e. people who can be easily bribed. The timing of the track's release was also significant, coming as it did in the lead up to the 2020 presidential elections, whose result between PiS incumbent Andrzej Duda and centrist candidate Rafał Trzaskowski, was predicted to be a close race. Meanwhile, on 'Panie, to Wyście!' (Sir, it's you!) Hemingway brings to attention the perceived social divide in Poland, which is often cited as the reason for the success of PiS, who have introduced policies favourable to those living in rural areas. His lyrics imply that the divide is a false narrative, peddled to serve those in power.

In turn, weakening political institutions can be understood to be the aim of tracks which point to the difficulty of "being different" in Poland. For example, on 'WWA Nie Berlin' ('WWA, Not Berlin'), Hemingway tells his listeners: "*Chcesz być inny, to pocierpisz, Będzie wpierdol, bo Warszawa to nie Berlin,*" ("If you wanna be different, you'll suffer, They'll tell you to get the fuck out, 'cause Warsaw ain't Berlin,") (Taco Hemingway, 2020b). This passage can be read as a direct criticism of the anti-LGBT sentiment which has characterised Polish politics since PiS took power, and especially elections, in recent years. That Hemingway is trying to foster greater tolerance towards the LGBT community, makes sense, given that this is one social remittance that is quite common amongst return migrants in Poland. "Demonstrations in support of refugee or LGBT rights in Poland regularly involve Polish return migrants alongside stayers," write White *et al.* (2018: 27), while adding that "Polish LGBT activists such as Robert Biedroń, Poland's first gay mayor, gained inspiration from periods of living and working in other EU countries," (2018: 27).

A more cosmopolitan outlook, or a certain "wokeness" and a desire to educate Poles on its virtues is also evident on 'Toskania Outro' ('Tuscany Outro'). Firstly, the track's title refers to the Italian region of Tuscany, home to some of the world's most recognisable Renaissance art and architecture, thus suggesting that Hemingway is himself also an intellectual and moderniser. Secondly, he makes it clear that he is attempting to change Poles' outlook on issues such as toxic masculinity by rapping: "*Staram się redefiniować męskość, Chcę nauczyć typów, że to super kiedy tęsknią, Że nie muszą dusić kiedy uprawiają seks z nią, Że gdy na agresję odpowiada się agresją,*" ("I'm trying to redefine masculinity, I want to teach guys that it's cool to miss someone, that it's not necessary to choke a woman when they're having sex with her, that you don't meet aggression with aggression,") (Taco Hemingway, 2020b). The pitfalls of toxic masculinity is also the topic of the 2018 Bedoes track on which he features, 'Chłopaki nie płaczą' ('Boys Don't Cry'), which counsels especially against macho violence. Meanwhile, there is also a more subtle attempt of conveying cosmopolitanism via brands mentioned. As argued by Miszczyński and Tomaszewski, while Polish rap's brand usage has traditionally nurtured "classlessness and collective solidarity," (2017: 146), as well as constructed "a new sense of self in reference to Polish neoliberal reality," (2017: 146), whereby it "avoided 'bling' consumption and instead sought to emphasize the equality of rappers and the audience," (2017: 152), Hemingway seems to have gone in the opposite direction as his career progressed, increasingly making reference to foreign brands, perhaps as a way to signal the physical and intellectual distance between him and his Polish fans, or as a way of introducing them to a wider range of goods and fashion styles. For example, on *Europa (Europe)*'s 'Big Pharma' he namechecks brands such as the French skincare line Bioderma, the French leather luxury brand Celine, as well as the celebrity favourite Figi Water, which was founded by a Canadian businessman.

Hemingway is also critical of Poles more directly, and particularly his fans, in tracks such as '8 kobiet' ('8 women') from his 2018 album *SOMA 0,5 mg* with Quebonafide. Conveying his supposed cosmopolitanism and his fans' lack thereof by pointing out a fan's mispronunciation of the Canadian rapper Tory Lanez's name, the track's title also seemingly speaks to Hemingway's worldliness, being a nod to the dark comedy *8 women*, by French film director François Ozon. Hemingway also describes his fans as wolves elsewhere on the track, recounting how they relentlessly ask him to autograph their phone cases and for photos. His sense of superiority is also conveyed when he points out, again, Poles' seemingly failed attempts at cosmopolitanism, characterised as following specific lifestyle trends, as well as their materialism. For example, he takes issue with people who are focused on health and wellness, at the expense of political engagement on tracks such as *Umowa o dzieło* (*Contract work*)'s 'Białkoholicy' ('Proteinaholics'), where he also underlines the futility of their efforts, by pointing out that they still take illegal drugs at the weekend. However, he seems to be more grateful for all he has achieved thanks to his fans on *Europa* (*Europe*), rapping on 'Toskania Outro' ('Tuscany Outro'): "Przed wami dzisiaj się kłaniam w podzięcie," ("Before you today, I bow in thanks,") (Taco Hemingway, 2020b), which suggests that, upon leaving Poland for good again, Hemingway has achieved a sense of perspective, and ultimately, peace.

Hemingway's low opinion of Polish institutions can also be gleaned from his approach to the media and his disregard for Polish accolades. He famously does not give interviews to journalists, nor has he personally accepted any of the Fryderyk (the Polish equivalent to a Grammy) music awards he has received. On '100 km/h' from *Umowa o dzieło* (*Contract work*), he even explicitly says that he would rather receive a Noble Prize than a Fryderyk, a subject he returns to on *Marmur* (*Marble*)'s 'Ślepe sumy' ('Summing up blind'). Here, he mentions coveting a Noble Prize once more, as well as the American Grammy. That this standpoint is a disregard for Polish institutions is underlined by the fact that in 2020 Hemingway gave an interview to the American newspaper the *New York Times*, telling the interviewer that his parents "wouldn't forgive me if I said no" (Marshall 2020). Within this context, it is also important to mention that earlier in his career, Hemingway was active on the website Genius, a 2009 founded site which allows users to provide annotations and interpretation to song lyrics. He would either co-sign interpretations he agreed with, or provide clarifications, should some explanations be incorrect. Such a micromanaging approach pertaining to his message, whilst avoiding the media, can be understood as a clear attempt to influence social groups from afar.

The measure of social remittances – critical reception and commercial success

Taco Hemingway's first Polish language release was met with both critical acclaim, as well as approval from fans of rap, and not only. In a 2015 Vice article which asked his fans to explain why they like his music, answers erred on the side of Hemingway representing something new in Polish music and that his songs also spoke to people who were not fans of rap typically (Wolniaczyk and Piasecki 2015). His lyrics were singled out as speaking to and for a new generation of Poles. Indeed, Hemingway has been praised by both fans and critics alike as rapping about places and situations that his listeners could relate to (Hajdzi 2015). Unlike rappers who have gone before him, especially those from the *uliczny* hip hop scene, he was not rapping about the street; his lyrics concerned themselves with trendy hangouts even tourists would know about: the popular bar Plan B in Warsaw, or the nightclub Niebo. One Youtube fan, writing about his feature on fellow Polish rapper Schafter's track 'Bigos' ('Hunter's stew'), made the comment that while someone like Polish rapper Bedoes might be

featured in a video drinking on a park bench, Hemingway is featured cutting up an avocado, thus aligning with the lifestyles of millennials and Generation Z, who are his fans (Wernio 2017). However, with each new release, Hemingway was less favourably viewed. While albums such as *Umowa o dzieło* (*Contract work*) and *Marmur* (*Marble*) were still praised and Hemingway's technical ability was deemed to have improved, he was accused of less intelligent rhymes, and a lack of original material (Flint 2016; Kmiecik 2016; Samborski 2019). Moreover, Hemingway was criticised for being increasingly self-obsessed; too many of his tracks were focused on his dissatisfaction with his life as an ever more famous rapper and not enough space was given to sociological observations. *Szprycer* (*Spritzer*), while credited as more experimental in terms of sound, with influences of Drake, Future and Travis Scott, was especially criticised as lacking in both, lyrical prowess, as well as originality in terms of flow. Indeed, perhaps one of the biggest criticisms Hemingway has been subjected to throughout his career, is his monotonous, if instantly recognisable voice.

Despite seemingly taking what critics said about him on board, and broadening his subject matter, 2020's *Jarmark* (*Fair*) and *Europa* (*Europe*) were received with mixed reviews from critics, some of who accused Hemingway of a broad strokes approach to the nuances of the Polish political situation (Cieplota 2020), with one critic, Oliwia Bosomtwe (2020), commenting that it seemed that Hemingway's research for *Jarmark* (*Fair*) appeared to be simply reading the news, then writing about it from the comfort of his home in London. Indeed, Hemingway was interviewed in London after the album's release. In the abovementioned *New York Times* article, he revealed that he was anxious about the direction Poland was going in, but also expressed his uneasiness with the polarisation his foray into political subjects caused. "That was just not pleasant," he told the interviewer (Marshall 2020). However, it appears that *Jarmark* (*Fair*) can boast of measurable impact, not least its recognition by the Fryderyk awards, who nominated it in the "best hip hop album" category and awarded it the "song of the year" award for 'Polskie Tango' ('Polish Tango'), but also the album's commercial success and Hemingway's sold out 2022 tour.

Conclusion

Like other scholars writing about social remittances and societal change within the context of post-accession migration in Europe, Anne White points out that change cannot be understood as isolated phenomena, nor can social remittances be measured. Indeed, she argues that rather than putting a number on the level of influence, "it makes sense to consider changing views among stayers in the sending society as a kind of cosmopolitanism," (White 2016: 50), to which social remittances contribute. As such, it is impossible to say exactly how much influence the social remittances of migrants have impacted the societal, cultural and economic changes taking place in Poland. Still, the popularity of a rapper like Taco Hemingway and the united voices of critics and fans alike suggesting he has brought something new to the Polish hip hop scene, points to the fact that the migrant experience has an ever-greater visibility in Polish society and culture. That it seems undetected by those very same fans and critics, insinuates this topic is some way off from mainstream conversations. Hemingway's work also demonstrates that migration is ever more complex, as his life story as expressed in his music, shows that Poles can leave temporarily, or engage in circular or incomplete migration, even returning to their original destination country after deeming Poland too changed for them to call it home again. It also adds to the literature on the failure of migration and its short as well as long-term psychological impacts, as Hemingway's protagonists experience the failure of the "Grand Narrative", and find themselves humiliated in their destination country, and when they return. It is this sense of failure and the reason for it, that perhaps distinguishes Hemingway the most from his peers and popular Polish rappers

who have gone before him. It also acts as a catalyst for a reckoning amongst Poles who have migrated and for those who are thinking about it. Perhaps then, Hemingway's music can be seen as patriotic too, but in a different way. Rather than valorising Poland's history, it simply says: you might lose more than you can gain, by leaving.

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