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Attitudes to the New Ethnic Diversity in Poland: Understanding Contradictions and Variations in a Context of Uncertainty and Insecurity

Abstract: The European Values Study (EVS), which has been conducted in Poland since 1990, allows changes in attitudes to ethnic diversity to be examined. This text will analyze changes in Poles' tolerance of "the new others" in the context of uncertainties related to the political, economic, and socio-cultural transformations of the past thirty years, with a focus on the last decade. The paper aims to unpack and understand attitudes to Poland's new ethnic diversity as well as to analyze the dynamism, relationality, and complexities of these changes. Rich empirical data from the European Values Study, focus-group interviews, and individual in-depth interviews are originally analyzed in relation to the concept of (super)diversity, the notion of (in)security, and the theories of complexity and individualization.

Keywords: The European Values Study (EVS), new ethnic diversity, attitudes toward migrants, tolerance, (super)diversity, (in)security, uncertainty

This paper will examine changes in attitudes toward "the new others" in Poland in the context of uncertainties related to the political, economic, and socio-cultural transformations of the past thirty years, with a focus on the last decade. Drawing on the European Value Study (EVS), focus-group interviews, and individual in-depth interviews, the text will aim to unpack and understand attitudes to ethnic diversity as well as to analyze the dynamism, relationality, and complexity of these changes.

The political, economic and socio-cultural transformations occurring in the 1990s created enthusiasm about the diverse opportunities emerging, but also increased the levels of ontological insecurity (Giddens 1991) and institutional instability in Polish society. However, the anxieties and uncertainties brought by the systemic transformation were rather outweighed by optimism and growing satisfaction with life (Koralewicz & Zagorski 2009). The reception of the first migrants was predominantly marked by curiosity and hopes for better prospects for everyone in the context of market liberalism and a democratic political system with a variety of opportunities where individuals enjoy civil liberties, and minorities should have equal rights and the state's protection. While referring to the cognitive, identity, and egotistic role of ethnic stereotypes (Weigl 2000), migrants arriving in Poland at that time were predominantly seen as contributing to the economic growth and development of the country and as being a kind of proof that newcomers had begun to perceive countries

such as Poland or Hungary as “the West” (Nyiri 1995). The legitimation of the country’s own “Europeanness” through upholding a European sense of belonging (and make it recognized by other countries) and values such as democracy, equality, human rights, modernization, and progress, could be seen not only in social attitudes to the presence of migrants but also through the willingness of formal institutions and political elites to adopt EU migration laws, policies, and practices (Kępińska and Stola 2004; Kicinger et al. 2007). As a result of marketization in the 1990s, the overriding importance of economic factors could be observed in the lay perception of “the others” as offering cheap labor in unwanted jobs such as farming or domestic work, or providing inexpensive imported goods for wholesale or direct sale in open-air markets.

“Europeanization,” as an institutional adjustment and a growing sense of belonging to Europe, gained momentum in the first decade of the twenty-first century and was marked by Poland’s accession to the European Union. These processes were coupled with the uncertainty associated with further institutional and legislative changes (e.g., the impact of the European Union on the country’s policies, the implementation of the principle of the free movement of people, goods, and services), as well as with the cultural and social transformations related to late modernity. In the 2000s, migration to Poland remained relatively low, with a prevailing circular, transit, or temporary mobility. There was a low sense of threat associated with the presence of migrants, due to the still relatively low scale of long-term or settlement migration and the “favorable” socio-cultural characteristics of migrants (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2007).¹

In the last decade, if the prevailing media and popular discourses are considered, the sense of danger and uncertainty associated with proceeding globalization has increased in relation to noticeable migration problematized and politicized; processes of growing institutional complexity and fragmentation, and conflicts and violence intensified.²

In parallel and in contrast to the generally low levels of registered settlement immigration to Poland between 1989 and the first years of the 2010s—a period in which there was substantial emigration (Gorny et al. 2010; Kaczmarczyk 2015a)—recent years have witnessed a sharp increase in the numbers and dispersion of migrants in Poland. According to data from the Office for Foreigners, on January 1, 2015 there were 175,065 migrants registered in Poland, of which 40,979 were Ukrainians, followed by migrants from Germany (20,200), the Russian Federation (10,739), Belarus (9,924), and Vietnam (9,042). In the last few years, the number of foreigners registered in Poland has more than doubled, reaching 372,239 on January 1, 2019, with over four times more Ukrainians: 179,154.

This larger presence of migrants in Poland was reflected in research by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) showing a noticeable increase in Poles who personally knew a foreigner in Poland: from 25% in 1999 and 26% in 2008 to 33% in 2016 and 40% in 2019,

¹ These were mainly single, low-skilled migrants of European origin filling the gaps on the secondary job market. They were predominantly from countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), with only one substantial non-European group: Vietnamese migrants, who were perceived as hard-working and not presenting a cultural challenge or causing serious security problems.

² For example, as is visible in the rising nationalist and confrontational political rhetoric within and between states; the political destabilization of North Africa and the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe; armed conflicts in European countries such as Ukraine; international terrorism; and the increase in inequality and the decline of the welfare state.

with the most frequent contact with migrants being reported by residents of large cities, managers, specialists, and the self-employed (Bozewicz and Głowacki 2020). In 2019, in response to the question of how often respondents met foreigners working in Poland (while shopping, ordering services, using the health system, or on public transport), 37% of participants declared that they saw foreigners every day or a few times a week, 22% at least a couple of times a month, 11% at least once in three months, and only 29% seldom or never (Bozewicz and Głowacki 2020). Residents of cities over 500,000, skilled and unskilled workers, managers, specialists, and office workers had the most frequent contact with migrants (apparently reflecting work-related encounters), while respondents over 65 years of age and pensioners had the least contact.

Between 1999 and 2015 there was a noticeably shortened social distance and growing acceptance of migrants in various roles: as a neighbor (from 74% to 88%), colleague (from 71% to 86%), doctor (from 69% to 82%), teacher of the respondents' children (from 63% to 78%), boss (from 60% to 78%), priest (from 53% to 76%), daughter-in-law/son-in-law (from 60% to 68%), and child-minder (from 42% to 56%) (Kowalczyk 2015a). Another study by CBOS from the same period demonstrated substantially lower resistance and fears over the presence of migrants in Poland in comparison to other countries of the Visegrad group (Kowalczyk 2015b). For example, respondents' anxiety over losing their own culture due to migration was lowest in Poland, where those who feared such an eventuality constituted 44% of the respondents, in comparison to 65% in Hungary, 73% in the Czech Republic, and 68% in Slovakia (Kowalczyk 2015b). Only 25% of Poles reported that they feel uneasy in contact with migrants, in comparison to 57% of Hungarians, 61% of Czechs, and 52% of Slovaks.

CBOS's repeated research has also revealed a rising acceptance of migrants on the labor market in Poland—the percentage of those who would allow foreigners to hold jobs in Poland grew from 9% in 1992 and 18% in 1999 to 50% in 2008 and 62% in 2019, while there was also a noticeably decreasing share of those who would not allow migrants to work in Poland (42%, 31%, 10% and 4% respectively) (Bozewicz and Głowacki 2020). Those who said that it is “difficult to answer” constituted 9% in 1992, 5% in 1999, 4% in 2008 and 5% in 2019.

However, the dynamism of attitudes to people seeking refuge in Poland was different—and much less favorable—when measured by questions about admitting refugees from countries affected by armed conflicts. Since May 2015, when only 21% of Poles said that Poland should not accept refugees, we have witnessed a growing rejection of the idea of hosting people with refugee experience: the share of rejection increased to 55% in May 2016 and then to 63% in October 2017 and 60% in June 2018 (Bozewicz 2018). While support for an unconditional welcome for refugees to settle was 14% in May 2015, it decreased to 4–5% in the other periods, with a similar percentage of those who were undecided (7–4%). The large change in the proportion of those who claimed that they would allow refugees to stay until they could return to their home countries dropped from 58% in May 2015 to 29% in June 2018 (Bozewicz 2018).

The respective figures concerning the Polish public's acceptance of refugees from the Near East and Africa reflected even larger disapproval: the opponents (those who “did not want” or “rather did not want” Poland to host such refugees) dominated, constituting 53% in May 2015, 63% in May 2016, 74% in April 2017, and 72% in June 2018 (with similar levels of those

who did not provide an answer—4–9%—except in May 2015, when the number was 14%). The remainder of the respondents were supporters, that is, they claimed that Poland “should” or “rather should” receive refugees) (Bozewicz 2018). At the same time, Poles presented visibly more favorable attitudes to admitting refugees from Ukraine, with the share of opponents among the respondents being 38% in May 2015, 37% in May 2016, 40% in April 2017, and 35% in June 2018, with a range between 12% (in 2015) and 4–5% of undecided, and the rest (50%–62%) supporting the acceptance of such refugees (Bozewicz 2018).

Certainly, it should be remembered that all these changes in attitudes had taken place in a period when the intensified discourses on the so-called “refugee crisis” and the associated moral panic (Victor 1998) were particularly noticeable, following a peak in the Mediterranean sea crossings, with submissions of asylum applications in the EU28 reaching 626,960 in 2014, 1,322,825 in 2015, 1,259,955 in 2016, and 712,235 in 2017 (Eurostat 2020). In the Polish context, it was also not without significance that the theme of a “refugee threat” was used by the conservative and nationalist parties, for instance in the 2015 election campaign.

Still, neither the scale of actual problem of incoming asylum seekers constructed as “refugee crisis” nor symbolic threat (e.g., an imagined danger resulting from the perceived cultural difference) (Stephan and Renfro 2004) explain why between 2015 and 2017 Poles changed their attitudes to “others” to such a substantial degree. To better understand the dynamism and the complexities of attitudes toward migrants transpiring from our data, we can turn to the theoretical framework provided by the combination of the relatively new theory of (super)diversity, the notion of (in)security, and the theories of complexity and individualization.

Theoretical Points of Reference

The concept “superdiversity” has been coined to capture the “diversification of diversity,” which in some countries involves unprecedented socio-cultural and demographic complexity due to intensive and growing multiculturalism (Vertovec 2007). Although in terms of demographics superdiversity remains embryonic in Poland, the relevance of the concept has been demonstrated in research concerning Polish migrants—their growing diversity and their attitudes to the superdiverse contexts in which they find themselves (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2019). In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate that the concept carries the analytical potential to stimulate sociological imagination (Mills 1959), encourages thinking alternatively about contemporary Polish society as non-homogenous and reimagining it beyond binary divisions and oversimplified categorizations (e.g., the “receiving society” versus the “migrants”), and helps in depicting reactions to the emerging heterogeneity of society (including ethnic diversities in Poland and diversity encountered by Polish migrants abroad) in order to develop our understanding of the complexities of attitudes to the new ethnic diversity.

Grillo (2015) proposes considering the multidimensionality of superdiversity as occurring along several different axes such as ethnicity, socio-legal and political status, socio-cultural diversity (which is different from ethnicity and relates, for example, to language and

religion), and economic and life opportunities. Superdiversity may be understood not only as a descriptive term capturing a changing demographic and socio-cultural reality but also as an analytical perspective highlighting contemporary complexity and being more sensitive to issues of difference and equality (Vertovec 2011). The notion of superdiversity can help to overcome binary categorizations and “groupism,” which leads to the oversimplified perception of societies through the lens of groups seen as rather internally homogenous and externally bounded (Brubaker 2006). It offers a new narrative to replace contested social categories and the notion of multiculturalism (Vertovec 2007) and underlines the implications of growing heterogeneity for policy (Vertovec 2010). These promises make superdiversity a stimulating concept even though it has evoked various criticisms concerning its vagueness, lack of novelty (Blommaert 2013), descriptiveness (Arnaut and Spotti 2014), overemphasis on cultural and localized differences at the expense of structural inequalities, social conflicts and divisions, still-extant racism, and discrimination (Sepulveda et al. 2011; Hall 2017), and its having the “side effect” of contributing to social anxieties and uncertainties (Back 2015).

In contemporary societies, the growing heterogeneity and diversity are accompanied by widening inequalities and a feeling of increasing uncertainty (Giddens 2006). Moreover, European societies are undergoing processes of individualization, fragmentation, growing complexity, and accelerating socio-cultural and institutional transformations (Fenger and Bekkers 2012; Luhmann 2006), which have been captured by theories of complexity (Burnes 2005; Grobman 2005), or Bauman’s metaphor of “liquid” reality (2000), where individuals are prone to experience uncertainty and instability. The previous coherent cultural systems and traditional social institutions, such as life-long marriage and the patriarchal family (Popenoe 1993), or institutional religion (Dobbelaere 1999), are becoming less substantial, while the shrinking welfare state (which in the past offered certainty and security) is coupled with increasing economic precariousness and job instability (Kingfisher 2002). In the context of contemporary neoliberal doctrine and flexible capitalism, jobs no longer provide a sense of identity and life stability (Sennett 1998). In late modernity, individuals have become more and more conscious of unavoidable uncertainty and various types of risks (Beck 2006). Cohen and Kennedy (2013) also stress that instabilities arising from the nexus of inequalities and globalization contribute to a wider, prolonged condition of chronic uncertainty, which permeates different geographical regions and dimensions of human life. The decline of cosmopolitan, communitarian, pacifist, and modernist narratives and welfarist ideologies, accompanied by growing social divisions and political conflicts, have led to contemporary anxieties and discourses of insecurity.

Lianos (2013) argues that competition between individualistically oriented people, together with the erosion of social bonds in neoliberal capitalism and the vulnerability that ensues, result in a politics of fear where insecurity becomes a kind of mobilizing and cementing frame, providing a substitute for social bonds, and is exploited by leaders and politicians. Vail, Wheelock, and Hill (1999) indicate that this rise in insecurity may generate high levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and passivism. Von Benda-Beckmann (1994) underline that indeterminacy, uncertainty, and insecurities have become critical features of contemporary societies and concern not only basic needs such as food, housing, health and care, but also moral questions and identities, social relations, and ever-changing institutions

and legal regulations. In Poland in recent years (as in many other European countries), an increase has been observed in the visibility of various types of (in)security discourses and the dominance on the political scene of parties with a conservative and rightwing emphasis on issues of order, stability, and control.

In popular discourses the lack of safety is often linked to “otherness” by politicians and perpetuated by the media (Lianos 2013), contributing to “the new politics of fear”, concentrated on “others,” particularly migrants (Massey 2015). Politicians use this mechanism to generate electoral capital and media interest, justify their actions, and divert social attention from outcomes for which they do not want to be held accountable. Migrant issues become largely politicized and politicians use fear of strangers to construct a relatively easily controllable and politically viable problem, such as, for example, the issue of migrant crime. In a similar vein, the concept of the “moral panic” is applied to analyze the so called “refugee crisis” (cf., Robinson 1999).

Haas and Cunningham (2014) argue that uncertainty might lead to different attitudes toward the world depending on the sense of danger people experienced. If uncertainty is perceived as threatening, it is more likely to contribute to the rejection of different viewpoints and new information, and thus to less open attitudes and lower tolerance.

Moreover, individualization constitutes one of the crucial aspects of contemporary society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001) and provides a specific context for analyzing changes in attitudes to growing diversity. These changes can be considered from the perspective of Walzer’s (1999) distinction between two types of tolerance. Modern tolerance can be linked to the institutionalized norm of protecting the rights of individuals and groups to be different from each other within a nation-state framework of coexistence and preservation. Such tolerance often coexists with the norm of assimilation, so that individuals and groups are included in mainstream society in accord with modernist ideas and the democratic spirit. It can be expected that in this context, passive or formal tolerance, which facilitates the elimination of differences, will be more common than an active or “content” tolerance characterized by closeness, acceptance of, and even responsibility for others, which might be measured by a readiness to help immigrants. In contrast, postmodern tolerance based on acceptance of change and diversity can be associated with greater relativism, individualism, and permissiveness (e.g., in the sphere of attitudes, lifestyles), as well as post-materialistic values such as individual freedom or self-realization.

Methodological Note

The above theoretical framework will be used to analyze the rich empirical material collected in the project *Values in the age of (global) crisis*, in which different types of methods were used. First, there was a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 1,352 adult Polish residents, based on the European Values Systems (EVS) questionnaire and conducted at the end of 2017 as computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI). Among other questions, the respondents were asked about their attitudes to foreigners, Muslims, and “people of a different race” as their potential neighbors, as well as their opinions about the presence of migrants in Poland and various threats connected with migration.

Second, 12 focus-group interviews (FGIs) exploring the issues of social justice, a “good” life, the limits of freedom, social divisions, and aims and concerns were conducted in April 2018, in groups of eight participants differentiated according to the respondents’ age, gender, education, size of town in which the respondent resided, and political orientations. The focus-group interviewees had the following characteristics: FGI1—voters of a national-conservative party, with a university degree, residing in a large city; FGI2—national-conservative voters, with a university degree, living in a medium-size city; FGI3—national-conservative voters, with a vocational education, residing in a small town; FGI4—voters of a centrist party, with a university degree, residing in a large city; FGI5—centrist voters, with higher or secondary education, residing in a middle-size city; FGI6—centrist voters, with vocational education, residing in a small town, FGI7—non-voters with higher education, residing in a large city; FGI8—voters of the anti-establishment centre-right movement, with higher or secondary education, residing in a middle-size city, FGI9—voters of a centrist and liberal party, as well as the leftwing and progressive parties, with a higher or secondary education, residing in a small town; FGI10—younger voters (25–34) with a mortgage, living in a new area of a large city; FGI11—young people working as “subordinate” employees, without a university degree, residing in a medium-size city; and FGI12—participants 65 years of age and older, with a university degree, residing in a small town. All but the participants of FGI12 were working, and the groups had an equal share of women and men, apart from FGI4 (with five women and three men) and FGI10 (with only seven participants). The participants were interviewed by members of the research team after being recruited by a specialist marketing and social research company and were paid moderate incentives for their participation in the study.

Third, there were 29 semi-structured individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), conducted by PhD student researchers involved in the study between October 2018 and February 2019. These interviews explored how the systemic transition in 1989 influenced the participants, how their lives had changed over the years, what their current situation was, how it had been impacted by recent political events, what the participants predicted for the future, and what their aims and fears were. The interviewees were purposely selected and recruited by the PhD students to represent different genders, ages, education levels, and places of residence (large, medium-size, or small cities or villages). They included 15 men and 14 women, of various ages (five in their 20s, six in their 30s, four in their 40s, five in their 50s, and nine in their 60–80s). 14 participants had a university degree; four interviewees had a secondary education; 11 individuals had a vocational or other lower degree. There were 12 residents of cities with a population over 100,000, four from towns with a population not larger than 20,000, and 13 from villages.

The research complied with the ethical guidelines of the European Commission (2018) and the code of conduct practiced at the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Warsaw including the protection of the participants’ privacy and confidentiality, obtaining their informed consent, and respecting their right to withdraw from the research.

The topic guides used for both group and individual interviews did not include specific questions about migrants, so this issue did not feature prominently in the interviews and emerged spontaneously (e.g., when we asked the participants about threats and the future), which could have resulted in negative reactions being more prominent than positive or in-

different ones. On the other hand, this method may have helped produce more “unguided” and naturally occurring utterances on ethnic diversity, and is more in line with nonreactive methodology, where researchers avoid direct influence on the production of content. The mixed-method approach used in the study (combining the survey, the IDIs, and the FGIs) allowed for a beneficial triangulation of data, methods, and researchers (Denzin 2006), where qualitative fieldwork gave insight into the complexity of processes and the experience of diversity in the context of group discussions and individual interviews; such a combination also benefited the quality and comprehensiveness of the study (Babbie 2001). The data from the IDIs and FGIs was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed employing substantive (Kelle 2014) and theoretical coding (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014), with the support of NVivo software. The article includes all the major excerpts appearing in the analyzed material.

Attitudes to the New Ethnic Diversity

Complexities, contradictions and variations in attitudes to the new ethnic diversity

Despite predictions about a significant deterioration in attitudes toward migrants in the context of the so-called “migration crisis,” the EVS data does not provide conclusive results in this regard. The comparison of ethnic perceptions at the beginning of the transformation in 1990, and again in 2017, shows some increase in the exclusion of immigrants/foreign workers, and resistance to Muslims as neighbors, with a significantly enlarged sense of distance in regard to Muslims over the last decade (see Table 1). On the other hand, the distance in regard to “people of a different race” had shortened considerably in the previous 30 years in Poland (as had the distance in regard to the traditional ethnic minorities in Poland, that is, Jews and the Romani), which might demonstrate a simultaneous growing acceptance of non-group-based diversity.

Table 1

Percentage of people who did not want representatives of particular groups in Poland for their neighbours (%)

Groups	Year			
	1990	1999	2008	2017
“Gypsies”	37	38.7	32.3	31.4
Muslims	19	23.8	24.2	35.8
Jews	17	25.1	17.5	10.6
Immigrants, foreign workers	10	23.5	17.1	21.3
“People of a different race”	16	17.2	12.0	8.1

The larger sense of distance in regard to Muslims might be linked with a general increase in Islamophobia as a consequence of terrorist attacks associated with European residents of migrant background, and the contested visibility of Islam in the public sphere in Western countries (e.g., the presence of mosques, veiled women, etc.). The recently increased distance in regard to Muslim migrants, who are seen as alien and dangerous, can also be linked to anxiety over the so-called “migration crisis”. This distrust was also

reflected in CBOS research showing an increased unwillingness to host people seeking refuge in Poland (Bozewicz 2018). It can be related to Haas and Cunningham's (2014) assertion that when uncertainty is accompanied by a feeling of danger, individuals adopt a more closed and intolerant attitude.

The index of xenophobia toward new "others"—based on refusal to live by Muslims, immigrants/foreigners, and "people of a different race"—shows that nearly 60% of the respondents did not mention any of the three categories and only 4.4% rejected all of them. The index was positively correlated with older age (table 2³). There was also a clear negative correlation between xenophobia and higher levels of education and the larger size of the town where the respondents lived. The similar direction of a significant relation was observed for the respondents' satisfaction with their own life and control over their own life—those who reported higher levels of satisfaction and control displayed less prejudice. Higher engagement in institutional religion (attending religious services) and belief that there is only one true religion were related to higher levels of distance, as were a preference for state responsibility over individual responsibility and general distrust of people. Moral rigorism⁴ turned out to be positively correlated with lack of tolerance while no significant correlation was established with the index of empathy⁵ and the scale of fear.⁶

Table 2

Correlations between the index of xenophobia and some characteristics of respondents

Variables	Index of xenophobia
respondent's age	.121**
level of education	-.229**
size of the town where the interview was conducted	-.116**
how satisfied are you with your life	-.111**
how much control over your life	-.071**
how often attend religious services	.141**
there is only one true religion	.212**
individual versus state responsibility for providing	.082**
index of moral rigour ^b	.201**
people can be trusted/cannot be too careful	.171**

**p < 0.01

^a The index based on the rejection of Muslims, immigrants/foreigners and people of a different race. The index ranges from 0 to 3.

^b The index was drawn up by counting how many people answered 'never' to the question: "Can the following be justified?". The issues covered were homosexuality, divorce, abortion, and euthanasia. The index ranges from 0 to 4.

³ Calculations done by M. Marody.

⁴ Moral rigorism was measured on the basis of responses that divorce, abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia are never justified (see Marody et al. 2019).

⁵ The index of empathy was created on the basis of answers to the question to what extent respondents care about the conditions in which groups such as the elderly, the unemployed, immigrants and people with disability live in Poland (see Marody et al. 2019).

⁶ The scale of fear was calculated on the basis of replies regarding such negative events as terrorist attack, war, long-term illness or unemployment (see Marody et al. 2019).

The above pattern of correlations suggests that higher levels of intolerance might be linked to the feeling of insecurity and lower levels of agency and control over one's own life.

Overlooking diversity while orienting toward the West

At the same time, the data we collected during interviews show that growing ethnic diversity as such remains rather underestimated in Poland, while there is a focus on intra-society divisions, inequalities, and envy, coupled with different types of pressures (e.g., related to religion or the conservative government agenda). The interviews demonstrated the prevailing vision of the contemporary Polish nation as homogeneous, without acknowledging the multicultural heritage of pre-war Poland, where minorities counted for 36% of the population (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Okolski 2010). In the 1930s in Poland, there were 5 million Ukrainians, 3 million Jews, 2 million Belarusians, 780,000 Germans, 200,000 Lithuanians, and 40,000 Russians (Lodzinski 1998). The issue of inter-war ethnic diversity and the post-war homogenization of Poland's population has been discussed in numerous texts (e.g., Tomaszewski 1991; Chałupczak and Browarek 1998; Babinski 2004). After World War II, as a result of the Nazi extermination of the Jewish and Roma populations, shifts in Poland's borders, the forced displacement of ethnic minorities within and outside of Poland, as well as the post-war emigration of citizens of different ethnic origin, Poland became almost ethnically homogenous and the idea of a single nation was promoted. Consequently, just after the fall of the Communist regime, the estimates of recognized ethnic minorities were as low as 2–4% (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Okolski 2010).

The lasting self-image of a highly homogenous Polish society, which is striking in the context of recent migration to the country, can be illustrated by the following comment of one of the participants: “The trouble with Poland is that we have very few foreigners” (IDL11). Although the same participant subsequently noted the current high numbers of migrants he highlighted the temporariness of this phenomenon: “There are a lot of Ukrainians at the moment...” (IDL11). A similar discrepancy can be observed when one voter of the national and conservative party stressed that Poles should treat “Jewish issues” carefully and not dwell on the past, while also pointing out that, unlike people in Western countries, for instance, the Dutch society in which he had worked, Poles are unable to deal with other nations because they are unaccustomed to living with people of different cultures and ethnicities:

I had the pleasure of living abroad for a few years and I must say that we should focus more on the family, more on down-to-earth matters, not delve too much into Jewish issues and deal carefully with every topic. (...) I have to mention something that strikes me in Poland—that we delve too much into topics that are already in the past. And maybe we are rather people who cannot live with other nationalities and probably we don't know how to deal with this very well. Because I lived in a country with a lot of nationalities ... (...) and I think that in Poland it wouldn't work at all. This proves our level of closure to the world and other races, to other cultures, etc. I say it is also a fact that we have never been used to that kind of a life with other people (FGL2).

This evident complexity can be linked to different types of otherness surfacing in the above narration in regard to external others (migrants), and historic, imagined, internal others (Jews) (Mayblin, Piekut, and Valentine 2016).

The above participant referred to his direct experience of diversity abroad (in the Netherlands) which made him aware of superdiversity in Western Europe and affected his views of the local situation after returning to Poland. In other interviews as well, opinions about migrants in Poland were compared or even contrasted with attributed attitudes toward migrants in Western countries, either to criticize the “backwardness” of attitudes prevailing in Poland or to praise Polish “straightforwardness” and “common sense.” The contrasting opinions about tolerance in the “old” EU countries can be demonstrated by a passage of a discussion where some participants recalled the Netherlands⁷ as an example of a state where [in contrast to Poland] “no one cares what language you speak, what color your skin is,” whereas other interviewees (also referring to their experience of working in that country) insisted that the Dutch are even “more racist than Poles” and outside the workplace manifest increasingly visible strong anti-Black and anti-Muslim sentiments, although the older generations of the Dutch respect Poles as good and loyal employees (FGL6). This shows how some interviewees drew on their emigration experience to position themselves as diversity experts in their focus groups.

The context of Polish emigration to the West was also recalled in a more general and historical sense to highlight the need to better understand and have empathy with those who come to Poland. As in the previous case, this approach was recognized by some participants but dismissed by others as a liberal standpoint. It is visible in the following conversation in a focus group:

— *But we are hardly a very tolerant nation, because we want to go to the West, we want money from the West, we want to have a better job there, better conditions (...) And we want, we crave this prosperity, but [we don't want], for example, to let somebody poorer come and earn here (...)*

— *(...) In my opinion, if someone from any country, of any citizenship, wants to go abroad and live there—here, there, anywhere, around the world—it's their business—let them leave, but I believe that when I am Polish, I should be able to live in Poland, earn money and live here (FGL8).*

Some participants pointed to high levels of intolerance toward Muslims despite the practical lack of contact with this group in Poland and attributed it to negative media coverage. High levels of religion intolerance (not only Islamophobia)—even if decreasing—were linked to the strong position of Catholicism in Poland, as well as to Polish society's general lack of preparation for dealing with differences (starting with a lack of diversity-awareness training in schools) and a lack of acknowledgement of the diversity of Muslim populations and the negative impacts of other religions. The interviewees in various groups associated low levels of openness and tolerance in Poland with religious conformity and state prescriptiveness. Apart from the low levels of ethnic tolerance in Poland, the discrepancy between declarative and actual attitudes was also emphasized, as in the following quote:

— *God forbid...their daughter should marry a Jew or a Black...In a questionnaire it's 'yes, of course, let's give everyone equal rights'...but the theory is one thing and practice is another.*

— *99% of Poles answer that they are not racists, but [indistinct] in their place (FGL6).*

However, it is worthwhile to point out that in Poland there has never been a strong norm of political correctness comparable to that in Western countries, where such norms

⁷ Apparently, a particularly popular emigration destination in the areas where the study was conducted.

are now increasingly resisted by part of society (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2012). Examples of open racism and xenophobia from our interviews will be more discussed below.

Unpacking the feeling of threat from ‘the new others’

As indicated earlier and demonstrated in previous research (Kowalczyk 2015b; Grzymala-Kazłowska 2007, 2012), former surveys demonstrated a relatively low sense of threat associated with the presence of migrants, due to the limited scale of long-term or settlement migration and the “favorable” socio-cultural characteristics of migrants (of predominantly European origin). Strikingly, the largest concern for respondents in EVS in 2017 was migrants’ hypothetical pressure on the social-care system, despite such pressure being unsubstantiated, given the rareness with which migrants in Poland make use of its social-care systems (Kaczmarczyk 2015b). This was followed by concerns over migrants’ alleged criminal activity and, to a lesser degree, their “taking jobs” from Poles, with the first two threats perceived as being considerably more acute in 2017 in comparison to 2008. The higher acceptance of migrants on the labor market in Poland was also reflected in EVS in responses to a question about whether Poles rather than foreigners should get a job when there was a shortage, with the percentage of those supporting or strongly supporting this opinion being 91.5 in 1990, 94.3 in 1999, 92.8 in 2008, and 74 in 2017. It should also be highlighted that only in the last wave did a quite substantial number of respondents clearly reject this view, with as many as 16.2% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with it.

In the EVS survey in 2017, around one fourth of the respondents considered the impact of migrants on the country’s development to be beneficial (25.2%), a similar percentage considered the impact to be harmful (26.7%), whereas the rest held mixed opinions (48.1%). There was a strong correlation between the answer to this question and the respondents’ education ($r = -0.263$) and the population of the place where the interview was conducted ($r = -0.232$)—the higher the education and the larger the place of residence, the greater the appreciation of immigration.

The increasing feeling of cultural threat in Poland could be indirectly implied from attitudes to migrants’ maintaining their customs, with a shift over the last decade from a slightly more favorable perception to more respondents insisting that it would be better if migrants do not preserve their traditions. This change toward assimilation may indicate growing resistance to the new diversity.

In general, the issue of immigration quite strongly surfaced in our interviews in the context of perceived threats and fears of the future. Symptomatic in this respect is the quote below, which presents the opinions of voters of the national and conservative party, who revealed feelings of anxiety over the increasing presence of migrants:

- *In 10, 20 years we will be...when we die — because we won’t live forever...our children will live here together with Black people. I don’t agree to that.*
- *Society is, indeed, ageing.*
- *What has happened in the last twenty years? Nothing has happened.*
- *That’s as it may be with Black people, but I am terrified of the number of Ukrainians in our country now.*
- *Yes, or with strangers at all.*
- *Even today, a Ukrainian woman asked me near the subway if...*
- *What would the English say—how many Poles are there in England?*
- *Yes.*

- *We have to take into account that we migrate to the West, and they come from the East to us.*
- *But personally, for example, I prefer...I am closer to Ukrainians than to Muslims.*
- *Me too.*
- *Honestly, when they pass so close to me, I don't feel...at home. (FGL1)*

As is visible in this citation and other excerpts, the participants mentioned different factors behind migration, including demographic changes, the demand for cheap work coinciding with migrants' search for better prospects causing a move from the East to the West (comprising the emigration of Poles to Western countries), and conflicts and instability in some regions of the world such as the Middle East, producing migration inflow. A fear of foreigners in general—"strangers at all"—was manifested, but there was more in regard to people categorized as being more culturally and racially different (more fear of "Black people" than of Ukrainians).

One of the interviewees in the above group presented the immigration policy of the European Union as a threat to Europe, involving Poland, due to substantial changes in demographics.

You know, today...from [19]95 to [19]98 we could have become a colorful and multicultural society. Already today there could have been about five-million people of color here. Five maybe not—up to two. And they would have been here—perhaps sitting among us, going to our schools, taking the bus. And it was a huge threat, and people didn't see it. (FGL1)

When challenged by others because of his xenophobic and nationalist attitude and counter-argued that Poles are not threatened by "Black people" or "Pakistanis," the above participant replied that those who define themselves as "normal Poles" and present themselves as "cool," do not realize the danger. This shows that those with anti-migrant views consider themselves to be a minority and resist negative labeling by referring to pragmatic arguments and the supposed sensibleness of their opinions.

An extreme vision of a weak and helpless Europe "invaded" by immigrants was articulated in one of the individual interviews:

Europe is flooded today with a huge wave of immigration—immigrants—the problems that the world simply...That Europe is rich, lazy, broken, and tired in fact, and that there are areas of poverty—bordering with gigantic areas of poverty, which have never experienced such a phase of development and where people are just trying to flee to Europe to reach this wealth. This is a very big threat. Of such a kind that just...Maybe Europe doesn't take a responsible approach to it and it may turn into something we don't want (IDL1).

In answer to the question of what could mobilize people in Poland to protest, a different participant from the above-mentioned focus group pointed to Muslims coming to Poland, as being "unpredictable" and "dangerous", and associated with violence and terrorism:

Among people who have a family, children—who have something to be responsible for, not only for their own lives—something awakens that—if you see terrorism all over the world—what it looks like, what is happening—they would like to let such people into this country (...) I am very pleased that the Polish government opposed this and not otherwise, and they [Muslims] were not admitted in such numbers as were imposed. There are a lot of such people. I, personally, looking at some such groups of people (...) I'm afraid sometimes. Really. These are unpredictable people for me. I'm not judging them, as someone will say immediately. People are good and bad, but unfortunately, these people create opinions about themselves by doing these and not other things (...) I'm afraid of these people. That is to say, I didn't want them and for that reason alone. Not because they have nowhere to live. I think they have a place to live. But the question is why they can't organize their own state for themselves? (...) Why don't their neighbors, who are also Muslims, admit them? (...) They [Muslims] don't assimilate (FGL1).

The above participant backed up her claims by the second-hand opinions of a friend about the allegedly poor school attainment of Muslim children in the Netherlands. The other justifications included an ascribed unwillingness to assimilate (particularly of men), women's oppression, and different child-raising methods, which allegedly cause Muslim children to be "aggressive" and "unruly". The views that Poland could attract Muslims, who might "flood" it, that the cultural differences are irreconcilable, and that Muslims are allegedly hostile toward people of different denominations were expressed by other single participants in other groups comprising voters of the national and conservative parties.

Immigrants were also mentioned in the context of concerns over security in relation to conflicts and wars. It was articulated that migrants could bring divisions and conflicts from their homelands and cause new ones, as in a discussion with pensioners (FGI.12) and in the focus-group interview cited below:

As someone once said, when the Second World War started, there was shooting in the world, but in Asia or Australia, everyone was living normally, as we do today. It's not like the Second World War began and everyone started shooting [everywhere]. Oh no. This war is going on somewhere. There is a chance that it will spread, so those concerns are justified here. There are more and more immigrants. They bring some of their ideas, their own culture. I also have such a fear... (FGI.11).

In general, however, refugees were hardly mentioned by the interviewees and if they were, rather not in a compassionate manner. In addition, the EVS data manifested higher levels of indifference to the life conditions of migrants in Poland in 2017 in comparison to 2008, although the levels were lower than in 1999 (the percentage of those not concerned or minimally concerned were respectively 49.7, 44.6 and 60.4; those very highly and highly concerned 11.6, 14.8, 8.7, and those concerned to some degree 38.7, 42.5 and 30.9). In our interviews, refugees as a category were juxtaposed with "normal" migrants and alleged to receive even higher benefits than those obtained by unemployed Poles (FGI.7).

The rare exception was the following criticism, during one individual interview, of the current political climate of intolerance, as well as the insufficient and dehumanizing help for refugees. The speaker referred to moral and religious arguments in presenting her views:

I also think that the government that is there is trying to convince us to hate other races. And I find that very bad too. Because if we call ourselves a Catholic nation, that is, a nation whose religion is Catholicism, yes, then it should be filled with love. And this issue of refugees, which is that, however... We treat them like people of—I don't know—a different race, worse than ourselves. I don't like that either (IDI.16).

The collected material indicated relatively increasing levels of a sense of threat caused mainly by the "blurring" of borders and categories, where the participants felt more threatened by the imagined new diversity and divisions rather than by actual migrants themselves (which translates directly into the challenges of (super)diversity). The above-discussed attitudes were related to direct encounters with Western diversity (due to migration experience and foreign trips) or indirect encounters, which allowed the interviewees to distance themselves from or transcend the imagined ethnic "homogeneity" of Polish society or, contrarily, led to them manifesting higher levels of insecurity and resistance. The unfavorable reactions were also linked to negative media representations and political orientations (these latter coincided with voting for the national and conservative parties), which emphasize a need for restoring "order" and dealing with "migration threats") (which resembles cf.

Lianos' thoughts, 2013). However, such views do not seem to be influenced entirely by social position, because the opposite attitudes were present among respondents varying in terms of education, occupation, and place of residence.

The relative easiness of encountering "the similar other"

Despite the relatively low awareness of the new diversities in Poland, the presence of one specific group—migrants from Ukraine, predominantly in the context of the labor market—was acknowledged across different focus groups and individual interviews⁸ (although less notably in IDIs than in FGIs), as in these examples: *Recently, they reported that there are 1.5 million Ukrainians in Poland* (FGL7); *Ukrainians are everywhere* (FGL11); *We have many people from the East—Ukrainians who come and work for lower rates* (FGL5); *After all, how many Ukrainians do jobs here, work here in X?* (IDI15); *Well, I mean there are a lot of Ukrainians, from Ukraine* (IDI3). It is worthwhile to highlight that the presence of Ukrainian migrants was also noticeable for the participants from small towns and villages—unlike in the past when migrants were seen clustered around the largest cities (Fihel 2008). Even in our selected small town, the focus-group participants referred to their direct contacts with Ukrainian migrant workers, who were portrayed as hardworking and living in spartan conditions (e.g., FGL3).

It was emphasized that Ukrainian workers were frequently invited by employers who could not find employees on the local market, with some interviewees expressing the view that the employment of foreigners is encouraged by the Polish state instead of reducing taxes, which would cause a rise in pay and encourage more Poles to work (e.g., IDI2). The low wages in Poland, which do not allow Poles to make ends meet, were presented as working differently for migrants from Ukraine and countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Tajikistan, or China due to the other relative value of the pay earned in Poland in those countries (FGL4).

Generally, the interviewees were in agreement that the presence of Ukrainians is not mostly perceived as "pressure" and there are rather no prejudices against those migrants who are not seen as causing problems. Similarly, some participants emphasized that "work is available" in Poland even though Ukrainians are filling many jobs, due to the migration of Poles to the West (IDI15) and the inactivity of some Poles on the labor market in Poland because of "the overly generous welfare system" (IDI22). It was stressed that Ukrainians are recruited to supply work and skills that are lacking in Poland due to a mismatch between the education system and the labor market (IDI26). Furthermore, other benefits of the presence of Ukrainian migrants, such as additional income for local residents such as landlords and shop owners, were highlighted, as well as the Ukrainians' integration efforts (e.g., the good performance of migrant children at school) (FGL5).

As expressed in the individual interview quoted below, Ukrainians and other workers from the former USSR were perceived as "desirable" migrants not only because they supply the workforce needed in certain low-paid sectors of the job market but also due to

⁸ In the latter, the issue of migration, including the influx of Ukrainian migrants to Poland, surfaced less frequently—it was mentioned briefly in 10 interviews out of 29.

their cultural and linguistic similarity, which helps with communication and adaptation in Poland:

“These are regulations that would have to be modified so as not to hinder at least those people from the East who want to come to work with us. Because I believe that it is a little safer matter for us because they are—it’s a Slavic nation—it will always be easier to talk to them and cooperate with them. I’m not talking about religious views, but about character and origin in general. Well, but it’s not well developed here. Now I’m starting to fear something that has begun to show up in recent weeks. The Germans are already working on improving the regulations so that foreigners, mainly here from this side, could come to them to work. Because they are afraid—and maybe this is a bit of a political matter—why should Arabs and other religions be there when there can be white people and also other nationalities. If they create it, the Ukrainians and those who have come to us, whether from Georgia or Belarus or somewhere else, from beyond the Eastern wall, so to speak, will move, will run away. We will be left without people again (...) But I think that this is a slightly different problem, because here, as I said, with these people from beyond the Eastern wall, it’s like this: some language barrier, some customs and origin—it was a bit simpler. And with Asians, it will not be so easy. That’s why I’m a bit afraid of it, but at the same time we have no influence on it. Unfortunately, we are depopulating, there are fewer and fewer of us” (IDL28).

In the above passage, an interviewee with a degree manifested his macro-level thinking to argue for a more active pro-Slavic migration policy to prevent Ukrainians going further west. He contrasted the migration of Slavs with an “undesirable” influx of migrants with different cultural and racial characteristics, thus revealing over-simplistic and racially loaded views. In another discussion, low wages were also mentioned as factors discouraging Ukrainians from seeking employment in Poland and leading to their migration to Western countries (FGL7).

Examples of fear and discontent with the numbers of Ukrainian migrants working in Poland were far less frequent in the interviews but appeared in the focus group with voters of the national and conservative party cited earlier (FGL1). In this discussion, the idea that Ukrainians were “taking jobs away from Poles” was counterbalanced with arguments that Ukrainians take “unwanted jobs” and migrate to Poland in the same way that Poles go to the West for work. Resistance in regard to Ukrainian workers was also more noticeable among the participants with “subordinate” occupations who competed the most directly with the migrants and who stressed that the large supply of cheap labor provided by migrants disadvantages Polish workers: “The boss started hiring Ukrainians, and he told the Poles that they would either have to work twice as much or [would work] for the money that the Ukrainians are getting” (FGL11).

On the other hand, the presence of Ukrainian migrants in Poland was presented as a manifestation of progress and “Westernization” associated with appealing aspects of diversity: “It doesn’t bother me. It’s normal in the UK, when you go to the center in London. At the airport I was welcomed by a man in a fancy turban; it’s cool” (FGL7).

Ukrainians were not only mentioned as workers performing specific jobs in Poland but also as neighbors. This was particularly highlighted in the focus-group interview with the residents of a peripheral district of a large city in the context of challenges in their local environment: “When it comes to X [the name of a ward], to use the example of my housing development, there is a massive rotation. People change every 3–4 months. I’m not a racist, I don’t have... For example, there are now a lot of Ukrainians. They moved into my block [of flats] as well, for example. And somehow they do not respect... That is a very loud nation, so loud, even when riding the bus—they’re very loud, phones, screaming” (FGL10).

By and large, there were only rare examples of seeing Ukrainian migrants as individuals and at the individual level as acquaintances, colleagues, or even friends, normalizing their presence, as in the following excerpt:

There are a lot of Ukrainians at the moment—there are already some tensions. It is already evident that for some, it's a problem. But hopefully not and nothing bad will come of it. But I have the impression that since they arrived, they have become something normal for many people. Many have friends. Five years ago I didn't know any Ukrainian. I knew a few writers—and today I know several people. I like them very much; we talk. That's it. And that's why this opening up of the world and all is so great for me because I believe that people will become a little more civilized thanks to it (IDI-11).

Ukrainian migrants appeared to be constructed as relatively close and useful “others” across the IDIs and different FGIs regardless of the respondents’ socio-occupational position, place of residence, or political orientation. The above-mentioned scarcity of an individual approach to migrants and not referring to them in an individualized way, even in the case of Ukrainians, means that the processes of individualization and the acknowledgement of complexity are not very advanced in relation to the new diversity.

Conclusions

Drawing on the EVS survey, focus-groups and individual interviews, the paper discusses perceptual disjunctions and complexities in attitudes to the new ethnic diversity in Poland in the context of changing demographics and uncertainties. Rich multi-method empirical data was analyzed through the lens of the concept of (super)diversity, the notion of (in)security, and the theories of complexity and individualization.

The paper shows discrepancies in the perception of “the new others” and reluctance in reimagining Polish society as increasingly individualistic, complex, and diverse. The attitudes to the new ethnic diversity in Poland indicate the still predominant underlying mechanisms of thinking in terms of divisions rather than diversity, groupism instead of individualism.

I argue that despite the actual growing ethnic diversity, the prevailing social perception—though sometimes more diversified or even polarized—remains conservative in undermining the increasing ethnic heterogeneity. Social attention is rather concentrated on “old” political and ideological divisions and inequalities. The perceived character of migration as temporal, and the similarity of predominant migrant populations originating from Eastern European countries, especially Ukraine to Polish society do not trigger a high sense of threat, particularly of an ontological or cultural nature. The striking disjunction between the increase of actual diversity and the lack of its acknowledgement can also be linked to the reproduction of a long-lasting vision of a single nation, as well as to the prevalence of conservative ideologies and narratives, which add to the mechanisms of diminishing and silencing ethnic variety. This can be related to Balogun’s (2020) notion of “Polish-centrism” which highlights the strong focus in Poland on Polish identity and culture leading to the exclusion of wider and more complex visions of the world, and the obscuring of racial dimensions of diversity in the Polish self-concept.

The concept of (super)diversity offers a stimulating and original approach to attitudes to “new” diversity in Poland. As I emphasized at the beginning, the notion of (super)diversity

should be applied with caution to the level of difference encountered in Poland, because immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in this country, the numbers of permanent migrant residents are still relatively low, and temporary labor migrants are mostly of (Eastern) European background and thus they are mostly perceived (including by the participants in the study) as being “culturally close”. Moreover, despite the emergence of actual diversity, the study showed that it is underestimated by the interviewees in the local context and even if acknowledged, is seen as a rather ephemeral phenomenon. However, drawing on Stephan and Renfro’s (2002) differentiation between realistic and symbolic threats, it can be noted that concerns about imagined (super)diversity were mainly contextualized in relation to other parts of Europe and featured noticeably in the material under analysis. The potential of this framework could not be fully explored due to the limitation of the study, as described in the methodological note, and thus it requires future research. Alongside the mechanisms of upholding the imagined homogeneity, the feeling of threat from “the new others” could be steadily growing due to internal and external processes that produce insecurity and the related politics of fear (Lianos 2013). The above material has demonstrated that the feeling of insecurity related to immigration was mainly caused by the “blurring” of borders and categories, which translates directly into the challenges of (super)diversity. Migrants were constructed as group categories, not as individuals. Their representations, and attitudes toward them, were constructed in relation to an imagined West. Ukrainian migrants, who have become widely noticeable in Poland in recent years, were depicted as being relatively close, similar, and useful (with their presence on the secondary labor market being accepted) (Piore 1979), yet subordinate and inferior—which helped to raise national self-esteem.

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