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Transcultural encounters of diversity –
towards a research agenda. The case of
Polish presence in the UK

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Abstract

International migration and transnational ways of life of migrants bring a new kind of complexity into European societies. The term diversity is used to describe the quality of ethnically, religiously and socially complex societies and the processes taking place within them, yet there remains much confusion in the scholarly mobilization of the concept. The paper suggests a number of perspectives to think about diversity. In particular, it looks at what kind of diversity is in play, and how the experiences people have with other cultures transform their practices and their attitudes. The paper has an explorative character and aims to establish an approach for studying the socio-cultural consequences of diversification of societies. The suggested ideas and concepts are derived from examining the case of the post-accession migration from Poland to Great Britain. They are illustrated with examples taken from online editions of the key Polish and British newspapers that dedicated much attention to the Polish migrants in the UK. The paper is organized into three sections. First it describes the new configurations of diversity to which Polish migrants contribute in terms of demographic changes, material diversification and new relations of social inequality. Second, it draws attention to aesthetic and affective aspects of encounters with diversity. Finally, it shows transcultural practices that arise from these encounters.

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1. Introduction

Transnational flows are no longer exceptional – indeed, one might even say that they are now the norm, or at least they are rapidly becoming so. In addition, today migrants encounter a social context that is much more tolerant towards ethnic diversity compared to the past, when assimilation was demanded more strenuously. Rather than feeling pressure to abandon their unique traits, some migrants feel encouraged to maintain, if not celebrate, their social and cultural differences, sustained through ties back ‘home’ (Levitt, DeWind & Vertovec 200: 569). The various movements of people, images and ideas have brought with them new kinds of complexity into the European space. In fact, we may say that cultural diversity has by now become an integral aspect of the social landscape of Europe (Amin 2004), posing a new challenge for policy makers and social researchers, who are called upon to investigate this growing heterogeneity between and within groups based on ethnic belonging, social class, legal statuses and so on, and to explore how transnational ties are rapidly changing the patterns of migrants’ incorporation into new countries.

Despite a growing number of empirical studies on the topic, few scholars have explicitly addressed the question of an adequate conceptual framework that could capture the complexity of these phenomena. ‘Diversity’ – relating to a particular quality of ethnically, religiously and socially complex societies, and increasingly serving as an analytical tool to describe and understand the processes taking place in them – is also a term that needs to be rigorously addressed. It refers to the broader question of how international migration and migrant transnationalism effect changes in contemporary societies (Faist 2009: 180), and it clearly points indicatively to significant social developments. However, there remains much confusion and inconsistency in the social science mobilization of the concept to address the changing composition and functioning of collectivities; it has little analytical power despite – or maybe because of – its growing popularity.

The aim of this paper is to point to possible new directions in researching socio-cultural diversity. I suggest a number of perspectives which help to think about diversity, and in particular to conceptualize what it means for people to encounter diversity in society. The challenge is to adequately analyze people’s experiences of diversity and their consequences. I use the term ‘transculturality’ or ‘transcultural’ (Robins 2006) to stress that cultures undergo constant negotiations and that they are permeable, contested and open to change. In addition, migrants’ experience is never straightforwardly and unproblematically about being more or less involved in one or

the other cultural practice. Cultural ambivalence and the questioning of the powerful imaginaries of cultures as singular and homogeneous entities characterize the life of transnational migrants. In this sense, every migrant experience is transcultural and involves struggles for power and acceptance, symbolic manifestations of conscious connection to a group (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004: 1010) and some kinds of idealization of one or another cultural space, apparent in the rhetorics and mythologies involved in migrants' presence.

The concepts I present below are derived from examining the case of the recent migration from Poland to Great Britain and Ireland ('the islands', as they are commonly referred to in Poland). The 'Polish case' offers an inspiring set of examples of how immigrants encounter a highly diverse environment in their new host country, and how the host societies react to their presence on their territory. I draw here on Internet resources to illustrate the particular aspects of these encounters with the increased diversity. In particular I refer to online pages dedicated to the Polish migration to the UK from a mainstream Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (GW). In July 2006 *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the top Polish daily national with the highest circulation, launched the first of a series of reports on the new Polish emigration called 'Przystanek Europa'¹. This was followed by regular reporting on the daily life of Poles abroad, mostly in the UK, which included interviews with the migrants as well as an 'Emigration Service' titled 'Poles abroad' (2008), dedicated to Poles who want to keep in touch with Poland and engage in the discussion on conditions for re-migration, and a blog for emigrants called '17th Voivodship'², both of which give migrants the chance to express their opinions online. A similar blog entitled 'Bye, bye Poland' was initiated by *Polityka*, the best known and oldest Polish weekly journal. These, as well as other Internet blogs and online forums published by Polish emigrants in the UK (*cooltura, moja wyspa*), were further sources of my inquiry. Occasionally I also refer to the British media (*The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Mail*); most of these articles dedicated to the Poles were reprinted in the Polish press as well, and some were noted and commented on when their interpretation was particularly controversial from the Polish perspective. I keep in mind the political background and sympathies and antipathies of particularly the British newspapers' editors and journalists

1 The title links to an American TV soap opera called 'Northern Exposure' that is extremely popular in Poland – in Polish 'Przystanek Alaska' (directly translating as 'The Stop Alaska'), which gained the status of a cult series among young Poles in the mid-1990s.

2 There are 16 Voivodships – administrative regions – in Poland, the title suggests that the UK has become a part of Poland due to the large number of Poles living there.

towards the emigrants respectively immigrants. The examples here were not subject to a discourse analysis and serve as an illustration of my theoretical points.

I begin by presenting the configuration of diversity (Vertovec 2009: 10) – social and demographic structural conditions, indicators, variables and structures of population – which are generally considered to characterize cultural diversity. Also, I draw the attention to non-human and relational configurations of diversity. I go on to claim, however, that this configurational perspective can only be understood as a point of departure for understanding more complex processes that happen when a significant and proliferating number of migrants arrive in a country.

2. Points of departure

Demographic configurations of diversity

In a book published in 1995, the American historian David Hollinger introduced the term ‘diversification of diversity’ to describe the dynamics of cultures and identities in the US context. In 2004, Marco Martiniello applied the same expression to speak of the multiple sources of diversity in the European Union. One of its key sources, according to Martiniello, has been the process of enlargement as new candidate countries joined the European Union, and particularly the unanticipated phenomenon that new member states ‘do not want to assimilate in the EU project’. Another source, he maintains, is immigration and its new patterns and dynamics, combined with different strategies of (non-)adaptation of migrants in host countries (Martiniello 2004: 3). Following this argument, Steven Vertovec writes of the new reality of super-diversity in the British context, with respect to ‘a multiplication of variables that affect where, how and with whom people live’ (Vertovec 2007: 1025). Such variables include ‘differential immigration statuses and restrictions of rights; divergent labour market experiences; discrete gender and age profiles; patterns of spatial distribution; and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents’. Furthermore, migrants who ‘engage in transnational practices now do so with considerable variation in the degree, strength and formality of their involvement’ (Vertovec 2007: 1025ff).

Taking up the configurational perspective on diversity, I see Poles as significantly contributing to the growing diversity, or super-diversity, of ‘the islands’. Soon after the European Union enlargement on the May 1, 2004, the UK was to become the most desired destination of Poles. The strength of the UK economy and the advan-

tageous exchange rate of Sterling to the Polish Zloty have acted as a pull factor for many Polish immigrants; and unemployment, in particular among youth, and low wages for professionals, have pushed many to leave the country. However, some surveys show that wanting to learn English is also a significant draw for many migrants (Pollard et al. 2008: 43). A large number of young people are motivated by the potential of broadening their existential horizons, and by the cosmopolitan atmosphere and possibilities of London (compare Conradson & Latham 2007). The positive image of the UK as a country offering a tolerant and friendly environment in which migrants can realize their own personal ambitions and earn money, results in a greater diversity of migrants wanting to take advantage of what has been opened up in the enlarged European social space.

The configurational approach to diversity needs to consider the heterogeneity of newcomers from one country, their diverse motivations for migration, skills, educational levels, age, gender and family backgrounds, but also their distribution across economic sectors and geographical space in the receiving country. Following this claim, we can draw the following picture. In the second quarter of 2005, of the total number of migrants from Poland, the share going to the UK reached 20 percent (in 2000, it had been 4 percent), and by 2007, it exceeded 34 percent of all migrants who had left Poland since May 2004 (Okólski & Grabowska-Lusińska 2007). At the end of March 2007, 506,650 Polish workers were registered in the UK (Accession Monitoring Report 2007), excluding the self-employed or those working unregistered. The exact number of Poles temporarily or steadily living in the UK seems, however, much higher.³ Within the first two years after Polish accession to the EU, almost two million Poles traveled to the UK, as data from the Office for National Statistics revealed, outnumbering Australians and Canadians. Pollard *et al.* (2008) estimate that Polish workers are by now registered in every single local authority area in the UK, and are – remarkably – the single largest foreign national group in Britain, overtaking those born in India.

What should be noted is that this recent wave of migration does not have any link to three previous waves⁴. The new Polish workers are recruited through British or

3 The pick of applications of A8 country nationals to the WRS was achieved in the last quarter of 2006 and exceeded 600,000. Since the third quarter of 2007 the number of applications steadily decreased to reach slightly more than 200,000 in the first quarter of 2009, with Poles constituting 66 percent of all applicants over the five years (Accession Monitoring Report 2004-2009).

4 Some 120,000 Poles came to the UK after World War II; a small number of asylum seekers between 1986 and 1996; and illegal workers in the 1990s.

Polish agencies, but a considerable number arrive in the UK on their own initiative in search of a legal job, directly approaching potential employers or responding to newspaper advertisements (Iglicka 2008), and relying at arrival, or prior to it, on personal social networks (White & Ryan 2008). Significantly, only 9 percent of the registered workers intend to stay in the UK for more than two years, while 55 percent assume a stay of three months only – which suggests that this is a commuting migration. The Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) reveals that Polish migrants to the UK are predominantly young persons (among them more than 80 percent aged 18 to 34).

A certain aspect of diversity may refer to patterns of social positioning by Polish immigrants resulting from their distribution across multiple economic sectors, and we should be aware that this economic logic is a dynamic one. Thus, while the new migrants have tended to generally concentrate in a few sectors of the economy – namely administration/business/management and hospitality/catering – a sharp increase was recorded particularly in the case of the first sector (from 17 percent in the last quarter of 2004 to 49 percent in the respective period in 2006). Meanwhile, the proportion in hospitality and catering fell from 27 percent in 2004 to 17 percent in the first quarter of 2007, and continues losing in importance (Accession Monitoring Report 2004-2009). The new immigrants are now often crucial to the provision of public services in localities and communities across the UK. As of June 2006, there were 1,500 teachers, researchers and classroom assistants, 600 dental practitioners, and over 2,000 GPs, hospital doctors, nurses and medical specialists registered. Between June 2006 and March 2007, 1,000 new medical and 200 dental practitioners registered (Accession Monitoring Report 2007). In 2006, 25,435 residence permits were given to Polish citizens in the UK. These are made up of self-employed, self-sufficient workers or students not registered in the WRS, or those who have worked legally for longer than 12 months (Home Office 2006). Another growing group is Polish students. Studying at a British university is no longer too expensive for Poles, who now pay lower (EU) fees and often qualify for educational grants and student loans. In 2002/03, 790 students were enrolled in Britain. In 2006/07, 6,770 Poles studied at universities in the UK (HESA 2008), and their numbers are bound to increase given that British universities are now directly recruiting Polish students in Poland, with admissions officers visiting secondary schools to make offers to young Poles.

The spatial distribution of Poles in the UK corresponds to the available patterns of employment and is therefore dynamic as well. A significant number of Poles arrives first in London, from where they go to other regions to undertake employ-

ment. Anglia received the greatest number of workers between May 2004 and March 2007 (15 percent of all Eastern Europeans), and it stands as a region recruiting predominantly agricultural and administrative workers. Large numbers of Poles work in London in the hospitality and catering sector; however, London also attracts medical professionals. Areas that had not traditionally attracted migrants, such as Scotland and Southwest England, have noticed a significant influx of Poles as well.

The configurational approach badly needs to draw attention to how dynamic the picture is in contemporary Europe. The regime of 'free movers' (Favell 2008) facilitates a very flexible reaction of workers to the conditions of the labor market. This is particularly true for the Polish migrants in the UK and Ireland, and especially for low-wage, or precarious and vulnerable workers who were badly affected by the recent recession (Rogers 2009). Hit by unemployment, in fear of it or anticipating it, Poles returned home or postponed or abandoned their plans to emigrate, and the new tax legislation in Poland in favor of workers and the comparatively good prospects of its economy facilitated these moves. The changes on the labor market thus have serious consequences for configurations of diversity, while the dynamics, their rapid pace and the relatively slow response of policies and the lag in statistical encompassing of the situation make it difficult to steadily provide reliable and up-to-date data on diversity.

Material diversification in everyday life

Demographic constellation is perhaps the most obvious aspect of diversity. However, when looking at how people refer to their experiences of socio-cultural diversity in everyday life, it is not the demographic characteristics alone that seem to matter. It is what they do when they move, the things that they bring along and the things that they do, the materials and their practices, which are the most visible outside of their community. I thus suggest having a closer look at other patterns of non-human material diversity first in order to gain an understanding of what the presence of the new migrants means for the participants of the space they occupy.

At the end of 2006, the newspapers in Poland were reporting a new – and for many people, serious – problem, that of Polish dogs and cats that emigrate from Poland. In 2004, there were no Polish dogs or cats in Ireland, and only six Polish dogs and four Polish cats in the UK. By 2006, there were already 721 dogs and 46 cats from Poland officially registered on the islands. These animals have EU passports and do not need to go into quarantine for six months. What remains, however, is the problem

of their transportation, which is expensive and also stressful for both the Polish pets and their owners. A certain Marcin, interviewed by *Gazeta Wyborcza* (13/12/2006), converted a bus, which he had been using to take people to the UK, and installed compartments for small animals. Long breaks during the journey, in order to walk 'our' dogs, and good quality animal food and fresh water on board are included in the service. 'First we take the husband. Then his wife and children. And then their dog. And, at the end, we take the furniture,' Marcin told the Polish newspaper.

Marcin, like thousands of other people, has become a 'translocal operator'⁵: someone who supports migrants in various ways for his own benefit and profit, and who contributes to the creation of transnational social spaces (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992; Pries 1998; Faist 2006) between two, and frequently more, locations. Airlines like Ryanair are booming in Poland, and Internet bookstores have doubled their revenues. The trade exchange between Poland and the UK is flourishing – it rose by 72 percent between 2005 and 2006. The surplus of Polish exports to the UK exceeded 1.3 billion British pounds alone in 2006. The British-Polish Chamber of Commerce estimates that there are 40,000 Polish companies registered in the UK, which played their part in this increase (compare Barrett et al. 2003). The success of these 'translocal operators' is based on the mobilization of their cross-border networks and resources (Portes, Haller & Guarnizo 2001). Some of them are involved in the transfer of goods across countries ranging from an array of informal couriers to large formal firms. Others rely on, and seemingly can depend on, the continuing desire of immigrants to consume goods from their country of origin (Landolt, Autler & Baires 1999). Poles turn out to be patriots with respect to their nutritional habits. Most of them buy Polish bread, ham, alcohol, cheeses and sweets (GW 18/10/2007). Especially at Christmas, Poles buy specialties from home, such as carp, bigos, barszcz, flaki, pierogi or makowiec, a poppy-seed cake (GW 22/12/2006). And they prefer Polish products even if their import is illegal – the sign of this being the popularity of cigarettes from 'home' sold under the sales counter (GW 18/10/2007).

The British market has also been affected by diverse services offered by Polish enterprises in response to demand from the growing number of migrants. For example, the Polish mbank opened a financial center in London offering mortgage loans for Poles who want to invest in real estate in the UK. Furthermore, a pharmaceutical group has opened several drug stores in London districts inhabited by large numbers of Poles, with personnel able to advise customers in Polish (GW 16/10/2007).

5 This term emerged in the course of my discussions with Kevin Robins.

But, of course, most of the services are not restricted to the immigrant community. FLY MiniCabs, opened in London by two Polish migrants, drive Brits around the city for half the price of other taxi services (GW 20/12/2006).

The demand for products from Poland was subsequently and quickly discovered by the British companies. Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda started selling Polish food in September 2006. By May 2008, 500 Tesco supermarkets were offering Polish products, and the company also opened an Internet shop with Polish products. Polish products even became more popular than the Chinese and Indian specialties offered by this supermarket (GW 12/05/2008), which certainly made the path for foreign food popularity in the UK and enabled such fast introduction of Polish products to the market (Oddy 2003). But small Turkish and Indian corner shops also began importing typical Polish specialties: mayonnaise, sour cucumbers and beer (GW 18/08/2006).

Certainly, there is a need for more research on whether Polish entrepreneurship in the UK and Ireland follows the patterns known to researchers of various migrant groups in other countries. For example, it is not clear whether newcomers from Poland find niches in which typically migrant businesses are (over)represented, such as garments, restaurants, petty retailing, or taxis, which profit from particular opportunity structures favoring products and services oriented toward co-ethnics, but that are also situations in which a wider non-ethnic market might be served, and therefore enjoy a supportive attitude from the host societies (Waldinger et al. 1998; Kloosterman & Rath 2003).

However, the point I want to make here is that thinking about these developments in terms of non-human agents helps to identify how immigration changes the patterns of diversity in very diverse ways. Migrants are always accompanied by their belongings and businesses, and the consequences of migrant presence in a place also need to be considered in respect to how these materialities that they bring along start up a number of processes, which lead to further diversification of societies. Before I go more into details on this issue, I will briefly digress to discuss the shifting configurations of social positioning. This aspect of social diversity is, similar to the demographic characteristics of migrants, often considered a key feature of diversity, or more precisely, of the consequences of diversification. Again, I will argue in the following that this is just another point of departure from which to think about diversity in societies, and I will bring the two strings together to argue for the need to analyze the aesthetic and affects on encounters of diversity.

Relational configurations of diversity

The next issue which should be raised in research on diversity is how the changing configurations of population impact on relational configurations of social positioning, including both individuals and collectives. One example illustrates this point best, that of a particular, 'Polish' kind of religiousness, experienced primarily through, with, and within, the large groups of regularly practicing believers, rather than displayed through any particularly different religious garb or rituals. Religious practices also become a distinct marker and expression of the Polish presence in the UK (despite the fact that the opposite trend – to abandon regular visits to church, as family pressure lessens – can also be observed among the Polish community) (GW 27/05/2008). Catholic churches in the UK are now full of Poles. Every Sunday in Ealing, the core Polish district in London, some 800 people, mostly young migrants, attend each of the seven holy masses in the Polish language. Some travel in, from outside of London, where there are no churches with services in Polish (GW 01/02/2008). Also, Catholic schools are admitting a growing number of children from Poland (GW 06/03/2008). In August 2005, a small locality in northeastern Scotland, Pluscarden, welcomed about 500 Polish pilgrims who came to see a copy of the famous picture of the Madonna of Częstochowa, donated after WWII by Polish soldiers as a proof of gratitude to the people of Pluscarden, who had helped them during the war (GW 24/08/2006).

Clearly, this new way of experiencing spirituality together with hundreds of other Poles in their new migrant context has an impact on the balance of influence and power between new Roman Catholics and other confessions, and raises mixed feelings in the UK. Some pastors enjoy the new, vivid spirit of religiosity in their parishes. Indeed, there is even a kind of competition between dioceses to attract more pilgrims – for example, between Pluscarden, with its copy of the Black Madonna, and Carfin, near Glasgow, where a sanctuary of the Madonna of Częstochowa also exists. The bishops of both dioceses seek to lure believers from Poland (GW 24/08/2006). Some Anglicans, on the other hand, are cautious about the augmenting population of Roman Catholics in the UK. At stake is 'respect for diversity' (*Church Times* 29/02/2008) among different Christian traditions in the UK, and Anglican sensitivities and fears are fed by stories from the Polish media, which comment satirically on women vicars and gay curates, and by statements from bishops in Poland that the migrant communities are still considered to be an integral part of the Polish church.

Some interesting developments in the new relational configuration of diversity can be observed in other fields as well. For example, the growing number of Poles on

‘the islands’ has brought about fears and protests among British workers and their unions against the cheap and ready-to-perform-any-job Polish workers with which some companies have sought to replace them (*Daily Mail* 03/03/2008), with such voices increasing in times of economic recession (*The Guardian* 03/02/2009). At the same time, Polish trade unions sign agreements on cooperation with trade unions in the UK and Ireland, to better protect Polish workers from discrimination in these countries (GW 28/11/2006). In April 2007, Poles in Ireland went on strike to demand equal treatment from the Musgrave Corporation. The strike organized by Poles was very quickly joined by other migrants, as well as by their Irish fellow workers. When the first talks between Polish workers and the Musgrave management did not produce any results, they joined the Irish trade unions, and their spontaneous action became a legal, official strike (GW 07/05/2007).

Of course, relations of this kind should be placed in a more general framework. They crystallize a number of ongoing and related debates. The protests are partly to be understood in terms of national protectionism or in some cases in terms of rising xenophobic reaction to migrant employment, but they also reflect a more general tension between social and neoliberal views on Europe (Rogers 2009: 51).

Such new constellations of inequality (Vertovec 2007: 1045) often involve non-Polish immigrants as well. In this respect, the growing number of cases of illegal migrants from outside of the EU who marry Polish migrant women in the UK is worth mentioning. These obviously fictitious marriages secure the non-EU migrants – mostly from Algeria, Turkey, Albania and some African countries – access to the EU labor markets, and provide the women with a small additional income (GW 27/02/2007). Marriages are conducted in the Polish consulates, which do not have the capacity to assess whether it is a question of a relationship of pragmatic convenience or a serious and valid one.

At the level of individuals, new ways of emancipation of Polish women are interesting, and a new research question would be if their new possibilities for positioning through more income and symbolic power over their immigrant husbands influence their relationships to their families and men in Poland. At a more general level, the question arises as to how such everyday strategies of immigrants call into question the ability of nation-states to impact on the citizens and immigrants. The examples above point to bottom-up processes and studying them should complement the approach that takes into account the political economy and the top-down policies towards immigrants that directly and indirectly influence their status and possibilities of articulation of power (Vertovec 2009: 14).

3. Encountering diversity in everyday life

The examples above of the proliferation of the British market with Polish food products, the habit of buying them by the Poles, and the 'Polish' way of practicing religion should be considered from a perspective which more strongly takes into account the nature of encounters of diversity. I identified a number of issues which need to be considered: demographic constellations, material aspects of immigration and the changing patterns of social inequality. Below I bring these strings together. First, I speak of aesthetic experiences of diversity. Then, I draw attention to affective aspects of encountering diversity, and subsequently I discuss how migrants involve and reproduce diversity through transcultural practices.

Aesthetics in experiences of diversity

The point that I want to make here is that the growing number of Polish businesses is contributing to the changing aesthetics of public spaces in host societies (Inciroglu & Tandogan 1999), an aspect which needs to be considered when researching the issues of diversity of contemporary societies. Through the proliferation of Polish products, and, of course, the bodily presence of Poles themselves, a new kind of aesthetics is entering British public space and culture. Polish products are all over London and the UK: in shop windows, next to job offers, one can find adverts for the 'best Polish ham' or 'home-made pierogi'. As Polish breweries have increased their export to Great Britain, more and more British pubs serve Tyskie or Żywiec to more and more diverse customers (GW 11/08/2006). New Polish restaurants are appearing, and their owners estimate that at least half of their clients are Brits (GW 18/08/2006, *Daily Mail* 11/08/2007). At the same time, the import of fresh poultry has increased dramatically, so that chicken from Poland can be more easily found on British supermarket shelves, and finally on British dining tables, than domestic products (GW 29/01/2007), so that some speak of 'Polish shelves' in the shops.

This new Polishness in the UK manifests in a number of food products and beverages that bring new smells and tastes, but also a kind of displaced symbolic patriotism of Poles through the practice of buying these products and services. These practices disturb a certain invisibility of Poles as white immigrants with the legal equal status of European Union citizens (Fortier 2000: 22f). For some communities witnessing a massive influx of Eastern Europeans, this experience may seem quite dramatic, as in Peterborough, the town where, as the British press has put it (*Daily*

Mail 23/08/2006), it is hard to find an English person on the streets. This is obviously considered a serious disruption of a normal condition, or is believed to be so. These products, shops, and Poles themselves, on the streets of London or Peterborough, interrupt the pre-existing order of what is visible and perceptible and acceptable, and thus transform the experiences of other participants of these spaces. A subject for further research would be to look at how deeply transforming these aesthetic experiences are and what the long-term consequences are in terms of new conflict lines or the development of attitudes of openness to other people and their cultures.

However, solely the proliferation of Polish products in the British space would perhaps attract scant attention if not for the symbolic dimension of it. Polish products, I suggest, are visible due to the ongoing and massive public interest in Poles as new workers in the UK, and in particular the – often negative – media coverage. One can pass by chicken curry on the supermarket shelf without noticing it, yet not by bigos if one has just read about the Brits losing jobs in favor of cheap workers from the East. It is not purely the novelty of the products nor their sheer presence that constitutes the aesthetic experience of diversity, an aspect which certainly needs more attention in research.

Affects and diversity

Many people employ strategies and conscious self-positioning within the social structure and thereby benefit from their own migratory status, as pointed to previously in this paper. However, some developments should instead be considered in different categories. Ignorance, racism and even xenophobia belong to transmigrants' phenomena as much as strategic positioning, and the research of diversity should dedicate attention to these issues as well. The point is that the encounters with diversity also include less conscious, strategic – not in motive but in outcome – behaviors and ways of engagement with diversity.

Let me illustrate this point with the following example: School principals and teachers in Britain complain that many children from Poland show racist behavior towards pupils from Pakistan or India and argue for the intellectual primacy of white people. Furthermore, Polish parents have been known to make their selection of a 'proper' school for their children based on whether 'blacks' attend the school (GW 21/03/2007). In Peterborough, Polish students suffer physical assaults, verbal abuse and intimidation from classmates – of all students, of both British and immigrant background, they are the most likely to be on the receiving end (*Daily Mail*

22/04/2008). Conflicts arise for all manner of reasons: the ‘Slavic’ beauty of Polish girls in a school in Lincoln was a reason for the formation of two rival gangs of Polish and British boys; in Acton, in London, a Polish girl was bullied by her British school friends for being ‘too beautiful’ (GW 30/03/2007).

These examples shed light on different but related aspects of diversity – the affective consequences of relational configurations and interactions between new migrants and the rest of those – majoritarian and minoritarian – living in the host population. In this context, I speak of affect as an outcome of encounters, interactions and engagements between human presences in particular places (Conradson & Latham 2007: 232). Affects are manifest in emotions, which can be expressed in speech reflecting particular cultural vocabularies or, alternatively, in other, less self-aware reactions. Affects possess a collective dimension, and may work to align and mobilize individuals into certain collective formations. I speak of affects, rather than use a more diffuse and broad term of intercultural interaction, in order to highlight these aspects of diversity that are less self-consciously interpersonal. Also, I am invoking a complementary idea to the common interpretation of social-class and ethnic struggle between new migrants and the rest of the host population. The notion of affect, I am convinced, helps to think about diversity in terms reaching beyond simple ethnic categories.

When thinking about cultural diversity in European societies, we ought not to forget that, besides a number of factors contributing to the ‘colorful’ landscape of cities, we need to look at how migrants change these landscapes in terms of the aesthetic and affective experiences of (mainly) urban populations. While much of the literature has focused on new patterns of social power, developing as a result of actual and symbolic forms of discrimination, the notions of aesthetic and affective experience, in the context of cultural diversity, draw attention primarily to the alteration or transformation of processes of social figuration (Elias 1982), which do not (yet) involve clearly defined new patterns of exclusion and new group building in particular spaces.

The above examples give some sense of the massive scope of the processes taking place with respect to how new migrants may change the social and cultural imagination of the public spaces and the conception of who does and who does not belong to them. The concept of ‘imagined public’ can be useful in this context: an ideal community, an imaginary entity, qualified to enter the public spaces (Incirlioglu & Tandoğan 1999: 56).

If we consider London, which, as qualitative interviews show (Pollard *et al.* 2008), attracts people from Poland with its image of a vibrant and exciting city, offering a plethora of cultural and social opportunities, we can easily demonstrate that for some spaces cultural diversity is a key resource (Massey 2007; Kosnick 2009), and that the diverse ‘imagined public’ plays a particular role for them. Unlike London, which migrants perceive as an imagined cosmopolitan space in which they feel welcomed, other spaces, for example smaller, rural localities, might define themselves in different categories, and their inhabitants may experience the new diversity as a threat to the established order of things. In the everyday world, these and other spaces – schools, neighborhoods, churches – are an arena of more or less conscious struggle between newcomers and established inhabitants. Some of them find their expression in racial rhetoric (for example, in schools, between Polish and Pakistani pupils) or stimulate a new definition of whiteness (Keith 2005) (involving, for example, the idea of the threatening beauty of Polish girls).

This rhetoric, the naming of emotions and thoughts, always articulates particular cultural vocabularies. Considering the ‘Polish case’ we ought not to forget that diversity is not equally distributed across Europe. When focusing on diversity one should not blend out the context from which the migrants originate. Some countries have a long, colonial and post-colonial immigration tradition; others – especially in Central and Eastern Europe – underwent processes of homogenization due to ethnic cleansing in the course of and right after World War II, of the flattening of the social structure during the period of real socialism, followed by a resurgence of nationalism and racist resentments in the age of economic transformation of the 1990s. Consequently, these countries are characterized by low rates of immigration, and a relative cultural and religious homogeneity resulting from it.

This situation creates a transnational context for commuting migrants from Poland who currently work and live in the UK. The divergence between the degrees of diversity of these two spaces in which they dwell has significant bearing on how they encounter diversity in the UK. But it also matters whether they came from larger cities, which typically host more immigrants, receive more foreign direct investments, and which quickly accommodate imported brands and foreign trends and are therefore more diverse than rural areas. We also need to consider the migrants’ personal trajectories, which affect their readiness to more cosmopolitan practices or, quite the contrary, to support racial behaviors. It would require a further study to judge whether the new migrant and non-migrant racial rhetoric includes specific categories that reflect a particular experience, in the Polish case of an ethnically homo-

geneous society. In this racial narrative we would possibly find reference to more general notions, as we do in the struggles for upward social mobility in the rhetoric of the equality of all workers, which might then also attract other migrant and non-migrant groups to participate (as in our example of striking Poles in Ireland), or in the emerging concerns towards this new Roman Catholic constituency, the narrative of which draws on a universal rhetoric of care for global poverty and injustice, which is supposedly absent in the Polish Church (*Church Times* 29/02/2008).

The examples demonstrate the rhetorical struggle over the imagined ideal space and its public and, at the same time, how everyday affective experiences constitute a real challenge to cultural diversity. It is the presence of new fragrances and tastes, spellings and pronunciations, dresses and hairstyles in the space of British cities that reflects the subtle ways in which other cultures are becoming 'internal' social agents in European societies.

There is another issue involved as well, namely the problem of the cultural mythology of Polishness, which is in part a projection of the Poles themselves. I agree with the anthropologist Michał Garapich (in an interview with the online magazine *cooltura* from 28.08.2007), who said that when Poles create their self-image as a hard working national group, they do so by referring to this quality as a natural, almost genetic, characteristic distinguishing them from other migrants. This rhetoric camouflages the fact that they prefer a strategy of short-term stays abroad during which they work hard for little money. In this way, they contribute to a homogenized image of Poles as an ethnic group with particular and distinctive qualities, which may be mobilized in social and cultural struggles among migrants.

Experimenting with diversity

What does it do to people to encounter diversity? What are the impacts on the personal level? Diversity is a challenge not only for public service providers but also for people in everyday life. There is ongoing research on how people deal in ethnically highly diversified contexts but I want to make some suggestions based on the 'Polish case'.

Several scholars have shown that the presence and everyday interaction of people from all over the world provides opportunities for the development of multiple cultural competences (Vertovec and Rogers 1995), and for practices of cultural 'crossing' or code-switching. In my case study, such culture-crossing might include elements of playful experimentation by a young Pole, a housekeeping manager, who, during his

brief holiday in Poland, held ‘a kilt party’ after noticing that he had attracted quite a lot of attention by wearing a kilt on the streets of Złotoryja (Southern Poland). In an interview with *The Times* (20/01/2007), he said: ‘I found them very comfortable [...] I’m Polish, but I am living in Scotland now [...] I want to be seen as a Scottish person. Polish tartan seems like a good idea.’ Polish tartan had been produced by a company in Edinburgh after a request from a local baker with Polish grandparents, and was primarily meant for the Polish servicemen who remained in Scotland after WWII. The pattern combines the red and white of the Polish flag, with dark blue threads to symbolize their adopted home. Ewelina, a student at the University of Edinburgh, bought a kilt for her boyfriend in Poland. ‘I think he likes it,’ she said to *The Times*, ‘although so far he refuses to wear it outside the house.’ A part of this new transcultural practice, then, is in the pleasure of experimenting with how to articulate a new way of life and multiple belongings. There are those who are proud of being Polish, as well as proud of being different from the majority of non-migrant Poles and non-migrant Scots. Polish tartan symbolizes a new self-consciousness of transmigrants who do not feel the need to define themselves through any single category.

Often, the emergence of a new (trans)culture is marked by changing patterns of language use (Harris & Rampton 2002; Harris 2003). Polish immigrants in Britain have created their own special language that combines Polish and English: Ponglish (GW 31/01/2007; *Daily Mail* 3/07/2008). English borrowings in the Polish language are common and reach back to the early nineteenth century, most commonly in science and technology (trend, stres, walkman, komputer), sport (aut [out], derby, mecz [match], ring, outsider), music and culture (musical, bestseller, drink, fan, happening, party), fashion (topless, lycra, dzinsy [jeans], klipsy [clips]), but also health (jogging, aerobic, lifting, peeling), politics (lobby, budżet [budget], lider [leader]) or economics (biznes [business], boom, holding, leasing, menedżer [manager]). Now, as a consequence of their use of the Internet, of movies in English, and of the growing popularity of English as a second language in Poland, the younger generation has introduced Polonized English words into daily vocabulary in a new way. English borrowings by young Poles have different functions, the most important of which are camouflaging the meaning, creativity and linguistic games, and valuation (especially negative ones). However, the use of Polish words in their orthographic or phonetic version, suggesting their English origin, is more frequent now. It is as much a result of conscious creative action as a side effect of an imperfect command of the two languages (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2008).

Ponglish – the emigrant mixture of Polish and English – is not exclusive to the recent Polish migration in Britain, but has only now gained visibility both in Britain and in Poland. This aspect – the visibility of phenomena – is an important one when we talk about diversity of societies. Some kinds of difference, and not others, are talked about, they are more visible and more relevant than others. It might not be gender but ethnic belonging, not a country of origin but the language spoken on the streets, that makes a difference to the participants of public spaces and that contributes to the feeling of super-diversity. The hybrid language contains English words with Polish endings and Polonized pronunciation and spelling of English words, and is quite strange to listen to, both for Poles and Brits not used to it. ‘Jestem klinerką’ [I am a cleaner], ‘Jestem fixerem’ [I am a fixer], ‘Jestem laborerem’ [I am a labourer] or ‘Jestem domain manadżerem’ [I am a domain manager] are common descriptions of jobs performed by Poles, jobs which do not have a translation into Polish. ‘Od aprila coś się ruszy’ [from April something will move on], ‘Miałam wczoraj offa i poszłam na szoping’ [I had yesterday off and went shopping], ‘Jesteś jutro fri?’ [are you free tomorrow?] or ‘Jestem teraz na brejku’ [I am having a break] are normal sentences of the ‘island Poles’.

What is distinctively new is the attitude of Polish transmigrants to their native language. Whilst the ‘old’ emigrants of the twentieth century, especially those in the United States, cultivated the Polish language as their highest national and cultural value (according to the principle expressed by the nineteenth-century Polish philosopher and politician Karol Liebelt, ‘A nation lives as long as its language is alive’), and prized education in Polish literature and culture more than any other nation (Smolicz 1990), the contemporary migrants tend to have a more easy-going relationship to the language. This trend is related to the greater diversity of immigrants – who rarely constitute closed communities based on geographical and kin relationships; to their higher educational level, and thus ability to learn a second language; as well as to looser ties with church groupings, which cultivated the Polish language most actively (Miodunka 1990).

Whether the opposite processes are also taking place is difficult to speculate. The Polish language does, however, challenge the British and Irish public administrations, at least. New (and perhaps strange) sounding names and different letters (ą, ę, ł, ń, ó, ś, ź, ż) are a serious source of trouble. A Polish woman tried to register her newly born daughter in Limerick, Ireland, with the name Małgorzata. The civil registry office did not find the letter ‘ł’, and so the name was first printed “Ma322#gorzata”, and then it was suggested to the mother that she should agree to a more English

spelling Malgorzata, or Mawgorzata. Such mistakes can be corrected later on only through the appropriate Polish registry office when the parents apply for a Polish passport or identity card for the child (GW 04/02/2007).

As hard-working, skilled and highly motivated Poles ‘push British workers to the back of the job queues’ (*Daily Mail* 30/12/2007; 06/04/2008), complaints become louder from those who stress that the immigrants’ command of English is too poor to allow them to replace British workers, especially in the service industries. The inadequate English used by migrants induces a range of reactions, from political arguments against the foreign workers’ presence on the British labor market to the almost physical discomfort of listening to grammar mistakes and incorrectly pronounced words which make sentences almost incomprehensible. As the new language enters the British space, on the other hand, more and more service providers in both private and public sectors are orienting themselves towards Eastern European clients, which may well be an expression of the fast, market adaptation that has been typical of the British migration regime (Rex 2003). It also reflects the new challenges to public and private service delivery (Vertovec 2007: 1048). In a town in Scotland, one real estate agency employed three Polish lawyers to advise its Polish clients about the purchase of property (GW 31/01/2007). Since June 2007, the Bank of Ireland has been offering special service packages for new Polish entrepreneurs; all forms and information are in Polish, and some 80 or so Bank of Ireland clerks can speak Polish (GW 14/06/2007). Lloyds TSB recruits clerks who speak Polish in order to attract Poles to use their services (GW 12/12/2006). The British police is also recruiting Poles (GW 18/03/2008). In Lincolnshire, where Poles are the largest immigrant group, police officers took a Polish language course to be able to speak the basics of the language and to be able to pronounce difficult Polish surnames correctly (28/11/2007). Thames Valley Police also organizes Polish lessons for police officers to enable them to communicate with the growing population of Polish origin (mojawyspa.co.uk, 13/04/2007). In Scotland, where many policemen are to be retired, Poles are to save the teams from staff shortages and fill in the generation gap (GW 12/01/2007), and the same is planned by the military (*Daily Mail* 19/03/2008). The chance to reach more people was recognized by the Scottish National Party, which now prints flyers in Polish to get the votes of the 50,000 Poles living in Scotland (GW 13/11/2006). Great Britain is opening up for Poles and learning about Poland. In a Borders bookstore in London, one can find classical and newer Polish literature in Polish and in English. Immigrants are, of course, the largest group that is interested, but Polish authors draw the attention of the British media – *The Guardian*

has recently published several reviews of Polish classics and the *Times* interviewed some important contemporary Polish writers (GW 16/03/2008). More and more Brits, though primarily those who have fallen in love with Polish women, are learning Polish. New Polish language schools have opened in London and in Edinburgh (londynek.net 10/02/2009).

Language (mis)understandings can take more amusing forms: the number of guests in a Polish restaurant, 'Polonium', in Sheffield rose by one third after Alexander Litwinienko, the Russian ex-spy, was poisoned with the radioactive substance polonium in London. 'Amazing, we are booked out for the next week', said Bogusław Sidorowicz, the owner, to *Gazeta Wyborcza* (01/12/2006). The restaurant was named 'Polonium' after the name of a folk band, of which Sidorowicz was a member in the 1970s. The radioactive substance 'polonium' translates to Polish as 'polon'; the name of the restaurant has nothing to do with it but is related to the Latin 'Polonia', meaning 'Poland', and frequently given to Polish associations or cultural undertakings abroad.

These amusing examples are less banal than they seem. They show how the new migrants, as well as their hosts, display a competence to operate across cultural frontiers. It means neither that this practice encompasses all areas of life to the same degree nor that it is a straightforward process. But, in their daily lives, migrants do undermine the national cultural categories, often in a non-reflexive way. The above examples also point to the daily but serious struggles for acceptance of cultural difference. They also show how problematic the assumption is that people necessarily struggle for maximum unity and coherence of their life projects and identities. Rather, they may experiment and enjoy the ambiguity of migrant experience. What these new migrants are bringing into existence, then, are cultural dynamics that exceed the capacities of the nation-state and ethnic belonging.

There is one more aspect of the example above which seems to me to be of key importance: the struggle for the use of one's own language, which certainly reflects a deeper issue of cultural identity, mixes in daily life with a simple joy of cultural competence derived from crossing the ethnic and national divide. There is a need for a new vocabulary to adequately describe and analyze such phenomena, which would highlight migrants' determination to maintain their native language on the one hand, and less reflexive practices of playing with cultural symbols and extending their cultural repertoires on the other.

4. Conclusions

The transnational way of life of migrants is leading to the creation of a European space conceived in terms of a new kind of cultural configuration. It may be characterized in terms of cultural porosity operating across space rather than in terms of a landscape of boundaries containing communities living inside national jurisdictions and fixed cultural spaces (Robins 2006). It creates cultural diversity in terms of groups and networks linked to a number of different national jurisdictions, through a variety of coexisting vital interests such as birth, work, marriage, or family.

The encounters of diversity refer to the shifting of a sensory order of what is visible and perceptible and a consequent transformation of personal experience. New constellations of diversity – in terms of social characteristics of migrants, new products and services offered by them, and their practices in public spaces – invoke a number of processes, including production of new inequalities and symbolic construction of ethnic belonging. However, we should also think beyond these categories in order to adequately capture the everyday transcultural practices of transmigrants. I consider migrants active agents who are capable of an intellectual and emotional involvement with the diversity they encounter. They are reflexive in respect to their choices of how to live, which diverse societies offer them. They may also behave strategically when enlarging their lifespaces across more than one cultural space. But their transcultural experience with diversity is also grounded in their native culture and so it may also involve ignorance towards other cultures and even xenophobic reactions to them, parallel to developing a new competence of cultural code-switching. There is no necessary contradiction in these reactions, and their multiplicity contributes to the landscape of diversity in Europe.

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