9

Polish society abroad

ANNE WHITE

1. Introduction

This chapter argues that one result of migration from Poland in recent years is the formation of ‘Polish society abroad’. Society abroad is not a unique historical phenomenon. In the Polish case it is foreshadowed by early twentieth-century Polish society in the United States, analysed by Thomas and Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20, 1984). However, ‘society’ would not be a suitable label for other Poles abroad, such as refugees from World War II and the communist regime. They could better be described as a diaspora, according to criteria discussed in chapter 3, since many were characterised by a strong collective ethos, a ‘passionate commitment to remaining Polish’ (Temple 2001, 389) and a sense of exile from the homeland (Burrell 2006; Lehr 2015; Sword 1996; Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989). They were also much more separate from Polish society in Poland. As late as the 1980s, many Poles abroad maintained a strong anti-communist identity. They took a keen interest in the Solidarity movement and its suppression, sending aid to Poles in Poland (Burrell 2002, 66–7). The impression of a united anti-communist Polishness was perpetuated by diaspora organisations that spoke on behalf of fellow Poles, though many younger Poles assimilated into the receiving societies and often referred to their parents as living in a ‘time warp’ (Sword 1996, 216). Today, Polish society in foreign countries such as the United Kingdom can be considered to some degree a microcosm of Polish society in Poland, even if it also has specific local characteristics.

Since migrants are not usually referred to as ‘societies’, the term needs justification. I explain why it might be less misleading than other
terms, and, if used carefully and not too literally, provide an analytical lens. Previous chapters have mentioned how social change occurs among Poles abroad, and the circulation of influences between Polish society in Poland and elsewhere. However, the focus in those chapters was on individual migrants as social remitters. The term ‘Polish society abroad’ is a guide to understanding these phenomena collectively.

The chapter is not about social change in receiving societies, although this has an impact on Poles abroad, most obviously when hostility is directed at migrants, as in Ireland and the United Kingdom following the 2008 global economic crisis and the ensuing austerity policies. Nor does the chapter discuss the impact of Poles on receiving societies, since this is not within our remit. Such impacts can be significant, ranging from indirect political consequences such as Britain’s exit from the EU to more inconspicuous changes in practice, which constitute social remittances and deserve further research. One example would be the reversal in the decline of breastfeeding in Ireland. This is a direct result of migration and the high rates of breastfeeding among Poles and other EU migrants (Brick and Nolan 2014), which increases the share of breastfeeding mothers in Irish society. Qualitative research is needed to show whether there is cultural diffusion as Polish practices spread among ethnic Irish women. Polish grandmothers on birth visits encourage their daughters in Ireland to breastfeed (Kerrins, Share and Williams 2016), but does the example of Polish women breastfeeding encourage ethnic Irish mothers to do the same? Do Polish mothers support Irish friends who are also mothers to continue breastfeeding?

This chapter discusses why Poles living abroad today can be considered part of ‘Polish society’, and analyses the particular characteristics of Polish society abroad. Poles abroad today are often believed, and sometimes seem to be, more liberal, less religious and more individualistic than Poles in Poland. They are therefore sometimes seen as ‘less Polish’ by Poles who have a normative view of Polish identity as Catholic, unique and not combinable with other identities. Poles living abroad have to take into account such expectations, so they do influence the nature of the Polish migrant experience, as discussed in this chapter. However, if we view Polish migrants abroad in a different way, as mobile members of two or several modern European societies, people whose mobile and migrant identities are often more significant than their Polishness, we gain a better sense of what Polish society abroad is like. First, rather than seeing it as more individualistic, it would be better to see it as offering more choice of lifestyles and livelihoods. Second, it is important to look beneath shared nationality and see internal differences within the Polish population.
abroad based on cultural capital, income, age, gender, sexual orientation and place of residence. Agency and mobility are not distributed equally among Polish migrants, and intersections between Polish and other identities crucially affect the nature of society abroad.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses contours of the ‘society abroad’ concept. Section 3 briefly describes an alternative approach, constructing typologies of Polish migrants, which was appropriate when the recent migration wave began, but which is now outdated. Section 4 investigates the idea that Polish society abroad is socio-demographically a microcosm of Polish society in Poland, although to some extent differently stratified. Section 5 examines migration as escape from social control, but considers how nonetheless Poles are conscious of the gaze of other Poles abroad. Section 6 discusses the Catholic Church and, more generally, the changing Polish cultural spaces spanning Poland and foreign countries. These often have typically migrant rather than Polish features; for example, the already sizeable body of post-2004 Polish migrant fiction can be seen as a subsection of global migrant literature. Finally, Section 7 examines how ‘diaspora’ organisations and institutions evolve and how new organisations, institutions and networks emerge that are typical for ‘society abroad’ – society which, as I have argued, is socio-demographically complex and tightly tied both to Poland and the receiving country. This includes social movements that span borders, actively working for social change in Poland.

2. The concept of ‘society abroad’

As this book has shown, there is a social space encompassing Poland and other countries, in particular popular destinations such as Ireland, Norway, Germany and the United Kingdom. To draw a sharp line at the state borders of Poland would be artificial, considering how often Poles communicate with friends and family across borders, or visit Poland or foreign countries for healthcare (Goodwin, Polek and Goodwin 2013; Osipovic 2013), shopping, and so on, or swap their places of residence between Poland and foreign countries, despite an overall trend towards settlement in western Europe (White 2017, 237–40). Polish migrants often possess a sense of living lives in ‘Poland’ despite being far away. As described in chapter 7, stayers in Poland also feel they are living their own lives partly in foreign countries. In many cases Polish migrants resemble commuters. For example, Main (2016a, 75) describes how a woman based in Berlin, ‘who has two small children, went every month for a week or two to visit
her parents in Poznań. She laughed that she visited them more often than her brother living in Warsaw.’

Empirical research suggests that most first-generation Poles abroad consider themselves Polish, even if they redefine what that means (e.g. Kempny 2010; Kusek 2015; Ryan 2010; White 2017; Wojtyńska 2011). They are positioning themselves as individuals in relation to some wider Polish entity. They often feel distant towards the Polish state (Fiń et al. 2013), so this wider entity is the Polish nation. Their Polishness is a social identity, so it might seem obvious to see them as part of the society of their nation-state. A longitudinal survey among UK Poles asked directly whether respondents considered themselves on a four-point scale a ‘member of Polish society’; average agreement was 2.87 in 2007 (when respondents had been in the United Kingdom under three months) rising to 3.17 in 2009 (Goodwin 2009). However, this survey was unusual: methodological nationalism, which still prevails in the social sciences, leads to the assumption that the geographical bounds of a society are the nation-state’s borders. The convention is therefore that migrants are no longer members of their societies of origin. Thomas and Znaniecki, the pioneers of qualitative migration research, claimed, for example, that ‘the immigrant is no longer a member of the society from which he came, since he lives in the midst of American society’ (1918–20, 1984, 239). This has generally been assumed to be true by subsequent generations of scholars.

With regard to membership of the receiving society, Kucharczyk (2013, 10), in his introduction to a groundbreaking study of Polish civil society in the United Kingdom, argues that ‘Poles are becoming an integral part of the fabric of British society’. Nonetheless, migrants usually find it hard to gain acceptance as full members, at least not until they acquire citizenship. There is an expectation among scholars, policymakers and ordinary people that non-naturalised immigrants, who live outside the borders of their nation-state but are not full members of the receiving society, should be grouped under some extra-societal ethnonational minority label. It is not so clear how to label such minority groups. Migrants are often assumed by themselves and others to belong to a ‘community’ or ‘diaspora’. Both terms imply groups with tight interpersonal ties and a strong sense of common identity, based on ethnicity. In the United Kingdom, the usual term is ‘ethnic communities’. In countries and localities where multiculturalism is practised, official policy is to help ethnic communities nest comfortably within the receiving society. In other places, where there is pressure to assimilate, migrant populations may feel collectively excluded from the mainstream, which can enhance a sense of shared collective identity (Portes and Sessenbrenner 1993). However,
as chapter 3 demonstrated, a strong sense of collective identity among co-ethnics abroad should not be taken for granted. The term ‘diaspora’ (and by extension also ‘community’) tends to represent an ideal type rather than reality (Morawska 2011), and empirical evidence suggests that migrants from CEE in western Europe today do not form actual diasporas.

Poles commonly distinguish between ‘Poles’ (in Poland, or just visiting abroad) and ‘Polonia’ (Poles living permanently abroad). However, it seems strange to use a term that implies that a Pole in Berlin is part of the same community as a Pole in Melbourne, but lives a separate life from Poles in Poznań. Moreover, there is so much repeated and temporary migration, of indeterminate length, and it is so hard to say what counts as ‘settling’, that ‘living’ and ‘visiting’ abroad are often hard to distinguish. Given the realities of mobility and transnational existences today, common sense and empirical evidence suggest that migrants cannot be neatly sorted away from Poland and into some ‘community’, ‘diaspora’ or ‘Polonia’ box.

Garapich (2013, 20–3) argues that Polish communities (as he terms them – społeczności) outside Poland today form an intrinsic component of Polish society as a whole. Discussing Polish sociologist Marody’s paradigm of ‘three Polands’ – privatised Poland, state Poland and Poland on welfare benefits – Garapich suggests that a fourth Poland is ‘Poland in migration’. Hence the impact of contemporary migration on already existing Polish populations abroad is also part of the consequences of migration for ‘Poland’. Rakowski similarly notes (2016, 38) that a group unmentioned in Marody’s paradigm is ‘those unemployed who take farming and construction jobs in the EU countries’. Dunin-Wąsowicz (2013, 101–2) refers to post-accession migration as a ‘fluid and dynamic social phenomenon of transnational dimensions which “happens” between Poland and the UK’.

Although ‘Poland in migration’ is a helpful concept, especially if the purpose is to position this population vis-à-vis Poles in Poland, I prefer ‘Polish society abroad’ for several reasons. First, ‘Poland in migration’ seems to privilege Poles’ migrant identities. While these are important, nonetheless it is questionable whether they are of paramount importance in all situations, especially as people settle abroad. Using the term ‘Polish society abroad’ helps avoid seeing individual Polish people primarily as migrants. Second, using the word ‘society’ draws our attention to the social locations of Poles abroad – the social structures and power relations that to some extent shape people’s lives, such as a sense of social pressure from other Poles. Thinking sociologically also suggests the need to consider processes of ‘resocialisation’ (Mole et al. 2017) that may occur under the
influence of both the receiving society and co-ethnics abroad. Third, and bringing the discussion back to the main approach adopted in this book, using the term ‘Polish society abroad’ sheds light on the lives of Poles abroad by using information from Polish sociology about Polish society in Poland.

3. The stage of typology making, 2004–13

Around the time of Poland’s EU accession, UK-based researchers tended to sort Polish migrants into specific *migrant types* rather than seeing the phenomenon as Polish society arriving in the United Kingdom. The most popular typology, devised by Garapich (*Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007*), divided Poles into ‘hamsters’, or target earners on one-off visits; ‘storks’, or circular migrants; ‘stayers’, intending to remain for the long term, though perhaps retiring to Poland; and, the largest category, ‘searchers’, or those with flexible plans. In other words, Poles in the United Kingdom were viewed not as a microcosm of Polish society in Poland but in terms of their migration motives and intentions. These did, however, imply a certain socio-demographic baggage, particularly with reference to social class and age. Young and well-educated people, in particular, fell mostly into the ‘searcher’ category. Luthra, Platt and Salamońska (2014), using the term ‘migrant classes’, applied a similar typology to the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands. They identified student, family and ‘adventurer’ types alongside the circular, temporary and settled labour migrants.\(^2\) Other scholars, writing about different countries, have advocated slightly different typologies. Engbersen et al. (2013), for example, taking as their point of departure the strength of migrants’ transnational ties, identified ‘bi-nationals’, settlers, ‘footloose’ and circular migrants in the Netherlands.

Typologies can be useful analytical tools, especially for small-scale qualitative research, but they are inherently problematic because they accentuate boundaries between individuals, however much their creators explain that individual migrants cross from group to group. Typologies tend to privilege certain clusters of identities (e.g. ‘flexible university graduate’, ‘poorly integrated seasonal worker’). By contrast, for example, Main (2016a, 66), writing about Berlin and Barcelona, suggests that

a combination of expectations and aspirations make up migration motivations, which in the case of Polish women migrating to Berlin and Barcelona have been found to centre on education, relationships,
employment and a desire for adventure. The four are not mutually exclusive, rather the dimensions are differently accentuated in individuals’ own life stories.

Similarly, I found that mothers with little education from small towns, on the face of it ‘typical labour migrants’, often displayed a hedonistic and adventurous streak, despite the fact that they framed their migration decisions as being for the good of their families (White 2010a). Szczygielska (2013, 226) found similar mixed attitudes among her middle-aged women migrants from Starachowice, as did Małek in her 2011 study of women working in Italy.

Even if typologies were helpful in understanding migration to the United Kingdom circa 2004, they have outlived their usefulness. Many Poles are now more or less settled, in the United Kingdom and other West European countries, so thinking of them primarily by original migration intentions is unhelpful. Moreover, typologies cannot capture their many intersecting identities. These are better analysed using standard sociological approaches. Many analysts of Polish migration in recent years almost entirely avoid typologies, preferring, for example, to follow Bourdieu (e.g. Garapich 2016c; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Nowicka 2013). They explain migrants’ different trajectories with reference to their possession of varying, mutually transferable economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Partly in connection with this social capital approach, there has been a tendency to see Polish society abroad as consisting of networks, linking Poles to each other and to the receiving society (e.g. Bell 2016; Gill and Bialska 2011; Ryan 2016; Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2008), as well as, less often, to the sending country (e.g. Nowicka and Krzyżowski 2017; White and Ryan 2008).

Divisions within migrant populations are sometimes unnoticed by receiving country analysts, but when migrant populations produce their own sociologists and anthropologists these shine a light on stratification and hierarchies. This has happened in the case of Polish migration to the United Kingdom, which in the past few years has produced its own ‘Polish social scientists abroad’ (White 2016c). A social anthropological approach is more common in this extensive scholarship than a focus on overarching social structures, with a more qualitative approach to sociology than is common in Poland (Bucholc 2016). However, Polish sociology in Poland is also changing in a more qualitative direction, partly thanks to transnational influences.
4. Polish society in the United Kingdom and other countries as a microcosm of society in Poland

This section discusses some statistical information, although statistics with regard to shifting populations are by nature inaccurate. This is especially true considering that Poles commonly do not deregister from their place of residence in Poland; use informal networks to migrate abroad; and in some countries, notably the United Kingdom, do not need to register when they arrive.

The size of the Polish population in countries such as the United Kingdom, where Labour Force Survey data suggest that 984,000 Polish nationals lived in the first quarter of 2016 (Hawkins and Moses 2016, 3), is a particular reason to use the term ‘Polish society abroad’. By contrast, it would not be helpful to talk about Polish ‘society’ in countries, such as New Zealand, where there are small numbers of Poles (Goodwin 2017). In addition, geographical dispersion within the main receiving countries means that even if the word ‘community’ were used, it would have to be in the plural. For example, Poles are scattered across Iceland, inhabiting even the remotest areas (Raczyński 2015, 46); the same is true of Ireland (Bojarczuk and Mühlau 2018, 102) and the United Kingdom (Harris, Moran and Bryson 2012, 212; ONS 2011). Okólski and Salt (2014, 12) write that ‘the varied geography of the movement, affecting regions and communities not normally associated with immigration as well as the common honeypots like London, has made for a rich tapestry of analysis’. Poles in the United Kingdom find themselves in a country characterised by even higher levels of regional inequality than Poland (Herbst 2012, 50), directly affecting their opportunity structures and life chances (see, e.g. Knight, Lever and Thompson 2014 or 2017 on different locations in Wales). Moreover, complex patterns of ethnic diversity, intertwined with different levels of economic deprivation, infrastructure and politics and different local histories of race relations (Robinson 2010), create a ‘rich tapestry’ whereby locations vary in terms of the mix of conflict and conviviality between ethnic groups (Karner and Parker 2011). As a result, migrants are made to feel welcome to very different degrees in different locations, as evidenced by local results of the Brexit referendum in June 2016. In turn, different locations can influence Polish migrants’ changing attitudes towards ethnic diversity.

UK Polish society is a cross-section of Polish society in Poland, in the sense that Poles originate from all over Poland. This is illustrated, for example, in Nestorowicz’s (2010) analysis of the Polish population of
Glasgow (Anacka et al. 2011, 125). Such diversity reflects the wider trend towards international migration occurring from all Polish regions (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009, 107; Kostrzewa and Szaltys 2013, 52), although migration from the biggest cities was most marked in the period around EU accession (Czapiński 2015a, 244).

People from opposite corners of Poland are thrown together so that, paradoxically, it is often by coming to the United Kingdom that they appreciate the complexities of Polish society in Poland. Kempny describes how she had to rethink her assumptions about ‘Polish culture’ when she encountered the claim that there were 13 dishes at Christmas dinner from another migrant in Belfast (2012, 48). I personally witnessed an argument between residents of Gryfice and Katowice who asserted that Halloween trick-or-treating was respectively commonplace and unknown in ‘Poland’.

Also striking is the increasing socio-demographic diversity of Polish people in the United Kingdom. In some other countries, the Polish population has more specific socio-demographic features. In particular, Poles in Italy have traditionally been mostly female carers, though the population has become more diverse recently. With regard to the United Kingdom, it is often suggested that immediately after EU accession, Polish migration was also fairly selective, with young university graduates disproportionately well represented. Okólski and Salt (2014, 21) observe that ‘in the post-accession period, a stylised portrait of a Polish migrant heading for the UK is that of a young male, highly educated, and originating from an urban area’. However, this is just a ‘stylised portrait’, since university graduates were never the majority (Okólski and Salt 2014, 18).

The most significant change between 2004 and 2017 is that more older Poles have come to the United Kingdom, although the average age is naturally lower than among Poles in Poland. In 2016, around 69 per cent of people born in Poland living in the United Kingdom were aged 25–49, and a quarter were aged 30–34 (Hawkins and Moses 2016, 6).

Family reunification in the United Kingdom became a mass phenomenon soon after 2004 (White 2017), and, with a few years’ delay, in Ireland (Bojarczuk and Mühlau 2018, 102), Norway (Friberg 2012) and other destinations. As discussed in chapter 6, the birth rate among Poles in Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom is higher than in Poland. This connects to the fact that in Poland couples put off childbearing, or decide against having more than one child, for economic reasons (Galbraith 2008; Kotowska et al. 2008, 826; Prorok 2015; Staszyńska 2008, 54). In Poland, it seems that, among the youngest age groups, it is the less educated women who are least likely to give birth or aspire to having more than one child (Gromada 2016, 13). The trend is different in the United
Kingdom and Ireland, where couples feel sufficiently financially secure to have more children (Heath, McGhee and Trevena 2015; Klimek 2017).

As discussed in chapter 6, the most basic social unit, the Polish family, is often transnational, and this is one of the strongest arguments for considering ‘Polish society’ to exist abroad. Poles have caring duties in other countries, and socialisation is a transnational matter, as ‘floating grandmothers’ (Bojarczuk and Mühlau 2018, 103), sisters and other relatives based in Poland help to bring up Polish children living abroad, through frequent visits or by receiving children in Poland during the holidays. Poles living abroad also have caring duties towards their own parents. Krzyżowski (2013), for example, writes about Poles in Iceland and Austria caring for older parents in Poland, such as by helping organise their medical care. He illustrates that differences between the receiving countries influence this culture of care: social remittances occur because Polish society in Iceland has acquired more faith in institutional care from Icelanders, contrasting with the expectation of family caregiving in Austria and Poland. As Kordasiewicz and her co-authors make clear, it is not simply the case that a Polish demographic trend (its ageing society) is exacerbated by migration; rather, Polish society (both generations, located in Poland and abroad) is having to rethink caring practices as ‘cultures of care of countries of origin and destination intertwine’ (Kordasiewicz, Radziwinowiczówna and Kloc-Nowak 2018, 89).

Poles in countries such as the United Kingdom also represent a cross-section of society in Poland, in the sense that they are increasingly diverse occupationally. Poles have penetrated the entire economy, and every level of income and occupation is represented, though many Poles performed humbler jobs immediately after their arrival in the United Kingdom. The 2011 census showed 10 per cent of Polish-born people in managerial or professional positions (Haynes and Galasińska 2016, 50–1). Upward social mobility, which may be hard to achieve today in Poland (Domański, Pokropek and Żółtak 2015) is also an expectation and to some extent a reality among Poles in the United Kingdom (see esp. Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007; Gałka 2016; Haynes and Galasińska 2016; Parutis 2011). Nonetheless, it seems that on average Poles in Britain and Ireland still work below their qualifications (Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015; Voitchovsky 2014).

However, interviewees often express a pragmatic attitude: money, not status in the foreign society, is the key consideration. The important thing is to feel comfortably off relative to how you were in Poland. For example, Jerzy, a bus driver I interviewed in Bath in 2012, observed, ‘Here, if someone wants to work, I’ve noticed, as an ordinary bus driver, even if
it’s a low status job (zawód taki niski) you can live, you have money to pay the bills, go on holiday, if you want to work. In Poland it’s a hard job, low paid.’ Marzena, a return migrant, interviewed in Wrocław, who had lived in Bristol, described a friend who had been cleaning in the United Kingdom for 10 years, commenting, ‘She comes from a small town where there aren’t any prospects – so in England, as a cleaner, she is “somebody”’.

Migration offers opportunities for travel, for example, which people did not always enjoy when they lived in Poland. Malwina moved from a small town to Bristol and commented in 2009: ‘We’ve been to Cardiff, to Weymouth, down there, everywhere around Bristol, we’ve been to all the sights . . . Me, my husband and our daughter. Or sometimes with our friends, taking two or three cars . . . I want to see things . . . In Poland I haven’t visited lots of places. This is my chance.’ Poles can expect that by working in the United Kingdom they will achieve a ‘normal’ life (Galasińska and Kozłowska 2009), as opposed to the ‘abnormality’ that characterised their previous lives in Poland. (Fehérváry (2002) describes similar attitudes in Hungary). Comparisons are not just made with previous lives, since – as discussed in chapter 3 – status is often also enhanced in the sense that many labour migrants feel upwardly mobile relative to their contacts who still live in the country of origin (Garapich 2016c, 166, 187).

By contrast, some newly arrived educated Poles prefer to emphasise their status vis-à-vis other Poles abroad, reproducing class borders brought from Poland. Galent, Goddeeris and Niedźwiedzki (2009, 40–1, 88–9), found that Polish students in Leuven, like the students in London interviewed by Andrejuk (2011), constructed boundaries between themselves and labour migrants and denied they had anything in common with Polish workers. By contrast, working-class Poles stressed what united them with other local Poles, for instance living in low-quality housing, or attending mass together. Pawlak (2016, 64) reports similar ‘othering’ by professional Poles of manual workers in Oslo. Among other examples, Elgenius (2017, 276–7) quotes a banker in London: ‘We have so much to offer: Polish people are clever and professional. I don’t want them to think that we are all builders or manual workers’. In her article about Glasgow, Piętka (2011) comments on how her socially diverse interviewees reported social stratification and wariness of other Poles among the local Polish population to the extent that they could not be considered to constitute a singular ‘community’.

Social stratification intersects with the stratification delimiting different migrant generations. Garapich, in his aptly titled book London’s Polish Borders (2016c), argues that Polish professionals position themselves
within pre-existing hierarchies, associating themselves with the 1940s diaspora and their descendants, organisations and patriotic values. In turn, some of these established diaspora members have a tendency to ‘other’ the recent arrivals, whom they describe as ‘backward’ and ‘post-communist’ (Elgenius 2017, 268). Though it might be stretching terms to describe Polish society in the United Kingdom as being riven by class or generational conflict, there can be tensions, including between members of different generations of migrants (see, e.g. Bielewska 2012, on Manchester; Fomina 2009, on Bradford; Galasińska 2010a, on the Midlands). Anti-immigrant sentiment on the part of some second- and third-generation Poles testifies to how well they have imbibed certain ‘Little British’ attitudes. For example, the second-generation representative of a provincial Polish organisation complained to me in 2009, using British tabloid newspaper terminology, about the ‘tsunami’ of Poles arriving from Poland.

However, as already mentioned, recent Polish migrants are scattered across the United Kingdom, and this means they find themselves in many locations without pre-existing Polish communities. Several of my interviewees in the UK provinces noted the spirit of camaraderie that prevailed among small groups of pioneering migrants around 2004. In such locations, friendships with individual longer-established Poles could be eagerly embraced. Raczyński (2015, 118–9) notes a similar phenomenon: he states that, unlike in other Scandinavian countries, in Iceland there is no established Polish diaspora and therefore no tensions between different waves of migrants. As the number of Poles grows in foreign destinations, however, stratification and boundary drawing within the Polish population increase. Marzena, mentioned above, who lived in Poland but often went back to Bristol to visit, claimed that

there are people who earn more money and don’t want to keep in touch with people who clean and build. Nowadays [in 2016] I see a distinct division. In the past, although some people wanted to be better, all the same they always kept together. There were fewer of them. Now there are lots and lots of them and there are definite sub-groups, like social strata.

Kusek (2015, 110), writing about professionals in London, suggests that the situation is rather one in which individual professional Poles occasionally interact with a ‘Polish community’ that consists largely of labour migrants:
Out of several characteristics shared by these participants, their low levels of interaction with non-professional Polish migrants was most interesting . . . The participants of my study indicated that, although they were familiar with the Polish neighborhoods in London, they saw themselves as customers rather than members of the core Polish migrant community. For example, Artur said: ‘I visit a Polish community maybe twice a year: usually when I need my [car] oil changed I go to a Polish mechanic in Hammersmith.’ Together, and in a generalised and simplified sense, the labor migrant and professional migrant communities create a micro-replica of the Polish society in the context of London itself, and draw from similarly distinct experiences from home.

Fomina (2009) similarly writes about the ‘parallel worlds’ of middle- and working-class Polish migrants in Bradford, while Toruńczyk-Ruiz (2008, 37) reports how in Amsterdam professional migrants are hardly aware of the presence of other Poles, although working-class Poles report, ‘You don’t feel that you are abroad, there are so many Poles’.

Social exclusion also marks parts of Polish society abroad. Cities such as Oslo (Mostowska 2013) and London (Garapich 2011) contain a homeless Polish population. Poles abroad, even officials, sometimes conflate homeless people and criminals (Garapich 2016c, 305). There is an opinion circulating in Poland that Polish criminals are disproportionately well represented among migrants. For example, Gorzelak (2008, 25) reports a key informant mentioning that his town had become more law abiding because ‘the hooligans [“shaved heads”] have gone off to England’.

An intriguing but unanswerable question is how far Poles in certain foreign countries present a microcosm of Polish society in Poland in terms of attitudes and opinions. Election results that suggest, for example, an unusually high level of support for nationalist parties among Poles in the United Kingdom, are not helpful guides, because of low proportions registering and voting. A study of Poles (n=172) who arrived in the United Kingdom in 2007, the year when the largest number came to Britain, found that on arrival they were less traditional and conformist and more focused on self-direction and having an ‘exciting life’ than the average young Polish person, making them more like British people. After two years, their value for self-direction had increased still further and was higher than for British people. Bardi et al. (2014, 143–4) suggest this could be because ‘they found that they had more opportunities to pursue self-direction values such as freedom and originality, and as a result
of the ability to pursue these values, they became more important to them. This would accord with research showing how Polish migrants appreciate the ‘work-to-live’ culture and opportunities for boundaryless careers (Grabowska 2016; Szewczyk 2014) as well as less hierarchical workplaces.

Bartram (2013) discusses whether migrants report more happiness than stayers when asked the question, ‘Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?’ A comparison of European Social Survey data about migrants in western Europe and stayers in CEE uncovered significant variety across origin countries. The clearest finding was specifically about Poles: ‘Polish emigrants are significantly less happy than stayers; when we adjust for positive selection (happier people are more likely to migrate), there is support for the conclusion that this difference represents a decrease for Polish emigrants’ (167, 169).

5. Migration as choice, escape from social control and merging into the receiving society

Of course, many Poles abroad would not like to think of themselves as belonging to ‘Polish society’ in the sense of being constrained within specifically Polish social structures, or indeed playing out roles or even sharing values held by the majority of the population in Poland. In all places and periods of history, migration is often an escape route and a way of cutting social ties for individuals. For example, women can escape from domestic violence at home and initiate unofficial separations or even divorce (Urbańska 2014, 258). For young people, it is an escape from parental control. Rafał, whom I interviewed in Lublin, described his first job in London, standing in Trafalgar Square with a placard advertising pizzas: ‘I felt very good because I was free, I was on the street and no one was breathing down my neck, threatening me or telling me what to do’. Although, as mentioned above, Heath, McGhee and Trevena (2015) report that Polish couples were taking the opportunity of being in the United Kingdom to settle down and have families earlier than would be possible in Poland, Mole et al. (2017, 212) claim that among the CEE population in the United Kingdom there is ‘less social pressure to marry – especially on women’. Parents who stay in Poland are frustrated by their inability to influence migrants’ behaviour in this respect. For example, when I interviewed Sławomir and Maria in Warsaw in 2016, he mentioned that their daughter, who lived abroad, often asked when they were coming to visit her: ‘Maria says, “I’ll come, but to play with the children.” “Whose children
will you play with?” “Yours.” “Mine?? In that case you probably won’t be coming.” Maria confirmed, ‘We have those conversations.’ Also in Warsaw in 2016, Anita complained to me about her children living abroad:

What about a wedding, what is it with these young people today? . . . I phone and ask, ‘Daughter dear, when are you getting married?’ ‘Give me a break!’ I phone my son – ‘When’s it going to be?’ ‘Mum, leave me alone! I don’t have time for that [expletive deleted]’ . . . . Young people don’t get married nowadays, I don’t know what it is.

Garapich (2016d) writes about the complementary auto-stereotypes of Poles abroad: on the one hand, the self-reliant, dependable individual with a model work ethic; on the other, the untrustworthy, individualistic and envious co-worker. As discussed in chapter 7, some Poles abroad deliberately shun contact with other Poles. In particular, Mole (2015) suggests that LGBTQ Poles positively prefer to avoid fellow Poles, whom they assume might be hostile to sexual minorities. Probably more often, Poles abroad do not avoid, but also do not deliberately seek contact with other Poles. For example, Ewa, a 30-year-old single professional interviewed by Louise Ryan in 2006, commented about her friends:

Oh, a few definitely are Polish, yes, you naturally build up those relationships, but also Canadian, Japanese, British, Irish. Actually it wasn’t really an issue, their nationality, it just happens that they are my friends. I never looked for Polish friends. It is silly to look for the same nationality. If you are moving to another country, you want to learn something, you don’t want to find exactly the same what you just left.

Elsewhere in the interview Ewa commented, ‘People are more free here. I can be more free . . . I always like to go my own way and I feel I can do it easily, no one is shocked’ (White and Ryan 2008, 1494–5).

As mentioned in chapter 4, Poles are struck by differences in workplaces abroad and in Poland. My interviewees commented particularly on the more relaxed, less hierarchical workplace and institutional relationships that they encountered abroad (see also Cieśluk 2011; Karolak 2016; White 2014a). For example, Lucyna, a nursery school teacher in Poland who had worked in Lidl supermarket in Ireland, explained her greater sense of agency in Ireland:
Parents felt they had an equal say in how the pre-school was run . . . whereas in Poland the head teacher runs things more her own way. . . . After I returned I read some Internet postings by Lidl workers and definitely [it’s different in Poland. In Ireland] the managers treated us like partners . . . whereas in Poland employees are treated more instrumentally.

To existing members of the receiving society, and the Polish individuals themselves, it often seems like they are simply becoming part of the majority society and embracing a new, and in some respects more relaxed, way of life:

The local culture and lifestyle was attractive for Polish women both in Barcelona and Berlin. They mentioned easy access to culture, recreation areas, sport and a healthy lifestyle. Some women also valued key features of a multicultural society as it made it easier for them to fit in . . . . Several women liked the more relaxed attitude to appearance and material status in comparison with prevalent perceptions among their peers in Poland. (Main 2016a, 76)

Main (2016a, 199) also argues that Polish women feel empowered by having more awareness of healthcare choices thanks to moving abroad. Goodwin, writing about Polish women in New Zealand (2017, 256) reports a similar kind of liberation to that sensed by Main’s interviewees in Berlin or Barcelona. Goodwin mentions, for example, that women feel free to go to bars and restaurants on their own and that, after an initial sense of shock, they like the greater freedom New Zealand parents accord children. New Zealand can seem very foreign in this respect. One interviewee commented, for instance, ‘A Polish mother would never let her child put dirty shoes on a chair in a restaurant, a New Zealand mother would’ (2017, 166). Lack of scrutiny from other Poles is a factor enhancing Polish women’s sense of freedom:

The Polish community in New Zealand is very homogenous in terms of class background and education (mainly due to strict immigration procedures and logistic difficulties of moving so far), and very small. All of these factors, combined together, make Polish women’s behaviour less scrutinised (including by their families, who are too far away to be a disciplinary force in a case of any transgressions), but also unburdened by any negative ethnic and class stigmatisation. (Goodwin 2017, 269–70)
As shown for example by Pustułka (2013), many Polish people prefer to spend their leisure time in regular British organisations without any ethnic conditions on membership. Leszek, for example, a 29-year-old professional from Kraków interviewed in Bath in 2012, claimed that ‘because I want to improve my English, I’m trying to make more friends, English friends, and somehow operate within British society’. To this end he had joined a rock-climbing society, which helped him form trusting friendships with English people as well as providing hands-on familiarity with the British landscape. Wojciech, interviewed in Grajewo in 2012, was a Real Madrid supporter who had travelled all over Spain to matches and gained a geographically wide-ranging knowledge of the country. Migrants who do not participate in co-ethnic organisations can be hard to find, and often pass unnoticed by researchers (Moroșanu 2013, 2165). In their survey of Poles living in 11 foreign countries – accessed via Polish Internet portals, and therefore more likely to be engaged in Polish activities abroad – Fiń et al. (2013, 56) found that only 19 per cent of post-accession migrants were involved in diaspora organisations, although this rose to 24 per cent of those who had lived abroad over 5 years.

However, even Poles who immerse themselves in the receiving society and do not have much contact with other Poles will sometimes be reminded of their Polish identity by others. Goodwin shows that Polish women in the United Kingdom assume themselves to be under certain social pressure from other Poles to dress and bring up their children according to Polish norms (Goodwin 2017, 270). Garapich (2016c, 225, 231–3), and other researchers have also commented on how Poles try to identify other Poles on the street or in public transport (as seems to be common for other nationalities as well, such as Romanians) and how they feel anxious about being identified as Polish. Fomina (2009, 17) found that some of her interviewees kept away from the Polish church in Bradford partly because they felt ‘under observation’ by fellow parishioners.

Poles living abroad are also to some extent under transnational social pressure, for example, because of the expectation to ‘pull’ friends and family abroad, in line with the conventions mentioned in chapter 7. Urbańska (2015, 287–92) refers to a ‘culture of suspicion’ and cites examples of Polish married women being spied upon by neighbours from their Polish home localities, with gossip relayed back. On the other hand, Krasnodebska (2012, 132) found that women return migrants she interviewed in Opole Silesia were scrupulous about not telling tales in Poland about fellow migrants’ behaviour abroad. To conclude: however much individuals in countries with large Polish populations refuse to believe
that they are part of some Polish community abroad, there are situations where they are ascribed ethnic identities by other Poles and therefore they sense that certain expectations and prejudices accompany these.

6. The role of religion and Polish-migrant cultural identities

Moving from Poland abroad, Poles are leaving a country where symbols of religiosity are publicly present – for example, congregations overflowing into the churchyard during mass, crosses in schools, wayside shrines, initials of the Three Kings chalked onto front doors. In some cases they move to a country, like Italy or Spain, where Catholicism is also the majority religion and Catholic Poles have a sense of being integrated into the majority group simply by virtue of Catholic identity (see Galent, Godderis and Niedźwiedzi 2009, on Belgium). In many countries, however, Catholicism is not the majority religion, and this poses both integration strategy problems (would it be better to avoid the Catholic Church in the interests of integrating into mainstream society?) and practical problems (where to go to mass?). In such countries, local Catholic churches can be welcoming because they are keen to supplement their congregations, as in Norway, where most adherents of the Catholic Church are migrants, with Poles now the largest category (Erdal 2017). Overall, the international Catholic Church recognises that it is the responsibility of the receiving country Church to support migrants, if necessary through ethnic parishes.

Nonetheless, Catholicism is viewed as a universal religion, and these parishes are supposed to be bridges into the receiving society, though not for assimilation (Ryan 2017, 296–8). In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the Catholic Church has welcomed the arrival of additional parishioners but also been concerned about potential separatism of newly arrived ‘Easyjet priests’, who ‘come with their cultural baggage and agenda (spiritual and institutional)’ and sometimes try to create Polish ethnic enclaves in regular parishes (Trzebiatowska 2010, 1057). Krotofil (2013, 108–26) suggests that, as was sometimes also the case in the Cold War period (Lehr 2015, 204–5), priests prefer to discourage integration because they see their main role as keeping Polish identity safe from competition, not believing in the possibility of mixed identities even outside the religious sphere and worrying about moral contamination. She quotes a priest complaining, ‘We’ll be dealing with a great degradation of all the values we bring from Poland’ (2013, 108). Similarly,
Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Hay and Krotofil quote a parishioner who observed, ‘Our priests stress that Poles should not integrate but remain in a Polish social context while living and working in the UK.’ However, they point out that some Polish parishioners have the opposite expectation: priests should aid adaptation (2011, 227–9).

Małkosa (2015, 186), using Polish Catholic Mission data, suggests that around 2015 the proportion of Polish migrants attending mass was 10 per cent for England and Wales; Lisak (2015, 106) gives a figure of 8 per cent for 2010. Erdal (2017, 270) reports that in Bergen, Norway, about 20 per cent of registered Polish church members attend Sunday mass. Lisak (2015, 105) calculated that 5–7 per cent of the local Polish Catholic population was attending Polish mass in Dublin, Cork and Galway in 2012, with 12 per cent attendance in the smaller town of Tralee, ‘where social life is less anonymous’. Raczyński (2015, 190–1, 207–9) argues that in Iceland different Poles go in opposite directions – they either become more religious, especially at first, when both priests and co-worshippers support their adaptation to the new environment, or less practising. Religion becomes a more private affair; Poles distance themselves from the Catholic Church as an institution and in some cases refer to themselves simply as ‘Christians’. They even treat the Catholic and Lutheran churches as equivalents to the extent that they may christen one child in one Church, and the next in the other.

Considering that the clearest change in religious trends in Poland itself is towards a personalisation of religion, the evidence collected about Iceland and the United Kingdom can be used to argue, as I did in chapter 8, that this personalisation may be reinforced to some extent by migration influences. Polish migrants in Krotofil’s UK survey were ‘increasingly ceasing to believe that regular church attendance is fundamental to their faith’ (2013, 203). Krotofil found (2013, 264) that most interviewees did consider faith in God very important to their identity (for some, it became increasingly important), but this did not necessarily have to be mediated by the Church. Lisak (2015, 116) similarly criticises Polish Catholic hierarchy expectations that in Ireland Poles would spontaneously collect together to form parish ‘communities’. As Raczyński (2015, 180, 208–9) argues with reference to Poles in Iceland, religion was becoming a private matter. Koralewska further suggests that different types of ‘emancipation’ abroad follow parallel tracks (Koralewska 2016, 31). Polish women in Iceland, reflecting on the role of institutionalised religion and rejecting it to some extent, combine this with reflection upon and rejection of traditional gender roles. Many types of non-institutionalised religious practices are
invisible to outsiders. Transnational religious activities among Poles in Norway include reading Catholic media from Poland and taking part in Norwegian-Polish simultaneous rosary prayers (Erdal 2017, 276).

Individualisation of personal religiosity is mirrored and reinforced by a parallel trend among migrants abroad towards individualisation in celebrating religious holidays. As noted by Wojtyńska (2011, 118), with regard to Poland as well as other countries, ‘patterns of celebrating are rather a matter of individual choice, therefore related to projects of identity construction. They depend for instance on the importance given by an individual to tradition or one’s religiosity. Frequently, detached from worship, religious holidays are gradually turning into family celebrations and part of leisure time’. For Poles abroad, like migrants of all nationalities, celebrating holidays as they did in Poland is often an important way to remember their links with their homes in Poland and sometimes to ‘perform’ their Polish identity in the company of other Poles. For example, Izabela, a return migrant to Wrocław, described to me how her friends who were Jehovah’s Witnesses had met up in Dublin to share the Christmas wafer together – in this case, a Polish rather than a religious act, since she was not a Catholic. Wojtyńska (2011, 121) describes remote fishing villages in Iceland where joint celebrations of Christmas and Easter are important for Poles. Individualisation of family holidays is happening in Poland, but the process is more dynamic abroad, since opportunities and motivations for adding in non-Polish traditional elements are even greater, as is the possibility (and pressure from children) to celebrate additional, local holidays. Wojtyńska (2011, 123, 125) notes that Poles eat doughnuts on Tłusty Czwartek (Fat Thursday) but then have cream puffs with Icelanders on Bolludagur. She further quotes an interviewee who presented her migration to Iceland as a culinary escape: ‘In Poland one has to eat carp on Christmas. I hate it. It is not good. Here [in Iceland] I don’t even try to have fish. We can make our own menu and eat for example reindeer meat.’

Polish society, despite the imaginings of some priests, is obviously not an object that can be transferred to a new place and remain unchanged by its surroundings. Hence the most important questions seem to be how Polish culture in migration evolves alongside and within (for example) British or Icelandic society, and how this evolution relates to change in Poland. Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–20, 1984) explored the first part of this puzzle when they analysed Polish society in the United States before World War I. They saw the emergence of a hybrid ‘Polish-American society’ (240) which would gradually de-Polonise. Garapich’s monograph on

Many researchers, usually implicitly, seem to assume that it is the migrant status of Poles abroad that particularly shapes their lives in this hybrid world. By contrast, non-scholars, not having the benefit of comparable knowledge about non-Polish migrant groups, would probably most often point to the ethnic factor: Polish community life, in particular, is as it is because it is specifically ‘Polish’. For example, a culture of suspicion among Poles abroad, discussed in chapter 7, is regularly presented by stayers and migrants alike as something uniquely and painfully Polish. However, studies of Albanians (King et al. 2014), Colombians (Guarnizo, Sanchez and Roach 1999) and Romanians (Vicol 2017) suggest that some other migrant groups are equally suspicious of co-ethnics. If some migrant groups display more solidarity than others, this is connected to aspects of their migrant experience such as likelihood of encountering discrimination (Portes and Sessenbrenner 1993) or the socio-demographic cohesiveness of the population abroad (Guarnizo, Sanchez and Roach 1999).

The two identities, ethnic and migrant, need to be distinguished. It is the migrant identity that brings certain types of social change among migrant populations. One aspect of being a migrant, as discussed above, is freedom from social control, insofar as this takes place. Collectively, this results in what Thomas and Znaniecki termed ‘social disorganisation’: Poles in the United States were partly released from the social control of the Polish village, even while maintaining transnational ties to Poland. A second consequence is often downward social mobility and stigmatisation by the majority population, and sometimes also by earlier waves of co-ethnic migrants. A third consequence of being a migrant is the need to engage in a process of establishing status and identity vis-à-vis other co-ethnics abroad, both one’s own generation and other waves. Finally, being a migrant almost always involves renegotiating one’s individual sense of ethnic identity, so it becomes a dual identity, or even a form of hybridity that is more than the sum of its two parts.

To illustrate this last point, as argued throughout this book, migrants’ decisions are often informed by pragmatism rather than patriotism. This applies to eating habits, as to other spheres of life, such as parenting (Pustułka 2014). Polish migrants can choose to eat Polish or experiment with non-Polish food. Migrants, who tend to be busy people, often eat what is easiest. This consideration (which creates a hybrid Polish-non-Polish menu) overrides the ‘ethnic’ aspect of their eating patterns, as was illustrated in my interview with Judyta and Dariusz in Bristol in 2011:
**JUDYTA:** Mostly Polish. English sometimes too. I don’t go to Polish shops the whole time. And you can get Polish food in the ordinary supermarkets. I buy mostly English food.

**ANNE:** But there are families where it’s considered very important to eat Polish.

**DARIUSZ:** The important thing is to eat!

On a collective level, this is the merging of two societies that Garapich (2016c) describes. It is the hybrid, or ‘same but different’, quality, not just of individual Poles but also of Polish society abroad, that is most intriguing, particularly the attitudes, practices, informal institutions, and so forth, that characterise society in migration, even if many Poles living abroad are only faintly aware of some of these. Attitudes, practices and institutions develop over time, relating both to trends in Poland and to those in the receiving society. For example, it is not just the case that individual Polish women see different models of gender relations abroad; they also discuss these, face-to-face and on Internet forums (Siara 2009) while also being in touch with friends who may be adopting more partner-like approaches towards the division of household labour in Poland.

Cultural change brought about by migrants from the receiving to the sending country, or vice versa, can be hard to identify and track, particularly considering that Poland and countries such as the United Kingdom are already part of the same cultural space. This is considerably influenced, for example, by popular culture from the United States. As Wojtyńska (2011, 124) points out with reference to Poles in Iceland: ‘Many keep various linkages with their previous homes. Thus, they follow changes that are occurring in Poland and innovations. . . . Consequently, it is difficult to judge the source of influences, if they come from Iceland or Poland or maybe popular culture’ – which can be common to both. Similarly, Kusek (2015, 113) writes that:

Clubs, bars, and nightlife elitism is a particularly significant example of a lifestyle feature of Polish professional migrants. This indicates continuity in their behaviors between Poland and the UK. As the life of Polish elites in Poland becomes increasingly similar to that of global elites, similarly to shopping or golf, it is difficult to decide whether cool nightclubs and bars are significant for migrants due to their experience in the UK, or if they are also an extension of their life from Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan, or other large Polish cities.
Recent Polish migrants have also produced a copious literary output, so that Polish society in the United Kingdom, for example, has its own Polish migrant literature there; the same is true for other countries, such as Ireland and Germany (Kosmalska 2016; Kosmalska and Jarniewicz 2016; Pleške and Rostek 2013; Rostek and Uffelman 2011). The subject matter of much of this literature is life in transnational social space. The writers who produce this literature are a mix of return migrants, current migrants and non-Poles, and the literature falls within overlapping national traditions, as well as being located within the wider international genre of migrant fiction.

7. Institutions, organisations and networks: Evolving from diaspora to Polish society abroad

If society is envisaged as ‘happening’ across national borders, complete with income, class, gender, age and other social divisions and hierarchies, it becomes readily apparent why so-called diasporas do not display the solidarity they are supposed to. They are simply too plural, too diverse and too stratified. As mentioned in chapter 7, Poles tell sociologists that they are a predominantly divided society, with few unifying attributes. Hence it is unsurprising to find fault lines in Polish society abroad. However, this specifically Polish condition is exacerbated, as argued above, by the migrant situation. At the same time, co-ethnic migrants of any nationality often find themselves trying to collaborate, for emotional and practical reasons, although facing many difficulties along the way – as, for example, Gill (2010) details in his aptly titled article ‘Pathologies of Migrant Place-Making’.

Polish institutions in the United Kingdom, with which this section is mostly concerned, are impressively numerous. This is thanks largely to the hard work and sacrifice of Poles who arrived in the United Kingdom in the 1940s, founding churches, educational and professional organisations, clubs and social centres, scouts, dance troupes, retirement homes, charities and much else (Elgenius 2017; Lehr 2015; Sword 1996). It is also thanks to the efforts of more recent waves of migrants. Polish institutions are the envy of other CEE migrants living in Britain, who see Poles as being better organised. New formal Polish institutions include new businesses and media outlets (Garapich 2008) as well as the more traditional clubs and Saturday Schools. With regard to informal organisations and networks, Pustułka (2013, 113) distinguishes between those whose members meet face-to-face to pursue common interests; those that have
a purely online existence; and groups that organise one-off or cyclical events. Different institutions and organisations address the needs of different sections of Polish society, needs that to some extent overlap but that also come into conflict.

The adaptation of existing diaspora organisations and the creation of new ones are migrant endeavours and usually analysed as such. However, class and generation are also highly relevant, as Garapich (2016c) discusses in his warts-and-all portrait of Poles in London. Garapich (correspondingly with Kusek's findings, see above) suggests that organisations such as Polish Professionals or Polish City Club are deliberately elitist. Garapich (2016c, 303) quotes a member of Polish Professionals who asserted, ‘We want to be elite, we want to create elites.’ Other institutions, such as Saturday schools, are more inclusive, although the well-established schools faced challenges after 2004 in adjusting to catering mostly for children arriving straight from Poland (Praszałowicz et al. 2012). Voluntary work in Polish institutions also plays a role in re-establishing social status temporarily lost in migration. It can help educated but newly arrived Poles stuck in manual jobs to lead a parallel life as Saturday school teachers, for example, maintaining the middle-class status they enjoyed in Poland. In UK British society, they are at the bottom of the ladder. In UK Polish society, they are middle class.

Polish organisations also divide according to how important they consider integration with the wider British society. For example, trade unionists have to decide whether to make common cause with British workers. Dunin-Wąsowicz and Garapich (2016, 75) quote an activist – a proponent of ‘deep cosmopolitanism’ – who commented, ‘I once had the idea of founding such a union but it turned out to be a mistake because it is divisive, it can’t unite us. In every demonstration we take part as members of the GMB, a British union, because Brits have the same problems as we do.’

The raison d’être of traditional diaspora organisations was to be islands of Polish culture; for example, in Saturday school it is mandatory to speak Polish. Today there is a divide between Polish activists, worldwide, over their functions – as illustrated, for example, at the 2014 international conference of Saturday school teachers in Kraków. Are they still intended to preserve a cherished ‘Polish identity’, perceived as an identifiable object to be held or lost? Alternatively, are they expected to engage with the majority society and construct new forms of hybrid Polishness? In the United Kingdom, they are formally regular British institutions – supplementary schools like those teaching many other languages – and in this respect not ethnic ‘bubbles’. Some UK Saturday schools (though
my impression from reading websites is that they are in a minority) emphasise the school’s role in helping pupils and parents function equally well in Polish and British UK society, in other words developing their British alongside their Polish identities. The John Paul II School in Liverpool, for example, includes among its aims:

To promote Polish culture to broader public by participating in and organising cultural and social events aimed at integrating wider communities in Liverpool; To support existing and newly arrived Polish and bilingual children and their parents by providing them with the advice about British Education System, the Curriculum as well as other aspect of life in Britain.

Different opinions about Saturday school functions can reflect changing priorities of individual parents as they become more settled and their children grow up abroad. Teaching Polish to Polish children can be seen as fulfilling an emotional need to connect with Polish identity and perhaps also a patriotic duty towards the Polish nation, but it also has many practical functions, such as supporting bilingualism as an asset for future life in the United Kingdom; helping older children acquire additional GCSE and A-level qualifications, which will improve their overall life chances in the United Kingdom; or simply enabling children, especially younger children, to spend a morning with Polish friends.

Poles abroad to some extent also participate in social action focused on Polish events and causes, sometimes alongside non-Poles. The death of Pope John Paul II provoked extensive spontaneous demonstrations. Polish migrants occasionally mobilise around their own causes, as shown by mass protests in the United Kingdom against double taxation and for right-hand-drive cars to be registrable in Poland (Garapich 2016a, 106) or to preserve Polish language exams in UK schools. In 2015, the Polish Blood campaign to donate blood to the National Health Service highlighted Poles’ contribution to life in the United Kingdom, with the aim of countering anti-migrant propaganda in sections of the UK press and politics. Poles abroad also participate in Poland-based protest movements. Binnie and Klesse (2013, 1108–9), in their article about LGBT activism, use Tarrow’s (2005, 29) term ‘transnational activists’ to denote ‘people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts.’ In particular, in October 2016 demonstrations took place in London, as elsewhere outside Poland, to support the Black Monday women’s strike and demonstrations against the proposed tightening
of the abortion law. In July 2017, demonstrations throughout Poland defending the independence of the Supreme Court were complemented by rallies in front of Polish embassies across Europe – including non-Polish, pro-EU activists. The Committee for Defence of Democracy, KOD, a movement formed to represent a broad coalition of opposition to the Law and Justice government, has organised events in cities across Europe as well as North America and Australia (Karolewski 2016).

8. Conclusions

Many Poles in western Europe who arrived after 2004 are already fairly well-settled. The Polish-born population living abroad increasingly resembles a microcosm of Polish society in Poland, especially in countries like the United Kingdom, where it is not only demographically diverse but also socially stratified. Many migrants do not consider themselves to belong to a diaspora or ‘Polish community’ abroad, with its connotations of smallness, closeness and solidarity, although they are conscious of other Poles living around them, and use Polish media, services, and the like in the foreign country to a greater or lesser extent. (In some cases, they merely consider themselves occasional consumers of Polish services.) Poles with weaker foreign-language knowledge lead more Polish lives, which sometimes build on the tradition of the old diaspora organisations – for example, through Saturday schools – but often have nothing to do with them, and are thoroughly transnational.

Thanks to their (varied) transnational ties, Poles abroad often feel themselves part of Polish society in Poland, but each person has different ties to Poland and feels the connection differently, in different situations. Social change among Poles abroad and social change in Poland are linked, partly through social activism, but mostly through a more elusive process of resocialisation and mutual cultural influence, including the social remittances (senso stricto) that travel between the two societies, Polish society abroad and Polish society in Poland. At the same time, these often reinforce global/American popular cultural influences. The societies are also in a sense ‘complementary’. For example, Poles frequently express concern that the birth rate in Poland is low, and, since Poles come abroad partly because it is seen as a ‘normal’ place to start and support a family, one can see the high birth rate in the United Kingdom as a reaction to economic constraints on family size in Poland. According to the logic of ‘Polish society abroad’, it might even make sense to view births in the United Kingdom as contributing to the overall Polish birth rate (rather
than diminishing it, as discussed in Janta 2013, 86). However, this raises a further question mark, since it is rather hard to imagine what can happen to ‘Polish society abroad’ in the second generation, when ties to Poland may be weaker. This is a salutary reminder that mass EU mobility is a recent phenomenon, so any analysis, lacking the benefit of hindsight, must remain provisional.

Notes

1 Babiński and Praszałowicz (2016, 96–7) suggest that the term ‘Polonia’ should be reserved for Poles who self-identify as Polonia, which they believe would exclude most post-2004 migrants, as well as Poles stranded in countries such as Belarus and Ukraine as a result of Polish border changes in 1945.

2 The survey, in 2009–10, questioned over 3,500 Poles who had arrived within the last 18 months. They found that different countries attracted different types of migrant, from different parts of Poland.

3 Population about 50,000, north of Kraków.


5 According to GUS 2016 (460), among Poles temporarily resident for over six months abroad in other European countries in 2015 men outnumbered women everywhere except in Italy. On diversification, see Kowalska and Pelliccia (2012).


7 They were compared with respondents in the European Social Survey 2006–7 born after 1965 (Bardi 2009).

8 Discussion at Romanian Migration Workshop, UCL SSEES, 28 April 2017.


10 For a timeline showing the main London organisations founded 1939–2015, see Elgenius (2017, 264).

11 As of July 2016 there were currently at least 146 schools in the United Kingdom, located in all major towns (Polska-szkola.pl), including many which before 2004 had no Polish communities at all. Some of the following section draws on my observations as a volunteer teacher of English to Polish adults at Saturday schools in Bath, since the academic year 2008–9, when the first school was created.

12 For discussion of various campaigns, see Elgenius (2017, 270–1).