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“EITHER WE DEFEND OUR POLISHNESS OR THERE WILL BE NO *POLONIA*”. PRACTICES OF NEGOTIATING NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG THE POLISH DIASPORA MEMBERS IN CLEVELAND

Abstract. The article presents the findings of a pilot study on the ways of negotiating national identity within the Polish community (*Polonia*) in the American city of Cleveland. The study showed the complex ways of maintaining and building cultural boundaries (and thus constructing collective identity) by the Polish diaspora in the situation of unequal power relations with the host society, but also within *Polonia* itself. These practices are conducted not only in opposition to the American society but also to members of their ethnic group, as a result of which there are simultaneous processes of strengthening and weakening diasporic ties, including and excluding individual members and groups. These processes are being reinforced by the existence of multifaceted divisions within this community (generational, social class-based, spatial, and political), which shape its condition and the patterns of its members' participation.

Keywords: migration, diaspora, Polonia, Cleveland, national identity.

1. Introduction

One of the global consequences of mass migration is the formation of numerous diasporic communities. Due to the turbulent history of Poland, one of the world's largest diasporas is the Polish one with up to 20 million members. It includes emigrants after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 as well as descendants of Poles who voluntarily or forcibly left the country in the 19th and 20th centuries (Stefańska 2017). The largest group of Poles and people of Polish origin abroad, which accounts for around 9.7 million people, lives in the United

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States (MSZ 2015). The Polish diaspora in the U.S. (or *Polonia* as it is usually named) is a highly heterogeneous community with a diverse sense of connection with the ancestral country.

Constitutive features of the diaspora are the orientation to a real or imagined “homeland” as a source of identity and loyalty and preservation of own distinctiveness within the hosting society (Safran 1991; Brubaker 2005). Diaspora’s collective identity is defined by constantly sustained transnational contacts and identification with the country of origin. It is perceived as the “true home”, where one feels he/she most belongs, and an object of nostalgia and longing (King, Christou 2008). At the same time, the memory of the homeland, being one of the pillars of diasporic identity, is mythologised through narratives delivered by successive diasporic generations (Safran 1991). It is accompanied by various practices aimed at maintaining group distinctiveness in the host society. Defining cultural boundaries between “ours” (minority group) and “others” (majority group) allows immigrants to maintain a sense of community and conviction of their own specificity (Barth 1969).

How do these diasporic attributes refer to the scattered and numerous Polish community in the USA? What narratives of Polishness are being passed on to the next generations? What are their implications for *Polonia*’s identity negotiations? To answer these questions, in the following paper, I present the findings of a mixed-method pilot study on the practices of maintaining and constructing Polishness by *Polonia* in Cleveland, Ohio. The study was conducted within my Kościuszko Foundation fellowship at the Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, in autumn 2018.¹

2. Research problem and methodology

The goal of the presented research was twofold. First and foremost, it tackled the issue of interrelation between the American Poles’ intergenerational practices of maintaining Polishness and transformation of their identity. I attempted to examine what were the contents of the narratives on Polishness transmitted to subsequent *Polonia* generations and their implications for collective identity negotiations. Furthermore, how did these definitions of Polishness vary between those who migrated from Poland (so-called *immigrants*) and those already born in the USA (*ethnics*) (cf. Erdmans 1998)? And what other factors could have impacted the practices of maintaining Polish background?

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The issue of dynamics of identity work, which was the axis of the presented study, reflecting the vivid discussions within the social sciences that have lifted the identity problem from the marginal concept being used only to support other analyses to the central and autonomous subject of key importance in the description of the postmodern world (cf. Bauman 2004). At the time of fast changes of social, economic, and political orders, individuals are constantly obliged to redefine their own social identities. It is particularly essential in the situation of migration and living in a diaspora when an individual is forced to adapt to a new socio-cultural context. These challenges raise a question about the process of identity negotiations of those who are targeted towards a mythologised homeland that is a source of emotion, common symbols, family narratives, or language, or, on the contrary, those who treat it as a repertoire of instrumental tools to be utilised when needed (cf. Gońda 2017).

Second, I explored the *Polonia*'s reception of Poland's diaspora policy. Diaspora is generally understood as all people with common ethnic roots living outside of a country of origin as a result of voluntary or forced emigration (or other reasons, e.g. change of borders) and whose identity is shaped by relation to this country (Cohen 1997). This understanding prevails in anthropology, sociology, geography, and history. However, I understand the diaspora as a dynamic category rather than a fixed social entity, following Brubaker's (2005) concept which highlights the capacity of this group to make claims, formulate expectations, and mobilise its members towards both the country of current stay and the country of origin. Similarly, the relations of diaspora and state of origin are seen in a processual and contextual perspectives (changing in time and influenced by complex conditions). It means I consider the diaspora not only as a subject of state policy but also as an active player in the political scene (Vertovec 2005). Despite diaspora policies remaining state driven, the diaspora's impact on relations with the country of origin increases due to the growing economic and political potential of populations abroad. Following this assumption, within these bilateral relations, both parties have an impact on their direction and content.

Consequently, my analyses attempted to confront the existing theories of diaspora with the situation of the examined group. Particular attention was given to the reconstruction of the activities conducted by the Polish community in Cleveland. I attempted to answer the question what is the role of the Polish authorities in maintaining Polishness in America? And how the *Polonia* is reformulating the expectations that are being delivered by the Polish state?

To analyse the American Poles' practice of negotiating collective identity, it was necessary to study both the individual perspective of diaspora members (their biographical experiences) and the macrostructural context (activities of the Polish state and diasporic organizations). In detail, the study investigated individual's determinants (e.g. socio-cultural capital, role of family and local community) as well as the institutional practices of diasporic organizations and the Polish state (e.g. driven

by national ideologies and shifts of diaspora policy) of maintaining and building Polishness. A number of research methods were applied to achieve these goals.

I conducted desktop research on the history and present situation of *Polonia* in the United States, with a major focus on Cleveland area. I also focused on Poland's diaspora policy and migration flows between Poland and the USA. Since data on migration flows is scattered, attention was given to both Polish (GUS 2018) and American registers (*Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* 2018). The Polish institutions in Cleveland were also a reliable source of information in this respect. That contextual information was then confronted with 16 autobiographical narrative interviews (cf. Schütze 1987) delivered by two distinct groups of Poles: those born in Poland who personally experienced it (*immigrants*) and those born in America that had only a remote images of the ancestors' the country (*ethnics*). Each group comprised of eight interviewees of different migration history and socio-economic characteristics. Among *immigrants* (hereinafter named as *the 1st generation of immigrants*) there were those who moved with parents to the U.S. after the end of WW2 (from camps for displaced people in Western Europe), people rejoining their families in America in the 1970s, political emigrants of "Solidarity" (*Solidarność*) in 1980s as well as recent labour immigrants of 2000s and 2010s. To the interviewed *ethnics* born in U.S. belonged members of the 2nd and 3rd generation of people of Polish descent who, interestingly, stem from purely Polish families of Polish parents or grandparents. The youngest interviewee was 22 (3rd generation) and the oldest was 75 (1st generation). The interviews were collected using snowballing sampling. This bottom-up approach enabled me to reproduce the traces of intergenerational and transnational transmission of Polishness in the diaspora as well as the impact of particular socio-cultural, economic, or political conditions on the transformations of individual identities in a possibly broad temporal perspective (cf. Breckner 2007; Gońda 2017).

Moreover, I also conducted eight in-depth interviews with the key members of Cleveland's *Polonia* so that the institutional aspect of diaspora activities was analysed. They were interviewed about the reception of Poland's policy towards Polish community in America. Finally, these research steps were followed by intensive participant observation of Polish institutions in Slavic Villages, i.e., a traditional Slavic/Polish neighbourhoods in Cleveland. The list of investigated entities included the Polish-American Cultural Centre, the Union of Poles, the Polonia Foundation, the St Stanislaus church and the Polish Veterans Club.

3. Why is it important to study *Polonia* in Cleveland?

This exploratory study seems of high importance as the issue of biographical aspects of Polish migration to America is rarely present in today's analyses. There is a long-lasting tradition of research in this domain (just to mention the classic

book of W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* from 1918–1920) but not explored further in recent decades. Few publications on the *Polonia's* identity changes were also written in the 1980s (e.g. Mostwin 1985; Paleczny 1989) using other analytical perspectives, but since then no other major studies were noted. Despite there is still a quite big outflow of the Poles to the USA and it is the second most frequently chosen migration destination after the EU (GUS 2018: 430), we can also notice the declining interests of researchers in the American Poles (both in Poland and the USA) after many studies conducted in 1970–1990s (e.g. Morawska 1977; Kubiak et al. 1988; Rokicki 1992). Scholars in Poland are rather interested in a massive outflows to other EU countries (and a recent growing inflows from the East), whereas their American colleagues are mostly focused on immigration from Latin America (Fiń 2014). Those Polish scholars who continue their work on *Polonia* are concerned with labour migration from Poland to America (e.g. Iglicka 2008), the *Polonia's* relations with other ethnic groups (e.g. Praszalowicz 1999; Babiński 2009; Sosnowska 2012; Fiń 2013), integration of the Poles with the hosting American society (e.g. Mucha 1996; Morawska 2004) or socio-demographic aspects of the Poles settlement (e.g. Sosnowska 2012; Fiń 2014).

The Polish community in Cleveland, Ohio, is not present in contemporary analyses either. In contrast to the well-described *Polonia* in New York or Chicago (e.g. Erdmans 1998; Sakson 2007; Sosnowska 2016), the Poles in Cleveland have not been studied since the early 1990s and Adam Walaszek's (1994) book on Polish immigration in 1880–1930. Even earlier, in the mid-1970s, John J. Grabowski et al. (1975) made a comprehensive historical study of this community. Interestingly, the Poles in Ohio are quite numerous, being the ninth largest group of *Polonia* (4.6% of all Poles in America) (Fiń 2014). Since I planned to study the mechanisms of identity transformations, I did not have ambitions to generalise results to the whole *Polonia's* population. Thus this “average” community that remains at the outskirts of the “main” Polish life centres in the USA seemed to be an appropriate group to reconstruct “ordinary” practices of maintaining Polishness.

In the chapters below, I will reconstruct a variety of practices of maintaining and constructing Polish identity among *Polonia* in Cleveland. There are also different patterns of participation in this community's activities as well as expectations towards other diaspora members' involvement. Furthermore, there are multiple divisions in this community that frame its cooperation capacities both within the *Polonia* itself and with the American society.

4. Practices of maintaining and constructing Polishness

Michał Nowosielski in his study (2016: 93–109) on the Polish minority in Germany noted that the main areas of Polish diasporic organizations are: 1) contributing to the improvement of relations between the country of settlement and Poland, 2) promotion of Poland (mainly its culture and art) in the host society, 3) maintaining Polish culture in the host society, 4) education (mainly of children and youth), 5) representing the interests of Poles in the host country's public institutions, 6) helping and advising immigrants from Poland, and 7) charity. Since the Polish community in Cleveland is located at the outskirts of the main *Polonia* groupings (in Chicago and New York), it does not impact much Polish-U.S. relations (area 1). Immigration from Poland to Cleveland is nowadays marginal and therefore not much support and advice services for the newcomers are required (areas 5–6). On the other hand, despite *Polonia* in Cleveland does not have a strong institutional background, the members' main effort is to maintain Polish culture (area 3), mostly through the education of younger generations (area 4) and different promotional activities on a local level (area 2) as well as fundraising events (area 7). In the chapters below, I will try to reconstruct these activities.

Polish community in Cleveland conducts various practices of maintaining and constructing Polishness. This applies primarily to the first generation of immigrants from Poland who, having potentially the highest cultural competences, try to both maintain contact with Poland and promote Polish heritage in the new environment. The main concern in this respect is teaching the Polish language and providing broad access to Polish culture, which are seen as the only available substitute of the distant homeland. As one of the interviewees (female, 62 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) explained:

Why am I involved in all those activities for Polonia? It is because of the longing for Poland, the language, and Częstochowa. Everything we do, all festivals, dance competitions, Sunday schools, trips to Poland are just a kind of substitute. At least that has how we can taste Poland.

Another interviewee (male, 63 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) pointed to a specific obligation of intergenerational transmission of Polish heritage in diaspora. He noted that his family's efforts to maintain contact with the ancestral culture were unpragmatic, as in a new country one should adapt quickly to the dominant culture, but they resulted from an internal needs to raise children with the awareness of their Polish background:

From the very beginning I persuaded my children to learn Polish. The first son was born in Poland and the second one here in the U.S., and they both speak Polish fluently. It is not about being pragmatic, I learned English after a few years, so we could use English at home now and it would be easier for them. It is about our culture, transmitting culture and language. I cannot do it other ways.

In order a diaspora could endure in a dominant culture, its institutions' activities are mostly aimed at those members who are already settled and well-integrated with the host society. Those who arrived to a new country recently are those to propel that cultural transmission rather than its addressees (Nowosielski 2016: 110). Thus, both the individual and institutional efforts of *Polonia* in Cleveland to acquaint its members with Polish roots are mostly directed at the youngest diasporic generations and all of those who, following Ewa Nowicka's (2000) concept of different modes of Polishness in the post-Soviet area, have some sentimental feelings towards the ancestral country (i.e. lack of language and cultural competences but a clear consciousness of Polish origins and the pride of Polish ancestors). There are four Polish schools delivering lectures during weekends in the Cleveland agglomeration. Local fundraising and charity institutions award students of Polish origin with scholarships to cofinance high, after all, tuition fees at American universities. Thanks to several agreements with Polish educational institutions, both young kids and university students have a chance to visit Poland, spend summer holidays, or take part in exchange study programs there. Several festivals, concerts, and knowledge contests about Poland are also held on a regular basis. As noted by one interviewee (male, 28 years old, 3rd generation of immigrants):

At home we didn't talk in Polish much. However, participating in these dance contests, common singing of Polish folk songs, or going to church each Sunday enabled me to get to know Poland better. When I was 5 or 7 years old, I didn't understand why I had to wear all these strange suits or recite some poems I didn't understand. However, now I'm very thankful for my mom, she forced me to do it. Later on learning Polish was quite easy and I could go to Krakow for summer language camp. And thanks to that, now I can contribute for Polonia.

Two institutions play a key role in the integration of the Polish community in Cleveland: the Saint Stanislaus church and the Polish-American Cultural Center (PACC). The first one, although it is one of the few “Polish parishes” in the Cleveland agglomeration, has the largest number of believers (around 1100 families) who come to Sunday masses from even distant places. The community gathered around the parish is actively involved in the educational, integrating, and promotional activities of the local *Polonia*. The aforementioned PACC has a similar function. Despite it is one of the youngest Polish organizations in the area (it was established in the mid-1990s), it turned out to be the largest one and acts as an informal umbrella organization for other Polish entities. An important integration factor are Sunday lunches and other occasional events (concerts, lectures, exhibitions) that that are organised there for the Polish community. There is also a Polish history museum in the Center's premises.

The interviewees also emphasised the importance of these institutions also for discovering Polish roots. One woman (22 years old, 3rd generation of immigrants) indicated that she had studied her Polish background thanks to the people gathered around the Saint Stanislaus parish:

I started coming here to church and I met Reverent R., who asked me if I wanted to help organise the Saint Stanislaus Festival, which was a purely Polish event with costumes of Krakowiaks, dumplings, sausages, etc. And then I just got involved. I asked my parents about my family history but could not say much so I started doing it myself. I learned Polish in a Sunday school, I went to Poland for a language camp, and now I am helping to organise a gala on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of independence...

The local “Polish parish” as an institution where one can look for undiscovered family history was also mentioned by another interviewee (male, 54 years old, 3rd generation of immigrants):

I can barely remember my grandmother saying strange words that I could not understand. The issue of Poland was not present at our home. However, then I started thinking about my last name, which none of my classmates or teachers could pronounce. Therefore I came here to church to learn more about my family. And here I met my wife, who came from Poland in the late 1990s. And from that time on I started learning Polish and discovering my Polish roots.

The Saint Stanislaus church and PACC are located in Slavic Village, a traditional Slavic district, where Poles, Czechs, Ukrainians, or Slovenes started to settle at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (cf. Grabowski et al. 1975; Walaszek 1994). As a result of the post-war collapse of the steel and heavy industries, which previously attracted immigrants from all over Europe, as well as the dynamically progressing suburbanization of Cleveland, Slavic Village has impoverished in recent decades. Despite currently only a small numbers of Poles (and other Slavs) live there, it still remains the center of Polish community life. The local *Polonia* members run a radio and a newspaper. There are also restaurants and groceries with Polish goods, the heyday seems to be over although. The remains of the former Polish presence can be also observed on inscriptions left on abandoned houses, shop windows, and services.

5. Patterns of diaspora involvement

The Polish traces are also visible in Cleveland public spaces. Polish *pierogies* (dumplings) are considered a local delicacy, available in restaurants or during American football games. What is more, the popularity of the *Cleveland Dyngus Day* organised on Easter Monday is growing year by year. That street party started in Buffalo in the 1960s and then spread to many cities in the Eastern part of the U.S. Just like on the Irish St. Patrick’s Day, people march with banners praising beer, dumplings and sausages, accompanied by a *polka* (wrongly associated with Poland) and *disco polo*. Interestingly, this festivity gathers not only Poles and people of Polish ancestry, but also other Clevelanders. The Dyngus Day and other “invented traditions” (cf. Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983) raise big controversies in the Polish community, though. Some consider them caricatures of Polish culture, which only perpetuate the negative images of Poles in American society. Others,

like one of the interviewees (male, 65 years old, 1st generation of immigrants), are of the opposite opinion and claim, in a simplifying comment, that:

Americans don't have a long history, so they like ethnic festivals when they can learn a bit of history, have a beer and dance. We do not have a new Chopin. What else could we promote? This is the only way to show this Polish culture.

Several other meetings and festivals on the occasion of major Catholic or national holidays, such as Easter, Christmas, or Polish Independence Day on November 11 are also organised. They are aimed not only at familiarizing the youngest *Polonia* generations with the ancestral country but also at collective demonstrating of Polish affinity and heritage with the American environment. Interestingly, similar practices have been also observed among Poles living in London (Rabikowska 2010). A good example was the great gala to commemorate 100 years of Poland's independence in the Cleveland State University in 2018 that gathered hundreds of *Polonia* members and other locals. As noted by several interviewees, such events contribute to already observed positive changes of *Polonia's* image in the American society. One of them (male, 75 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) explained that:

*When I arrived in the U.S. in 1970s, Polish people were associated with drunkards or dumb construction site workers. You could spot so-called Polish jokes in every magazine or TV series. However, then there was Solidarity movement, Wałęsa, better educated people started to arrive and Americans stopped laughing at us. And at the same time, all these *Polonia's* groups and institutions also opened to people, not only to Poles but also to Americans, so that they could understand us better.*

Positive outcomes of that process were experienced a few decades later, when another interviewee (female, 35 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) arrived in Cleveland and, as she declared, “I've never been discriminated or insulted because of being Polish”. She was very critical of racial inequalities in the American society and further explained how *Polonia* managed to escape from the underprivileged positions:

You could say American society is an immigrant society, but Americans always had someone to mock and humiliate. First there were Indians, then Irish, then Italians, then Polish, now Mexicans. I wouldn't say that I'm discriminated now. I would even say that it is a privilege to be Polish because you are white. Just go to the store and see how White and Black people are being treated here...

Whatever the reasons for that advancement of Poles in multicultural American society were, the general opinion is that *Polonia* has done recently much to improve its unfavourable image among Americans. However, new challenges for the existence of *Polonia* in Cleveland have emerged. The main concern of its leaders are the shrinking Polish community and, as a consequence, lower engagement in its organizations' work. It is natural as the inflow from

Poland is smaller and conditions of immigration have changed. The first minority institutions established by Poles in America were fraternal organizations, like Polish National Alliance, that were focused on providing its members different forms of social activity and protection, mostly health insurance and social benefits (the membership requirement was to buy an insurance policy) (cf. Pienkos 2004). Nowadays, the need for fraternal support decreased with the stabilization of migration (lower number of newcomers) and greater offer of insurance programs on the market. However, for the interviewed *Polonia* members, the most symbolic indication of those negative tendencies would be not only the lack of “young blood” and, thus, decreased presence of Polish entities in public sphere, but the high number of closed churches. As evidenced by one of the interviewees, there are currently eight “Polish parishes” in the Cleveland diocese, whereas at least another 13 parishes were closed in the last decade.

Interviewees are also arguing about the overall low interest and involvement of American Poles in *Polonia* matters. Most activities are based on voluntary work of few (mostly older) community members. The commitment of the PACC members in this domain was emphasised by one of the interviewed women (35 years old, 1st generation of immigrants):

It can be said that the Polish diaspora is very conservative and that it concerns only the elderly. It is true. And it can be criticised. However, when you take a closer look, you can see how much they are doing with such limited possibilities. There is no support from the city or from Poland. Everything is based on donations and daily volunteering. When you come from Poland, you are surprised to see how much they have done.

However, such low engagement of diaspora members should not be surprising again. As many studies show, most Poles living abroad do not show interest in the problems of the Polish community in their countries of settlement. Polish institutions there represent only a part of the diaspora, most often the “traditional” (or, as in this case, “older”) one that originates from earlier waves of emigration in North America (or Western Europe). Furthermore, during the last decades the structure of the Polish diaspora has changed, which is now dominated by relatively well-educated people, focused more on professional advancement and quick integration with the host societies rather than on involvement in the diaspora issues or in the ancestral country. They prefer informal ways of self-organization, which are primarily used to solve “ordinary” problems (Garapich 2014).

6. Intragroup divisions

Several interviewees also argued that the reason for the low interest and engagement of Poles in diaspora matters is the fact that *Polonia* in Cleveland is scattered and divided. As noted by one of them (female, 62 years old, 1st generation of immigrants):

We are trying to help the Polish community maintain or establish their children's attachment to Poland. Second or third generations do not pay attention to their children education, so we, the first generation who came from Poland, need to do everything that is possible to bring them to our school. However, there are some people that do not like that, we have so many learners. Poles like to be successful, but they do not like other people to be successful.

Another interviewee (female, 54 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) also referred to stereotypical features of Poles such as being quarrelsome and fractious, being jealous of other's successes or unpredictability so that cooperation within this community is difficult, if not impossible:

I don't attend these festivals and other events organised in the Slavic Villages. Once we went there for the New Year's Eve, people were so drunk there was a fight... There is no cooperation but only a few small groups that think they are important. There is a big jealousy and envy. It's better to avoid contact with Poles here. You know, the Pole is the enemy of another Pole.

The study revealed then the complex practices of maintaining and building the distinctiveness (cultural boundaries) of the Polish community in Cleveland from the host American society. Interestingly, similar mechanisms also occur within the diaspora itself, as a result of which there are simultaneous processes of strengthening and weakening diasporic ties, including and excluding particular individuals and groups. The production of internal “others” seems to result from the multifaceted divisions within this community that shape its conditions and the patterns of participation of its members (cf. Garapich 2014).

6.1. Generational divisions

First, there are clear generational differences. Many scholars examined tensions within American *Polonia* between particular waves of Polish immigration to the U.S., for instance early 20th century immigration vs. post-war immigration (cf. Blejwas 1981) or post-war immigrants vs. “Solidarity” immigrant cohort (cf. Erdmans 1998; Wojdon 2018). In the studied group, the division between *immigrants* and *ethnics* also refers to different ways of maintaining their Polishness. Whereas the first generation migrants, i.e., those who were born in Poland, attempt to intermediate between Poland and U.S. and to transmit Polish language and contemporary culture, the Americans of Polish descent either cultivate more traditional and conservative elements of Polish heritage or, on the other hand, contribute to the development of new cultural practices, like the mentioned Dyngus Day.

What further differentiates this community is the level of particular generations' involvement in diaspora matters. As emphasised by the interviewees, the first generation of immigrants are most devoted to working for the Polish diaspora. Activization of people already born in the USA is more difficult and therefore, as it was indicated above, the efforts of diasporic organizations are

directed primarily at *ethnics*. Moreover, the most active members are the elderly, regardless of whether they are the first, second, or third generation of immigrants). One of the interviewees (female, 35 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) tried to explain it:

They are mostly retirees who are looking for a purpose in life. And they find it in these organizations. That would be fine, it is nice they work for Polish community, but the problem is that they do not want to hand over power to the younger ones. There are a few younger ones, but their ideas are being immediately restrained because they are not so patriotic or simply understandable to the donors. Thus they meet and integrate, but in closed groups. Therefore we have either Chopin concerts or Weekend [Polish disco polo band]. There's nothing in between. This way they won't encourage young ones to work for Polonia...

Another interviewee (male, 28 years old, 3rd generation of immigrants) followed the same argumentation and claimed that “*Polonia* institutions do not have anything attractive to offer younger generations. Those older members are only making own businesses there”. A representative of one of *Polonia* institutions (male, 67 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) opposed, however, those allegations and underlined that the expectations of younger Polish community members towards its leaders were groundless:

This issue [of the involvement of young Polonia] returns every single year. They are complaining but whenever there is an opportunity, they do nothing. We agreed they could do whatever they want and they did nothing. We organised a barbecue and only our regular members came. Those complains are eternal and still Polonia lasts...

Other organization's representative (male, 33 years old, 2nd generation of immigrants) even accused her peers, i.e. people in their 20s or 30s, of the same bad motivations that the current (older) leaders are supposed to have:

The young ones pop up only when they can get some profit out of participation in some events. Thus, there are so many students that are interested in scholarships for summer language camps in Poland and not so many when we are organizing some exhibition or concert and you need to distribute tickets or clean our hall.

These contradictory attitudes result in a big generational gap within the community. Whereas “older” community members tend to use existing *Polonia* institutions for integrating purposes, the “young” ones, mostly those who moved to Cleveland recently, either meet in closed and private circles (e.g. house parties) or withdraw from the community at all. Intergenerational divisions have been observed also in other Polish diasporic groups, for instance, in England (cf. Garapich 2016). Agnieszka Bielewska (2011: 92) noted that post-war migrants in Manchester take an opportunity to collectively demonstrate Polishness during Sunday masses, local festivals, and other holidays, whereas younger generation (post-accession migrants) raters tend to limit their activities to their own Polish networks of family members and friends, and express, if any, their attachment to Poland through consumer behaviours like buying Polish products.

6.2. Social class divisions

Second, there are strong social class divisions within the community. Despite the myth of “Promised Land” that still prevails, the U.S. do not always guarantee quick social advancement as one may expect. As a result, the existing social class hierarchies in Poland are being transferred (reproduced) to new American circumstances. It clearly reflects in the activities of Polish organizations in Cleveland that include mainly representatives of the middle and upper classes (irrespective the generation they belong to). At the same time blue-collar workers and people doing simpler jobs, including those who moved to Cleveland in recent decades, either do not find interest in the cultural offers of Polish organizations or do not feel welcomed there. As one of the interviewees (female, 42 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) explained:

I work in houses [I do cleaning services], so these organizations are not for me. There is an elite out there. They don't talk to people like me.

Other interviewees (female, 54 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) emphasised that *Polonia* institutions were highly inbred with the leaders deliberately restricting access to the less privileged (less affluent) or younger ones. She even argued that the main goal of these institutions was to promote its (older) leaders and provide a space for business networking rather than to work for the community and maintain contacts with Poland. Another vivid example of *Polonia* leaders' symbolic power is extensive titlature and ceremonial. In the above mentioned interviewee's argumentation, *Polonia* institutions lost their primary goals that were to protect and advise migrants in a new (possibly hostile) surroundings:

These Polonia organizations are made only for their members, not for the whole Polish community. It is all about networking, making business in those closed cliques and giving new titles and medals to each other every single event is being organised.

Interestingly, similar social class tensions have been observed by other scholars (cf. Bielewska 2011; Garapich 2016) who studied national identity changes among the next Polish migration waves in the UK. Michał P. Garapich (2016: 245) has even pointed to a “discursive hostility” of postaccession migrants towards their co-ethnics. They tend to use the rhetoric of mistrust towards more generalised “Poles” living in the UK as being troublesome, but at the same time they accept Polish friends and make use of Polish networks as a source of capital (for instance to ease their settlement in the new society). Such ambivalent attitudes are not so present among *Polonia* in Cleveland as the inflow of Poles there was not so dynamic but more extended in time. The social class positioning remains, however, crucial for power relations in this community.

6.3. Spatial divisions

Third, there are also clear spatial divisions as a result of advanced suburbanization processes. Unlike in the early stages of every migration, when migrants normally tend to settle in close proximity to diasporic institutions and their co-ethnics (cf. Massey et al. 1994), nowadays the studied *Polonia* members are spread around the whole Cleveland agglomeration. Most of Poles moved in the last decades from the impoverished and seemingly dangerous Slavic Villages to richer suburbs. Changing a relatively homogenous neighbourhood into more diverse districts resulted also in a decreasing number of endogamic (Polish) couples (cf. Grabowski et al. 1975) and, thus, contributed to smoother integration with the host society. Despite only a small numbers of Poles remaining there, various efforts, as it was mentioned above, are being made to make this district again a real center of the Polish community's cultural life.

6.4. Political divisions

Finally, the polarization of the Polish political scene is also much reflected in the Polish community. It overlaps with the generational divisions (liberal younger generation vs. conservative older generation). As noted by Magdalena Lesińska (2018: 115), the results of the last few presidential and parliamentary elections showed that Poles living in the U.S. (and Canada) overwhelmingly had voted for right-wing parties and candidates (mostly ruling party Law and Justice), whereas the voting preferences of Polish citizens in the EU countries had changed into more central and liberal (mostly Civic Platform). These contradictory voting results could be explained, as Lesińska argues, by the different profiles of Polish population in Northern America and Europe related to the cause and time of emigration (younger and better educated people leaving Poland after accession to the EU) and region of origin (traditional emigration channels from more conservative South-Eastern provinces of Poland to America).

One of the younger *Polonia* members (female, 35 years old, 1st generation of immigrants), who personally supports left-wing parties in Poland, deconstructed the political views of *Polonia's* leaders in Cleveland and the dominant political preferences in American diaspora:

We know what political options Polonia leaders are in favor of. We know why they are inviting Mrs. S. and Mr. A. [prominent far-right politicians] from Poland. And it is not even about the fact that some people here do not want to see them later, but that you have to apologise to Jews or Ukrainians for some strange insinuations they made during their speeches.

On the other hand, one of "old" *Polonia* leaders (male, 67 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) saw young *Polonia* members as opponents who should have not been given power as their assumed liberal political stance was "against Polish tradition and interests". As he further explained:

We are not against those young people and their ideas. We will give them access to our premises to the radio, newspaper. Some financial support could be also offered. And we will let them work. However, it is not in our interest, it is not in the interest of the Polish community to cooperate with anyone who belonged to the previous ruling party [PO – Civic Platform] and we will not invite them here.

Interestingly, on the occasion of organizing important celebrations (such as the above mentioned gala for the 100th anniversary of Polish independence), *Polonia* members are able to “cover up” existing divisions and to cooperate. These divisions are strongly present in their daily works once the undertaken actions are not so “significant”. The most striking examples that were mentioned by the interviewees were two separate 3rd May (Constitution Day) parades organised in different parts of the city by the Polish National Alliance members and the Polish community from the Slavic Villages. Four different Sunday schools with very similar study offers were also perceived as “a senseless loss of human capacity that we do not have much in *Polonia*” (male, 65 years old, 1st generation of immigrants).

7. No bright future for *Polonia* in Cleveland

In these difficult circumstances, *Polonia* members in Cleveland are oriented to endure rather than develop an own community. America is no longer the “Promised Land” for Poles and those who continue to emigrate to the U.S. are likely to choose New York or Chicago over Cleveland. Although among Clevelanders Poles there are many people who devote every moment to *Polonia*, they are aware that when there is no inflow of “new blood” its future is at stake (cf. Orzechowski 1996). Such negative prospects are being detected by all community members, regardless of the length of their stay or the level of involvement in *Polonia*’s matters. One interviewee (male, 67 years old, 1st generation immigrant) called for “defending” the Polishness:

*Well, the future is not bright. America is no longer a migration destination for Poles. Those who are already here are not much into working for the community. Slavic Village changed its Polish character once people moved to the suburbs 20 years ago. That is how it is. It is an irreversible process. Therefore either we defend our Polishness that we brought here from Poland or there will be no *Polonia* we remember...*

What needs to be emphasised, that the postulate to “defend” Polishness (that is also mentioned in the title of this paper) is supported mostly by elder, conservative, and tradition-oriented *Polonia* members and refer primarily to those cultural practices that were transferred from the ancestral country. This exclusivist approach contrasts, however, with the attitudes of those who, despite being also worried of the future presence of Poles in Cleveland, affirm, or at least do not oppose, more diverse modes of Polishness. They do not see the transformation

of Polish identity under the influence of dominant American culture as a threat but, as explained by one of the interviewees (male, 67 years old, 1st generation immigrants), “natural, irreversible process that enriches us”. Thus, since various efforts to “defend” own distinctiveness of *Polonia* in Cleveland were insufficient so far, some of the interviewees argued for external support in this matter. For instance, one of them (female, 35 years old, 1st generation of immigrants) underlined:

In 20 years there will be no Polish diaspora. Those who run Polish organizations will die and there will be no one to take them over. These leaders should anticipate this and begin to hand over some of their authority to the younger ones, but they are unable to do so... I am thinking now that without some outside intervention from the PNA [Polish National Alliance] or even from Poland, this situation will worsen.

Interestingly, besides a few younger community members, most of the interviewees do not have any expectations as to eventual support from the Polish state. Sustaining some contacts with schools and other cultural institutions in Poland so that they can continue visits and language courses, there are seen as sufficient cooperation. Polish community’s leaders are not aware of the Polish Senate’s programs for *Polonia* or other financial resources and organizational assistance from non-governmental institutions. The Cleveland City Council does not offer any financial support either. Their activities are financed from donations and voluntary work so that, as noted by one of *Polonia*’s leaders (male, 67 years old, 1st generation immigrant), “we cover all our expenses and we remain financially and organizationally independent”. Such policy raises, however, some doubts of the other members (male, 65 years old, 1st generation immigrants) who argued that:

Money is not such a problem as in Polonia we do have some affluent donors who support us. The problem is that these organizations are in decay. Some new ideas, new people, and organizational support could revive them a bit. However, they do not want any assistance from Poland as this kind of assistance is followed by audits and different evaluation measures. And they don’t want anyone to check how and what are they doing...

Mistrust as to the real intentions of the Polish community leaders on the one hand, and, on the other, opposing ideas concerning the way of maintaining Polishness in the diaspora contribute to deepening the already existing divisions. In such conditions, the call to “defend” Polishness might not be responded by many *Polonia* members.

8. Summary

Lack of optimism about the future of *Polonia* in Cleveland among its members, stemming from objective demographic factors, is exacerbated by the multiple divisions within the community. Generational tensions appear as there

are opposite ideas and practices of maintaining Polishness in exile as well as different concepts as to the involvement of particular generations in diaspora matters. Social class differences transmitted from Poland are being reproduced in new American circumstances. Spatial dispersion as a result of suburbanisation processes in Cleveland area contributes to better integration with the hosting society but deepens the decline of traditional Polish settling in Slavic Villages. Finally, growing political antagonisms within the community make cooperation and broader participation in diaspora activities difficult. The observed tendencies impact practices of negotiating collective identity and maintaining cultural boundaries in the dominant American society. The mechanisms of creating divisions between “ours” and “others” that the diaspora normally implements to maintain distinctiveness from the host society also occur within the Polish community itself. Thus, similarly to the discursive practices observed both in Poland and other Polish diaspora locations, a constant process of including and excluding particular individuals and groups occurs.

It seems that it will be highly demanding to continue the long presence (now for over a century) of Poles in Cleveland area without new measures to reduce the existing internal tensions and to open wider to external collaboration. The functioning of Polish organizations in Cleveland is based on voluntary work and – typically in the American third sector – financial support from various private donors. However, these sources are slowly running out. The solution could be therefore to deepen cooperation with the best organized and largest Polish communities in Chicago or New York as well as broader organizational support from the Polish authorities in Warsaw.

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**„ALBO BĘDZIEMY BRONIĆ SWOJEJ POLSKOŚCI, ALBO NIE
BĘDZIE POLONII”. PRAKTYKI NEGOCJOWANIA TOŻSAMOŚCI
NARODOWEJ WŚRÓD POLSKIEJ DIASPORY W CLEVELAND**

Abstrakt. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania pilotażowego dotyczącego sposobów negocjowania tożsamości narodowej przez członków polskiej społeczności (Polonii) w amerykańskim Cleveland. Ujawniło ono złożone sposoby podtrzymywania i wyznaczania granic kulturowych (a zatem i konstruowania tożsamości zbiorowej) przez Polonię w sytuacji nierównych relacji władzy wobec społeczeństwa przyjmującego, ale i w łonie samej diaspory. Praktyki te realizowane są nie tylko w kontrze do społeczeństwa amerykańskiego, lecz także członków własnej grupy etnicznej, wskutek czego zachodzą jednoczesne procesy wzmocnienia i osłabiania więzi diasporycznych, włączania i wykluczania poszczególnych jednostek i grup. Procesy te potęgowane są przez istnienie wielopłaszczyznowych podziałów wewnątrz tej społeczności (pokoleniowych, klasowych, przestrzennych i politycznych), które kształtują jej kondycję i wzorce uczestnictwa członków.

Słowa kluczowe: migracje, diaspora, Polonia, Cleveland, tożsamość narodowa.