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Openness or Prejudice?: Students' Attitudes to Refugees in Poland

Abstract. This paper aims to present a study into student teachers' and social workers' attitudes towards refugees in Poland. Based upon survey data, it explores three categories of respondents' attitudes towards refugees in Poland: 'positive,' 'ambivalent,' and 'negative'. Overall, the findings of this study reveal a very worrying trend – almost half of the participants (46%) demonstrated a negative position on accepting refugees into the country, indicating that they believe refugees possess a threat for both society as a whole and their own personal security. This paper concludes that teacher preparation and professional development are essential building blocks in developing more positive attitudes not only towards refugees, but also other minority social groups in Poland.

Keywords: student teachers, social workers, refugees, attitudes towards refugees, migration crisis

Introduction and Background

The phenomenon of mass immigration has been present in Poland for over a century and, in recent decades, has grown to the scale we know nowadays. In 2019, the Office for Foreigners reported that the number of asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) applying for asylum status in Poland was 4,096. Of those, 135 people were granted asylum (i.e. less than 0.1% of the country's total population) (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019). These are people who need to flee from their homelands out of fear for their lives and their families' security, and the vast majority

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are the victims of wars or – even more often – tyrannical rulers in their countries (e.g. Amnesty, n.d.). Post-flight, their journey usually involves long months, or even years, of uncertainty and psychological stress waiting for an asylum decision by the government in another country or place: in Poland, the rejection rate was 86.89% in 2019 (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019; Górný et al., 2018). In the face of such direct threats to human life and the violation of human rights, the international community often either feels helpless or considers any intervention inadvisable. Furthermore, as the above statistics indicate, on an economic and political level, governments do not pay attention to the victims themselves or to their own humanitarian obligations.

Greek camps are worth mentioning as an important point of reference for other countries due to the vast number of refugees residing there. As of 2020, 40,000 people have been residing in tragic, unsanitary conditions in Greek refugee camps (with place for only 6,000 people); these people primarily come from Syria but also from many countries in the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region (International Rescue Committee, n.d.). The local communities already living on the Greek islands were left unprepared by their government for this influx of ASRs seeking refuge. The ASRs' already precarious situation has become even worse during the escalating pandemic: the borders have been closed and sealed, and public health restrictions have been introduced to protect citizens, often excluding ASRs (UNHCR, n.d.). In summary, the response of Europe (as well as other continents and countries) to the basic needs of ASRs has been – and continues to be – negative. This humanitarian crisis, however, is not a temporary incident: rather, it has been growing for several years. Tragic terrorist attacks that took place in France, Germany and other western European countries, and the subsequent cycle of sensationalised, racist media coverage deepened the anxieties of 'front-line' states, which do not help with softening the public image of refugees. The 2016 European Social Survey, as well as data from the Polish Public Opinion Research Center and the Center for Research on Prejudice show that the image of refugees in many European countries, including Poland (IPSOS for IOM, 2016), has generally become increasingly negative since 2015 (Heath & Richards, 2016).

These facts have motivated a research project concerning young Poles' attitudes towards allowing ASRs to reside in Poland (Danilewicz & Prymak, 2020), which was carried out among 203 students of pedagogy and social work at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of Białystok. The respondents were students in the last year of their Bachelor's or Master's degree. Their selection was deliberate – they would soon become teachers and start working with children and shape the children's attitudes towards other people. In the survey, students were asked to provide explanations for their attitudes to the ongoing migration crisis and ASRs arriving in Poland (using open-ended questions in order to gather broader and more detailed statements). The comments documented during these interviews form the

basis of the qualitative analysis presented in this paper. The aim of this text is to explore the narratives around ASRs in Poland believed to be true and/or upheld as a socio-political ideology by current students: i.e., people who will soon be entering their professional world as teachers and social workers.

This text is composed of two parts. The first discusses an overview of students' attitudes to ASRs, based on their comments regarding accommodating them in Poland, and the second part is an attempt to identify the determinants behind these perceptions.

The Reasons for Accommodating ASRs in Poland according to the Narratives Believed by Future Teachers and Social Workers

In general terms, students' comments mostly represented three main kinds of narratives or attitudes: approving of ASRs being accommodated in Poland (10%), disapproving (44%), and ambivalent (46%). The presented analysis will focus on reviewing these categories of attitudes, including exploring sub-categories.

In the comments approving of receiving ASRs in Poland, the following main categories of argumentation were identified:

- ethical (exclusively focused on the good of other people);
- conditional (involving limitations);
- obligational (resulting from compulsory obligations);
- conservative (resulting from care about themselves);

Students making ethical arguments strive to understand the situation of ASRs, and treat them as human beings in need, referring to humanitarian obligations, for example:

“We need to help those people, because if everybody turns a blind eye to them, they will be left completely alone” (9), and “I think it’s crucial to treat them as humans” (162).

Similarly, obligational arguments focus on a sense of responsibility – specifically in the understanding that Poland belongs to the European Union, which is a community where there are communal obligations to fulfil on a legal basis as well as out of a sense of responsibility. For example:

“Because Poland is one of the members of the EU and it is our responsibility to fulfil the assumptions of the treaties we have signed” (10) and “We are able to ensure them protection and normal functioning. If other states can help, why should we, as a developed country, be different?” (8).

Although these arguments result from the awareness of obligations and honourable acts, rather than from the personal desire to address the needs of strangers, they are worth noting as arising from reflecting on the principles of functioning in a community and the related obligations that come with that (Skarżyńska & Golec de Zavala, 2006). There were also more pragmatic arguments, based on the fact that Poland clearly makes less effort than other countries to help handle the migration crisis, although it does cooperate with them: *“if more sides help, we will make the problem of failure to cope with the massive influx less acute”* (121).

Some students also accepted the idea of ASRs coming to Poland on a conditional basis, stating, for example:

“We should receive them as long as they are able to return to their countries of origin. We should help our neighbors. If someone needs support, we need to do so” (145) and *“we are all humans and everybody may need help sometimes. Of course, we should only do things that are reasonable”* (56).

While some of the conditions specified are general (potentially resulting from the students' reflections and knowledge concerning the multitude of difficulties connected with providing aid for refugees), others are selective, for example, specifying that they would only receive *“mothers and children”* (178). Despite this explicit selectivity, statements of this type might generally be understood as an expression of a positive attitude towards refugees, because they are an attempt to support the people most in need or considered to be the most vulnerable, and to find some solution to the crisis.

Further comments expressing consent to receiving refugees in Poland included arguments that can be categorised as conservative, i.e. perspectives that are less orientated towards the good of others and more orientated toward the good of the subject (even if it is only hypothetical), for example: *“It's good to help. It's obvious for a Christian. You never know if Polish citizens will not need help one day”* (192) and *“Because we should help people in need. Who knows? Maybe in the future we will need help”* (10). This hypothetically reciprocal way of thinking is not wholly altruistic, instead resulting from caring for oneself (and, by extension, one's nation) on an egotistical level.

Finally, some students who support the idea of allowing ASRs to reside in Poland do so on a selective and discriminatory basis, revealing a tendency towards mono-culturalism where the dominant language and religion of the host country is adopted as standard by all living there. Comments of this type include: *“We should receive them out of consideration for human rights, but only on the condition they agree to learn our language and culture”* (162) and *“If they need help, there's no problem in receiving them here. But I think they should have the same religion as most Poles have, so as not to cause conflicts”* (87).

In summary, the presented arguments for approving ASRs being accommodated in Poland are not consistent: some of them result from an ethical care for fellow humans in need, while others arise from a position of pragmatism (or even egoism) and do not refer to the essence of assistance based on humanitarian and humanistic principles. Crucially, very few participants arguing in favour of accommodating ASRs in Poland reflected on the meaning of aid and support in a tangible or concrete way (i.e., activities, resources, or policies that would fundamentally satisfy the beneficiaries' needs), suggesting that this group of students as a collective have perhaps not been educated in depth regarding the material needs of the ASRs crossing our borders.

“Different – Strange – Enemy”: the Reasons for Disapproving of Accommodating ASRs in Poland according to the Narratives of Future Teachers and Social Workers

The arguments presented by students who disapprove of ASRs being accommodated in Poland took several dominant directions, although they generally focused on the perceived dangers that they believe refugees may cause, both to Poland and to them personally – often articulated in aggressive rhetoric. Several distinct categories were identified, in which the students associated ASRs being accommodated in Poland with hypothetical threats to the economy, national security, culture, and religion.

Indeed, the perception of a hypothetical economic threat is an often cited argument by subjects who disapprove of ASRs being accommodated in Poland: *“there are many Poles who need jobs, and if we receive refugees, there will be no more jobs left”* (167). As this statement demonstrates, the Polish economy is imagined to be a highly rigid and finite resource, where the success of one demographic is directly equated with the suffering of another.

In fact, this particular topic carries a great deal of frustration and misinformation among the students participating in this study, leading to these fears being expressed in an aggressive way, positioning ASRs as a drain on the country's financial resources:

“First of all, Poland is not obliged to do so; we don't have to help those spongers. In my opinion, the Polish state should care for its own citizens, so that they no longer live in poverty and don't have to go abroad in such great numbers. This money should be invested in locals. [...] In my opinion, Poles have more right to receive homes, shelter and benefits. Not to mention that nobody would help Poland if it was in need” (165).

As we analyse this comment, we must not ignore the expression of the catastrophic thinking in terms of imagining how other countries would respond to Poland in a critical but entirely hypothetical situation: the subject demonstrates a real sense of distrust towards others and a lack of the sense of belonging to communities outside Polish borders. After all, ‘the attitude to other people, what we expect from people we know and those we meet for the first time, the generalized belief in humans and their good qualities vs. generalized distrust and suspicion in contacts between individuals, institutions and groups are a significant factor that may either promote or prevent economic development and democracy at the macro level’ (Skarżyńska, 2019, p. 94; for more information Inglehard & Baker, 2000; Sztompka, 2007).

The arguments presented in opposition to accommodating ASRs in Poland include not only a perception that the national economy would be under threat, but a fear that national security would also be endangered. This category of comments made by the study subjects reveal a general superabundance of fear: from a relatively minor sense of threat up to a high level of fear (specifically fear for one’s life). For example:

“Because Poland is a secure country and I want it to remain so. Not all Muslims are bad, I know good ones, but it’s better to be cautious” (5) and “Because we can’t allow this danger. Europe should think how to help refugees otherwise, not by receiving them thoughtlessly” (5).

This sense of caution and danger is also viewed as personal threat:

“People in Poland (Poles) should feel secure. Personally, whenever I see a refugee, I always have negative connotations and many fears connected with them. I try to avoid them, because I’m afraid they will harm me” (46).

Other participants express their personal fears from a religious perspective:

“Of course they are [a threat]. It may lead to religious persecution. They will start to kill us. I don’t even want to think about it” (165) and “Cause if we have an Islamist here, I will fear for my life” (152) and “Many of the refugees are terrorists, who want to save the world by their terrorist attacks. They want to promote Islam and the Muslim culture. For them, Christians are enemies they need to destroy” (169).

Here Islam is falsely understood as a monolithic faith with only one form of expression – hyper-masculine violent acts of terror – and Christianity, presumably Poland’s Roman Catholic faith, although this is not specified by the subject, is viewed as a hypothetical victim in need of protection.

It is worth questioning the basis of this statement, as the results of the author’s original quantitative research show that the same group of students have never had

direct contact with ASRs themselves, and most of them have also never had indirect contact (for example, through reports from other people who know refugees). So, in reality, it is highly unlikely that this respondent has 'see[n] a refugee' themselves – rather, it is possible that this is a mistaken reference to a Black person or a person of colour who is an economic migrant, as these demographics are often confused with ASRs. Whatever the cause, this illogical way of formulating opinions is not grounded in fact and relies on stereotypes.

In summary, the comments presented above demonstrate a superabundance of fear – from generalised, imaginary ones, to very strongly-held, aggressively articulated ones – all based on the respondents' beliefs concerning national security and persecution (namely terrorist attacks and the hypothetical killing of Christians).

Another distinct category of data is a threat to so-called 'national identity,' resulting from the fear of losing one's culture and religion due to the imagined and hypothetical dominance of the ASRs in Poland. Slogans such as "*Poland is for Poles!!!*" (92) or "*Poland is Poland*" (173) are examples of such a nationalistic way of thinking (Billing, 2016). Indeed, commenting about ASRs from the perspective of one's own mental images of those people (and their needs) is a defining characteristic of this category of comments, for example: "*In my opinion, refugees try to influence Poland, to change its culture and values. I think refugees should adapt to us, not otherwise* (46)". An additional ramification to defend the perceived 'Polish' identity is sought in references to Polish culture, and hence, cultural differences with ASRs. Indeed, the study respondents imagine that the culture of our country will be dominated by ASRs when they arrive in Poland:

"I have been raised in a multicultural country. It's very likely that people who come to Poland will force others to accept their ideas and religious beliefs. I also think the Polish state should help Poles, both in terms of finance and jobs" (NUMBER) and "cultures should not be blended" (7) and "we have a different culture, different religion and different motivations" (149).

Fears concerning national identity are sometimes enhanced by the sense of threat created out of religious differences. For example, according to some participants:

"The Muslim religion is very powerful, and most Muslims are devout believers. In many countries where they have settled, the level of conflicts and threat has grown" (154) and "On the internet there are many examples of refugees from Africa defiling the Christian religion. The Islamic State may be a threat to Poles, imposing their religion and values on us" (35) and "Many refugees are obsessed with their religion and they often kill others because of it. I wouldn't like my child to be

friends with a refugee who would persuade them to kill others in the name of God” (3).

These explicitly expressed opinions are often based on frequently repeated, untrue information and a lack of grasp on facts, for instance, concerning the individuals responsible for terrorist attacks in western Europe, one participant stated:

“I think Poland should not receive refugees. When people see what happens in France or Germany, they begin to fear about their security. Because of the many attacks and murders with racial background, refugees should be isolated. I want to emphasise that more than 50% of the people coming, e.g. from Syria, are young males” (15).

In summary, these comments regarding fears surrounding a loss of national identity are divorced from reality and fact and reveal an inclination towards fear rather than critical thinking or truth.

Furthermore, some students use ‘bargaining’ statements to support their argument against the accommodation of ASRs in Poland. For example, they think that allowing Ukrainians to stay in Poland will make it impossible to receive more foreigners – thus, the accommodation of economic migrants from Ukraine is used as the evidence of Poles’ altruistic attitudes, meaning that rejecting ASRs is justified because:

“Poland is not a country that declared readiness to accept high numbers of refugees because it does not have the proper conditions to do so. Moreover, many Ukrainians come here, and our state helps them (most of them find jobs here). But the aliens received i.e., by Germany or France only use benefits and don’t want to adapt to the local law, our culture or customs” (155).

Moreover: *“If other countries can’t cope with it, it will also be a problem for us” (176).*

The use of language such as ‘aliens’ and ‘problem’ suggests that these participants view ASRs both in an entirely negative light and as a homogenous mass.

Furthermore, the above and many other comments from subjects include explicitly degrading terms and expressions when referring to ASRs, diminishing their dignity as human beings. Indeed, they are a clear reflection of the hate speech which has become part of Polish daily life in recent years, echoing the language used by government ministers and mainstream press outlets. For instance:

“Refugees are not accustomed to living in accordance with European standards and do not want to change. Refugees from Africa are uncivilised, bring many diseases to Europe, and behave like beasts” (59)

*"We don't need dirty w*gs" (34)*

"Because it's an attack against Europe, Christianity will disappear, and they will rape our women. They think they can do anything, they behave like savages. [...] They want to destroy Christianity. They will build mosques and demolish churches. Actually, they have completely different values than do normal, civilised people" (140).

In short, these comments from university students are examples of hate speech: references to 'beasts,' 'swine,' 'w*gs,' and 'savages' are all deeply dehumanising terms when targeted at ASRs in the Polish context. Similar conclusions are drawn by the authors of research concerning verbal violence against minority groups, that is, hate speech or contempt speech: many 'references to refugees refer to a lack of good manners and low intelligence of representatives of that group. They also communicate the desire to eliminate them from society.' (Winiewski et al., 2017, p. 26).

In the case of the participants of this study – future teachers and social workers – one conclusion is extremely significant. Hate speech and the false perceptions underpinning it are demonstrated by a significant proportion of the subjects, i.e., individuals who will soon occupy professional roles where their duty is to teach and care for and teach children, young people, and families. It is deeply worrying, then, that 'contact with hate speech may lead to greater prejudice against the groups being the target of insults, because hateful expressions present minorities as dangerous for security, worse, less intelligent, and not fitting the society' (Winiewski et al., 2017, p. 128). Furthermore, through the building of fear and aversion among white Poles, contact with or use of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee hate speech may lessen the willingness of individuals to help those groups, instead promoting greater support for a state which uses violence and surveillance (Winiewski et al. 2017, p. 133).

Despite the positions of authority and trust that the subjects of this study will soon occupy, many of their comments are the direct result of a fundamental lack of knowledge about the critical and ongoing topic of migration. One subject claimed:

"Although many Poles are emigrants, Poland should not receive refugees. The Polish situation does not even ensure Polish citizens a decent life, so we should not 'sponsor' such life conditions for others. A war refugee differs from a Polish one. Poles go abroad to look for jobs, while refugees make use of Poland's sovereignty, not contributing anything to the Polish economy but only greater economic debt of the state" (56).

This description is rooted in a stereotypical perception of ASRs' reasons for exile and the consequences of their stay in Poland and/or from attributing the isolated (real) acts of violence by a very small number of refugees to the entire community.

In addition, some students write about the effects of refugees staying in Poland on the basis of examples that simply never took place – for instance, they refer to their knowledge about ASRs framed as resulting from direct contact, while the fact is, as previously mentioned, most respondents have never had any contact with refugees. Many also claim to fully understand ASRs' intentions, conduct and even attitudes towards Poles, for example: *“Refugees don't respect Poles; they terrorise them and feel like they were in their own country”* (34).

In brief, the comments made by these students demonstrate a great deal of misinformation; reliance on stereotypes; a lack of understanding of facts and reality; and deeply rooted fears manifesting in aggression and slurs. Nonetheless, there is also a degree of duality and complexity to their comments and perceptions: some students claim that they are ready to receive refugees in Poland, but that they also imagine many dangers resulting from their stay here. Therefore, in a general sense, it seems that this group includes people who experience cognitive dissonance (Pasamonik, 2017): on the one hand, they see the needs of ASRs as valid, yet, on the other hand, they absorb the dominant social messaging instructing them to reject them.

Selected Determinants of Students' Narratives Concerning Accommodating ASRs in Poland

The current migration crisis in northern Europe follows a recent wave of extreme socio-political changes in the SWANA region. In the course of the Arab Spring, spanning 2010 – 2012 (e.g., Danahar, 2013; Kadri, 2015; as cited in: Bobryk, 2017, p. 47), protests expressed citizens' deep dissatisfaction with their political, economic, and social situations. Joining a long history of colonial violence perpetrated by the West, imperial geo-political actions contributed to further destabilisation of the region. This caused further destructive processes, such as increasing the prominence of extreme 'Islamic' circles, including the establishment of the so-called 'Islamic State' (as cited in: Bobryk, 2017, p. 47). This chain of destructive processes led to mass migration movements, mainly involving refugees, not only to adjacent states but also to Europe. In the face of this new influx of ASRs and migrants, a collective European anti-crisis programme was clearly lacking, exposing the EU's loss of ability to regulate the migration movement. Although for several decades, Europe (including Poland) has been experiencing multiple migration processes, this recent and ongoing inflow of refugees and other categories of migrants is viewed as a socially destabilising influence (Kaszuba, 2014, pp. 205–206).

The European Commission proposed to relocate 40,000 refugees to selected EU states, and some of these states accepted the proposal. As part of this effort, the previous Polish cabinet agreed to accept seven thousand refugees. The subsequent

one, however, resolutely rejected Poland's participation in these relocation efforts (having established the Humanitarian Aid Ministry in 2017, with the aim of providing assistance to those in need, it dissolved this department in 2019).

During the time, anti-immigration movements began to develop in Poland and across Europe, with extremely right wing parties growing in power, and nationalist movements (not only resulting from the refugee crisis) became highly active. The situation grew increasingly complicated as public opinion became increasingly radical due to terror attacks carried out by 'Islamic State' fighters, who had returned to the continent among this influx of refugees (and the subsequent highly antagonistic handling of these events in northern Europe's mainstream media). In addition, the number of refugees was rising, and they sought new routes to reach EU countries; simultaneously, a lot of media coverage centred disproportionately on acts of abuse and violence carried out by ASRs, plus media narratives focused on men leaving boats that reached Italy and Greece, and public opinion grew indifferent to the dramatic photos of mothers, children, and whole families.

At the turn of 2016, Poles' attitudes to refugees changed. This was the result of the above-mentioned (partially macro-scale) and Polish-specific (micro-scale) factors. Significantly, at this point, parliamentary and presidential elections were preceded by election campaigns with a clear anti-immigration rhetoric, and then (just like now), politicians falsely associated the inflow of refugees with terrorism, thus introducing the narrative of effectively defending Poles against attacks etc., by forbidding the accommodation of refugees from predominantly Muslim countries. This kind of aggressive public debate (Winiewski et al., 2017) remains in place even now. Sociologist, Krystyna Skarżyńska (2019) argues that, in 2015, the sense of threat linked to refugees increased by 40%, as a result of some politicians and the media using this particular false framing of the topic to frighten people. Skarżyńska is convinced that 'politics is a part of social life. It not only affects our daily existence and plans, but it also promotes or prevents people's attitudes' (2019, p. 263).

It was within this recent political shift, then, that the process of the securitisation of migration (especially ASRs) began.

'In this process, an issue is presented by a specific subject as a threat. The message is directed at the audience, and the audience may respond to it positively (i.e., agree with the line of argument) or negatively (disagree with the line of argument). Agreement means taking actions, including extraordinary measures. Thus, the process of securitisation is a process of communication and negotiation aimed at achieving specific goals.' (Ziętek, 2017).

In a similar vein, Ole Woever defined securitisation as a speech act, positioning a particular issue as an existential threat. Thus, language can be used, not only to transmit messages, but also to create social facts (Woever, as cited in Ziętek, 2017).

Thus, a severely negative image of ASRs emerged in the Polish media in what Pasamonik refers to as 'media panic' (2017, p. 26): specifically, they were identified

with terrorist inclinations, associated with the so-called 'Islamic State,' aggression, and unrest (Pasamonik, 2017, pp. 29–30). This portrayal had a definite and direct impact on Poles' attitudes to refugees. As part of this, hate speech also became commonplace, shifting from social media to other kinds of media. The report on hate speech carried out by Winiewski et al. in 2017 shows that (in 2016) the most common objects of hate speech in Poland were ASRs and the LGBTQ+ community. That research (based on the comparative analysis of Poles' attitudes to people from other countries between 2014 and 2016) shows that in those years, the proportion of people being targeted by hate speech, both in the media and in everyday situations, grew considerably. Muslims were the most often insulted group in the press, and, at that time, more and more Poles tended to read anti-Islamic articles.

It was also found in this report that people who more often face hate speech in their immediate environment will be more inclined to use it themselves, which leads to the disappearance of social norms (especially in the case of young people). Indeed, 'young people who experience hate speech also learn to violate other principles of community life, declaring greater readiness to resort to violence in daily life or greater support for repressions against refugees (isolation, closing borders, or surveillance)' (Winiewski et al., 2017). Therefore, the group of Poles who consider using aggressive insults and slurs, exclusively against minority groups (especially Muslims), to be inhumane is shrinking – a shift that the authors of the report attribute to the clear change in mainstream political rhetoric. The narrative dominant in the public sphere emphasises potential threats connected with those groups of people coming to Poland, and Poles often readily adopt a stereotypical vision of refugees, in which they do not deserve any help (Kropiński & Hansen, 2016). This phenomenon of desensitisation has been more and more intense in recent years. It has been found that the greater contact that people have with hate speech in their daily environments, the more they become used to it, no longer perceiving hate speech as a serious social problem (Kropiński & Hansen, 2016).

The current generation of young people have grown up in the first decade of the twenty-first century: i.e., the time of 'media panic' (REF). They have also witnessed the rapid development of the internet, smartphone technology, and social media platforms, and participate in online communities (such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook), which connect people with similar viewpoints or using the same sources of information, and offer them the same websites and sources via algorithm technology. These technologies, and the algorithms behind them, create increasingly polarised views among their users, thus creating 'echo chambers' where individuals are exposed only to perspectives which match their own.

In looking for the causes of negative attitudes to refugees, we must also examine the mechanism operating within many of the participants of this study: they refer to arguments which, in their opinion, allow them to refrain from providing help to refugees. Such arguments include the national security of Poland or examples of

our 'national' openness and generosity (e.g., to Ukrainians). There is a cognitive dissonance resulting from the duality of media information concerning the perceived threat from ASRs (media panic) and a simultaneous sense of solidarity with those in need – as demonstrated by several subjects of this study. However, this sense of contradictory images, opinions, and judgements (i.e., the cognitive dissonance) was quickly reduced.

'In this case, the reduction of the dissonance does not involve the elimination of the sense of moral responsibility but a change in the scope of its application by reducing the moral community from general (humanistic) to national one. This way, we retain the positive view of ourselves as morally responsible individuals' (Pasamonik, 2017, pp. 39–40).

Conclusion

The core aim of this text was to discuss students' narratives concerning the potential accommodation of ASRs in Poland. We need to pay particular attention to one issue that emerged clearly in the students' narratives concerning refugees: the readiness to dehumanise other people. In fact, I am convinced that this narrative may easily be transferred to any group of 'others,' not only ASRs. I draw this conclusion on the basis of the content of many comments made in this data characterised by contempt, insults, disrespect, and perceiving others as weaker, worse, and valueless. Put bluntly, these are examples of contempt for other human beings. The fact that these views are held by students presents a serious challenge to the Polish education and social work systems, both in their current academic sphere and, more worryingly, in the professional roles they will soon occupy.

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