

## **IV.**

# **CHILDREN MIGRANTS IN DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS – CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

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## **ADAPTATION AND CULTURAL CONTACT. IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN WARSAW HIGH SCHOOLS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article discusses the problems of adaptation, acculturation and integration that children of immigrants in Poland are facing. The research is focused on immigrant children attending Polish schools mainly in Warsaw and investigates both the perspectives of children themselves and of school as an institution. It includes refugees, temporal employees and economic immigrant children. Adaptation in foreign school life is affected on the one hand by the primary socialization and on the other hand by the individual experience of the child in the country of immigration.

The issue of the study seems to become more and more important in Poland – the country that entered the process of globalisation already one generation ago. Globalisation, the key concept of the contemporary social sciences (Kempny, Woroniecka 2003) is a cultural fact gaining impetus. The process has its socio-cultural aspect: people from different cultural backgrounds are coming into contact with each other and it is far from smoothing away the problems relating to cultural or perceived physical differences. In this way, globalisation may actually be an exacerbating factor – being physically closer, different people do not

become culturally closer; on the contrary, they become “more stranger” (Simmel 1975; Sumner 1908; Merton 1982; Nowicka 1990; Nowicka, Łodziński 2001).

These general issues appear with particular intensity in the situation of transnational emigration. For example, the number of immigrants in Poland is growing together with the questions about the Polish educational system. Different situations of emigration produce different types of challenges for the host country’s school methods and goals.

In Poland, there are: (1) children of diplomats and long-term contract employees, whose stay in Poland is strictly determined, (2) children of economic migrants who choose between long-term stay in Poland or further migration, or even when returning home, their stay in Poland is an element of the individual life strategy of the family, and finally (3) children of political refugees and persons who attempt to receive the legal status of political refugee, whose stay in Poland and life plans for future are strictly defined by the decision of Polish authorities. This research is mainly about the first two categories of people mentioned above, the conclusions however, may be of interest for researchers dealing with children of refugees.

## METHODOLOGY

There are many publications on immigrants in Poland written from various disciplines’ perspectives: demography, sociology, social anthropology and psychology. They depict numerous aspects of migrants’ life in Poland. However, all of them deal with adults. To be sure, problems of children adaptation, acculturation and assimilation have been ignored or treated marginally. In Poland, every child under 18, including a foreign child (i.e. having no Polish citizenship), has legal right to free education. It means that all immigrant children, having their own language, cultural habits and patterns of functioning in school, attend Polish schools.

The situation of the immigrant child at school has its legal, practical and moral aspects; one cannot ignore them while analyzing their adaptation processes. At the same time, as stated earlier, we should note that the number of immigrants in Poland is growing together with the questions about the Polish educational system. It is closely connected with the increasing migration as a result of open frontiers and the relative attractiveness of Poland for various groups of migrants.

The Polish school system consists of three levels: 1) six years of elementary school, 2) three years of secondary school (*gimnazjum*) and 3) three years of high school (*liceum*). The first two levels are obligatory. The child – according to Polish law – should attend school until 18 years of age. Foreigners i.e. persons

without Polish citizenship regardless of their national or ethnic origin, should be accepted in elementary and secondary schools with the same rules as Polish citizens. The third level is not compulsory and is not available for immigrants without a tuition fee. After 1989, there are public and private schools of every level in Poland and in both types we can meet children of immigrants.

## TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

The terminology in scholarly discourse about migrations and migrants is rather unclear and vague. In order to communicate clearly, we need to sharpen, and improve the basic terminology of adaptation and to develop a precise definition of the concept. To do so, it is necessary to distinguish between the practical and the psychological aspects of the main processes of migration.

In the case of migration, a person and/or a group meet generally with different physical and social environments. To operate successfully and “smoothly” (with no conflicts and traumas) one needs to change one’s “original” behavioural pattern (not necessarily one’s views, opinions, and values internalised in the home culture). One’s behaviour has to be perceived by members of the receiving society as “normal”, “understandable” and “acceptable”. In everyday life, members of the receiving society are not interested in a more profound internalisation of the value system by a migrant. These are components of “practical adaptation”. When functioning „smoothly” one may feel either “happy”, “satisfied” “OK” or not.

When there is congruity in both aspects of adaptation, we may speak about good practical and psychological adaptation. In the absence of congruity, we may speak about good practical adaptation and bad psychological adaptation. However, it may occur that an immigrant does not estimate properly his/her situation of being happy and not functioning well in practical life. This rare case can be found among those immigrants whose life is not dependant on practical functioning in the society of immigration e.g. because of good financial situation in home country.

### – acculturation

Acculturation – from the migrant’s point of view – is a much more profound process of real acceptance of new norms, ways, patterns and values of the receiving society. It requires serious changes such as the internalization of the new value system often linked with the rejection of the value system of the home country. The acculturation process often results in cognitive dissonance and internal family conflicts (Nowicka 2013; Szymańska 2006; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2011).

– integration

Having numerous meanings, often identical with adaptation or acculturation, the term „integration” becomes extremely fashionable and popular in public discourse. It also tends to be identified with assimilation – the term is disliked as it implies inequality and superiority when one should assimilate to a more developed society.

### WHY IS SCHOOL SO IMPORTANT FOR THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION, ACCULTURATION AND INTEGRATION?

I have chosen the situation of cultural contacts at school because I wish to emphasize that the institution of school is extremely important for the processes of adaptation, acculturation and integration for an individual migrant and often the entire group of immigrants in the receiving society. The process of adaptation, integration and acculturation of young immigrant is strongly influenced by the cultural background of the immigrant child.

The most important factors are the norms regulating behaviours of a young person in relation with adults belonging to (1) the native group and (2) the group of “ethnic strangers”. Norms regulating different behaviours of boys and girls in relations to adult women and men, teachers and school children, teachers and parents are of special importance. The reality of immigration in Poland during the last several years provides extremely different (partly opposite) examples: Vietnamese and Chechen children (particularly boys).

Basil Bernstein (1990) wrote about the enlarged socialisation, claiming that one gains more competence during the secondary socialisation. It's not however always in accordance with the primary socialisation. School is a sort of the prolongation of family authority, but socialisation is not simply a continuation of primary socialisation which takes place in the family. The secondary socialisation may be its development and its supplement or it can be in opposition to the home (primary) socialisation. Usually socialisation is divided into two levels: primary socialisation in the family which ensures the child's orientation in the society with its norms, patterns and an understanding of the place of the individual in the society as a whole. The second level includes the secondary socialisation during which individuals learn how to function in various social roles and gain success. The two levels work for the whole life of the individual starting from the moment of entering the school system.

During school years, the secondary socialisation can be continued with the same system of values or can be in profound conflict. In case of young Vietnamese children in Polish schools, their continuation of certain crucial values

of original Vietnamese tradition and its compatibility with the Polish way of socialization is of great importance. There are also cases of total contradiction of values as teachers indicate the children (mainly boys) coming from Islamic countries. Generally, there are no educational (social) problems mentioned by Polish teachers in their work with Vietnamese pupils; the only technical problem may be the lack of proper language competence and difficulties in conversations with Vietnamese parents. General acceptance and even glorification of acquiring education are one of the important features for Vietnamese culture which have crucial influence on the attitude of Vietnamese children attending Polish school. Vietnamese culture requires submissiveness, calm and obedient behaviour in contact of a child or a young person with any older person and particularly with the teacher whose social position is extremely high<sup>1</sup>.

The Polish school system is a part of Polish culture, so the immigrant child becomes competent which, in some ways, may differ or even can be in conflict with cultural values transmitted by the child's family. It is only at school that the young migrant finds out that the environment is not culturally, socially or ethnically uniform.

Jerzy Nikitorowicz speaks of the stage of split autonomous identity, which is in agreement with John W. Berry's typology of acculturation. The immigrant child in Polish school is a different person than the same age child at school of the home country. The development of the young person in the situation of school cultural contact may go through the following stages: isolation, accommodation, reorientation (controversies between the values of two groups – individuals who already changed culturally and the immigrant group as a whole). The last stage can be observed among students learning in Polish high-school and universities who acquire the feeling and awareness that they are different from their parents and family members who did not attend Polish school.

The school as the institution with its specific organisation, its division of labour, social roles and statuses is extremely important for the process of adaptation, integration and acculturation of immigrants because of several traits of interpersonal contacts in the school situation. Below I indicate only some of those features:

- At school, children experience physical and cultural contacts for a long time, five days a week, almost all year round, during many hours almost every day.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Vietnamese girl called her 35 years old woman teacher "Babcia" (Grandma) that expressed her reverence. The teacher, unfortunately, felt offended as treated as an old woman that means a lower position in Polish culture.

- For an immigrant child, the contact has a particular importance because Polish children, Polish teachers and Polish school workers ensure permanent contact with Polish social and cultural system.
- Moreover, the objectives, goals and the ideology of the school system consist of many elements essential for the adaptation and acculturation of the immigrant child. The school system has a special role in the socialisation process because it is centrally guided by the government of the country,
- It intentionally reasserts the adaptation to the life in the country and the internalisation of values seen as important for the country.
- As a result, the school plays a special role in the transmission of a particular culture and social memory characteristics of the receiving country.
- Also, the scope of knowledge required in Polish schools differs in many aspects from the one required in the home country.

All of the above mentioned features of the school system make the Polish school a school of a foreign country, the first complex and unknown labyrinth in which the immigrant child must find his/her individual way. It is a form of adaptation which is not a forced acculturation nor integration. Teachers who have permanent contacts with immigrant children at school mention situations when the child of for example a refugee family from Chechnya is expected to behave according to Polish norms and patterns. Chechen children with the trauma of war experience are usually suspicious, mistrustful, distant and often even aggressive.

Adjustment to the school regime, rigour and discipline that are difficult for the children, create serious problems for teachers. Polish teachers had contact with Sudanese children who have never attended school and cannot adjust to the school environment. The perspective of the school system differs sharply from the perspective of the immigrant child and those of his/her family. For the typical teacher, the idea of a “good pupil” in practice consists of several traits: it is mainly a pupil who makes no troubles for the school (teachers, administration, school-mates). The pupil (Polish or immigrant) should be quiet and hardworking, not necessarily brilliant. It is also good, but not indispensable to have an adequate preparation for the school and its requirements. To be a good pupil means to have certain sociocultural qualifications. Those children who fit well the ideal pattern are permanently praised by interviewed educators, even when they show poor results in learning.

Vietnamese primary and family socialisation in the Vietnamese culture foster a good adaptation in Polish school system. The quiet, calm, submissive and hardworking Vietnamese child is an ideal student even if he/she does not receive good marks. Interviewed teachers often praised Vietnamese pupils as exceptionally good students but when we asked about particular and specific

results in every area, it came out that the child receives poor grades. Those migrants who never attended any school and who have no background of valuing education as such, have serious problems with adaptation to the school environment.

Teachers who experienced contact with immigrant children and faced problems resulting in the situation of cultural contact insist that attitudes and methods of work should be highly individualised. Teachers should be prepared and psychologically trained, oriented on individual work and requiring a lot of patience, as it is expressed by Kaja Malanowska (2012). Immigrant children speak fluent English but have difficulties in reading and writing. The school in this case may offer only general knowledge about functioning in Polish society without any application of the regular school program.

## METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL MATERIALS

I conducted the subsequent research about foreign children in the following years:

The school-year 2002–2003 in Warsaw high schools, in 2003–2004 in elementary and secondary schools, and in 2005–2008 among university students. The first two above-mentioned studies referred to immigrant children of all nationalities, and the last research dealt only with young Vietnamese immigrants. My investigation in 2002–2003 resulted in the following statistics, which was not in agreement with the official data of the Ministry of Education. Children of immigrants attended 48 general high schools in Warsaw – 35 public schools and 13 private schools. In public schools, we had 72 children of immigrants which includes 44 Vietnamese, 4 Mongolians, 3 Ukrainians, 2 Armenians, 2 Slovaks and 2 Japanese. We met also 1 of each of the following nationalities: Russian, Byelorussian, Chinese, Liberian, Bulgarian, Brazilian, Saudi, Nigerian, Hungarian and Syrian. In private schools, there were 36 children of immigrants, including 4 Vietnamese, 3 Chechens, 3 Armenians, 2 Japanese, 2 Bulgarians, 2 Koreans, 2 Georgians, and 1 of each of the following nationalities: Hungarian, Ukrainian, Angolan, Israeli, Mongolian, Azerbaijan, Austrian, Indian and American.

The Vietnamese children were and still are the most numerous immigrant-children population in Poland. They constitute more than a half of the total number of all immigrants in public high schools in Warsaw and about 40% in all types of Warsaw general high schools (48 from 108). It is interesting and informative to note that the results of our research in all Warsaw general high schools are radically different from the data we had acquired from the Department of Education at the beginning of our research. The numbers were different in many areas.

The authorities at the Ministry of Education informed us that Ukrainian children are the most numerous, followed by Armenian children and in the third place are the Vietnamese. This discrepancy indicates the lack of a general orientation in the problem of immigrants at schools and misinformed administrative authorities.

We visited 48 high schools which declared that they have immigrant children, and in 25 of them the research was conducted more systematically with numerous visits. As the result, 45 interviews were collected (registered and transcribed). In some schools, we (the interviewers) were easily accepted and treated friendly, but in some other, headmasters and more rarely teachers were discouraging and at times even hostile. The problem of young foreigners at school seems to be a delicate and an uneasy subject to talk freely and frankly. Eight years later, when I intended to reconduct the research, it came out that it is practically impossible to do the research because (1) of legal difficulties – schools became much more closed in a literal and social sense, (2) school teachers and school headmasters are usually extremely reluctant to let anybody from the outside into their schools. Interviews concerned problems of adaptation: relations with teachers, school-mates and the Polish society in general.

My research materials concerning the previous years are based on the experience of teachers as expressed in publications, conferences and private conversations. During the years which separate the first and the last research, visible and significant changes can be noticed in the field of study, among others: a growth of interest in immigrants, immigrant problems and their solutions discerned in general discourse in Poland. The phenomenon is evidently the result of Poland's integration in the European Union's legislation and the European institutional order.

This article concentrates on materials collected in Warsaw high schools. The high school prepares young pupils for college and university education and as a result, the role of intellectual elite in the diasporic or transnational group. I focus on the following questions connected with the position of the immigrant child in the Polish school system:

- 1) legal and institutional rules regulating school attendance in the case of young foreigners;
- 2) teachers and school administration relations with the immigrant child;
- 3) the image of Poland and Polish school in the young foreigner's mind;
- 4) adaptation to the school environment and to life in Poland among young foreigners;
- 5) differentiation of the immigrant child's situation in Polish school in relation with the child's country of origin, the aim of sojourn in Poland and the length of time of the sojourn.

## POLAND AND POLES VIEWED IN FOREIGN STUDENTS' EYES

The immigrant child arrives to Poland either (1) in the age when it is not possible to have any sort of knowledge, image or stereotype of the country of immigration, or (2) in the later age when the person has certain opinions about the foreign country formed before immigration. The latter case requires a profound knowledge of the image of the country of immigration (in our case Poland). The stereotypes are ready-made, circulating in the home country of a migrant child and shared and transmitted by the child's family members. The image influences expectations and the feeling of superiority or inferiority expressed in numerous behaviours at school and in other environments.

The relations with Poles are influenced by general attitudes towards foreigners in the „receiving country” and stereotypical image of the particular country of the foreigner experienced by immigrants. There are important factors in smooth and effective adaptation in a new environment. I intend to describe the perspective of young foreigners living for a relatively long time in Poland. The emphasis is on school-children who often spend several years in our country, sometimes attending earlier Polish elementary school and sometimes only secondary school or just high school, so they lived in Poland for several years.

While describing Poles and their relations with other immigrant children in my study, I used expressions such as “nice”, “helpful”, “sympathetic”. These descriptive adjectives were always used by young Vietnamese describing Poles. These expressions seem strange, odd because they are extremely general and banal, casual and curt. The Polish researcher in the situation of contact with the immigrant interviewee evokes the situation when the young foreigner feels obliged to be polite and kind, never criticizing people who are defined as their hosts. This is a younger person's duty in Vietnamese etiquette, especially when the Polish researcher is obviously older. At the same time, my informants indicated Polish traits that differ from other nations', showing profound reflection. One of the interviewed boys said:

I was startled that people do not smile in the street with no reason, as it is in Australia. At the beginning I had a strange feeling because of this. Besides, there is this constant complaining and being dissatisfied, and distant. On the one hand I did not like it, but on the other hand yes, I liked it because you can frankly talk with the Poles and get advice from them. You do not hear always from an Australian: 'do not worry', 'everything will be good'. Here everybody is treated more individually.

One of the Vietnamese schoolgirls mentions other Polish character traits:

“Poles are more spontaneous, because Vietnamese, particularly seniors, are distant, nice, pleasant but distant”.

The comparison between the Poles and the Israelis comes out entirely differently.

There (in Israel – E.N.) people have more sense of humor; there is no censorship, there is more freedom. People are less cultured. People do not use so often polite expressions. Over there people are more dynamic. People can laugh at themselves. I miss the Israeli sense of humor.

However, they most often referred to Polish tolerance in contact with other cultures; even more often they stress Polish tolerance in contact with physical otherness of foreigners. The high esteem of Polish tolerance has a very important influence on the general evaluation of Poles and Poland.

The opinions expressed by my young interlocutors are not unequivocal, though, negative opinions speaking directly about racism and intolerance seem to be more often in group interviews. Our Vietnamese informers express the most favorable opinions about Poles; it is from them that we may most often learn that Poles are “nice, friendly, ready to help”. If we hear something different from them, it is rather in the context of explanation and justification of their disliked behaviors, than condemning them.

As an illustration I shall cite a response to the question about problems that foreigners have in Poland with fascism: “I mean... you know may be I understand them (Poles – E.N.), because I am not in my land, but such behaviours are never pleasant (...) Now not so much, but when I was younger, it was often the case”. I had the opportunity to find the same tendency fifteen years ago during my research entitled “Poles and Poland in Others’ Eyes” (Nowicka, Łodziński 1993) devoted to the adaptation of foreign students learning in Poland. Vietnamese students most seldom complained and expressed critical opinions; they were always extremely positive when speaking about Poland and Poles (Nowicka 1993). I was prone to explain this fact by specific Vietnamese cultural characteristics requiring a polite behaviour of the guest in the host country.

When asked to compare Poland with other countries that they had occasion to visit, our interlocutors stress that Poland is a place much more open to other cultures. A young Vietnamese says:

(...) There are plenty of foreigners in Poland, but Poles are generally very tolerant. I mean, is sundries, but in comparison with other countries they are really more tolerant. (...) I have friends in Germany and they speak that Germans are not tolerant.

We can conclude that at least young Vietnamese feel well in Poland, better than in other European countries. They do not face open aggression, reluctance, hostility as it occurs in many other countries, like Germany.

The image of Poland and Poles is much less favorable among dark-skinned young people. Two girls coming from African countries – Kenya and Angola had the most pessimistic opinions about Poles:

I know that people from Kenya do not want to come to Poland. Those who had visited Poland, tell that the Poles are very intolerant and this opinion had spread around and I think this is partly true though I personally have no drastic experience that somebody had beaten me, but I was hussled. In elementary school it occurred that money was stolen from me (...) My colleague, he is Mulatto, he was attacked already two times when he left school (Kenyan student).

The girl from Angola introduces still another element of contacts with the Poles: In the street, people stare at me, especially the old people. I feel bad in the tramway. “Now I am already used to it. I understand young children, but adult people? I am at the center and everybody looks at me. How can I feel?”. In this case, astonishment and the intruder’s interest in strange and unknown outlook is interpreted as a xenophobic behaviour. The ground for this kind of behaviour has its root in Poland’s minimum exposure to international contacts during long decades. We may optimistically conclude: these reactions of naively expressed astonishment and interest will disappear with the intensification of international contacts which is already occurring in Poland and in all Central-Eastern Europe.

Sociological studies (Nowicka, Łodziński 2001) inform us about a systematic decrease of xenophobic reaction and an increase of open attitudes towards foreigners in the society in general. However, our interviews indicate that critical opinions about Polish attitudes towards foreigners dominate and are more numerous than casual and positive opinions. Vietnamese students seem to be all in all more positive and very polite.

There are elements of Polish cultural norms which are evaluated positively and in this context compared with the equivalent norms of the children’s country. It refers to parents-children relations and women-men relations. Young Vietnamese often speak about these cultural differences: “The Poles are more liberal, because the culture of the Far East is something like confucianism. One must respect parents and what they think even more. We need not always to accept it, but we should not oppose them either”. A young girl from Mongolia says similarly about the strong dependance between children and parents in her country:

Mongolia differs a little by its culture and its child-rearing practices. There are different rules for upbringing, I don’t know how to say... Here for instance, when

a child is 18, he or she may do everything. In Mongolia up to the age of 20 children hold on to their parents like grim death and, obey them.

Also the relation between persons of different sex are not identical:

Vietnam is more traditional and there for example relations between a girl and a boy, in every area, any conversation, any form of conversation, for instance in school ... is treated as... tactlessness... so treated... Children are treated as too young for such things.

A Vietnamese girl says about relations between children and adults:

... Because adults in Vietnam treat us so that, I don't know... for instance when we want to make friendship with people from another country, or to have a boyfriend, they are not allowing and they say that we are still too young and that they are afraid of us. And for the majority of us when they want to change something, our parents should treat us as adults and give us more liberty.

One of my interlocutors answered this way to the question about those Polish customs and norms which deserve adaptation to his own life: "For example girls are here different than in Syria, more... I don't know how to say, I cannot express it...". When the interviewer suggests that probably girls in Syria are more closed, the informer answers assertively: "No, no, not in Syria, absolutely. But here everything is more open..."

Young foreigners evaluate in a variety of ways the cultural differences when they have the occasion to perceive them in Poland. Some of them prefer their own native tradition with stronger family bonds, others prefer the ways observed in Poland.

#### *The school system in relation to foreigners*

For our respondents, school, schoolmates and teachers make a very important social environment. Children spend several hours at school, they have an important part of their social activities at school, and there they make friendships and have important contacts with adults. Thus, their image of Polish schools influences strongly their image of Poland in general.

A young student who enters the Polish school has usually a low or a poor competence in the Polish language, with an inadequate general cultural knowledge and at times no knowledge of the Polish history and its socio-political reality. At the same time, there are no legal and practical regulations about procedures such as the behaviour of teacher and the school principal in relations to the immigrant child. Moreover, there is an absence of regulated support system for children with

different cultural backgrounds. Teachers have to manage practically without any external help; they have to decide on their own on how to evaluate the effects of immigrant child's school-work which is not always comparable to the results of the Polish children. My young respondents informed me that teachers treat with more tolerance the grammar and stylistic mistakes done by the foreign students in their written and oral works. Only in few schools these students may have special help on the part of teachers which is most often in the form of individual consultations. Sometimes they are totally left alone without any special interest on the part of the school system, even when they have serious difficulties at school.

My young interlocutors often understood "help" as having lower expectations on the part of teachers with a less severe way of evaluation: "They rather helped us, they had less expectations. Foreign students perceive these teachers' policy as harmful". One of the girls said bitterly:

From grammar school (gymnasium – from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade – E.N.) I had two teachers – the teacher came and explained, but she did not correct me. She said that I didn't have to write. At high school, I had a problem because I didn't have to write in gymnasium. All groups wrote and she said that I am a foreigner and I do not have to write. I wrote a few sentences. In high school (lyceum; Polish secondary school – E.N.) it is different. Our teacher says, that I don't write well. I have a big problem. Instead all additional lessons are perceived as real help.

There is one high school (lyceum) in Warsaw, which has a very good reputation, a private, and expensive school where I found this ideal system of individual work with a foreign student. One girl says: "Everybody helped, they tried when I had something..., always I had an appointment for consultations, and everything was explained". The same attitude was mentioned also in one public school.

### *The Image of the Polish school*

Most often my young interlocutors like Polish schools and particularly their class communities. Young immigrants use very positive terms when they describe their class-mates. Most often, they feel accepted and liked by the Polish children. A girl from Vietnam says: "I think, they like me" If they speak about unpleasant events and manifestations of intolerance, they underline that it did not happen in the high school, but somewhere else – in the street, or at an earlier stage of school education.

Polish schools have little experience in dealing with an immigrant child and little formalized assistance in the process of their adaptation to the school environment. Yet, spontaneous positive behaviour on the part of the teacher or

headmaster, their empathy and interest in the child's situation may serve as an important factor of a good adaptation. Readiness to help and condemnation of intolerance may significantly influence a good adaptation of a foreign child.

Teachers' and headmasters' attitudes are generally described as creating a good and decisive atmosphere. One of my informants said:

The school is tolerant, people are very tactful, especially after this affair with<sup>2</sup> ... When we had a geography class, people discussed but they were delicate. I am very grateful because of that – a Vietnamese student says.

From an Armenian boy we learn:

This is the best in this school, the teacher is not lofty – he doesn't look down at you, he is more like a colleague. You learn with less stress, if you do not manage, it is obvious that you can approach him and ask for help. Also the teacher can compliment you.

Another Vietnamese student says: "The school is O.K., tolerant. May be one percent of students (Polish school-mates – E.N.) is not tolerant. I have no troubles."

To sum up, we can observe a high discrepancy between the general image of the Polish society and of the Polish schools in young foreigners' statements. The Polish society is assessed much more severely than the Polish schools. I would suggest two types of explanation: 1) Increasing contacts with foreigners in the last few years, which result in less exoticism associated with the image of a foreigner in the younger generation; for older generation it is still a much more unusual situation; 2) Warsaw high schools have young people already selected – more ambitious and knowledgeable, better informed about other cultures, more tolerant and interested in cultural variety of human kind. Warsaw teenagers have much more opportunity to have contacts with cultural diversity than the older generation. This is well shown through the mass media, as well as through real contact with the foreigners. In numerous educational TV series produced specifically for young Polish children and teenagers we see that they are in contact with physical and cultural diversity; the main roles are played by children of different skin colour, and at the same time using fluent Polish language. The young generation of Poles who learn in high schools, as we can assume, represent a more open attitude towards foreign cultures and their representatives.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2003 Vietnamese owners of small restaurants were accused of serving cats and dogs' meat and to beating alive animals before the slaughter. This news was widely reported in all Polish media. Vietnamese small gastronomy suffered a considerable decline as the result of this report.

Warsaw high schools gather ambitious young people who – almost without exception – plan further university education, and are perceived as future social elites and who also identify themselves in these categories. Though it is obvious that this ideal is very distant, it is certain that the intellectual climate of such a place differs significantly from analogous climate of vocational schools. In this selective function of Polish highschools we may look for the factor of such a positive image in young foreigners' eyes. It should be noted that it cannot be extrapolated to all forms of the Polish school system. Moreover, we should remember that this research was conducted only in Warsaw; that certainly makes our results limited to the most metropolitan and multicultural city in Poland. Young Poles learning in Warsaw have much more opportunity to have contacts with foreigners than students in smaller towns.

It is also possible that the positive image of Polish high schools in the eyes of foreign students may come mainly from Vietnamese students. They are well known as highly regarding the education and above all have responsibility and obedience resulting in a sort of submissiveness in contacts with adults and people of higher status. The Polish school for them is the place where their values, ideals and ambitions are realized, it provides chances and opportunities that are difficult to acquire in their own country. They often become the top of their classes, often receive awards and are winners in various competitions (regional olympiads in humanities and sciences for high school students) and most often teachers and principals highly praise them and they become the pride of the whole school.

Generally, Vietnamese are known as being quiet, polite and non-contentious, they are most often described as kind and nice. This is why they provoke very positive reactions on the part of schoolmates.

However, it happens that foreign students are critical about some aspects of the Polish school system. The criticized aspect of the Polish reality is related to the particular child's ethnic/national background of a criticising person; they criticise those aspects of school in Poland which radically differ from their own cultural expectations. For instance, Vietnamese students sometimes do not like "to establish short distance" and according to their opinions, students must have reverence and obedience when in contact with teachers. Our Brazilian informer said that student-teacher relations are "too formal and distant" in Polish high-schools: "I was not used to so many polite expressions, especially among young people. It is similar with adults, particularly with teachers. In Brasil we treat teachers as our friends."

The reaction of the young Vietnamese to the same question is extremely different, they have reservations to Polish school-children behaviour; they criticise too little reverence in pupil-teacher relations in Poland. They often cite Vietnamese proverb, which says that if someone has taught you even only half of a word, you are obliged to respect that person.

Some of our foreign informers admit that the school in itself fulfill some of their expectations, but they are not happy about the fact that they learn in Poland, i.e. a post-communist country not well respected in the world, so that the education obtained here will not be valued neither in Western countries, nor in their homeland. Our Israeli respondent said: “The idea to come to Poland was not good because when I will graduate from high school here (my degree – E.N.) will not be accepted in Israel.”

Yet, all in all, immigrants do not object Polish schools. The image of Polish schools tend to be the consequence of a general evaluation of attractiveness of the Polish educational system as seen not only in the perspective of the individual experience but through general expectations that the young people have from the educational system.

School gives a better starting point in the future life, to go to university. (...) Besides, one can develop further one's own interests. I don't know..., language, whatever, everything that comes to your mind you can do elective courses, learn about everything. There is no problem (...)

This is the way a young Armenian advertises one of Warsaw highschoools. Similarly, a positive opinion is expressed by a school girl born in Angola: “My uncle, who studied in Poland, (...) told me that I may have some problems with learning because the level of education is so high in Poland.” High expectations and high level of school curriculum are often stressed by our foreign interlocutors. This is the opinion of a young Vietnamese girl: “In this school I like that language is on the high level, that the atmosphere is so international, and I like this curriculum and so on...”

Thus, Warsaw highschool is perceived as the place where pupils are faced with high expectations and gives a broad scale of opportunities for the individual development and not only for the intellectual development. Teachers are often very flexible, they try to adapt to the needs and interests of their pupils. In this way, highschoools in Warsaw with their fundamental tasks are attractive for young immigrants. Parents of many of our informers were students in Polish universities, from them they have learned about Poland as the country of a high quality education.

#### *Economic attractiveness of Poland*

Economic interest in a country is usually the most important element taken into account in the process of decision making for migration. Defining the other country as an economically attractive place for permanent settlement together with assessing the economic situation of the native country push people to

migrate. The hope for a better standard of living, of a better future for children, that in the far and unknown country migrant may find chances for their main dreams' realization are considered as pull factors. The most crucial element of these dreams is the improvement of the material standard of living. Thus, we may reasonably assume that opinions about Poland in general are strongly related with the economic attractiveness of our country based on a lower economic standards of the country of earlier residence.

For some migrants, Poland is the place to escape from extreme poverty, war and political oppression. For Armenians, very difficult material situation and total degradation of their country is the reason for their migratory decision and their arrival to Poland. This is why Armenians perceive the economic conditions in our country in positive terms. In comparison with Armenia, Poland looks promising in terms of their basic needs' satisfaction and reasonable life conditions. A young Armenian said frankly: "As to work and future life perspectives I would certainly like to live here, because the perspective of development is broader here."

For a considerable number of migrants, Poland is not a transit country of temporary migration. Those migrants who do not plan to settle for good in Poland plan to migrate to another more attractive country (Okólski 1999). However, a large number of migrants treat Poland as the place where they want to wait for the end of difficult times in their homeland. They do not think about leaving for a more economically attractive country, but about coming back to their homeland.

The economic situation in Poland is perceived in positive terms also by the immigrants from the Asian countries, most often from Vietnam. A considerable number of Vietnamese children who study in Polish high schools have parents who were students in Poland, and later decided to remain in this country also because of material reasons. They could return home (and even sometimes were instigated to do this), but they decided not to go back to poverty. In comparison to Vietnam, Poland offers a relative economic stabilization, together with a better social atmosphere in comparison with other countries. Generally speaking however, in the reported research, young people express negative opinions more often than positive ones about the economic conditions of living in Poland. A young boy from Abkhazia depicts the economic situation in our country in the following words: "It is difficult to live here from the financial perspective etc. particularly when you are a foreigner, a refugee..."

Israeli students say similarly: "Here in Poland it is difficult to make money."

I may conclude that the economic aspect of life in Poland is not a crucial element in the image of our country at least as expressed in conversations with young foreigners.

*The image of the Polish culture*

In declarations received from our young informers, Polish cultural tradition is highly esteemed. They especially refer to Polish traditionalism which is revered as a very positive national characteristic of the Poles. Sometimes I encountered even fascination with the Polish traditionalism. A young Australian who was asked about comparison with other countries he knew with personal life experience, told me: “In Poland I like the reverence for the past. The Poles cultivate the history of their own country, because they have something to be proud of (to boast about). Australians, for instance, they do not attach great importance to history.”

A young Vietnamese reveals another aspect of the attitude to the Polish tradition among immigrants as seen from a certain distance:

I treat Poland as my second homeland because I have spent most of my life in Poland, but I have my roots in Vietnam. I think in Vietnamese language. (...) I know the Vietnamese culture better (...). Polish culture is totally different than the Vietnamese culture, but because of that difference I'm very interested in it.

The Australian boy was less restrained in his opinion and we received an elaborate speech full of sincere fascination with the Polish culture:

Yes I like it (the Polish culture – E.N.) very much, especially romanticism, the literature of Polish romanticism. Besides, I love the celebration of Christmas. These 12 dishes, lay on the table, carp, this is all wonderful. This is not such market-like as in Australia. In Poland, these Holidays are really family reunions. People are not only interested with gifts, which play a secondary role. Christmas in Poland gives positive impressions. I like Easter very much (too), all this going to the church with a basket for consecration. The Polish culture is truly cool.

Our Brazilian informer also cannot be indifferent to the Polish traditions: “I like many Polish customs, e.g. *lany poniedziałek*, *thusty czwartek*”<sup>3</sup>. Other interesting elements of Polish culture is discerned by an Armenian girl: “I like very much the customs of the Polish Highlanders. They do not have this city small man mentality who runs for cash. It is important that they have strong family bounds. Also they produce *oscypki*”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> „Lany Poniedziałek” – Monday after Easter Sunday, boys pour water on everybody they meet particularly young women. The custom is also called “śmigus dyngus”. “Tłusty czwartek” (“Fat Thursday”) – the last Thursday before the lent, traditionally dedicated to eating sweets and cakes. The most popular are “pączki” – donuts filled with rose marmalade.

<sup>4</sup> This is a special salty cheese made by Polish Highlanders .

The fact that there was no negative opinion can be the result of the situation of the interview conducted by a Pole; the situation where the interviewed persons are restrained from expressing critical remarks.

In group interviews, we find an echo of individual identity strategies and identity dilemmas; young immigrants who live for a longer period in Poland feel that they are closely related to cultural traditions of this country. Moreover, they want to perpetuate this close relation, and at the same time they are reluctant to lose their own traditions and identities.

Let us show how a Kenyan girl is describing customs and habits practiced in her family:

This is such a mixture, because when I was born, my parents were still students, there was a multitude of their friends from Kenya, from Liberia, so I was brought up in the spirit of their culture – of my parents. But my younger sisters, who are much younger than me, were adapting more to this Polish culture, so in my family everything is mixed. (...) We are cooking diverse dishes, we celebrate Easter, Christmas a little differently, there is also a little of the African culture... As to Christmas, this is above all, that we do not have Christmas Eve, as such we make a supper, but certainly it does not consist of 12–13 dishes, the fast is not obligatory, so we eat meat and we can consume alcohol. Usually we invite multitude of our friends, friends of our parents, this is also a family celebration, we also have gifts, but dishes are different.

Similarly the rule of “mixing cultures” is practiced in the family of our Vietnamese informer: “We celebrate all holidays, which are in Vietnam... and some Polish holidays.”

Immigrants rarely manifest an attitude of total “merging” into Polish reality, though at times this situation may also happen. Sometimes foreigners attempt so much to gain the acceptance of the Poles, that they give up their own traditions or – at least – pretend to do so. They tend to hold that Polish traditions are so lively – and it is often true – that they accompany customs brought by their parents’ generation from young immigrants’ homeland.

#### *The image of Poles/Poland and young immigrants’ plans for their future*

The majority of highschool students immigrants plan to stay in Poland at least for a few more years to study in Polish universities. Some of them could even point out a particular institution and department they want to continue their education in this country. Few young immigrants mentioned universities in the Western Europe or America but nobody had clear emigration plans connected with any Western country. “As to my education, it is certain that it will be in Poland. I want to study economics at the SGH (Warsaw School of Economics

– a prestigious Warsaw school – E.N.)” – our Vietnamese informer says with no hesitation. A young man from Abkhasia has similar plans: “Some people, many of my friends, also foreigners, want somewhere... to the West, to Germany, but ... I don’t, you know, in general I want to live in Poland in the future.”

An Armenian boy says similarly: “Certainly I would like to study here, to finish here my education and to work. I would come back, if I have a proper financial position, if I have a secure and safe life there.”

In this respect, attitudes of young immigrants often differ from their parents’ vision of life. Young people seem to be more acculturated, better adapted and emotionally connected with Poland than people from their parents’ generation. More often parents express their wish to have their children in Western universities, they (not their children) are suggesting and organizing further education in the more prestigious universities, in a richer country for their daughters and sons. Of course, it is the case of more affluent families who can afford this sort of expenses. Sometimes family ties decide of a particular country chosen as the future life place for their children. One of the girls from an African country says:

I am in a journalism class, so I will probably choose journalism, I will study here, though, I am not sure because my mother have plans to send me somewhere abroad, but I will rather stay here. My mother has a lot of sisters and brothers in the US, they also study there, some of them are already working and have their families and children there. Mom wants me to go there.

The same student says that her parents have very clear plans for their own future place of living; they desire to come back home after their children will live on their own: “They plan to go (home – E.N.), but only when my younger sisters will finish high school. I suspect that they will leave Poland someday in the future.”

This is not an exceptional case. Many young people mentioned their parents’ plans to return home. This is true in the case of the majority of Vietnamese and Armenians, most of whom intend in more or less distant future to return home.

The present work in Poland is treated only as the way to earn money, guaranteeing a stable existence after returning to their homeland. Of course, interviews provide only declarations, and yet it seems to be meaningful that affirming the desire to return home is so often and so strongly expressed among my interviewees. “They say that in some time they will leave for Vietnam, for sure they will do it when they grow old” – reports a young Vietnamese, talking about her parents’ ideas for future.

Our young respondents have less clear plans when they are asked about family plans – their getting married in Poland and with eventual Polish life partners. When we asked, whether they imagine organizing their family life in Poland, they often answered that they still do not have an idea about their future mature life, that this was a distant perspective.

Estimating generally, half of our informers declares the wish to spend their whole lives in Poland and the other half declares that the wish to return home. The latter declaration is connected with the country of origin, called “home” and with the economic motive of emigration. This is true especially among Armenians who form one of the largest immigrant groups who have clear return plans, however the plans are presently rather not very realistic. Sometimes young people feel responsible for their country of origin:

I have such a plan, that after graduation from university, because I want to study international relations, I will go there and will work in some United Nations Organization. At first I would like to do something for my country. I know that it is perhaps a utopian dream, but I hope that when I have success in something, e.g. graduating from the university, I will have means to influence the improvement of its situation.

Yet, many young people coming from various countries feel very emotionally close to Poland and this country is attractive for them. This feeling makes them plan to stay here and settle here for good: “I know that if I went there (back home – E.N.), I would have this language barrier and there is a different mentality, another culture and I would have to change it a lot. I got used to these customs here” – says a young Liberian. A girl from Abkhasia has even a more clear attitude: “I would like to visit (Abkhasia – E.N.), but not return there for good. This is because all in all I plan to settle my life here. To visit – yes, absolutely.”

A Hungarian girl has different plans than her parents; she says frankly: “We just plan to leave (to Hungary – E.N.) for good, but I would rather stay. My parents do not know yet, but I have my own plans. I could live with my friend, because she is already adult, and she lives alone.”

These young people who do think about permanent living in Poland, do not plan further migration to a more attractive country, they rather plan to return to their homelands.

For immigrants from Asian countries, Poland is a Western country of a higher material standard of living, with higher level of education and an old Western culture. Among interviewed groups, only children who arrived from Israel perceive Poland definitely negatively; informers from other countries react in a diverse way to our question about their plans for the future. They express

opposing opinions about Poland and their life plans are different accordingly – a few of them planned to remain in Poland. It can be interpreted in terms of their type of migration (defined by the period of employment of their parents or the economic orientation to find a place for a “better life”).

One of the important factors determining the image of Poland among young foreigners is their own experience in Poland, which is sometimes connected with intolerance and xenophobic forms of behaviours. Africans who experience the most hostile acts from the part of Poles in Warsaw, say most often about leaving Poland and inhabiting permanently in one of the Western countries, where the level of tolerance is higher, where people are not astonished when they see a person with a black skin colour.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

We may summarize that Poland has become a relatively attractive country of immigration because of: (1) its relative easy access, (2) relatively high standard of living, (3) its safety and (4) its high level of education. Moreover, Poland is no longer only a transit country to other, more attractive countries; it becomes an ultimate aim of migration. The situation produces true challenge for the Polish institutions, especially for the education system.

The adaptation and acculturation of young migrants in Poland require subsequent interdisciplinary research. The research should be systematically repeated because of, on the one hand, the progressing transformation of the Polish society and, on the other, – serious changes on the international scene. One of the important changes in Poland relates to the education system, the sphere of life crucial for the conditions of adaptation and acculturation among young immigrants. At the same time, the intensity of transnational contact on the territory of Poland is undergoing major changes. Those changes include different national groups of immigrants who decide to enter the frontiers of the Polish State and the children of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds attend Polish schools. Future researches, in my opinion, should distinguish with more scrutiny the situation of various categories of young migrants: refugees, temporal employees and economic immigrant children in Polish schools.

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