

IDENTITY DILEMMAS OF POLISH REPATRIATES FROM KAZAKHSTAN – BETWEEN FULFILMENT, HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

KATARZYNA KOŚĆ-RYŻKO

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Repatriation, understood as a return to the country of ancestors, does not always look like people's initial mental images prior to departure. The realities often differ from the dreams and after arrival it turns out that everything is different, unknown-foreign. The reality is disappointing but the lack of alternatives is the starting point for the difficult process of cultural adaptation, which is not always successful. In 2000–2008 I conducted field research focused on the experiences of Poles returning from Kazakhstan to the homeland of their ancestors, who as a result of forced deportation to the USSR in the years 1936–1946 were abroad for many years. Their situation was extremely complicated and it was only after the year 1990 that repatriation became possible. Meanwhile, after their arrival to Poland they had to face a number of challenges, including public debate about their identity and a questioning of their right to Polish self-identification. In the research it transpired that the “Polishness” of repatriates does not fit the romantic vision shared by some of their compatriots for whom they were too Soviet. The “uprootedness” experienced by the descendants of Poles deported from the country which they longed for many years was much more severe than the one they felt in Kazakhstan. In this paper I discuss a number of issues related to the impact of specific imaginations and expectations preceding their decision to migrate on their later life satisfaction and cultural adaptation.

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Repatriacja rozumiana jako powrót do kraju przodków, nie zawsze wygląda jak w wyobrazeniach poprzedzających wyjazd. Realia nierzadko odbiegają od marzeń i po przybyciu na miejsce okazuje się, że wszystko jest inne, nieznanne – obce. Rzeczywistość rozczarowuje, a alternatyw brak. Zaczyna się trudny proces adaptacji kulturowej, który nie zawsze kończy się sukcesem. Prowadzone przeze mnie w latach 2000–2008 badania dotyczyły losów Polaków powracających do ojczyzny przodków, którzy wskutek przymusowej deportacji w latach 1936–1946 do ZSRR znaleźli się na wiele lat poza granicami kraju. Ich sytuacja była wyjątkowo skomplikowana i dopiero po 1990 roku repatriacja stała się możliwa. Po przyjeździe do Polski musieli jednak zmierzyć się z wieloma wyzwaniem, w tym z debatą na temat swojej tożsamości i kwestionowaniem ich polskiej samoidentyfikacji. Okazało się, że „polskość” repatriantów nie przystaje do romantycznej wizji funkcjonującej wśród rodaków i są oni dla nich zbyt „sowieccy”, analogicznie jak w poprzednim miejscu zamieszkania byli zbyt polscy. Wtórne „odcięcie od korzeni” doświadczane przez potomków zesłanych na Wschód Polaków w kraju, który przez lata uważali za ojczysty było dotkliwsze niż odczuwana obcość w Kazachstanie. W artykule omawiam zagadnienia związane z wpływem określonych wyobrażeń i oczekiwań poprzedzających decyzję o migracji, na późniejszy przebieg adaptacji kulturowej i stopień zadowolenia z własnego życia.

Key words: repatriation, identity, cultural adaptation, acculturation, life satisfaction, Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder.

INTRODUCTION

“Rootedness” in the colloquial sense is the sense of belonging to a specific place, environment, culture, society and/or homeland, which results in a person’s existential safety and conviction that they are at home and among their fellow countrymen and women. Conversely, a lack of sense of “rootedness” can result in chaos and destabilization in the life of an individual, which, in turn, leads to the sense of threat as well as to the conditions unfavorable for their development. Moreover, a lack of “rootedness” stands in opposition to one of the most basic human needs, i.e. the need of affiliation, stemming from a person’s natural desire to overcome their alienation and isolation and to be together with other people.

According to Simone Weil (1961, 192), “a human being roots himself through his real, active and natural participation in the existence of a given community, which preserves vivid treasures of its past and which sees its destination in the future”. In her opinion, this is the core of the meaning of this category as well as of its opposition, “uprootedness”, which is the key to understanding the sense of a well-functioning society¹ and of engendering a community spirit.

Quite often my interviewees lacked this community spirit, as, after their arrival in Poland, they had to face a public debate about their identity² and a denial of their right to Polish self-identification (Iglicka 1998). It was remarkable that they were accused of being “Soviet” and this adjective, in numerous environments, is the synonym of being foreign or even hostile. The “Polishness” of the Poles from the East turned out not to fit the romantic vision shared among Poles in Poland who saw the Kazakhstani Poles³ as outsiders longing for the land of their ancestors for many years with no material desires at all. The secondary “uprootedness”, which was experienced by many of the repatriates in the land regarded by them as their homeland, was much more severe than the alienation they felt in their previous place of living. (Wyszyński 2012, Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014). In this sense, their “uprootedness” is connected with a long separation from culture, tradition and ethnic group on the one hand, but on the other with the sense of not conforming to the local visions of “the patriot from the East”, as well as with the doubts within in the more elementary question of: “Who am I”?

The issues concerning the movements of people, their migrations, deportations and repatriations fall into the scope of numerous scientific disciplines, including those,

¹ Simone Weil regarded the “disease of uprootedness” as the main reason for the degradation of French society contemporary to her (1961).

² The questions of the national identification of Polish minority in Kazakhstan were discussed by Robert Wyszyński in his papers (1991, 159–164; 2008, 117–118).

³ I use “Kazakhstani Poles” to describe both Poles living in Kazakhstan and those who have already resettled in Poland, i.e. the “Poles from Kazakhstan”. Despite the fact that these communities are not the same, the term takes into account their common characteristics that are crucial for these topics.

which focus on an individual – their experiences and resulting psychological, social and cultural effects. Within this framework, modern repatriates constitute an exceptionally interesting research group⁴. During the times of multiculturalism in which a dynamic approach towards the process of forming ethnic and cultural identifications is preferred, individuals several times in their life might modify (and negotiate with themselves and with their environment) their own identity and the sense of group affiliation. Within this context, persistently maintaining the Polishness of the Poles deported from Polish East, as well as the tragedies of “uprooted” people are not easy to interpret. Herder’s way of understanding the nation as defined through cultural self-identification of people strikes us again with its currency and accuracy⁵. The so-called *Volkgeist* “nation spirit”, which accompanies the Kazakhstani Poles throughout their lives, regardless of location, could be the best evidence for the fact that it is something far more real than just a conception from the distant past (Herder 1962, 89–90; Bunzl 1996, 17–79). What is more, many of them have never been to Poland, so their conviction over “What does it mean to be a Pole?” is based merely on their family tradition, on the outlook of their relatives and on often mythologized thoughts about their homeland. As I observed, such a picture of their homeland didn’t facilitate their acculturation process (Glick 2006, 1–2); on the contrary, it frequently increased their culture shock and adaptation difficulties⁶.

The problem of cultural self-identification, from a researcher’s viewpoint, involves not only the knowledge of individuals’ personal declarations and the behaviors confirming them, but rather the analysis of the complex process of creating a picture of themselves. This picture is a result of various personal and social experiences, problems with

⁴ The problem of immigration to Poland has been discussed in numerous historical works, e.g.: by Kazimierz Żygulski (1962), Krystyna Kersten (1974, 1996), Jan Czerniakiewicz (1991), Mikołaj Latuch (1994, 1998), Jakubowska-Malicka (2007). However, there is hardly any literature concerning contemporary returns from Kazakhstan to Poland. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the publications by Paweł Hut (2002, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013) and by Robert Wyszynski (1991, 2000, 2008, 2012). Among ethnological works, the important papers are: Marek Gawęcki (1996a, 1996b, 1997), Zbigniew Jasiewicz (1992), Sławoj Szykiewicz (1996a, 1996b) and Antoni Kuczyński (1996). Recently a number of social, psychological and pedagogical discussions of the problem have also appeared, for example Gorbaniuk (2008).

⁵ According to Herder, a nation is a community of language and culture, and tradition plays an important role in shaping it. The ethnic conception of a nation united everybody who spoke the same language and belonged to the same culture, regardless of their social origin and religion (Herder 1962; Szymaniec 2008, 18–36). However, in the case of repatriates, the situation is still more complicated as, despite their strong ethnic and cultural affiliation, they often do not know the language of their ancestors (Kość-Ryżko 2011, 160–165).

⁶ In the case of Kazakhstani Poles the question of belonging to the homeland and cultivating an awareness of their ancestors’ national origin is additionally complicated by the fact that often in their personal and subjective experience, their compatriots are also Soviet citizens among whom they lived for many years, and their second homeland is Soviet Ukraine or Soviet Kazakhstan. Although the repatriates I encountered during my field research did not confess to such identification, I did hear about such cases.

other generations' contribution to cultural heritage, and of (re)constructing the ethnic identity of the younger generation who live in geopolitical circumstances completely different from those experienced by their parents and grandparents (Nikitorowicz 2005, 99–100). In the case of repatriates it is connected with, for example, the competing value systems, in which their offspring grew up; one conveyed at home and the other by the official propaganda in their place of settlement. The discrepancies between the two systems made the repatriates consciously approach the question of bringing up their children; they sought to bring up their children in a patriotic way, as they called it themselves. However, the measures the repatriates took for this purpose were not always adequate for the changing patterns of “Polishness”.

There are numerous arguments for a multi-contextual analysis of the migrations of Poles from the former USSR (including Kazakhstan). For me, the key issue was to know the mechanisms involved in the process of building up their identity and those of its aspects which are responsible for the bond with Polish culture and nation. Furthermore, the course of their cultural adaptation, the accompanying difficulties and the effects manifested, e.g.: in their attitudes, values and daily decisions were also seen as important. I undertook the research on the problems connected with the repatriates' adaptation to the new circumstances of living in Poland, because I wanted to ascertain whether it is possible to talk about any typical and common features of this process. I was curious as to what extent acculturation theory, which I know mainly from foreign literature, corresponds to Polish contexts. When looking for the answer to this and other questions, I selected a few families living in various regions of Poland in order to observe their lives after their return to the “country of their ancestors”. I paid particular attention to the ways the emerging difficulties were interpreted, and how they coped with changes, cultural differences and adaptation shock. My double education-as ethnologist and intercultural psychologist-allowed me to use scholarly tools from both disciplines in the research. Combining the two different research approaches, I wanted to gain the fullest picture of the repatriated offspring of Poles deported years ago to Kazakhstan⁷.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The main part of the research took place in the years 2005–2007; in 2008 I complemented them by interviews with representatives of local authorities and public administration employees responsible for contact with Kazakhstani Poles. The study

⁷ The research was presented and discussed in great detail in the book *Wykorzenieni. Dylematy samo-określenia polskich repatriantów z Kazachstanu. Studium etno-psychologiczne* (Kość-Ryżko 2014). Here I discuss some selected topics as an attempt to diagnose the mood of returnees, revealing their most frequent frustrations and disappointments.

was also broadened to include administrative documents relating to repatriates and articles about them in the press. Meetings and interviews with returnees included people who had come to Poland during the period from 1995 to 2006. Most of them lived in Lower Silesia, near Wrocław and Jelenia Góra and some in Podlasie Province. Several respondents also settled in Warsaw. Overall, 35% of respondents lived in rural areas, 40% in large cities (including the capital) and the rest in small towns (up to five thousand inhabitants). This allocation certainly does not reflect the general trend of settling returnees, since the selection of the respondents was dictated by their availability from a personal point of view.

The main objective of the study was to show the relationship between certain personal-psychological variables and the cultural adaptation course of successive generations of Polish descendants who came from the East. I wanted to answer the question about the relationship between acculturation strategies of repatriates and acculturation policies adopted toward them by the local society in the place of their settlement, and whether a sense of well-being (measured by Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder) has a significant impact on experiencing and coping with the subsequent stages of culture shock.

The researched group consisted of 60 people, with whom I conducted psychological questionnaires and in-depth interviews. I also met several times with some of them in wider group of relatives or friends conducting participant observation. My interlocutors were members of Polish origin families who, because of deportation, had lived outside Poland for many years and only the change of political system in 1989 had enabled them to return to or arrive. This latter group consisted of second and third generation descendants of displaced persons. For most of them Poland was at most an ideological homeland, known from stories and literature rather than something concrete. Among the respondents were people of all ages. The youngest was 15 years old and the oldest 76 years old. A majority of respondents (70%) were women, which contributed to the non-equivalence of the research trial, making it difficult to carry out comparative analysis. It did though reveal specific characteristics and problems of women returnees. Of particular interest is the fact that most interlocutors were women from the middle generation (approx. 40–55 years old), who although knew the Polish language poorly, had interesting experiences and observations from a new place of settlement, which they willingly shared.

The spectrum of professions declared by the returnees were broad. Beside railway workers, tailors, cooks, accountants and teachers were employees of *kolkhozes*, public administration and hospitals (nurses, doctors, medical technician, the X-ray operator, orderlies etc.), as well as unqualified personnel and farmers. It turned out to be very difficult to categorise such a diverse group in terms of gender, age, education, financial situation, etc.

Among the information collected in the in-depth interviews and participant observation, data was found on: the structure and biographical history of repatriated

families, their relationships with the previous place of residence, motivation to move to Poland, organization of the moving action, professional activity in the past and at present, the conditions of settlement, interpersonal contacts, livelihoods, material and living conditions, relations with the local community, adaptation difficulties, cultural differences, future plans, etc. The qualitative analysis was based on 50 interviews with approximately sixty people. The information obtained in this way allowed me to create an image of the general acculturation trends of Kazakhstani Poles returning to their ancestral homeland.

THE SITUATION OF KAZAKHSTANI POLES

The Poles, who nowadays live in Kazakhstan, went there as a result of the forced deportations from Soviet Ukraine in 1936⁸. They were deported from the territories called Marchlewszczyzna (Julian Marchlewski Region) and Dzierżowszczyzna (Felix Dzerzhinsky Region)⁹, also from Kamieniec, Żytomierz and Winnica districts¹⁰.

The interest in the fates of the group increased after the transformation period, i.e. after 1989, when the persistent difficulties in contacting Poles living in the former USSR republics were eliminated (Herbut *et al.* 2010, 129–186). Initially, the initiative of strengthening previously broken relations came from individuals or local environments

⁸ Because of the so-called Korienization policy, which involved granting national rights to non-Russian nations living in USSR, many autonomous administration entities emerged, including the Polish National Region in the name of Julian Marchlewski (March 1925), and, later the Polish National Region in the name of Feliks Dzierżyński [Felix Dzerzhinsky] (March 1932). These regions are commonly called “Marchlewszczyzna” and “Dzierżowszczyzna” respectively. The autonomous entities were liquidated in 1935 and 1938 respectively. Yet, despite the forced deportations in the 1930s, in 1945–1947 and after 1956, these regions are still inhabited, to a great extent, by people of Polish ethnicity, although many of them no longer speak Polish. For more on this topic, see *Pierwszy naród ukarany* (Iwanow 1991) and a set of published documents from The Archive of the President of Kazakhstani Republic (Zułkaszewa and Maskiejew 2006).

⁹ The National Region of Felix Dzerzhinsky was established in Minsk oblast, in the Byelorussian SSR, near the former Polish border. Its capital was Kojdanów (Belarusian Койданаў) but was renamed Dzierżyńsk [Dzerzhinsk]. The National Region of Julian Marchlewski was formed in the Volyn oblast, in the Ukrainian SSR, approx. 100 km west of Żytomierz [Zhitomir], where Poles lived in the surrounding villages. The capital of the Region was city Dołbysz [Dovbysh] (approx. 120 km from the Polish border), which was renamed the Marchlewsk. According to the administrative division of 1937 it consisted of Kamieniec, Zhytomyr and Vinnytsia districts. Details on this subject can be found in the work: *Represje stalinizmu wobec ludności polskiej na Ukrainie w latach 1929–1939* [Stalinist repressions against the Polish population in Ukraine in the years 1929–1939] (Stroński 1998).

¹⁰ A small group of Kazakhstani Poles consists of people deported in 1940–1941 from the territory of Second Polish Republic and those who came there after the World War II (Ciesielski 1997; Stroński 1994) but their post-war fates, social status and reciprocal relations were completely different in comparison with the first group (Walichnowski 1989).

who had been supporting the Polish diaspora in USSR for many years (Łodziński 1997). Later there emerged more formal institutions and associations supporting Polish communities and organizing their repatriation. Moreover, the political transformations in USSR were also significant, as they contributed to more frequent and better contact between representatives of national minorities and the countries of their origin (Grochmalski 2006). This stimulated the national consciousness of Kazakhstani Poles and intensified their attempts to strengthen their ties with their “homeland”¹¹. In the new circumstances a heated debate started (and has yet to be concluded) concerns the conditions of repatriation to Poland of the descendants of people deported to the East many years ago, namely, people who have never been to Poland and who have never learnt the Polish language¹². As such, the country of their ancestors¹³ has been for them an exotic distant land rather than their real homeland and their beliefs concerning Poland have frequently been idealized and unrealistic (Grzymała-Każłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014, 6–7).

Initially, for a few years, the discussions focused on the doubts whether Poland should bring its compatriots from Kazakhstan to Poland or rather leave them in the country they had been living in for so long. Sławoj Szynekiewicz has also paid attention to this problem:

“Kazakhstani Poles’ identity, which has been appreciated recently through the interest coming from Poland, became the source of another crisis, which is different in its quality. (...) Rash promises of mass migration given in Poland, turned out to be unreal and for some people they were disappointing, particularly as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned. There appeared the dilemma of where to live: in the national state of Kazakhs, or rather in inaccessible and inhospitable Poland” (Szynekiewicz 1996b, 252).

¹¹ The adequacy of the term used here may both raise doubts and bring some reflection. Both in the literature and in the daily press we may encounter the term “old-new homeland”. Although it is not very accurate, as it assumes a priori that Poland was always the homeland for the Kazakhstani Poles. Yet, it is uncertain whether people deported from the Polish Eastern Region were tied to a concrete state or rather with a concrete culture. The doubts still increase in the case of the deportees’ offspring in the second, third or even fourth generation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to question their ethnic affiliation, which I accept as a superior identification category, justifying the terms used here to describe their relations with the country of their ancestors’ origin.

¹² According to the census of 1999, only 15% of all the people in Kazakhstan describing themselves as Polish were able to communicate in Polish. Most of them had no possibility to learn Polish earlier, despite the fact that they describe Polish as their “native” language (Kozłowski 2006).

¹³ It is worth paying attention to semantic categories distinguished by Anna Wierzbicka, who, while analyzing vocabulary, which is, in her opinion, the key to understanding history, nation and society, analyzed the notion of “homeland” in a few languages, including Polish. She distinguished three types of homeland: “homeland as the country of birth”, “homeland as the culture and tradition” and “homeland as the country of our ancestors” (1997, 176–191, 347). It is worth comparing this with the work of Wiktoria Kudela-Świątek (2010) in which she analyzed images of the homeland in the collective memory of Kazakhstani Poles.

Some people, like the former Secretary of the Social Committee of Polish Government Kazimierz Barczyk, thought, from the very beginning of the debate on repatriation, that more than the one hundred thousand of Poles deported to Kazakhstan and the hundreds of thousands of other Poles in Asia were an enormous moral challenge for the modern Republic of Poland and that bringing them to Poland would be a test of the reliability of the government and nation (Starzak 1999). However, there are representatives of the Polish state and its citizens who think that Poland “can’t afford” to guarantee the return, and adequate living and work conditions for all the people, who feel bonded to it. Some people even would like to leave their compatriots in the East as the guards of the past of the former Polish Eastern Frontier of the First and Second Polish Republic, because they are afraid that otherwise this territory would become ‘de-Polonized’. Still another group sees in them as the elites of modern, post-Soviet societies¹⁴, which could become the bridge for contact for Poland with its eastern neighbors (Hut and Łodziński 2008, 100–101). A radical group of people who take part in the debate are those who question the “Polishness” of the third generation of deported Poles, who are very often unaware of the contemporary political and economic situation of the country, in which they would like to settle, let alone speaking Polish.

The first concrete legislative decision which actually affected the situation of the Poles behind the Eastern frontier was the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997, which guaranteed to them the possibility of settling in Poland permanently (art. 52). In the same year the Act on Foreigners was passed; this act regulated the repatriation visa requirements (see: *Konstytucja* 1997; *Dz.U.* 1997; *Ustawa* 1997). It also defined the procedure for obtaining Polish citizenship by those who have Polish ancestors and who came to Poland before 1996 and it regulated issues connected to the status of repatriates’ family members, who were of non-Polish nationality and origin.

According to the research conducted by the sociologist Bronisław Jan Kozłowski in 1999, 40% of the newcomers were under forty (1999). Research he prepared in 2011 for the Sejm Bureau of Research states that this repatriation mainly included the better educated, more enterprising people, who had been in contact with Polish community organizations and who knew Polish relatively well (Kozłowski 2011). These people saw in their return to Poland the chance of both improving their difficult material situation and defending their identity, which had gained the special importance in the face of a rise in Kazakh nationalism¹⁵ (*Raport* 2009). However, quite soon numerous unfulfilled expectations and hopes, as well as painful conflict in relationships were revealed. The

¹⁴ Formation of new elites in Kazakhstan and the factors affecting the relations of power in post-socialist society are discussed in detailed in the work: *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite* (Cummings 2005) and *Kazakhstan – Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Dave 2007).

¹⁵ Emerging Kazakh nationalism is considered the main cause of the increasingly complicated ethnic situation in Kazakhstan and the most common motivation for the emigration of minorities living there, including Poles (Poujol 2007).

sources of some of them were mentioned by the historian Wojciech Wrzesiński in the prologue to his book *Poles in Kazakhstan*, pointing to the inadequate knowledge in Polish society of the former and current situation of the new arrivals.

“The Poles gradually reveal the truth of the lives of their forgotten compatriots in Kazakhstan. This truth is extremely difficult. People in Poland were astonished by the fact that in Kazakhstan, in extremely difficult political and material circumstances, there remained quite large groups of Poles, who didn't denationalize, despite the external foreign culture style, which they adopted. It has frequently been seen that the knowledge we have nowadays about the Kazakhstani Poles is not sufficient to be able to make reasonable, but very difficult decisions, the effects of which will influence this group for many years” (Ciesielski *et al.* 1996, 11).

An explanation and possible justification for Poles' insufficient knowledge of the causes, courses and effects of the deportations of Poles to the East in the years 1936–46 might be found in the long-lasting misrepresentation of Polish history by the socialist governments of Poland and USSR. The effect of this was a lack of awareness of younger generations that Kazakhstani Poles had been forcefully separated from its nation and victimized for Polish culture, for using Polish language, writing letters in Polish, and having Polish books (Kuczyński 1996).

As Sławoj Szynkiewicz shows in his analyses, the situation of Kazakhstani Poles was, and still is, extremely complicated. Only a few people in Poland realize that the times of adversity, attempts to denationalize, and hard work in inhuman conditions all had considerable effect. On the one hand, Kazakhstani Poles underwent the complex process of adaptation to completely different natural, living and cultural circumstances. On the other hand, for many years they were subject to political and police control, as a result of which they often lost the indicators of their identification and their national consciousness (Szynkiewicz 1996b, 253).

For many of them the decision whether to stay in Kazakhstan or return to Poland became the key decision of their lives, i.e. the decision to which they related the further value and sense of their existence¹⁶. Some of those who returned – despite numerous disappointments – still think that their hope for the desired return to the land of their ancestors gave them the force to survive difficult times in USSR and, regardless of its consequences, they regard this decision as the right one. Even for those who were born abroad, their longing for the unknown country of their ancestors was a kind of escape compensating for their poor existence in Kazakhstan. Despite their doubts over which environment is more “of their own” – the culturally foreign place of their settlement or the never seen country of origin – their hope for return to the distant homeland strengthened their sense of ethnic distinctness in relation to the native Kazakhs over time and this hope became the main motivation for their actions.

¹⁶ The last chapter of Kudela-Świątek (2013) was devoted to a wider discussion of the origin and consequences of identity dilemmas of Kazakhstani Poles.

The unfavorable attitudes towards their compatriots from the East presented by part of Polish society raise fears over the mutual relationship after their settlement in Poland. This is due to the fact that the acceptance of repatriates by the receiving group is, to a great extent, a necessary condition for the success of their acculturation process and identification with the receiving national group and its culture. If repatriates are not accepted by their receiving group, there difficulties, crises and conflicts can appear. Yet, the survey conducted by Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej [Public Opinion Research Centre] (CBOS 1994), showed that only 77% of Poles preferred granting the right to settle in Poland to exiles. What is more, subsequent surveys showed that this level decreased in the following years¹⁷.

People who are skeptical about the “returns”, in assessing the Polish society in the East, often ignore such fundamental indicators of national affiliation as self-identification and blood ties. They often forget that the exiles’ lack of knowledge of Polish history and language is not the effect of their laziness or purposeful negligence but rather of the long-lasting process of denationalization. The consequences of this are misunderstandings and conflicts between the repatriates and “local” Poles, for whom it is very often difficult to accept the cultural distinctness of their forgotten Kazakhstan compatriots.

According to the statistical data available, in the first decade of the Third Republic of Poland (1989–1999) – already a completely different reality to Communist time – 2000–2500 Poles were repatriated to their homeland (about 250 per year). About 100 thousand Poles lived in Kazakhstan at that time (the data come from the former ambassador of Poland in Kazakhstan Marek Gawęcki) (1996a, 32)¹⁸. With this pace for all of them to return would last about 200 years. In comparison, the repatriation conducted by Germany on the basis of the agreement between German and Kazakhstani governments included, up to the end of 1993, about 300 thousand of approximately 1 million exiles (Elrick 2006, 48)¹⁹. The former president of the Kazakhstani Poles Association Franciszek Bogusławski estimated that up to the end of 1995 about 700 thousand of people would return to Germany (Wyszyński 2000). At that time no one was interested in Poles, neither Polish government nor the Kazakhstani Poles Association, and all the help coming from Poland was realized by private people. Only in 1996 did the Polish government decide to start the repatriation of people from these territories, and it was regulated by the law passed the following year. Polish families were to be invited by Polish communes, which promised to provide

¹⁷ Such surveys have not been conducted for many years and so there is no up-to-date data available.

¹⁸ His numbers include people of Polish origin, although not all of them declared their Polish nationality in the census.

¹⁹ See: Act of Accepting Returnees (Aussiedleraufnahmegesetz) of 1990 and the Act of removing the effects of war (Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz) of 1992, which came into effect on 1st of January 1993. A detailed discussion of the conditions of repatriation of German people from Kazakhstan is available in a study by Jennifer Elrick *Niemcy wobec rodaków na Wschodzie* (2006, 43–89).

them with accommodation and other benefits, as well as to help them find the job. In this way, the scale of returns became dependent on the will of local societies and on the financial conditions of commune budgets.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION

One of the psychological tools I used was a test which helps estimate the effects of repatriates' decisions and the influence on their adaptation to their new living circumstances. This test measures the subjective level of satisfaction with one's own existence and is called Cantril's ladder of happiness or Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder Test (Cantril 1965). It allows for the assessment (expressed as a percentage) of to what degree a given person looks into the future with optimism and to what degree they regret their lost past. A lower score means a smaller degree of satisfaction, while the higher means a high degree of satisfaction.

The analysis of the results of using this tool revealed some characteristic regularities. The general results concerning four time periods: five years ago, at present, in a year, in five years, showed a relative increase in life satisfaction in relation to the past. This provides justification for claiming that, regardless of the level of their satisfaction with their present and future, almost all respondents declared that their present lives are better than their lives in Kazakhstan.

In the case of repatriates who assessed their satisfaction level five or more years ago, i.e. before their arrival to Poland, the highest score is 100 percent and it was declared by two people: (a student, who declared being strongly connected to his previous culture, and a teenage girl). Another two people (a student and another teenage girl)²⁰ declared 98 and 95 percent respectively. This result may be regarded as a puzzling one because the group average was 61 percent. For the vast majority of respondents the main reason for leaving Kazakhstan was their low level of life satisfaction, lack of civil rights and generally not feeling very happy a country they saw as being as being culturally foreign.

The lowest scores in this period were 10 and 20 percent and they were declared by two people (an elderly man of primary education, and a woman of middle age with secondary technical education). Another 5 people declared a score between 30 and 50 percent (and they were primarily elderly people with no young people at all). It is puzzling that both the highest and the lowest scores differ considerably from the group average (61 percent). This represents great differences in repatriates' assessments of the reality in their previous place of settlement. The elderly people assessed their satisfaction level before arriving in Poland as considerably lower than the one presented by

²⁰ Because of the non-standard and unique attitudes of the two girls, I decided to provide a more detailed description of them below, so I distinguished them from other respondents by calling them the N. sisters.

young people. It is also interesting that the young people, who study in Poland, belong to this group. They explain this fact through a nostalgia for their childhood years of which they saw as carefree.

The highest scores in the period called the present life satisfaction (o) are between 90 and 100 percent and were declared by 40 percent of people. I regard this result as a very satisfactory one. This group included people of various ages, although there were more elderly people and women of middle age. The lower scores ranged from 80 to 70 percent and they concerned 35 percent of respondents, who belonged to various age and gender categories. To sum up, this gives the result of 70 percent of responses falling between 100 and 70 percent of present life satisfaction level, with the group average of 82 percent, which is a good result. This result proves that for most of the repatriates their satisfaction increased after their move to Poland.

The lowest scores at this “measuring point” were 50 and 60 percent and they were declared by 15 percent of respondents. The group of repatriates whose satisfaction of their present lives was the lowest consisted of 3 elderly people (a married couple and an ailing woman) and one teenager (the younger of N. sisters). These results are not surprising, because the situation of the family in question was a very difficult one at the moment of the survey (the women died some time later), while the response of one of the N. sisters, the younger one, born in 1986), was consistent with all other of her responses in that it was negative. It is difficult to say whether she simply decided to give only negative responses or maybe her responses reflected her true feelings.

The highest scores in the period of the predicted life satisfaction in a year (+1) were 99 and 100 percent, and they were declared by 40 percent of respondents (including 35 percent of all women and 50 percent of all men). The lowest estimations between 60 and 70 percent were declared by 25 percent of respondents, mainly elderly people. Other scores were at about 80 percent, i.e. near to the group average of 85 percent. These results show that the vast majority of repatriates express their hope for the improvement of their situation in the near future. Most skeptical in this respect were the elderly (both men and women) and the young. The middle-aged women declared the greatest optimism as far as their future lives were concerned, although the collective result is considerably lower, because of the results of the two teenage N. sisters and one girl-student.

As far as the life satisfaction in 5 years is concerned (+5), 45 percent of people said that they estimated their life satisfaction within a 5-year period between 90 and 100 percent. The lowest scores were 60 percent and they were declared by 20 percent of respondents (e.g. a seriously ill woman, one woman of mature age and two teenagers). In the case of people mentioned in brackets, the low scores reflecting their pessimism are justified by the very difficult point of their lives at which they were at the moment of the survey, e.g. extremely poor health conditions, the burden of the responsibility for the whole family, problems with choosing future schools, and the problems of Matura exams and studies.

The group average in this period was 86%, which reflects a wide range of estimations: from the lowest to the highest ones. This may be explained by a dual tendency prevailing among the repatriates: some of them tend to present the optimistic and hopeful attitude, while others are full of mistrust and fears of the future, which is so distant that it cannot be exactly predicted and planned. The differences in the repatriates' approaches presented here are conditioned by their age. The teenagers, who were facing important life choices and decisions at the time, were more cautious and careful in their life satisfaction prediction. By comparison women who had teenage children and the elderly people, whose future situation may change only a little bit, looked at their future with more courage and were more willing to believe in an optimistic vision of their lives.

To sum up, we should pay attention to the fact that the highest scores predicting life satisfaction concerned a five-year perspective (+5), as 75 percent of all the respondents fell between 80 and 100 percent. I regard this result as a good one, particularly with the assumption that the principle of "self-fulfilling prophecy" will prove correct in that such an attitude will optimize the repatriates' chances of realizing their short- and long-term plans as well as of achieving their goals.

In most of the analyzed cases the scores indicating life satisfaction tended to increase, although the increase was not as remarkable as expected prior to the survey. My initial hypothesis that the repatriates would complain about their past, glorify their present and plan a bright future in their new place of settlement, was soon confronted with reality and refuted. Most of my interviewees approached their future in Poland with skepticism and a level of reserve. I even had an impression that they didn't fully trust their "old/new" homeland, so they usually behaved as if they didn't have too excessive expectations in relation to their present place of settlement and its hosts.

Only two people (the elderly married couple M.) radically dissociated themselves from their past in the country they had lived previously, because they assessed its policy as an unjust one for Poles. Their test results confirmed my assumptions unambiguously. The degree of their life satisfaction before their arrival to Poland was 10 and 20 percent respectively, which means that it was extremely low. The characteristic features of these respondents were their religiousness, patriotism and strong ties with their ideological homeland, inherited from their ancestors. These were suggested by both the content of their statements and by their frequent references to Providence and to dead members of their family (to mother, father, grandfather, grandmother and so on), who were, for them, model Poles. Here, the very important fact was that the people in question, from an outsiders' viewpoint, had much fewer reasons for satisfaction and happiness in comparison with other respondents. The man, to whom I talked more frequently than to his wife (born 1934 and living in a village in Jelenia Góra district, employed in forestry) settled, after his arrival in Poland, together with his very seriously ill wife, in a big house previously owned by the forest district. Their younger son was studying

in Szczecin (a considerable distance from Jelenia Góra) and he was unable to help his parents settle in to their new place and with their adaptation to local life. That is why the elderly Mr. M. was forced to cope with all the living difficulties on his own as well as take care of his wife, whose health was getting worse and worse. He worried very much about her because her health after their move to Poland had got much worse and her illness had turned out to be incurable. Their elder son remained in Kazakhstan with his wife (a Russian) and their grandchildren, whom they missed very much. The denial of the right to come to Poland for his son and his family was an extremely difficult and disappointing experience for the Mr. M., as he had idealized Poland for many years.

After some time the situation of the family changed considerably. Mr. M.'s wife died in 2007. The elder son came to Poland with his family in the same year and he settled in his father's house, while the younger son finished his studies, got married and settled much closer to his father. It is difficult to say whether all these changes affected in any considerable way my respondent's satisfaction with his move to Poland. Nevertheless, it ameliorated his worries caused by separation from his close family. He is now retired and is happy to take care of his grandchildren, while "the young" go to work. As he said, he is now rooted in the local landscape.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR²¹

An interesting regularity may be observed when confronting the test results of the people who declared a high degree of satisfaction with their present life (between 90 and 100 percent, namely about 40 percent of respondents), with the content of their statements. They look at their future with caution and uncertainty, as if they didn't believe that their present status would be possible to maintain for an extended period of time. Some of them, when asked about the motives of their cautious predictions and about the reason for the decrease in their estimations of life satisfaction in subsequent years, gave evasive answers that they didn't want to "jinx" it or that it was always better to be positively surprised by the fate.

An analysis of the results obtained shows that the respondents who experience the adaptation success subjectively, quite frequently tend to attribute it to a positive stroke of luck rather than to themselves. They can't see their own role in coping with

²¹ Attribution theory describes the ways in which people explain the causes of their own and others' behavior. Internal attribution involves inferring that a person behaved in a specific way because of their own qualities, while external attribution involves inferring that a person behaved in a specific way because of the features of the situation they were in. A fundamental attribution error involves overestimating the internal factor belonging to one's disposition and underestimating the role of the situation. One of the reasons for its occurrence is finding the causes of human behaviors where we look for them (Kelley and Michela 1980, 457–501; Gawroński 2004, 183–217).

the problems and they are unaware of their own influence on the reality. Perhaps, for this reason many of them do not expect to be able to maintain their present level of life satisfaction in the future. They think they “managed somehow now”, but in the future “who knows?”. The observed relationship points to the mistake of reverse causal attribution, which was frequent among the repatriates. This mistake involves the tendency towards underestimating the role of the acting person’s features with a simultaneous overestimation of situational factors in attempts to explain or understand a given action (Zimbardo 1975, 663). In the case of my interviewees, this phenomenon manifests itself in the tendency towards attributing one’s own success to other people or to some favorable coincidence and the failures to oneself, to one’s own inability to overcome various fate difficulties, to one’s own inability to cope with the challenges, and, finally to one’s own incompetence.

EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS ATTITUDE

Another characteristic of the results obtained was the relation between life satisfaction, which the respondents predicted and which was supposed to be lower in the future than at present, and one of the indicators of managing stress, i.e. so-called task coping (Endler and Parker 1990). The analysis indicates a negative correlation, although at a level of low statistical importance. However, this correlation suggests that in difficult and stressful situations the individuals who got such results will prefer the emotional and escape approach rather than a task-based one.

A more detailed enquiry (supplemented with other tests) did not confirm this introductory claim though and nor did I observe any important negative correlation between the results obtained by the repatriates in other scales. On the contrary, all the respondents far more frequently presented the task approach (rather than any other approaches) towards the stressful situations and they revealed a large inconsistency in their answers.

The explanation here may be the fact that those individuals who declared a high level of present life satisfaction (between 90 and 100 percent), along with a simultaneous expectation of its decrease in the future, were aware of the amount of effort and engagement they put into the achievement of their current subjective sense of well-being. That is why they expressed the fear that the future may be equally difficult and, because of their previous experience, they didn’t expect to get anything “for free”. They preferred instead to take a cautiously optimistic approach. This approach is more rational as it leaves space for action which, even if it brings just a small change for better or maintain the status quo, will nevertheless be a success in relation to the original predictions.

This approach may be regarded as the manifestation of a kind of cautious approach, which is confirmed in the qualitative interviews with the repatriates. These interviews show that in comparison to other interviewees, the parents whose children in the near

future are to undergo some important and decisive changes in their lives (e.g. the selection of a new school or studies, or the end of their studies and looking for their first job), manifest more fears about what the coming years will bring, as well as more skeptical predication about the future. The mothers said that they felt responsible for the fate of their offspring in the new reality, namely, for them getting good jobs and salaries, for their successful private lives, for their accommodation, and, finally for their respect and good standing in their environments. At the same time, the mothers felt no fears for themselves, yet they realized that the situation in Poland was difficult and that perhaps no one would help their children.

REPATRIATED WOMEN – THE WOMEN WHO DECIDE

The repatriates' interviews lead to the conclusion that the burden of earning a living for their families was put mainly on women, who, after arriving to Poland, took the role of the "link" with the new "foreign" world and remain in this role for ever²². Perhaps, at the beginning of the new settlement period, the original division of home roles turned out to be inadequate for the local circumstances, so women's determination in their attempts to organize and stabilize their family lives quickly, as well as their greater openness and ability to get build contact with the local people, all determined the fact that they partially took over the manly role (Lesińska 2010, 180–181). The desired features here are the good communication skills of the repatriated women and their surprising persistence, which is an absolutely necessary feature for coping with various formalities. In consequence, a gradual reversion of traditional gender roles occurred.

After a longer period of contact with me several of the female interviewees told me openly that they were tired of their husbands' social dysfunction and of their adaptation reluctance. This manifested itself in an inadequate adaptation to living in Poland in the sense of alienation, in professional marginalization and in low language competence along with simultaneously low activity and motivation to change this state of affairs. Indeed, in comparison with their wives, mothers and daughters, who quickly became active, the men presented a "cognitive laziness" and resistance to changes. During my survey I also observed that the male interviewees were rather unwilling to talk to me and they tended to avoid meeting me personally. They were usually reluctant to be interviewed and sometimes even tried not to enter the room in which I was talking to other members of their family. Men who were really involved in the meetings

²² One can meet with the opinion that the life attitude represented by the women repatriates from Kazakhstan is typical of women inhabitants of post-Soviet space, where they are generally more responsible for family decision-making (especially the middle generation brought up on Soviet ideas and politics of emancipation of women) than their peers in Poland. An explanation of this phenomenon can be found in Elena Gapova's work (2009).

and interviews were a rarity. They might happen to add something from the another room, which confirmed that they were listening to the interview and that they were interested in what was going on. Such behavior was quite typical and characteristic of them, particularly because the standard behavior of other family members was gathering in the room where I was conducting the interview. What is more, I have to say that all other family members who were at home gathered around me (sometimes the elderly people happened to get up from their beds and come to me). It is noteworthy that the men's separation was nothing to do with hostility or dislike. They often asked me to stay a bit longer, to eat or drink something; sometimes they even advised their wives what else they should tell me. They rarely decided to participate actively in the interviews themselves, though. I do not think that their attitudes were caused by their cultural distance or by cultural norms (different from the Polish ones) concerning the division of social gender roles. Probably, one of main motives was their low language competency, low self-esteem and their convictions about the lack of social attractiveness in their changed cultural circumstances. They usually had less contact with the receiving society than their wives and it was difficult for them to establish a relationship with people in their new place of settlement. This was additionally problematic because they tended to avoid dealing with administration and living formalities and to leave these things for their women. It is also important that most of the repatriated men want to make a living for their families and as such so they took jobs beneath their professional qualifications, i.e. they usually did physical work in non-prestigious professions. Thus, it was difficult for them to get accustomed to their lost prestige and respect, which they had usually had in Kazakhstan.

THE PARENT'S AND CHILDREN'S LIFE SATISFACTION

The results obtained using Cantril's "ladder of happiness" test indicate that the level of parents' present life satisfaction was close to that of their children. Moreover, the highest parents' scores are, the highest children's scores are. Yet, it is difficult to assess the degree to which this correlation is statistically important and accurate because the sample is too small. This would be shown if the survey had been conducted on a larger scale among those families with children. These conclusions have to be treated therefore as suggestions and reasons for further studies in this field, especially in the context of complex home-family-marital-parental relations.

The analysis shows that the elderly people clearly tended to give lower assessments of their satisfaction level in the past than the present. They also looked at their future with caution. The scores differed in the case of young people (both school and university students). In this case, the data was no longer so unambiguous and so they cannot be subject to generalizations; it is also more difficult to observe one specific

tendency. Similarly, the percentage differences between the four time periods (–5, 0, +1 and +5) declared by young people are not very clear. We may look for the explanation for this in young people's answers during the interviews. They show that young people, in comparison with their parents, were not victimized as much when living in Kazakhstan. Thus, for them, this place had completely different connotations. For most of them, their time in Kazakhstan was a period of cheerful childhood or early youth, which was preserved in their memories as beautiful landscapes, close friendships and playing with friends, family members or neighbors (Sałacińska-Rewiak 2013, 212). In their memories the years in Kazakhstan were very often idealized or even mythologized and associated with a period when “everything was alright, and made sense”. Their parents were calm and had time for them and their life was ordered and fixed in a virtually eternal and model way. Within this framework the world of their childhood belongs to the irreversible past and the move to Poland, in their opinion, deprived them of all of that.

LONELINESS IN THE CROWD

For young people, the move to Poland very frequently had negative connotations, as it was associated with the loss of all those things which were valuable, familiar, and safe. Their new homeland did not always appear to be a friendly place and the challenges they had to face were sometimes unexpectedly difficult and painful. Those who, more or less successfully, survived the initial culture shock, matured and strengthened psychologically, but at the same time they lost a lot of illusions and became more “tough” and intrepid. When talking to them, there was the impression that they were older than their actual age. They said that Poland was for them “a hard school of life”. They experienced the worst kind of alienation and loneliness, i.e. the exclusion from social groups. They often appeared too Polish for Russians and too Russian for Poles (Brzozowska 2013, 239). They very quickly found out that if they want to be accepted, they had to be the best in the group. Thus, many of them were outstanding pupils and students. Even those people with no special aptitudes in any concrete disciplines tried to develop some of their talents or hobbies (e.g.: sports, music, languages etc.).

The interviews show that the most time-consuming process for them was finding friends and their place in the “new” country. Success for them was to find a boyfriend or girlfriend among “local people” as they described their compatriots. The people who managed to do this declared a much higher level of life satisfaction in the future, although this doesn't mean that they were free of fears of their future. Indeed, they frequently and willingly shared their doubts with me during the meetings. They gave the impression that the impossibility of venting their fears was very difficult for them and their fears and stress had been cumulating for a long time.

Many of my young interviewees were “pioneers” who paved the way to Poland for their families. This was the case with A. M. (the son of Mr. and Mrs. M. living near Jelenia Góra), who arrived in Poland just after he was eighteen and then helped in repatriating the rest of his family. The case of W. from Wrocław was also similar. Their 17-year-old son passed his exams in Kazakhstan and got to medical university in Poland, which was a great chance both for him and for his family. During his stay in Poland, as early as the first year of his studies, he handled all the formalities and he conducted the whole repatriation procedure for his large family, including his grandmother, almost on his own, even though he was still a teenager who didn’t know the Polish language or society well. Even earlier he brought to Poland his younger sister, who went to study in Poland although she was only sixteen.

For all of my young interviewees the separation from their close relatives was an extremely difficult experience as they missed their families very much in their initial years in Poland. Four of the young respondents were not able to visit their families for a few years because they had no money and before they made new acquaintances and friendships they spent Christmas or Easter alone, e.g. during the initial months in student hostels in Lodz or Lublin; during holiday such hostels were inhabited mostly by foreign students.

Such negative memories made young people assess with criticism their new homeland and their future life in Poland. They saw themselves as realists who were not deprived of optimism or hope. They thought that the worst was over and that their future could only be better.

They made their future dependent on finding a good job after they had finished their education (this was the main reason for skepticism in assessing the degree of life satisfaction in 5 years). They felt that only then would many things become clearer and they reserved between 5 and 10 percent of their declared enthusiasm for this very solution of their problems (44 percent of responses given by the young repatriates).

Only one person said that he estimated his life satisfaction for 100 percent both in a year and in 5 years. Two people (the N. sisters – 17 and 19 years old) predicted independently of each other that their satisfaction would increase only a little from the current 50 to 60 percent (both in a year and in 5 years) or maybe it would remain at the same level as at present (75 percent (the second of the girls)). The narrations of N. sisters showed that they stimulated each other in their negative approach towards their lives, Poland, their compatriots, and peers. Their case was so interesting that I described it below. It illustrates the fact that even a high standard of living and an apparent successful adaptation do not guarantee life satisfaction and do not make the individual feel part of the society in which he or she settled. This paradox forces us to rethink the priority importance for integration of reciprocal acceptance between “guests” and “hosts” and a sincere, open reception of the first.

THE CASE OF THE N. SISTERS

The surprising and interesting exception in comparison with all other young interviewees was seen in both the tests results and interviews of the two teenager sisters, who assessed their life satisfaction in Kazakhstan as much higher than now. During their interviews the girls repeated a lot of times (with clear examples) that they felt much worse in Poland than in Kazakhstan. They also declared their permanent willingness to return to Kazakhstan, as soon as they had the chance. They told me about their nostalgia for their previous life and for the things which made their life meaningful and of a high quality. To show a contrast, life in Poland was, for them, a nonsense existence full of days which were almost the same. They regretted a lot of activities to which they had got accustomed to and now they couldn't do all (their walks by the river bank, swimming in the river, fishing, their trips to the village with their parents' friends, playing and singing with them, etc.). In their interviews they often said that only "there" they had felt well, at home and happy, and their arrival to Poland appeared to them as the violent breakdown of an idyllic period of family closeness. In my opinion, the interviewees identify the period they spent in Kazakhstan with the blissful carefree childhood, from which they were suddenly taken out. The natural landscapes of their childhood is, in their stories, the Kazakhstan grassland, which is completely different from the place they live in now (both of them live bleak apartment blocks in Warsaw).

The N. sisters were probably unprepared for the repatriation experience, which forces an accelerated maturity and necessitates independence and the facing of numerous new challenges. Their scores in the questionnaires confirm that in many respects the situation was beyond their capabilities, which brought about their shock and adaptation difficulties. In their case, their arrival to Poland coincided with adolescence, which generates a lot of stress in itself and has certain unique features, such as: a changing image of oneself and the need to rebel, combined with a simultaneous desire of acceptance, affiliation and contact with peers.

The unexpected move to a "foreign" country meant the teenagers were faced with difficulties and new expectations, with which they had been trying to cope on their own for a few years. They say they told no one about their problems (even their parents) because they didn't want to worry them.

In the girls' opinions, the situation of their family became much worse in Poland. They also thought that their family life changed for the worse in Poland or it was even destroyed. They complained that their parents no longer spent time with them, they worked a lot, they were worried all the time and they even quarreled. They were very tired. Their father even stopped laughing and joking, whereas in Kazakhstan he had been a very cheerful person. He had spent all his free time with his daughters before; he played with them and went to the river with them. In Poland, they said, he was often angry and silent. He came back home from work and he went to sleep because

he was tired. He contracted some illness, but no one knew what it was. They said that he often felt unwell like their mother, who complained about her frequent headaches which make her go to bed immediately and sleep for many hours.

It is extremely interesting that by all appearances, the N. sisters fulfill all the conditions of good adaptation: they spoke Polish perfectly and with no trace of foreign accent, they were good and very active students (they learnt languages along with various additional classes and also played sports). They were pretty, attractive girls and they were well-groomed and fashionably dressed. They had several friends and so there was the impression that they were popular in their peer group. In their case, the optimistic fact is that in the future they expected an increase in their life satisfaction (albeit a tiny one), rather than a decrease. In comparison to their satisfaction before arrival to Poland at the level of 100 and 95 percent respectively and 50 and 75 percent at present, they predicted 60 and 75 percent for the future.

During my talk to the sisters, I had an impression that a few times they vented their cumulated frustration on me, talking about various “nasty things” they experienced from Poles – their friends, teachers and neighbors. A few times they clearly wanted to provoke me through putting me into the common category of the hated tormenters, i.e. they persistently used generalizations and said: “because you [Poles – KK-R.] are”, “you [Poles – KK-R.] always”, “you [Poles – KK-R.] never”, “Poles are Poles”, etc. Numerous things from their stories indicated that they experienced typical adolescent problems, although felt on a much stronger and larger scale.

In the face of all the difficulties and challenges connected with the move to a different country, it is not surprising that they did not cope with very well, as they lacked support from their closest environments and parents, who had their own problems to cope with. This made the girls perceive their environment as unfavorable, threatening or even hostile. Because of their irritability and negative attitude towards the world around them, they provoked several conflicts and unpleasant situations, which may be regarded as a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

ONE OR SEVERAL ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

The essential observation made on the basis of the survey is that the number of surveyed people is almost equal to the number of acculturation strategies – everyone has their own acculturation strategy. Thus, it is very difficult to make any clear classification of cultural adaptation types among Kazakhstani Poles without being accused of simplification and reductionism. The significant feature of the strategies the repatriates undertake is their flexibility. In various spheres of life they referred to their distinct cultural experience and knowledge and this does not always proceed easily and unconsciously, that is why this process is cognitively, energetically and even physically

“expensive” (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2000, 211–212). However, if we ultimately want to feel at home, we have to undergo this process from beginning to end, experiencing the subsequent phases of culture shock. In other words, we may prepare ourselves for cultural change only to a very limited extent. Obviously, the wider cultural and practical knowledge an individual possesses, and the better psychological “training” they undergo in life, the milder, fuller and less traumatic the adaptation process will be. Many things also depend on the personal qualities of a given individual and on features which are often not sufficiently appreciated by researchers which include: optimism, extraversion²³, ambition, openness to other people and other interpersonal skills, stress resistance, internal discipline and perseverance.

The analysis of the interviews indicates that all of my interviewees, with greater or lesser success, underwent the adaptation to new living circumstances, although it is difficult, in some cases, to regard this process as the completed one (this is the case particularly with the youngest respondents). The positive course of acculturation is witnessed in those responses that indicate that the respondents, despite numerous difficulties and despite being far from enthusiastic, did not want to return to Kazakhstan or change their country of settlement again. The elderly people particularly emphasized that despite their initial fears of how they would manage in the new place, they did not think they could live in any other place now:

“Yes, it was fearful. We feared a bit. We have been living there for many years, and here we went; I knew nothing, I knew no one; and I’m not allowed to return; I’ve never been here before, so we feared going to Poland. And my ill wife. Neuralgia. And there we could live no longer” (A man, born 1934)²⁴.

When asked about his future, the same respondent answered without hesitation:

“I would like to stay here and to be buried here. And my son I don’t know. Will he get a job here? Will he plan his life here?”

The expectations from their “new” homeland depended, to a great extent, on the life stage at which the repatriates were. The assessment of their prospects was different in the case of young people in comparison to middle-aged interviewees which, in turn, is still different from the assessment made by the oldest. The greatest expectations (which should not be taken to mean “excessive”) were presented by the well-educated younger generation. After the adaptation challenges they faced and the acculturation training they underwent after their arrival, they got rid of several illusions, but they also acquired numerous new competences and they were aware that they experienced much more than their Polish peers. They believed in their potential and they were

²³ Extraversion, in its psychological sense, includes the following qualities: sociability, activity, impulsiveness and boldness.

²⁴ His Polish was good, but not perfect. You could trace Russian syntax, for instance (translator’s note).

sure that with the problems they had experienced, they were more stress resistant, so they would manage in any circumstances. Their life goals and success, which most often meant for them finding a job and having a flat, could be achieved in Poland or in Kazakhstan. One of the students stated this openly:

“What I want now is just to live normal life, i.e. I have to have a job in order to earn a living. But, you know, I can ask for money everywhere, can't I? I'll be in the place where it will be possible to get a job. If it is easier to find a job in Kazakhstan, I'll return to Kazakhstan with no regret at all” (A woman born 1981)²⁵.

Not all the respondents were ready to take new acculturation challenges with equally tough openness. They expected to be successful in Poland and they expected that they would finally find their safe haven here and that they would eventually feel “at home” and “among their fellow countrymen”. After saying that despite the studies she would soon finish, she feared not finding a job and disappointing her closest relatives (i.e. her family living in Poland), one of the young interviewees confessed expressively:

“Yes, but I don't want to move anywhere. I want to depart neither to the States, nor to Germany or to any other country. I'd like to stay here” (a woman born 1984).

She answered the question about the reason for such a radical approach in the following way:

“I don't want to experience all that again. I've already adapted here. And I already feel good here... And I don't know whether in any States or Germany... I don't know whether I will ever be able to adapt again, as it is a completely foreign country. This is a completely different language, everything is completely different; here I felt strange, but I don't know... Some fundamental culture elements [I knew here – KK-R], a lot in common, Christmas Eve, for example!”

Later on in the interview, the girl admitted that her boyfriend was considering migrating to the United States where he had family, but she totally rejected the thought of leaving her family, which finally, after a few years of separation, was together again in Poland. This statement (and other, similar ones) indicate that the cost of cultural adaptation may be extremely high and it may deeply affect more sensitive individuals. The unwillingness to experience separation with the closest relatives and familiar places and to start “from scratch” made these people reluctant to “look for their happiness” somewhere else. Moreover, some statements even suggested that the repatriates experienced a significant trauma as a result of the confrontation with new a cultural environment. The process of experiencing the loss of what they left lead them to the conclusions that they changed; that they would never be the same as they were before; that they would advise other people against making such a decision; or that, in retrospect, they

²⁵ Her Polish was perfect (translator's note).

saw that they were too young for such a distant move abroad, for living their own life, and for the experience of a long-lasting separation from their family.

The success of acculturation and the strategies the repatriates adopted depended, in particular, on their adaptation experience, on the stress they experienced, and on their successes and failures, as well as on their personal factors and relations with the receiving environment. It clearly follows from the analysis I conducted that those people who were received with kindness and sympathy, who received emotional support and who were respected in their community and work environment achieved the greatest satisfaction and cultural competences (taking into account all the indicators adopted). Those people who were fully satisfied with their arrival in Poland were those who moved with their families, which live either together or within a small distance. This reveals the repatriates' tendency to reconstruct the social models from their previous place of settlement, where large, multi-generation families frequently lived in the same house or in the neighborhood. This is another manifestation of the tendency to integrate a few acculturation strategies and maybe the model "receipt" for successful adaptation and acculturation, which should be taken into account by the workers of those institutions responsible for repatriation and settlement procedures and, in a broader sense, for the migration Policy in Poland.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions drawn from the interviews with the repatriates are clear and unambiguous. Poles in the former USSR republics look at their future with fear. Many of them are afraid of staying in the country being ruled by Kazakh nationalists with an iron fist. As the historian Piotr Hlebowicz (1996) remarked, despite significant economic growth, Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan have gradually lost the prospects of functioning and development there. The people who have the support of their families in Poland or who are determined moved to Poland long ago. The people who stayed in Kazakhstan are those who are not strong or brave enough to move to a distant and uncertain reality or who have some complicated or unclear family situation (e.g. the mixed marriages), or, finally, who despite their awareness of Polish origin, didn't want (or were unable) to maintain the sense of ties with the nation which they didn't know. So they didn't decide to start the religious, cultural and linguistic re-education, which has been conducted recently by church or laic emissaries from Poland; this re-education is, for many people, the pass to their "new-old" homeland. People, who didn't move, preferred "their own alienation" in Kazakhstan or Russia to "alienation" among their fellow countrymen in Poland.

Another issue is the fact that the Polish government's repatriation procedures over the last 20 years do not make people optimistic. The pace, organizational rules, and

lack of a unified and clear model of Polish policy for the Poles in the East all cause numerous tensions, difficulties and conflicts for both the repatriates and the communes which decide to receive them. Thus, the question is: has Poland done everything in its capacity to make it easy for these Poles to decide on repatriation and has Poland satisfied all the hopes they have been putting in her for many years?

Numerous researchers think that integration is a never ending process of learning and adjustment to one another (Lillesaar 1998, 123–139). However, it is worth putting effort into make it easy and as free from conflict as possible. This is in the interest of both “guests” and “hosts”. In this special case, an additional justification is the solidarity with compatriots whose life stories are exceptionally strongly tied to wider historical events. Their life experience became the stories of a nation absorbed by the USSR at the beginning of during World War II. Yet, the full social and cultural integration in the new environment is impossible without the willingness of both parties.

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Author's address:

Katarzyna Kość-Ryżko, Ph.D.
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology
Polish Academy of Sciences
Al. Solidarności 105
00-140 Warszawa, POLAND
e-mail: katarzyna.kosc.ryzko@etnolog.pl