

TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES IN POLAND: CULTURAL CONTACT AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN BINATIONAL FAMILIES

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This chapter focuses on several aspects affecting the life of binational marriages currently residing in Poland. Examined herein are the dilemmas which transnational couples face in deciding about place of residence, language(s) of communication, the culture of their children's education, etc. Also of interest are assessments of both the positive and negative aspects of transnational married life as well as the unique problems identified by the spouses in their descriptions. These marriages have been analyzed as a case of cultural contact under the circumstances of strong emotional ties and a special closeness which underscore the slightest of cultural differences separating the partners. At the same time, it is on their basis that boundaries are shattered between what is familiar and what is foreign. The analyzed material is drawn from long-term qualitative research – specifically 65 in-depth interviews conducted in Warsaw and several other Polish cities over the past decade with one or both spouses. In each case, one of the partners is of Polish nationality while the other comes from Europe, Africa, Latin America or Asia.

Keywords: transnational marriage, cultural contact, ethnic boundaries, social capital

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INTRODUCTION

Entrance into marriage by persons of different nationalities, coming from different countries, and rooted in different cultural backgrounds is ubiquitous: it has been happening throughout all time and in every corner of the world. Nevertheless, an intensification of this phenomenon is noticeable in the era of globalization – an era of great migrations in a world which is simultaneously homogenizing and ethnicizing (Waldis and Byron 2006). With reference to this, Polish society comprises a highly interesting case due to its exceptional ethnic homogeneity and due to the limited nature of its immigration flows which, since modernity, have never been of significant magnitude. For these reasons, sociological research into this particular social fact of transnational marriages² in Poland is worthy of special attention.

Generally speaking, sociological analyses have been concentrating on issues of migrant integration and the role of the interethnic marriage in this process – in other words, the social relationship of the migrant as an individual versus the host society as a whole (Brzozowska and Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014). Also examined occasionally is the impact of such a marriage on the acquisition of social capital – something seen by the immigrants as helpful (Putnam 2008). Overall, binational marriages have been heretofore described in economic, structural, ‘practical’, and instrumental categories.

This article, however, will address a different aspect, overlooked thus far in the literature: the internal relationship within the transnational couple and not its external relationship with the host society. The focus is on the most meaningful aspects of the psychological, social, and cultural dynamics in the life of an intercultural, transnational marriage which is resident in Poland and does not, in the nearest future, plan to leave. The deliberations will concentrate on the problems which the binational couple must necessarily face and resolve. These include: 1) choosing the country of residence, 2) choosing a home language or languages, 3) deciding about domestic cultural practice of elements drawn from both cultures, and 4) deciding about raising a child in one or both cultures. Of further interest is also assessment of both the positive and negative sides

² For the purposes of this text, I will be using the following terms interchangeably: transnational marriages, binational couples, transnational couples, and mixed couples. Taking various factors into consideration, this will serve as more than a stylistic device, reminding the reader that these couples are, essentially and simultaneously, transnational, binational, as well as culturally and ethnically mixed.

of transnational marital life, the unique dilemmas which such a life entails as seen through the eyes of the spouses themselves.³

The couples under investigation were formed as a consequence of educational, refugee, or economic migration and encompass persons of higher, often specialized, education levels. Such marriages constitute a key illustration of a cultural contact situation since – under the circumstances of particularly close emotional bonds accompanied by a longing for mutual compatibility – cultural differences manifest themselves in the greatest detail and in the most intimate spheres of human life (see Turner 1993). As Gerd Baumann (1999) noted, this is multiculturalism in mutual accommodation. Transnational marriages are also the best indicator of a breaking down of cultural, social, and psychological distance, testifying to an integration of at least part of the immigrant group. This type of litmus test is applied, above all, to representatives of rather sizeable groups (such as the Vietnamese in Poland) which seem to weakly integrate with the host society. Such observations have accompanied sociology since the renowned text by Emory Bogardus (1925), *Measuring Social Distance* in which acceptance of an interethnic marriage stands as the strongest indicator of a closeness, a lack of social distance, and thus an integration (see Grzymała-Kazłowska and Łodziński 2008: 34–36).

Worth mentioning is the fact that the concept of ‘intermarriage’ or ‘mixed marriage’ appears only when the difference between the two individuals is perceived as noticeable and essential. Barbara Waldis (2006: 2–3) treats entrance into intermarriage as an element in the dynamics of group boundaries, whereas Barth (1969) sees transnational couples as fitting into the dynamics of ethnic boundaries. The interethnic marriage is a way by which to cross borders, but also demonstrates their actual limits (something overlooked by Waldis).

Present-day individualization leads to the setting of new standards and rules for intermarriage. Matrimony is no longer an emanation of group interests even if a mixed marriage is entwined in mutual stereotypes upon which foundation social positioning plays out. Still, the intercultural marital relationship – undoubtedly the closest social, psychological, and biological bond between human beings – does tear down the walls between what is ‘ours’ (*swoje*) and what is ‘foreign’ (*obce*).

In the introduction to a monographic issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* on postmodern mixed marriages, the editors wrote: ‘We argue that ethnicity and

³ Due to limitations on this chapter, the core comprises presentation of materials heretofore unknown and, on the whole, nonexistent in English-language publications. Moreover, the spotlight herein will be on presentation of original, empirical data and its analysis, rather than on discussions of theory – hence the fewer references to the vast literature on this subject with its theoretical content.

identity are not fixed properties to be quantified and reified' (Evergeti and Zontini 2006: 1027). Still they quickly add, 'Although cultural and ethnic signifiers exist, it is important to recognise that they are subject to change and negotiation' (Evergeti and Zontini 2006: 1027). The role and intensity of ethnic differences is a phenomenon of consciousness which varies depending on a multitude of elements in the social status of the transnational family. The life of an immigrant in a marriage with a Polish citizen is indubitably contingent upon the position of the latter in the social structure of Poland (see Coleman 1988). The status of the Polish citizen – anchored in a totality of social networks – comprises a form of social capital extended also to the non-Polish spouse.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on 65 in-depth interviews with one or both of the partners, living as part of a transnational mixed couple in which one of the spouses is of Polish nationality and the other comes from a different country. All interviews were conducted in Polish in the course of the last decade; all interviews took place in Warsaw with the exception of eight in smaller cities (i.e., Białystok, Suwałki, Połaniec, Przemyśl, and Olsztyn). The foreign spouses came from England, the USA, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Nigeria, the Congo, Kenya, Senegal, Vietnam, and Japan. All of the couples under study could be described as middle class; everyone had completed a tertiary education which resulted often in substantial responses, often including deep self-reflection.

The couples considered as part of the study at hand were not solely the effect of significant immigration waves to Poland although some of the marriages did arise as an effect of mutual agreements between the pre-1989 communist government in Poland and the countries it supported: the politically affiliated (e.g., Vietnam, Arab nations, African and Latin American states) or the Third World (see Marranci 2006). Consequently, in a large number of the Polish-Vietnamese or Polish-African marriages, the non-Polish spouse had immigrated as a child or youth and thus the lifetime spent in Poland is significantly longer than that spent in the birth country (see Winiarska 2011).

Some of pairs had met at university in Poland with the foreign partner deciding to remain in this country. Other couples had met while the Polish partner was studying or working abroad and then decided to return together to the homeland of that spouse. The foreign marital partners are persons integrating with Polish society to a high degree, something facilitated by their education level and their

Polish spouse. The data gathered is of a narrative nature, touching upon everyday personal family life, the past, planning for the future, child-rearing, as well as cultural differences and strategies for proceeding with a bicultural family. These are declarations – a form of self-presentation vis-à-vis the researcher who is of Polish nationality but an outsider. Some of the interviews were of a more freeform nature with the respondents leaving an impression that they were quite relaxed; others seemed to project a stiffness and formality. Reservations on the part of the respondents are, of course, understandable since the questions concerned family matters and intimate details which arouse emotions.

A TYPOLOGY OF TRANSNATIONAL COUPLES

Distinguished here are a few possible situations with regards to transnational marriages. The first category is connected to immigration and can lead to one of two situations: 1) when one of the partners is an immigrant and the other remains in his or her homeland, and 2) when the partners are from two different countries but remain as immigrants in a third. The second category, most frequently met in the history of human societies, entails trans-ethnic marriages formed in local, regional communities that simply are multicultural. These can be borderland areas which are mixed culturally, ethnically, and nationally; regions that became similarly mixed as a result of historical (forced or unforced) migrations (some from the very distant past); and states that were or are multiethnic or multinational such as the Russian Federation, former Yugoslavian republics or the halves of what was once Czechoslovakia. Herein I will refer to these as types 1.1) single migration; 1.2) double migration; and 2) local.

In the situation of a type 1.1 transnational marriage – precisely the situation upon which this article will focus – we most often speak of an immersion into the culture of the homeland spouse. The depth of this immersion corresponds with the length of the immigrant spouse's stay in Poland; the depth is also affected by the stage in his or her life in which this immigration took place: as an adult, as a university student, or as a younger youth. Among the cases studied here, a few of the foreign partners had come to Poland significantly earlier or later in life.

When the subject comprises the cultural dynamics within a family built upon the foundation of a transnational marriage, there is a need to understand the situational context, especially certain of its elements. One of these is the political-economic factor: what is the level of freedom and chance of mobility between the countries of origin? The answer is linked, on the one hand, to external political

circumstances (e.g., democracy, violent conflict, totalitarianism, etc.), and, on the other hand, to the financial standing of the family itself (e.g., the costs of travel between the two countries). Among other things, it is significantly more difficult for a partner who is cut off from his or her homeland to preserve the native language, customs, cultural patterns, or a familiarity with the material culture, and, most crucially, to transmit cultural competencies to one's children.

The second factor is of a psychological-social nature and pertains to the status assigned to the country and people of one spouse in the country of the other. This involves general opinions, national stereotypes, and historical experiences functioning on both sides. Here, too, it is more difficult to maintain one's culture when it is not only isolated, but also the object of less than positive opinions, stereotypes, and (however arbitrary) acceptance. The cultural dynamics of the transnational family are thus associated with the structure of the reference groups in which the nations and cultures of the countries of origin are entangled. This becomes the most manifest in the generation of the children who will (sub)consciously choose their primary language and national identity. Numerous are the problems which the binational couple must face and issues to resolve which the monoethnic couple does not even consider. These include choosing the country of residence, the language(s) used in the family, names of the children, the degree to which the foreign culture will be transmitted, and how to stabilize relationships with both families of the spouses.

CHOOSING THE COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS

The decision as to country of residence should be undertaken willingly and independently by the transnational couple, but sometimes circumstances do not leave much of a choice. As a consequence, this topic was raised by my respondents, but more often than not the decision had been made somewhat automatically and instinctively, seen as the only possible and sensible alternative. At times the reason behind staying in one country was a troubling political situation in the other.

Sometimes a more general political situation discourages the couple from choosing the foreign country. A Columbian asserted that he would not want his daughter to live in Columbia as he himself avoids it: 'When it comes to Columbia, I would absolutely not send a child to Columbia. I wouldn't go there myself' (C2M). Comparing his homeland to Poland, he sees the latter as better. In another case, an ongoing war meant that a Polish-Congolese couple

which had lived in the Congo for their first seven years, subsequently moved to Poland, to the wife's small hometown. If not for the bloody conflict, this pair would have rather stayed in Africa since the Polish wife was very happy with the simple life she found in her husband's country (49M).

In contrast – although she did express a desire to go there, to see and experience everything herself – the wife of a Nigerian could not at all imagine her life in Nigeria. She furthered the thought that it would also be hard for her husband to re-adapt anew to his own country after so many years in Poland. As an example she recounted the story of a Nigerian friend who had returned home, but, after only three months, came back to Poland. Back home he was now perceived as a foreigner, 'the rich relative' who would 'rescue one and all from any difficulties' – that he would pay someone's tuition, pay someone's hospital bill, etc. because he had 'come with a sack of money' (W41M). Similarly, Polish-Vietnamese couples emphasize that life in Vietnam would make no sense considering the differences in standards of living and the political atmosphere in Vietnam. Indeed, Vietnamese spouses commonly share such an assessment (see Winiarska 2011: 92). The wife of a Jordanian stated that she had no doubts that the family should live in Poland due to the restrictions to which she, as a woman, would be subject in Jordan, even if her husband did not require her to wear a headscarf (W45M).

Poland is seen by spouses originating from Western European countries as the perfect workplace for a foreigner. For an Englishman, thanks to his native knowledge of English and thanks to the development of international companies, Poland has become the ideal place to live. His wife adds that Poland is 'paradise for them [foreigners]' (M20). A Polish-Czech couple also decided that both spouses have more advantageous employment conditions in Poland. Still – and here it was not clear, if this exchange was tongue in cheek – the 25-year-old Czech woman commented that the wife should follow her husband: 'that's how it was in tradition'. To this her 26-year-old spouse added that, 'If it had been that I was the husband from the Czech Republic and she was the Pole, then for sure we would live in Czech Republic' (M06). In a different Polish-Czech couple, the wife provided an economic reason for choosing Poland: '[B]ecause it's my husband who earns more. For him it would be harder to find a job [elsewhere]' (M12).

In the absence of danger in both countries and with the possibility of easy mobility between the two, current residency in Poland is not necessarily treated as a definitive decision; sometimes the stay in this country is only temporary. For a Polish-Slovakian pair, the husband's university program in a highly specialized field is the reason for staying; upon completion of his degree they plan to leave

Poland for Slovakia (M07). The wife of an American states that ‘I would rather stay here; my husband likes life here, too. He has come to like Poland. But you never know what might happen’ (M32). A Polish-English couple migrated to Poland after two years in England: ‘You know, I missed it a bit. And then my husband got an interesting job offer, and I have a good job’ (M18). In this case, too, there is room for a change of permanent residency in the future although the wife’s attachment to her homeland does play a role.

In contrast, it sometimes happens that an individual who travels a lot, who has weaker ties with his or her country, and who self-defines him- or herself as a cosmopolitan chooses Poland as simply an interesting place to live. In this spirit one man – a teacher of English from the United Kingdom, married to a Polish woman – subjectively and highly praises features of Poland:

Before I married, I’d already been in Poland for 6 years. The key thing when it comes to Poland is that it is not England. It’s easier to meet people. In London life is very stressful. Here, I don’t know. I’m a simple man who doesn’t demand much out of life. I’ve been in many countries, in many lavish places, but that doesn’t mean that you feel better. But here, I feel good here; it fits my character. The tempo of life here is slower than in the West. You can hear the world turn (M11).

Nonetheless this respondent did not rule out the possibility of moving to another country and underscored that he also has to consider many factors, including his wife’s opinion. Similarly motivated to choose Poland is a German whose wife would not have anything against living in Germany where her life was more comfortable. Yet she went with her husband’s choice who, after a decade-long marriage, speaks Polish perfectly and feels quite at home here; he works online for a German company as well as at the University of Warsaw. All in all neither partner in this couple dismisses altogether the idea of moving from Poland to Germany and back again (E16).

The empirical data unveils two categories of factors critical in electing to reside permanently in Poland: 1) the political, cultural, and civilizational combined with limited financial resources which restrict movement back and forth; and 2) flexible economic choices which render change possible.

CHOOSING LANGUAGES

Transnational marriages face the issue of choosing a language in which they will communicate and, when children appear, choosing the language(s) spoken at home with the child. Often this entails a decision as to which parent's language will become the mother tongue. The situation of the emigrant partner in a binational couple is generally disadvantaged when it comes to preservation of that spouse's national language (not to mention an ethnic language or dialect) in the family (Kurecz 1992, 2005). A child's fluency in the foreign partner's language is the effect of various factors which are described differently by my respondents. They were usually not aware or not well-informed about ways in which to deal with bilingualism which is an exceptionally complex matter.

Most frequently my interviewees considered complete bilingualism an ideal for their children raised in Poland. Linguists and psychologists use the concept of balanced and full bilingualism when linguistic and communicative competencies have been equally developed in both languages. When a child is brought up in the social context of one parent – and this is the case of the families discussed herein – then, unquestionably, that child must attain full linguistic and communicative competencies in Polish. In comparison, the degree to which fluency is gained in the non-Polish language depends upon several elements: lessons in school, the presence of the language in family milieus (the circle of friends or family members who speak it), the attitudes of the Polish parent and his or her relatives, and, above all, the tenacity of the foreigner parent. Overall, dynamics within the marriage and a few external components will usually lead the couple's contact language (and then that of the whole family with the children) to fall to one side or another. Still it does happen that the language of communication between the partners is not the same as the language of communication with the children. This can lead to an asymmetry: one or both of the parents speaks to the child in some other language, but the child will reply in Polish.

In general, parents see bilingualism as a great chance for their children, but, to a great extent, adoption of this by the child depends upon the language which he or she must master. Among other things, there are languages seen as more or less desirable. An American's wife speaks of her 3-year-old son: 'Marek is learning both languages and we want him to be bilingual'. Yet a moment later she warns that, 'An American preschool is a tempting proposition but, on the other hand, we are living in Poland after all and I don't want to somehow isolate him. He already is bilingual' (M19). Hence situational components which, to some extent, help or hinder the possibility of balanced and full bilingualism are the Polish spouse, family, friends, and neighbors. In another case, the parents in

a Polish-Slovakian marriage stated: ‘We’ve decided that we will turn to the child in both languages’ – as they plan for their daughter to be completely bilingual. Yet here this is likely also linked to their decision to leave for Slovakia upon completion of the husband’s studies in Poland. Ultimately, as the couple notes, the girl will know Slovakian as her basic language, yet a decision as to the culture of closer contact and the language of higher fluency will be one that this now 5-month-old will make far into the future (M07).

A Polish-Japanese couple with no offspring as yet does plan bilingualism with the father speaking to children in Polish and the mother in Japanese (M13). The wife of a Nigerian, also childless at this point, imagines that her future offspring should, in fact, learn three languages: Polish, English, and her husband’s mother tongue. Although she herself does not know the last of these (with the exception of a few phrases), she is convinced that the child should: ‘so that he doesn’t have any barriers when we visit the grandparents’. In this instance an additional factor is attention paid to contact with the spouse’s foreign family. However, this wife sees the superiority of one of these languages as linked to the country in which the child will live – and in this case it will be Poland where the wife would like to live and ‘my husband finds it good’ (W41M). In contrast, the Polish wife of a Congolese man maintains French as the home tongue with her husband and sons, but seems consciously oblivious to other African languages. During the interview, she underscored that French was universal in the Congo and – asked point blank – claimed that there are no other, local languages there. In reality, her husband expressed an earnest regret that, ‘It’s too bad that she does not know my own language, my dialect. Everyone there speaks Kikongo or Lingala’ (49M).

Sometimes other things lead to a situation in which the children do not know the language of the foreign parent at all. A Russian mother of three children, who has lived in Poland for over two decades, laments that none of them speaks her mother tongue. Partly due to lack of time and partly intentional (to keep them from standing out), she taught them only Polish. Nevertheless, she still nurtures a hope that they will learn the language because she saw how well they did with Russian when the family vacationed in Crimea. She herself has deeply Polonized, asserting that she ‘thinks in Polish now’ (W47M). Noteworthy here is the foreign mother’s emphasis on the full immersion of her offspring into the Polish social context; deeper reasons underlie this about which I will write later.

Likewise a Vietnamese father who has lived in Poland for 30 years laments, in speaking of his two daughters, that ‘they don’t know [Vietnamese] at all. It just happened that way. I was constantly at work, rarely at home. They were with their mother, their grandmother. There was no time, no possibility. It is

a pity' (E6M). In turn, a Senegalese father of two sons but divorced from his Polish wife states, 'When I lived with them, I taught them some French'. Asked why, he accented that French might later be useful for his boys, and certainly more than his local Senegalese dialect (IO18). The daughter of a Columbian goes to a secondary school which her father labels 'normal' – meaning Polish – thus demonstrating an aspiration to avoid a sense of difference. The girl speaks Spanish poorly because she has neither time nor a desire to study it, and thinks English to be more expedient; her father also declared a lack of time. In a similar vein, a Polish-British couple imagines that any children they might have should be sent to a 'normal' school in the country in which they will live. Nonetheless, an English-language secondary school is decisively planned due to the chances which that language is seen as opening up for the future.

Yet another Latin American married to a Polish woman speaks in Spanish to his daughter although acknowledging that he will never be able to provide deeper linguistic fluency. That said, his wife states that the daughter knows Spanish well enough that, 'They have their secrets, unfortunately [chuckling]. I don't speak Spanish at all. My husband – from the very beginning, as soon as Ania understood anything – he always spoke in Spanish to her little, and now bigger ear, so she does know the language'. The husband admits that he will not be able to teach the girl a broader vocabulary because they would need more intensive contact whereas 'at the moment we're working hard. There is no time, no possibility to meet with Columbians, with Latin Americans' (C1M). The wife noted that children choose the language which they speak more easily and here that tends to be Polish. The language of the country in which one lives does hold an absolute advantage over any other. It is also more likely that the language of the street, the mass and social media, the school, and the general everyday environs will render that tongue easier.

Transnational families also occasionally deal with yet another phenomenon of a more psychological nature: at some point, a child might 'rebel' against the language of the immigrant parent. The wife of a Latin American recalled: 'She had this moment of rebellion. She was taken aback – what's happening here? Other kids are speaking Polish, their fathers are speaking Polish, but her father is somewhat strange. She didn't understand what this was all about. And there was a period when she told me straight out that she wants to have a Polish father. At the time she clung to my brother-in-law – he was her absolute favorite uncle, she cuddled with him, she wanted to have a father exactly like that, one who spoke Polish' (C2M). Ultimately the daughter's attitude radically improved after making friends with a classmate in a similar situation: the girl's father was Venezuelan and she also spoke Spanish.

An emphasis by the foreign parent on the learning of his or her language is a consequence of a conscious choice as well as agreement on this issue by both partners in the couple. Choice of the home language(s) tends, however, to be dictated by diverse living conditions. When the language of one of the spouses is very dissimilar from Polish, is perceived as exceptionally difficult, or is a local dialect completely unknown in Europe, then the family communication will be in Polish. If the languages of the husband and wife are relatively close, as in the Polish-Czech couple, then it does happen that each speaks in his or her own tongue and both understand each other quite well, occasionally filling in with even English words. In another couple, the Slovakian husband said that, 'My wife always speaks Polish; I always Slovakian [chuckling]' (M07). The nearness of the languages facilitates mutual understanding.

With regards to education, however, a decision between schools for their little son is being put off in a Polish-Czech family until future plans are made: the parents indicate that wherever the child lives, that is the language he should know best because it is where he will grow up as well as further his education. That same stance was expressed by the American mother of a boy who had just started attending school. Similarly, the daughters of a Polish-British couple have been sent to a Polish elementary school, though the parents consider the benefits of later sending the girls to an English-language secondary school because 'it will surely come in handy' (17M). Although progeny is only in the planning, the Japanese-Polish couple agrees that any child should certainly learn Polish and go to a Polish school (M13).

It does happen that the family language of communication is a spontaneous mix. In one case, even if the husband from England is set on learning Polish because they are settled in this country, family conversations switch back and forth from Polish to English. At times the children mix both languages in one response without evoking parental reaction and correction. Nonetheless, some parents consider the psychological and developmental aspects of the child. A Polish-Czech couple – after experiences with their older daughter who mixed languages and upon assumption of permanent residency in Poland – undertook a decision to speak only in Polish to the younger one. At this point the choice of home language became thought through and reflexive: 'I read that it's best if the mother speaks to her child in her mother tongue, and so I speak in Czech, and Marek in Polish'. The wife added that, 'In the future, when she is a bit bigger, when she understands (she's 6 months old), then I plan to begin speaking to her in Polish' (W2). Contact with both sides of the family – with equal contributions of the foreigner culture – facilitates preservation of the foreigner's mother tongue. In the case of the Czech wives described above,

socializing with family and friends on the other side of the border helps those living in Poland maintain connections and a feeling of familiarity.

With reference to language, the concept of cultural capital also arises. The mother of a 2-year-old girl is certain that she and her English husband are doing the right thing by speaking to their daughter in both languages – emphasized here is the social capital being built. The mother states, ‘We are trying to raise her in two cultures, even if she does not notice this as yet’. The father adds, ‘Yes, I think that it is a huge benefit in life when you are bilingual from birth because you have two points of view’ (41M). A Polish-Congolese couple also refers to the theme of cultural capital which knowledge of a second language provides: emphasis is on their sons’ maintenance of the French learned in childhood as an investment for their future. At home both parents speak in French with the children (49M).

Overall, two themes dominate in the interviews. One is a firm belief in the value of bilingualism and the cultural capital which the binational family provides its children. The second is a conviction that choice of a mother tongue is necessary; most frequently it was felt that this should be the language of the country of permanent residency, the country of the child’s development and education.

INTERGENERATIONAL CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

Fluency in a language is associated with transnational cultural transmission. One of the fathers asserted this clearly: ‘It is important to me that my child have at least something of my culture’. Consequentially, he taught his daughter Columbian dances as part of this minimum. Her identification with his culture is significant for him: ‘Despite everything, that is, she is descended partly from Columbia. She has some of my blood’ (C1M). The father does want his daughter to hold both citizenships, but it is difficult to claim two nationalities, and hence, for the time being, she presents the Polish although in practice she holds both. Correspondingly, a Turkish man who has lived in Poland for quite some time adopts certain Polish customs unenthusiastically, commenting: ‘However, I would of course also want to give the child a bit of our Turkish culture’ (IO7M). The Polish wife of a Slovakian man has found a way to deal with the child’s biculturalism: ‘The culture of the other parent is learned best through contact with his family’ (M06).

Most frequently cultural variances are described as an interesting difference, but sometimes as quite alien and strange. The theme of rituals connected with the

celebration of Christmas, and especially Christmas Eve (*Wigilia*) arises repeatedly in interviewee responses. Essentially, the Slovak's wife accepts her husband's culture to a high degree, but underscores that the Christmas wafer (*oplatek*) looks different back home and that family members do not offer one another wishes. The couple does spend Christmas with both families, adapting to both traditions, but this Polish woman appears to be somewhat disenchanted by the less ostentatious rituality of the Slovakian holidays. In turn, a Pole's wife would like to adopt the well-wishing ritual of her husband's family, but she also likes the humbleness of the Slovakian dishes, hence she would prefer to mix both traditions. Also in a Polish-Czech marriage, the husband noted that the Czechs also do not go around the table wishing family members well for the coming year, but since he and his wife alternate holidays in their family homes, they follow the local customs and traditions wherever they are.

If the country of the immigrant spouse is too far away, there is no chance for frequent visits and intense contacts with the families. It is different in the case of mixed marriages in which partners come from countries that are territorially close or even adjacent. A Polish-Czech couple harbors no doubts that their son will have continual contact with both cultures, regardless of where the family lives. Today there is facile contact via telephone, email, or audio-visual programs so children can know their relatives abroad. That said, there are countries overtaken by violent conflicts or wars which preclude such interpersonal, interfamilial communication.

In one of the Polish-English families studied, visits in England are frequent and thus there is a balance of both cultural influences. 'The children are constantly being raised in two cultures actually. It is normal that their father passes on his culture as I do mine' (18M). Customs and conventions are also described as clearly and equally doubled: 'We actually have Polish traditional holidays with *Wigilia* and, of course, Christmas carols, but with elements of English tradition, too. So some of the presents are in stockings, these big red ones which my mother-in-law made or bought (I can't recall just now). And we have pudding on Christmas Day. It's an English traditional food – very tasty, something or other... very good... something between a pudding and a cream, a bit like cake, but, no, more like pudding' (M18). Another Polish-English couple confirms a similar solution: 'We do the holidays in such a way as to connect both traditions. There is *Wigilia* and there is pudding' (M20).

The Japanese wife emphasizes that she would certainly want her child to have contact with Japanese culture. 'Naturally, of course I would want to teach them. We have our own holidays. Child's Day, Mother's Day, and they are on different days [than here]'. Yet, at the same time, this woman begins to

accommodate, for instance, to Christmas in Poland: 'I visit my husband's family because I join his family for the holy days. I don't know these traditions here'. Her physician advised that she eat only those foodstuffs to which she has been accustomed all her life, but she tries everything (M13).

As in the case of language, the immigrant spouse permanently residing in Poland has more limited possibilities to practice the customs and culture emblematic of his or her homeland. This pertains all the more to subsequent transmission of these cultural elements to offspring. During an interview with a Columbian man who has lived in Poland for over two decades, it turned out that his Warsaw apartment contained but a single object comprising something of a 'Columbian accent': a replica of an Indian plate from the Gold Museum in Bogota. Moreover, the respondent did not confer this object any special significance: 'It just hangs there as a sort of handicraft'. Then he adds, 'Well, unfortunately, perhaps it's my fault. Perhaps I wanted too much to adapt to the surroundings here' (C2M). This respondent remains suspended in a situation described herein as 'immersion': he lives in the homeland of his wife, is surrounded by her family, and has (due to political reasons and the long-term estrangement) weak contacts with his own homeland. Spending much time at work, this man fights neither for his own language in his family, nor for the preservation of some material signs, symbols, and emblems of his native culture. Such circumstances are typical for many foreigners who have married Poles and lived more permanently in Poland.

Nonetheless, other binational families do practice both traditions, maintaining a relative balance. This is the case with an English-Polish family even though tea with milk – the husband's 'delicacy' – is described as horrid by the wife (M20). Occasionally there are transnational couples that do not sense cultural differences at all. Among these is a Polish-Czech marriage in which both of the spouses accented their community of holidays, customs, values, etc. – detecting no other distinction apart from language.

Quite another issue surfaces in conversation with a Latin American who is of mixed heritage and rather dark-skinned. Asked how his daughter, raised in Poland, would do in Columbia, he answered, 'I think that she would do fine, would integrate, because she wouldn't differ much; not much distinguishes her looks. There would just be the matter of mastering the language' (C1M). Here it becomes evident that initially more significant than language and cultural fluency would be physical appearance; signaled is an awareness that physical differentiation could hamper adaptation in Columbian society.

As in decisions regarding maintenance of the foreign spouse's language(s) in the family, here, too, decisions about transmission of that spouse's other

cultural elements are impacted by political, economic, and living standard factors in Poland. Intergenerational transmission tends to be limited by practical circumstances. Still, the biculturalism which the binational family makes available to the children is treated as a form of cultural and social capital (see Nowicka 2006b).

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Yet another element of cultural difference is disparity in religious convictions and belongings. Such divergences touch upon the most intimate and sensitive spheres of life; they permeate an individual's psychologically anchored sense of sacrum. Therefore, the means by which a couple addresses religious differences and divides are among the most crucial decisions. In turn, however, religious similarity can bring persons from very dissimilar cultures closer together (de Singly 1987). Data from this research study unveils a broad spectrum of solutions.

Regardless of any religious or philosophical differences, the most common attitude can be expressed succinctly: one should adapt to the traditions of the country in which one lives. Getting accustomed to one another, getting to know one another, and gradual understanding and acceptance are the most frequently chosen path to mutual accommodation. A Vietnamese man living in Poland for quite some time declares that, 'We are here, so all customs must be respected and should be applied. There is a Vietnamese saying that when you come into a new family, you must accept its customs' (AW3). In this case it need be noted that this interlocutor immigrated to Poland as a teenager; he was already living in this country during the period in which his interests and adult personality were being shaped. But a Slovakian husband agrees, 'I am here, so I adapt to what is here' (M07). Although a Muslim, a Senegalese man (divorced from his Polish wife with whom he has two sons) very strongly underscored how he adapted and participated in the Polish Roman Catholic *Wigilia* with its *oplatek*, even if he never went to pray in a church (IO18).

A variation on this theme is found in a Polish-Czech marriage wherein the Polish husband insisted that children have a Roman Catholic upbringing even if he himself (to which his Czech atheist wife attests) is not as Catholic as he should be. Occasionally, certain elements of the religious culture of one partner can be a source of fascination for the other: 'It's such a community with roots. Slovakian youth understand their rural, folk culture which in Poland has vanished from everyday life' (M06). Nevertheless, Vietnamese spouses sometimes notice certain deep distinctions segregating their Confucian way of thinking from that

of the Poles. The latter group cannot comprehend Confucian principles of rigid obedience with regards to elders or a widely understood sense of familial duty and responsibility.

Generally speaking, interviewees assert that, even facing other distinctions, a shared religious community does help connect the family and help in breaking through other barriers. From a Polish-Japanese marriage, in which both partners are Roman Catholic, we heard, 'I am not saying that we do not have problems, but it is easier for me to accept a difference of opinion for that reason. We have completely different mentalities' (M13). In a Polish-African couple, also with Roman Catholicism in common, it is easier, for example, to decide about how to spend the Christmas holidays in the family.

Nonetheless, sometimes both halves of such a couple stress that religious similarities were inconsequential and did not facilitate understanding and compromise in other issues. The wife of an American spoke of dissimilarity with some awkwardness, manifesting a discomfort which indicated incomplete acceptance of even a rather guileless situation: Christmas presents were exchanged at the wife's parents', in Polish fashion, on the 24th, while at home they were exchanged, American style, on the morning of the 25th. She sighed while describing these differing customs, albeit taking comfort in that her husband really likes sharing the *oplatek* wafer. On her part, she had to get accustomed to Thanksgiving Day with all of its traditional foodstuffs (W19).

In some of the binational families ties to a faith or confession are weak and this eases mutual adaptation with regards to customs and traditions. On the one hand, a Russian woman living in Poland for over two decades was only baptized in the Orthodox church, but never practiced religious holidays at home. With no habits associated with her official religion, she became a Catholic in Poland and now practices that tradition. On the other hand, she does lament upon the fact that a person is forced to adapt to a culture that is not his or her own. She finds this painful and a source of loneliness; with a sense of nostalgia she harkens back to the times of her childhood (W47M). Contrasting is the situation of a Tunisian, non-practicing Muslim with a Polish wife: 'I share *oplatek* with my spouse, with my son, with all the members of the family'. And immediately he adds that this respect is mutual: 'On my holy days, my wife always wishes me well. We certainly do not try to create barriers between us. [Religion] has changed for me, perhaps it's on another level – neither very traditional, nor cultural... Culturally, you could say a lot about the things I have learned here in Poland'. In addition, this interlocutor accented the concentration of both partners on their work and on their small child. Together they respect all holidays, practicing both Christmas and Easter: 'You need to, you need to.

As long as you are in such a situation, you have to accept it. I can't, I can't just sit on the side while my wife, you know, observes her holy day' (IZ7). In this case a combination of mutual respect and weakened engagement in one's own religion expedites harmony in family life.

From time to time religious differences lead to conflict, tensions or a scar on the family communality. A Turk married to a Polish Roman Catholic, although not religious himself, wants to circumcise his son whereas his wife is against this. He recounts, 'At the beginning there was a verbal agreement between us that a child would be baptized and, in exchange, if it was a boy... circumcision'. This same man adds, too, that the Polish tradition of sharing the *oplatek* before Christmas Eve dinner causes him some unease and therefore he has not participated in this lately (IZ04).

Occasionally playing an emphatic role in attempts to preserve the religious traditions of both spouses is the opinion of the in-laws – the parents of the spouses. The Polish husband of a Japanese woman claims that his parents expect their grandchildren to be baptized and raised in the Roman Catholic tradition (M13). The character of family dynamics is, to a great extent, dependent upon individual personalities, enables peaceful consensus or arouses implicit or explicit strains which are particularly troublesome in the case of worldviews.

NAMING THE CHILDREN

Even before progeny appears, the transnational family stands also before the necessity of choosing a name for the child – a name which, to some degree, will become a symbol of his or her identity. This category of decision also bears a cultural aspect. For instance, the majority of Polish-Vietnamese children has a Polish first name but a Vietnamese middle name; for some both names are only Polish, while, in the case of two couples, both names were only in Vietnamese (Winiarska 2011: 94). A Polish-English couple with a two-year-old daughter chose a name which would work in both languages and would be easy to pronounce. Ultimately the Polish name 'Agata' was chosen, partly because it is associated in Great Britain with the queen of detective novels. As one spouse pointed out, 'The majority of such mixed marriages tries to choose a name which is present in two cultures, a name that is sort of a bridge' (M20). A Polish-Czech couple chose names for their daughters which would be familiar in both countries, while the son of another such pair bears a name which (though pronounced the same in both languages) the Czech wife describes as Czech-sounding, while the Polish husband perceives it as Polish.

A young Polish-Nigerian couple, however, has already chosen names for any future daughter or son – both are Nigerian. The motivation here is that the child should have a name which corresponds to the surname which will be patronymic (W41M). The future children of a Polish-Japanese couple is foreseen as a hyphenated, Japanese-Polish combination (M13). All arrangements are thus possible. Some parents want the name to work well in both languages, sometimes they match it to the surname, and sometimes quite the contrary – selecting, for example, a typical Polish first name to accompany an African-sounding surname.

THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF CHILDREN

Parents in a binational family do consider the future of their children who are raised in this unique situation, but the mother and father often do not have clarity about the nationality their children will carry: this is something left for the children to decide at some point. Some couples assume that their offspring will have a dual identity; some expect that the milieu in which the child is raised will play a formative and more decisive role. The children raised in Poland by a Russian mother feel (something of which she is certain) simply Polish in nationality.

Similar is the situation in Polish-Vietnamese families. The presence in the family context of cultural elements derived from the distant country of the foreign parent does influence the identity process, does form a bond between the child and that country. Still Vietnamese parents are not surprised that their children feel Polish: ‘And they completely don’t feel Vietnamese. That is, they know that they are half Vietnamese and this is in their consciousness. But their full consciousness is that they are Poles for sure. They live here and absolutely do not identify themselves as Vietnamese’ (AW6). Another Vietnamese father spoke thusly of his son: [My son] feels Polish. If a person doesn’t speak Vietnamese, then he doesn’t feel that way... even if he has Vietnamese blood in him, and is, after all, of Vietnamese descent’ (AW7). In any case, neither parent seems to question the Polish identification.

The Polish wife of an Englishman debates this national identity issue:

Looking at my children, I don't see them having any problem with that. Quite the contrary. Other children even envy them. For instance, there's that pudding: I once had to make one for some carnival party in preschool or school. Perhaps because they're still young and don't think about a lot of things, don't mull over what nationality they are, and don't think in these categories as yet. But later it

could be harder for them, for sure. On the one hand, it will be easier if they know more languages, and two countries. But, on the other hand, perhaps it's not easy to be Polish and English. It's hard to ride two horses at the same time.

Towards the end of the conversation, she recalls that, 'my aunt's mother was half-German, but her daughter didn't even know German and later held a grudge against her mother. Children should know both cultures, because, after all, they belong both here and here' (46M).

In addition to passing on elements of both parental cultures, two citizenships are seen as advantageous. The child of a Polish-British pair, 'Having dual citizenship, he already is Polish and English. But, in the future, he'll decide for himself' (E11M). Since the Polish wife in this couple is counting on their remaining permanently in Poland, she believes that the child will be pulled toward that culture and its identity. Nonetheless, such attitudes draw attention to the emergence of a polymorphic ethnic identification among both the immigrant parents and their progeny (Turner 1993: 411–429).

With a single parent holding Polish citizenship, a child automatically acquires Polish citizenship. This is not an issue, but sometimes the second citizenship is. A Nigerian's wife would like her child to have both passports whereas his or her nationality would depend more on the country of upbringing. For any girls in the family, the woman would prefer that they be raised in Poland where they would be less restricted. Yet another aspect in the family dynamics surfaces in conversation with a Polish-American couple. The husband expects to stay in Poland and is becoming a Polonized American. Nonetheless, the fact that his son will be more Polish because this is where the boy lives is a bit vexing for the American father.

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD

Noticeable among transnational couples is a phenomenon described herein as a transnational identity. Several of the interviews yielded a – sometimes more, sometimes less – directly expressed belief that divisions into national or ethnic groups makes no sense anymore. Citizenship and formal declarations of nationality are basically without meaning, and, all in all, people are just the same: 'I simply came in order to learn, to study, and to meet other people – and not in order to learn other nations with regards to ethnicity, religion, or something else. I've immersed myself in the landscape here, in the Polish environment' (E51M).

The customs and habits of the foreign country can be maintained in a binational family residing permanently in Poland, but, for practical reasons, only to a limited degree. As has become quite evident, especially key in Polish culture are Easter and Christmas traditions, and these tend to be fully accepted by the foreign spouse. In fact, in many interviews the celebration of Christmas Polish style appeared in the context of a complete acceptance, a total immersion in the culture. Responding to the question – ‘How do you celebrate the holidays in your home in Poland?’ – a Columbian who continues to hold only the citizenship of his home country answered, ‘In Polish. I’ve simply lived here in Poland for a very long time and try to be...’. When the interviewer here suggested ‘Polish’, this was affirmed with a ‘Yes’. Nonetheless, despite this deep integration, this interlocutor treated the idea of a Polish passport rather trivially, adding only that ‘somehow I haven’t taken care of the Polish citizenship’, even though it is formally possible for him (C2M).

Research into adults whose parents are of different nationality lead to a finding that the overwhelming majority declares a dual identity; only a few choose one or the other of their parents’ identities. Nonetheless, just a handful of those studied rejected a national identity altogether, stressing only the weight of individual identity (Nowicka 2006a; Jarymowicz 2002). The adult son of a Polish-Egyptian pair described his identity with the word, ‘cappuccino’ (E55P), while the son of a Polish-Kenyan couple spoke of himself as ‘like a zebra – black and white’ (E49P). A Slovakian appraises the issue in like fashion: ‘The children will be, I think, naturally half-and-half’ (M06). The wife of a Jordanian foresees that her future offspring, ‘Will perhaps be citizens of the world, as people say now’ (W45M).

PHYSICALITY

A problem for the transnational family of yet another category is the issue of a child’s physical distinctions and how he or she is perceived in Polish society which is so very homogenous, especially in physiognomy. A Polish-Nigerian couple with three children bemoans the painful incidents experienced in connection with their features. This theme recurs in the majority of narrations from Polish-African couples, but even the Japanese wife felt that her child would need to be psychologically prepared for this so as to provide him with an inner strength: ‘I’m afraid; I am because I have heard various stories about such situations. I will want to teach my child values, inner values. If a child has a sense of his or her own worth and value, then that is truly important’ (M13).

This problem, however, is not noticed by Polish-Vietnamese couples. The offspring of these marriages basically feels Polish and the parents do not question

this. The wife of an American refers to this issue inversely when emphasizing that her child will not have any problems precisely because it does not look physically different, not to mention that Poles also love Americans. Because he might be exposed to teasing or taunts from classmates, this Polish mother feels that a child from an ethnically mixed marriage should be enlightened and informed about differences and the exceptionality of his circumstances. 'Because he has to be aware of these differences and the possible questions, or even some distress, which might be coming from other kids or adults' (E21M).

An Englishman's wife speaks of her two-year-old daughter, 'I am aware that for the average Pole she will be a bit of a foreigner and for the English, too, but this rather distinguishes her in a positive sense. It's something interesting' (M20). Occasionally, cultural differences are perceived as quite significant by the Polish spouse. When this happens there is a feeling that a child, especially a girl, should be prepared earlier – to explain various types of differences before visiting her non-Polish grandparents, so that she does not experience a shock. Such was the case with a Polish-Nigerian couple (W41M).

The Columbian father spoke of his daughter in answer to the question, 'Do you feel that your daughter recognizes her uniqueness stemming from the fact that she is from a mixed marriage? Has this been significant for her at various points in her life?' To this he responded, 'It hasn't been so important. My daughter is aware of this; sometimes she even boasts about it in front of her girlfriends that she is... not a foreigner, but an Indian. I always tell her that she also has some Indian blood in her, likely some African as well' (C2M).

Also found among the children's generation is a seeking of contact with peers with similar family situations. According to our interlocutors from African countries, it is easier for their children to make friends with children of similar transnational marriages than with children of Polish-Polish or even African-African marriages. The distinct characteristics of a family bring both parents and children together. The parents often also have friends who are from transnational marriages, and especially seek out unions in which the foreign spouses come from the same country or continent.

MIXING OR DOMINATING

The power balance in a binational couple is decisive in whether one national culture dominates or if there is some manner of equilibrium between the two. Generally speaking, binational pairs do try to commingle both cultures. In a Polish-English marriage, the mixing of customs and languages is rooted in

a real interest in the culture of each side and a relatively low level of mutually perceived ‘threat’. This is possible due to a comparatively near, geographic proximity along with easy travel between the two countries. Emerging from a conversation with one Polish-British couple is a sense of security and freedom along with a conviction that a binational marriage is no trouble. The Polish wife compares the mixing of various regional traditions in Poland to the mixing of the national traditions in her own family and others like it (E33M).

In a Polish-Czech marriage, the Czech wife prepares typically Czech dishes for Christmas Eve – a sweet and sour, thick lentil soup and a potato salad with carp – but she has also learned how to cook Polish dishes, too. The wife of an African as well as the children in the family love certain African foods, but also see them as a luxury item appearing rarely on the dinner table because not all the necessary ingredients can be readily purchased.

In other families an evident domination of one of the cultures is made manifest. This will be the culture of one of the parents and, most often, the parent who is ‘at home’. Longer-term marriages speak of their shared life in categories of necessary compromises which, in the words of the interlocutors, primarily pertain to the realm of food preparation. When it comes to eating habits, each side must acknowledge the preferences which the other spouse has brought from his or her home country.

A sense of distinction can also be accompanied by a strong motivation to nevertheless preserve family unity. An Englishman underscored that ‘Poles and the English are completely different. You can see it in our marriage; everything is different. Nothing she does quite suits me. You can see it on vacations when she wants to lie on the sand and I want to go into the water; she’s here, I’m there, etc. The family is very important so I want to uphold it, because something is missing’ (E32M). This interviewee values the permanence and stability of the family and focuses on his near and dear ones. Hence the family and marriage have become values in and of themselves despite serious cultural and personality differences.

Nevertheless, the wife of another Englishman expresses something quite the opposite. She sees England and Poland as culturally similar and would expect difficulties only with a Chinese or Arab husband. With an English partner she sees things as rather simple although, in an aside, she did note that a transnational marriage is harder. Likewise a Russian woman drew attention to the similar languages and cultures in her marriage: ‘You can always find some compromise. But in the case of a marriage joining people from countries in completely different cultural circles – for example, a Polish-Arabic marriage – I think that there would be very great differences and problems, including in arrival at some

agreement' (W24M). Worthy of comment is this perception of an Arab culture husband as exceptionally incongruous.

Generally, symptomatic of transnational marriages is a striving for contact with each other. In other words, these couples seek contact with other mixed couples, and they especially seek other bearers of the culture represented by the spouse who is foreign and somewhat isolated from the home culture. Transnational families – across the generations – do bear a discernible sense of their own uniqueness.

PLUSES AND MINUSES

The intimate nature of marital relations gives rise to explicit problems for binational, bicultural couples. Further, the social context taken as a whole is decisive in a more or less positive assessment of one's own situation as a spouse in such a pair. The wife of the Columbian speaks of a universalism in marital commune: 'Chance and circumstance led to our somehow finding ourselves in completely different hemispheres' (C2M).

Among other things, important to the Polish spouse in relationships based on close emotional contact is a capability to display affection. Therefore partnerships with persons from Asian cultures can be troubled by a reserve and modesty in this regard. Moreover, foreign partners from countries with a high level of collectivism can be taken aback by the European cultural patterns of individualism in Poland. Some also describe Polish society as somewhat sad.

All in all, asked about the positive and negative aspects of being in a transnational marriage, an American's wife said, 'I would say that it enriches us though it does create problems, too. But I wouldn't describe this as a hindrance, nor a help. In any case, it will be my son who will be able to say something about this someday. I don't know... "hinders" is perhaps too strong a word, as is "help"' (M19). The Polish wife of a Congolese man drew attention to the overcoming of differences, but claimed that everything can be tackled; she did advise that all it takes sometimes is to explain intention in the conflict situations which inevitably do arise. In agreement, the Congolese husband and Polish wife said that 'When there are two people, there is always a difference of opinion. But you just have to get along, you just have to know how to get along' (49M). A Czech wife assents: 'I think that it maybe depends completely upon those two people. Sure there are some pluses and some minuses. I mean, you have to somehow adapt two cultures to each other, so you need a bit of willingness on both sides' (W23M).

Noteworthy are the reactions of Polish wives of Vietnamese husbands who most often accentuate a lack of crucial dissimilarities between two cultures seemingly so distant from one another. One Vietnamese husband accents the ease with which cultural barriers are overcome: ‘There just isn’t such a big difference between the behavior of Vietnamese and Poles’ (AW1). In turn, the Polish husband of a Vietnamese woman concurs, providing more detail:

To tell the truth, there aren’t any [differences]. The only thing which separates us is language. Just that. Otherwise nothing, just language. The culture doesn’t divide us at all; that’s a complete invention. You just have to be human, be with someone for half a year and you’re with her, there are no differences. The only thing is that you have to get along. We differ in language and our physical appearance. [...] So I’d declare that there are no barriers.

After a while he goes even further: ‘If you speak [Polish] well, you feel, you become a representative of that nation’ (AW2).

It does also happen that interviewees speak with caution about the binational marriage. A Russian woman, about 45 years-old, speaks of mixed marriage: ‘After all, you do complicate your life. You’re always foreign everywhere’ (W47M). This particular response is surprising in comparison with the full acceptance of the multicultural situation in Polish-Vietnamese pairings: after all, the culture of Slavic Russia is indubitably nearer and more similar to the Polish than that of Asian Vietnam. Therefore variations in acceptance of and acquiescence to binationalism should be sought in factors other than the degree of cultural differentiation.

One of the issues with which the spouses must deal are the attitudes of both their families; especially key here is the reception of the foreign spouse into the Polish family, but the other side can also be taken into account. Family members of a Japanese woman were anxious about losing their daughter, but fears were dispelled upon meeting the son-in-law whom the family came to like – among other things because, in their opinion, ‘he is not so European’ (M13).

Yet another hurdle which transnational couples face is formal, administrative issues. The wife of a Jordanian (previously married to another woman from Europe) complains of problems in obtaining a Polish visa due to accusations of a fictitious marriage. Consequently, she has travelled four times to Jordan, staying for up to one month at a time. Obstacles in legalizing residency also affect a Polish-Nigerian couple. The wife claims that her husband is ‘treated like a potential criminal’ and is constantly called to present papers proving his name, place of birth, etc. (W41M). An entire family returning to Poland from

Congo also met with a mountain of troubles when all their documents were lost in the violent conflict there.

Overall, a key type of complication is found in Polish passport rules and regulations with regards to aliens. However, this primarily pertains to citizens of countries lying outside the European Union, and especially certain geographically remote countries. Thus a Polish wife notes that, 'The Polish passport is simply more valuable in the world, permitting entrance into many countries'. Quickly her husband adds, 'In contrast, Congolese citizenship creates more difficulties – a visa is needed to get into many countries' (49M).

MARRIAGES IN THE SECOND GENERATION

An indicator shedding light on one's own transnational marriage is a personal attitude towards a child's possible marriage with someone of another nationality. Queries on this topic usually evoked affirmative responses. The sole objection, but often expressed by the parents was the conceivable loss of daily contact with their child who might therefore emigrate. A Czech woman speaks in this vein about the future of her daughters: crucial for her is that they live nearby, 'but their husbands can be of whatever nationality' (W2).

At times the Polish parent is more interested in offspring remaining in Poland whereas the non-Polish parent is of a different opinion. Such is the case with a young, Polish-Japanese couple: the Polish father would like to have his children near him, while the Japanese wife would have nothing against sending a child off to Japan (M13). For some parents only the feelings of their children come into play. They would concur with a Congolese man who lives with his family in a small town in Poland. 'For me there is no problem. I myself am alone here. There is no problem – it's love. If the child is in love somewhere, then he can [go], just to be happy' (49M).

Yet, asked about an imaginable choice by her daughter to take a foreigner as a husband, the wife of an Englishman makes note of one aspect. At first stating no objections, she added that, she 'would not want her to marry an Arab, for example. They treat women... this sounds a bit like a prejudice, perhaps unjust, but there is, after all, some sort of danger' (M20). Therefore, as noted earlier here, not every foreigner – especially with regards to the marriage of a daughter – is equally accepted.

STEREOTYPES AND HIERARCHIES

Positive and negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with the nations from which a non-Polish spouse is descended do impact a person's frame of mind in a binational family, as well as the intergenerational transmission and preservation of the home culture traditions and customs of the foreign spouse. Charles Taylor aptly notes that acceptance of a migrant's disparity and diversity in the immigration country is a constitutive element of his or her identity. Assumed here is that self-perception depends upon how one is seen in the eyes of others (Taylor 1989; Gracz 2007: 22). Thus we enter into the complex sphere of the influence of national stereotypes on binational families.

Deleterious motifs do not surface in interviews with individuals of Western European or North American descent. Since Poland aspires towards the West, better positioned are immigrant spouses from the United States, the United Kingdom, or Germany than those from the Middle East, Africa, or Russia. It was a reluctant attitude precisely towards the last of these which led a Russian woman to lament about how her nation is disliked in Poland: 'I think, why do I have this background and not another? It'd be better if I was from the West. It would be simpler' (W47M). Similar are the experiences of a young Romanian man whose son very sharply severs any ties to Romania and Romanian culture (E5).

Still more distinctive is the process of acceptance in the case of mixed marriages with African spouses; their evident and socially perceived physical characteristics distinguish them more (see Nowicka 2004; Nowicka 2005). A relatively neutral position is held here by immigrants from Czech Republic and Slovakia whose representatives are described in all surveys as the closest to the Poles. Hungarian spouses also sense a customarily friendly stereotype about their nationality in Poland. As for those from Latin America, the Polish attitude is tinted with a sense of exotica which leads physical and cultural traits to be seen as attractive.

IN SUMMARY

Analyzing the conditions and circumstances of both spouses in binational couples found in Poland, three fundamental strategies made themselves manifest in the research material. The first of these is a 'unilateral immersion' developing when the immigrant partner is completely or significantly cut off from his or her country and its cultural context. In such a situation, equal and

full intergenerational transmission of language and culture is rendered nearly unfeasible. Polish language and tradition come to dominate, which subsequently bears on the identity dilemmas of the non-Polish spouse. Long-term detachment from one's birthplace, accompanied by long-term residency in Poland, builds a barrier against one's mother country and leads to a torn identification. Primarily Vietnamese, Latin Americans, and Africans experience this. For years they have not visited their homeland, and they come to feel comfortable in Poland (despite Polish perception of their physiognomy as 'alien'). Ultimately, as a consequence of severance from life in their country of origin, they can also be perceived as foreign at home (Winiarska 2011: 90–91; Waldis 2006: 3–5).

The second type of strategy is 'equalized' or 'balanced'. This is characterized by regular contact with both homelands, languages, cultures, and families. In this case intergenerational transmission of language and culture is or can be balanced and full. Moreover, identity complexes are less likely to surface and the immigrant spouse is more likely to feel comfortable in both countries. This strategy is applied more often when Poland and the country of origin are territorially close (e.g., Czech Republic, Germany, etc.), when travel between the states is relatively practicable (e.g., United Kingdom or even the United States), and/or when the foreign culture and especially language are perceived as practical and beneficial (e.g., English, French, etc.).

The third and final strategy in binational marriages is a minimalization of the problem with reference to the future. This is best summarized in a response from the Polish husband of a non-Polish woman. On the one hand, he admitted that such families have it harder when it comes to language and legal issues, but, on the other hand: 'I'd put it this way: it'd be good to quickly unite the world. Thanks to such a world, people will not want wars because, in any nation, they will have some relatives. People are becoming more open' (M06). Similar sentiments were heard in other interviews. The wife of a Slovakian predicted, 'When the child of a binational couple becomes an adult, globalization will have gone so far that miniscule differences will become meaningless. Her husband underscored that he no longer could see any manifestly Polish tradition; everything is blurring (M11). An Englishman thought likewise: 'I think that if I were to have a child tomorrow, then in 13 or 14 years there won't be a difference between Poland and England when it comes to culture' (M20).

In the course of an informal conversation with a Spaniard who has lived in Poland for a long time, a general typology was described: this man divided societies into 'peaches' and 'coconuts'. The first of these refers to a society in which initial contact is soft and easy, but a hard, resistant pit can be discovered later in relationships. The second refers to a society in which initial contact

is difficult, leading foreigners to feel that they are facing a hard shell that is impossible to crack. It is only after closer, tightened contact that one breaks through, is met with kindness and friendship, and can be unconditionally and fully accepted. Here, Poland could be classified as the latter type. After closer, especially familial relations are established, the foreigner is genuinely accepted and the context is friendly. From the interviews cited herein emerges just such an image of Poles in their interethnic, international relationships. This takes on special meaning when individual decisions lead to mixed marriages – usually as an effect of migration.

The article at hand has dealt with binational families in Poland – a very specific setting of a more general social issue. Findings from similar research conducted elsewhere in the world will vary in accordance with contexts. Nonetheless, whatever the case may be, the spirit of a supranational community or humanistic universalism will be – as a matter of course – inevitably present in transnational marriages. They surmount stereotypes, customs, and habits; they prove that love is indeed everywhere.

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