

**ETHNIC POLISH STUDENTS FROM THE FORMER  
SOVIET UNION IN THE HOMETLAND OF THEIR FOREFATHERS.  
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

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***Introduction***

The aim of this article is to present the findings of an empirical qualitative research project on culture contact between ethnic Polish students from the former Soviet Union (the Polish diaspora is usually referred to as the Polonia, and I will be using this term as well) on the one hand and the Polish host society—Poles and Polish culture—on the other. On its general (theoretical and methodological) level, this project is based on the sociological, social psychological and cultural anthropological literature on culture contact; on psychological consequences of group contact for potential reduction of prejudices; on acculturation; on cultural shock and its phases, etc. (see Mucha 2000). I will not refer directly to this literature very often though, preferring to concentrate on the empirical problem and empirical findings.

***Socio-Cultural Situation of Foreign Students***

International or rather cross-cultural education is not only a modern phenomenon. Nor is it characteristic only of Western civilization, and studying abroad, in a foreign country, is as old as the recorded history. Adrian Furnham and Stephen Bochner give examples from the ancient India, medieval China, and medieval Europe (1982: 161-62). A great boom in international exchanges of students occurred, however, only after World War II. In the mid-1970s, the annual enrollment of foreign students reached about 600,000. About 80% of all overseas students attended educational institutions in the developed countries (Bochner, Lin and McLeod 1979: 29).

It seems that from the beginning of the post-World War II period the aims of cross-cultural education have not changed. They are as follows: intellectual and professional development of a given student in a specialized field of study elected either by or for him/her;

"general education" of the student; and finally the furthering of international understanding (see, e.g., Coelho 1962: 56). While the first two aims seem to be significant from the very beginning of recorded international education, the third aim became particularly important only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. However, "little hard data are available either to substantiate or dismiss the hypothetical link between study abroad and mutual understanding" (Bochner, Lin and Mcleod 1979: 29-30; see also Pettigrew 1998, Nowicka 1998).

Many scholars list a number of important social roles played simultaneously by foreign students: the role of a foreigner, of a student, of an adolescent, of a mediator between the culture of origin and the culture of host society. Requirements of the new foreign roles can contradict requirements of the "old," deeply internalized roles to which most of the sojourners will have to return, so a problem of role conflict and of living "between cultures" often emerges (see, e.g., Pedersen 1980: 302-04, Becker 1971: 467-73).

### *Educational Exchange and Studying in Poland*

Hard and systematic data on the international exchange of students are not easily available in Poland. Until 1956, the post-World War II Poland educated annually between 300 and 600 foreign students. Between the years 1957 and 1968, an average number of 1000 foreigners were educated here annually, and between 1969 and 1980, 2000. In the mid-1980s, among the European socialist countries, Poland was last in the number of educated foreigners (see: Michowicz 1980: 65-66; Maslowski 1987: 69-78). In 1971, 3700 foreigners studied in Poland, in 1982 there were 3200 foreign students, and in 1990 there were 7080. The increase is particularly visible when we analyze the number of students from the "developing countries," the so-called "Third World." In 1971, they constituted about 30% of the foreign student population and in 1990 about two thirds. In 1990, about 10% of the whole foreign group were ethnic Poles (the Polonia students). The foreigners were educated mostly in various technological disciplines and only about 15% of this population studied the "university disciplines" (Maslowski 1990: 65-66; see also Lodzinski 1993: 88-89).

During the academic year 1996/97, 8296 foreigners studied in Poland. There were among them 3798 (or 46 %) Polonia students. Most of them came from Eastern Europe and from the Asian post-Soviet republics. According to Julia Gorbaniuk, the first Polonia students came from the Soviet Union to Poland at the end of the 1980s, and in 1998 there were about 3000 of them (see: 1998: 87). To compare the Polish figures with figures from countries more developed than Poland, in the academic year 1993/94, in the US there were 80,000 foreign students; in France—56,000; in England—52,000; in Italy—38,000. Just as thirty years earlier, the foreigners constituted 1% of the student body in Poland, while 7% in the US, 9% in France, 5% in England and 4% in Italy (Grzelak 1997: 2-3).

The process of education of foreigners in Poland has been a subject of scholarly research for nearly forty years now. According to Paulo de Carvalho, the first studies on their "adaptation" were conducted in 1962 in the Institute for Science Policy and Higher Education in Warsaw, followed by research done at the Center for Language Studies for Foreigners at the Lodz University and later at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow's Institute for Polonia Research (later Polonia Institute) (see: 1990: 13). Among the research findings one should mention a collection on students from the "developing countries" edited by Ewa Nowicka and Sławomir Łodziński (1993), research reports on the attitudes of foreign students toward Poland and on their acquaintance with this host society (Michowicz 1988, Saleh 1995, Rokicki 1998, Furier 1998) and articles by Oleg Gorbaniuk (1998) and Roman Dzwonkowski (1998) on the national self-consciousness of the Polonia students from the former Soviet Union. Altogether there are not very many published works on this subject in Poland, while already in 1968 the selected world bibliography listed nearly 500 items (see: Bochner 1982: 15).

International, as well as Polish, anthropological, sociological and social psychological research on the foreign students uses various methodologies and differs in character. There are theoretically oriented studies which are to prove general hypotheses (mostly in the field of social psychology) concerning, for instance, effects of intergroup contact on the potential reduction of prejudices or concerning the phases of cultural shock (in the sense of Oberg 1960). There are diagnostic studies, the aim of which is to give us more empirical

information on foreign students in a given country or coming from a given ethnic/national group; studies in the field of social policy in which the research subject results either from social and cultural problems as defined by scholars and/or administrators, or from problems faced by foreign students or persons or institutions directly cooperating with them. There are studies based on very large samples with the findings elaborated with the help of sophisticated mathematical methods, but also studies based on very small samples coming from a single university. There are international comparative research projects, but also social psychological studies of a laboratory character.

***The Research Problem and Methodology of this Project:  
Introduction to the Empirical Part***

Studies on foreign students belong to broader categories of research on the relationship between foreigners and the host society in which they live for a time. What, in practice, the *individualized culture contact* looks like has many aspects.

The culture contact I am talking about is a complex social process which begins already in the sojourner's country of origin. It is here where the decision whether a person will study abroad and in which country is taken. For the actual course of the following direct contact it is important if there is in the country of origin a "generalized communication intention" with the outside world and adequate general and detailed information on the potential host society. We can study the situation before the actual culture contact mostly in an indirect way by asking our informants *post factum*, that is, during the stay in the host society

The second stage of the process under discussion is the actual contact, in our case in Poland. It is the above mentioned period of "in-betweenness," a period which begins in many cases with a more or less strong cultural shock. The strength of this shock depends, at least partially, on the level of preparation of the sojourner for the contact. It is a period of "liminality," of keeping the old ways (to which the migrant is to return) and simultaneously learning the new ways. This is the period when the individualized "third culture," either in the sense of Bronislaw Malinowski (1945) or Fred Casmir (1996) is born,

a period of the development of "internal cultural pluralism" in the sense of Jerzy J. Smolicz (1990: 102).

Finally, we can identify the third stage of the contact, the stage of the return home to the migrant's "old country" where he/she will have to re-adjust to the "old culture." In this period, the sojourner quite often becomes a "cultural ambassador" of the former host society. In this period, one often has to deal with a new cultural shock. We are not able to learn much about this third period from the migrant during his/her stay in the host society, but the sojourner can at least anticipate his/her future situation. It is also possible that the third stage does not happen at all, if the student does not return home or returns only temporarily in order to settle his/her affairs and move permanently to the country of former studies.

In the study presented in this article, I have concentrated on the second stage, the phase of the direct culture contact between the foreign students and the host society.

The field research was conducted in the academic year 1999/2000 at Nicholas Copernicus University (NCU) in Torun. Torun is a medieval city of nearly 200,000 inhabitants located in the northern part of Poland, more or less equally distant from the eastern and western national borders. It has one public university, the largest in northern Poland, and a few small private academic institutions. Nicholas Copernicus University's enrollment was around 13,200 full-time students in 2000. Among them, there were 47 foreigners (including 36 from the former Soviet Union), most of them of Polish origin. The proportion of foreign students at NCU is much lower than the Polish average. The all-Polish average is being lifted up, in my opinion (despite much effort, I was not able to find the necessary hard data), by the largest universities located in cities bigger than Torun. Another factor is, as I said earlier in this article, that only about 15% of all foreign students in Poland study the "university disciplines." In my understanding, the situation at NCU is typical of medium-size universities in medium-size academic centers in Poland. Among the 47 persons mentioned above, 28 received scholarships funded by the Polish government, and only six were paying tuition.

Among the 47 foreign students in Torun, there were 14 freshmen. I was not interested in them in this research because I intended to get information and opinions from people who had stayed in Poland for at

least one full year. There were 33 such persons. They studied at nine out of the ten faculties of NCU (with the exception of Faculty of Chemistry), with the largest numbers at the faculties of Fine Arts and of Economic Sciences. Out of the selected 33 people, 26 came from the former Soviet Union all of whom were of Polish origin.

The initial intentions of the author of this article was to study Torun's foreign students "in general" but the structure of the population as described above forced a shift in the research project. The only reasonable "object" of study became the collectivity of ethnic Polish students from the former Soviet Union (three persons in the sample who come from Lithuania are not of Polish origin, but two of them spoke Polish before coming to Torun, and all three had been at least superficially acquainted at home with Polish culture). This is an important shift. The Polonia students do not migrate to a completely alien culture but to a culture they do know a lot about. For instance, they were able to communicate either in broken Polish or in Russian from the very beginning of their stay in Poland. They had relatives in Poland. Therefore the culture contact is relatively simple. This fact significantly limits the possibilities of comparison with the situation of culture contact at Western universities and particularly American universities where most of the research on this subject is being conducted. It is also difficult to compare my findings with the research results of the studies done in Poland about ten years earlier on the adaptation of students from the "developing countries" (I will, however, refer to these results in due course when necessary and reasonable). Another thing is the size of the sample. As I have mentioned above, empirical studies based on small samples are not unique in sociological, anthropological and social psychological literature. However, it is difficult to compare generalizations based on very large samples with this study.

Interviews were conducted by students majoring in sociology at NCU. They were instructed by the author of the study who acquainted them with the general issues of culture contact and of theoretical aspects of studying abroad. In narrative interviews they were to collect information and opinions of their foreign colleagues on culture contact with the Polish host society. The interviewers were given specific instructions (but not detailed questions) regarding the direct phase of contact. The individual ways they asked questions was up to

them—which obviously had an impact on the answers. Some concrete issues were interesting for some respondents and not for others, which is reflected in the transcripts of interviews.

Interviews were conducted mostly in the NCU dormitories and lasted on the average 40 to 60 minutes. The interviewers said later, in the written accounts, that they had no particular problems during the interviews, either technical or psychological. On the other hand, not all foreign students were equally pleased with being a subject of the study.

The researchers also talked with representatives of the Office of Students' Affairs (OSA) of the NCU and with leaders of the NCU affiliated Club of the Lovers of the Eastern Borderlands. Most of the Polonia students from the former Soviet Union (I will also call them "students from the East") belong to this club.

In sum, we collected 24 interviews. This is the complete population (except for one person) of students coming from the former Soviet Union who were studying at NCU at that time at least in the second year. The largest number of our respondents came from Lithuania—nine women and one man. Six persons, including one man, came from Belorussia. Four students (two women, two men) came from Kazakhstan in central Asia. Three students, all women, came from the Ukraine. One male student came from Latvia. Throughout the rest of this article, I will use inverted commas with the nouns defining nationality for ethnic Poles coming from a given country (e.g., the "Belorussian," the "Kazakh," the "Lithuanian") but will not use them in cases of students declaring a nationality different from Polish (e.g., the Lithuanian).

Polish settlements in Belorussia, Lithuania, the Ukraine and Latvia, very close to the Polish borders, are quite old historically and in the first three countries most Poles lived in regions which were until World War II a part of the Polish state. Poles have lived in Kazakhstan since World War II, when they were expelled to Asia by the Soviet authorities from the territories where they lived, which earlier had belonged to Poland.

We can compare the size of this sample with samples of two empirical studies on a similar topic, conducted in two other Polish cities during last few years. Julian Gorbaniuk interviewed 126 people in her survey in all institutions of higher education in Lublin (1998:

88). It is not clear if they constituted the whole population of the students potentially available in this city and coming from the former Soviet Union. Lublin, very close to the Poland's eastern border, is about twice as big as Torun and has two universities and several other relatively large schools at the university level. Andrzej Furier, on the other hand, conducted in-depth interviews with ten students "from the East" (meaning the former Soviet Union) which equaled about one third of all students from that region at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan in the academic year 1996/97 (1998:109, 111). In all Poznan's institutions of higher education, there were about 150 students belonging to the category we are interested in this article. Poznan, in western part of Poland, is three times as big as Torun and has many more academic institutions.

Students coming from various republics of the former Soviet Union are in different social situations when their direct and indirect contacts with Poland and Polish culture are taken into account. In various post-Soviet republics, the size of the Polonia is different as well as its proportion to the population of the country. Moreover, these countries differ in the institutional opportunity to maintain cultural Polishness and in the distance between the centers of ethnic Polish populations and Poland. These countries differ also in the distance between their stage of economic growth and the Polish economic situation.

At the beginning of this section of the article I wrote that we could talk about three phases of the process of individualized, temporary culture contact arising from educational motivation. Out of these three phases, it is relatively easy to analyze the first two. It will soon turn out that the particular social situation of the Polonia students from the East results in the fact that in many cases the analyzed process can be limited to these two stages only because Poland assimilates many post-Soviet ethnic Polish students.

In the next sections of the article I will present what is in my opinion most interesting in the first and in the second phase of culture contact in our case study.



*Before Studying in Poland: Encounters with  
Polish Culture before the Sojourn*

Unlike the cultural and interactional situation described in Western literature on foreign students, the culture contact of Polonia students from the East and the Polish host society very rarely began only after they personally came here to study.

Before they came to Torun to study at NCU, our respondents were well prepared (I will return to this issue soon) but what is even more important, they had already been to Poland several times. Most of these earlier visits had taken place after the systemic transformation of 1989/90 but there are cases of visits before. The "pre-university" visits mean first of all youth camps, including scout camps. A third of our respondents, regardless of where they permanently live (even in Kazakhstan in deep Asia) told us about them. These students came to Poland to camp more than once, and some camped every year during the whole ten-year period. Some students told us about visits with the Polish acquaintances of their parents or with their relatives. Still others told us about visits but did not give any details.

There were, obviously, exceptions. One student from the Ukraine had been to Poland only once before and a few informants came to Poland for the first time to study at NCU: three Lithuanian students had passed Poland on their way to Germany but did not stop here; two students from Kazakhstan and one "Lithuanian" student had never been to Poland earlier.

In sum, the ethnic Polish students had known Poland from their personal experience before they came to study in Torun.

Interestingly, international mobility outside the country of origin (an individual Soviet or post-Soviet republic) did not mean only visits to Poland. In many cases it meant travelling throughout Europe, including its Western part. (This is interesting when we take into account the very well known low income level of the vast majority of the post-Soviet populations and the visa requirements. A possible explanation may lie in the economic status of these particular families which send potential students to Poland. The hypothesis that only relatively well-to-do people can do this needs an empirical test.) Our respondents are therefore able to compare Poland and her culture not

only with their country of origin but also with countries better developed than the present host society.

I have discussed above one important source of information about Poland before the decision to study here was taken. There are other sources as well: family tradition; attending a Polish school in the country of origin; Polonia folk ensembles; Polonia associations (some of which organize weekend courses of Polish culture); Polish electronic and printed media; and last but not least pre-university courses organized by ethnic Polish associations in cooperation with the Polish embassy or consulate. The Polish family, Polish home traditions, and stories told by parents and grandparents were important for two thirds of our respondents, coming from all the countries mentioned above. Five students (four from Lithuania, one from the Ukraine) stressed the significance of Polish school; five students (from Lithuania, Belorussia, Kazakhstan) paid particular attention to the Polonia folk groups and association. Six students from Lithuania and Belorussia underlined the particular role Polish (from Poland) media played in stimulating their own interest in Polishness and in learning as much as possible about Poland. Among the latter ones, there were two Lithuanians who had lived from childhood very close to the Polish border and often watched Polish TV. Lastly, five respondents stressed the particular role of courses preparing them for studying in Poland.

In sum, out of our 24 informants, only two people (one Lithuanian and one "Kazakh," did not know much in their own opinion) about the country in which they were eventually to study. Therefore, we can say that already before coming to NCU, the contact of the vast majority of potential students with Poland and her culture was relatively strong and used several channels. I will show in due course that in some cases this contact was not strong enough, though, to allow the students to feel later, in Lodz or in Torun, "as much" Polish as the Poland's native population.

In our research, we were not able to determine what our respondents had thought, before coming to NCU, about the differences between the culture of Poland and the culture of their countries of origin. Reconstruction of the "basic levels of consciousness" in this respect proved to be impossible—perhaps those "basic levels" had in many cases never existed. I will return to this problem soon, when presenting the current opinions of our informants on these differences.

In the interviews, we asked our respondents what their reasons were to study in Poland. Reactions to this general question, regardless of the ways it was asked, differed from my expectations. Perhaps it was not a valid problem for the sojourners. They preferred to talk not about their motivations but about the conditions which had to be met and the actions they had to take in order to come to a Polish university. Some answers explain, I think, this problem: studying in Poland seems to be to the educated strata in the post-Soviet Polonia obviously desirable. Therefore, the respondents preferred talking about the methods of realization of that intention. Here are some examples.

There are several ways of presentation of the "obvious" or "natural" character of university studies in Poland. A student said only: "*in order to* study in Poland, I took language courses in Lithuania." Another "Lithuanian" told us that she graduated from a Polish school in her country, *so* she could take a course preparing for university studies in Poland. Our third Lithuanian example, a man, said that *in order to be allowed* to study in Poland, he had to finish a Polish school and have good grades there. A student from Kazakhstan said the same: *in order to* study in Poland, she had to pass, in her country, an exam on Polish culture.

Other respondents gave us some substantive, but rather general, explanations why they wanted to study in Poland. Various motives were presented, sometimes several in an interview. I will give examples of three types of motivation. The first refers to strong ties with Polish culture, described by students in amore or less detailed way. A student from Kazakhstan had always wanted to study in Poland and therefore, when an opportunity occurred, quit his studies at home and went to Poland. A student from Belorussia said that she was raised, particularly by her mother, in the "Polish spirit," so it was "natural" that she would study in Poland. Several students from Belorussia, the Ukraine, Lithuania simply said that they were Poles—which explained everything in this respect.

I will call the second type of motivation the practical motives. Students from Latvia and Belorussia as well as one student from Kazakhstan told us that it was cheaper to study in Poland than in their countries, and they did not have to take entrance exams to the Polish universities. One student from Kazakhstan wanted to become a

Roman Catholic priest. There was an official agreement between the Polish episcopate and the Church administration in his country regarding the education of ethnic Poles to the priesthood. He came to Poland but soon quit seminary and applied to NCU. Two students (one from Belorussia, another from Lithuania) wanted to improve their material situation and to be as far from home as realistically possible, in order to become independent of their families. Two other respondents (one from Kazakhstan, another from Belorussia) said that they knew the high quality (and its consequences on the job market) of a university education in Poland. A student from the Ukraine stressed that it was impossible to be accepted by a good academic institution in her country without a bribe and in Poland the situation was different. A student from Lithuania was not accepted by the University of Vilnius so she took advantage of an opportunity to study in Poland. The third motive, sometimes occurring together with the above mentioned ones, stressed the significance of *studying abroad*, no matter where. This motive to travel, to learn as much as possible about the outside world, appears in our interviews several times. Poland just happened to help realize this dream.

To sum up this discussion of the motivation to study in Poland, I would like to stress that even in those cases in which our respondents mentioned other reasons than their ties with Polish culture, the system of institutional and family relations led to a situation in which Poland became their "first choice," a choice they later were not sorry about.

In some instances, in the immediate families of our respondents studying in Poland was nothing extraordinary. We interviewed three pairs of siblings: a brother and sister from Kazakhstan, a brother and sister from Belorussia (both pairs studied the same discipline) and two sisters from the Ukraine. In addition, a brother of our respondent from Latvia had graduated from a Polish university and stayed in Poland; a sister of a "Lithuanian" graduated from a Polish Academy of Performing Arts and emigrated to the US; sisters of three of our interviewees (from Lithuania, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine) and a cousin of a "Belorussian" studied at that time in four cities of Poland. Not only scholarly literature on the subject (as quoted in the former sections of this article), but also common sense stresses the significance of this kind of immediate family network for successful culture contact.

The people who became Polonia students at NCU were, as presented earlier, quite well acquainted with Polish culture and quite strongly motivated to study in Poland. Literature on the subject stresses another factor also: the significance of specific institutional support for people who will be studying in an alien educational milieu. Therefore, I was interested in this kind of support, which cannot be provided by, for instance, a Polish high school in Vilnius (Lithuania) nor by an uneducated (particularly having no Polish university education) grandmother in Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan). It turned out that this particular kind of support did not occur at all in the case of our respondents. As I have mentioned earlier, our interviewees stressed their participation in courses on Polish culture, some taking exams on this culture at Polish embassies or consulates, but nobody was informed about details of the Polish academic system.

### *On the Way to Nicholas Copernicus University*

According to the information I received from the Office of Students' Affairs (OSA) at NCU, students who receive a scholarship funded by the Polish government (and they constitute a vast majority of our respondents), are first directed when they come to Poland to one of the Schools of Polish Language and Culture located in various Polish academic centers. Nicholas Copernicus University cooperates mostly with two of them—in Lodz and in Lublin. In the School, the future students are to learn (in principle for one year) the basic vocabulary of the discipline they are to study. After this period, the School and the universities negotiate whom to accept where. Formally, the decision is later taken by the Office of International Exchange of the Ministry of Education. According to our interviews, this routine procedure led most of our Polonia students to NCU.

In the NCU's OSA, there is a person responsible for caring for and helping foreign students. However, it is assumed here that the students are self-sufficient, and in practice they have to deal with their university affairs directly in the respective dean's office, exactly as the Polish students do. At NCU, there is no procedure—either formal or informal—for introducing foreign students to the city life and university activities. On the other hand, NCU publishes (in English, which is not the language used by the students from the East) a

brochure on university and city life. Besides, there is at NCU the above mentioned Club of the Lovers of Eastern Borderlands, about which I will be writing again. All these institutions can be called the "shelter institutions" (see, e.g., Nowicka 1993: 23), helping in the efficient dealing with basic life affairs. Our respondents stressed that this help is hardly sufficient if compared with the problems and expenses of life in Poland. One of those basic and institutional affairs is the regular payment of the scholarship by the NCU cashier's office; another is the regular extension of visas.

When we asked about the shelter institutions, our respondents distinguished between the formal competencies and rules (disliked by them) and the activities of individual university employees. They stressed the benevolence of university administrators, tutors, professors. Some even said that it is possible to take advantage of the foreign students' (informal in these cases) status "playing games" with professors when a student happened to have academic problems.

I have already mentioned several times, the Club of the Lovers of the Eastern Borderlands, an important shelter institution. According to its leaders, its membership was about 40 Polonia students from the former Soviet Union. A professor emeritus of NCU who was born and raised in Lithuania is the Club's curator. He is also a go-between, coordinating the Club's cooperation with the "Polish Community," a sponsored by the Polish Republic's Senat central organization, dealing with the Polish diaspora, East and West. The Club is not very active. It organizes a formal Christmas party and invites to it all new foreign students and the deputy rectors. It also organizes an annual trip to one of Poland's big cities. Both events are free of charge for the foreign students. Students who participate in these events meet more often at Torun's student clubs.

We did not ask our respondents about the Club. Despite this, 15 of them told us about it, or rather mentioned it in the following way: "I belong, but do not engage in its activities very much." It seems to me that expectations concerning the Club's activities are high but are not fulfilled. They are higher than the readiness to work and to try to improve the situation. The Club plays an important role in helping in the integration of the aggregate of foreign students, but on the other hand the trips isolate them from their Polish colleagues. As we will see later, the recreational function of meetings of foreign students

coming from different countries stressed in Western literature (see, e.g., Bochner, McLeod and Lin 1977) is not particularly important in our context since the Polonia students from the East consider broader integration with Polish students and, more generally, with Polish society, as one of their main aims.

### *Foreign Students' Everyday Life in Torun*

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, foreign students in a host society play several important social roles. The role of a university student is the most important of them—he or she came to the host society with the intention of getting education. In the Polish literature of the late 1980s devoted to foreign students, the authors stressed that the students were actually poorly motivated to academic excellence and to graduating on time—earning their master's degree within five years (see, e.g., Maslowski 1990, Carvalho 1990). Today, we have in Poland a completely new type of foreign student, but interviews at the NCU's OSA showed that the problems were similar, but perhaps less serious: "the NCU's foreign students' academic results are not very bad"; they are "not much lower than results of native Polish students." Foreigners, more often than native Polish students, have to repeat courses and examinations. The situation has been improving, though, because low grades cause the withholding, reduction, or at least delay in the payment of scholarships funded by the Polish government. Perhaps this was the reason some students complained that they had a problem with paying on time. The above mentioned interviews at the OSA also showed that the NCU's authorities were aware of the fact that foreign students were treated more mildly than the native Polish students by the administration and professors. The administration allows them ("in exceptional cases") to repeat the first year of studies, which is not allowed in the case of students from Poland. Moreover, a foreign student who does not finish the first year often gets permission for a "fresh start" at another institute and may even receive a scholarship from the beginning (Andrzej Furier is also paying attention to the fact that many Polonia students study in Poland longer than they should, that they quit school, change schools, faculties, etc; see 1998: 110).

In interviews with the NCU's foreign students, we did not directly ask about their motivation to study, or about their academic results, but we asked about the way they spent time in Torun. We asked how they spent a typical weekday, weekend, and various kinds of holidays. Consequently, we learned a little about their academic attitudes. For our 24 respondents, 13 people (or about a half) presented a very positive attitude, 8 persons a negative attitude and the remaining three people a quite mixed approach to studies. It was difficult to find here strong correlations with for instance the country of origin or the discipline they studied, but it seems to me that the people who declared that they were not very much interested in studying were mostly men and rarely women.

What was the typical timetable of those students who were described here as having a positive academic attitude? During the weekdays: "I study," "I study quite a lot," "studying, studying, and once more studying," "I study at home and write my MA thesis," "I study a lot, my discipline is consuming time and effort," "I spend most of my time studying," "I have forty hours of classes a week and I have to study at home."

Those students who did not have a positive academic attitude spent their weekdays in the following way: "I have very few classes, only discussion groups three times a week; I never go to the lectures; I am often bored, I do not do anything" (a student of the Law Faculty); "my academic discipline is not very difficult; in comparison with Poznan (where the person studied before) the teachers' requirements are low in Torun, so I study in a nonsystematic way, do not go regularly to my classes" (a student of the Faculty of Economics); "my academic discipline is not very difficult; studying law would be harder, I study in a nonsystematic way" (a student of the Faculty of Economics); "I get up when I feel like it, I do not have many classes" (a student of the Faculty of History); "I do not like to study but I have to" (a student of the Faculty of Fine Arts).

We also asked what the Torun Polonia students did on weekends. We received only 16 answers. Four persons told us (among other things) something about studying. On this occasion (without asking) we learned that 9 students (seven women and two men) went regularly to church. The men (both from Belorussia) said that they went to church "from time to time," the women (from Lithuania, Belorussia,



Kazakhstan, and the Ukraine) simply said that "on Sundays they went to church." During the winter break, Christmas, Easter and during the summer vacations, all the students (except for two people from Kazakhstan who stay in Poland and a student from Lithuania who regularly works in Germany during vacations) go home.

The social role of a foreign student offers the opportunity to get involved in a variety of social relationships in the host society. The most important are relations within the university. Scholars who study this issue point out three sub-groups of the aggregate of all students at a given school who serve significant but different functions in the social life of foreign students: a group consisting of the compatriots of a foreign student; a group consisting of all the foreign students, and finally students of the host society (see, e.g., Bochner, McLeod and Lin 1977). In our case, the situation was a little more complicated. We were dealing only with students coming from the former Soviet Union. Due to this "generalized" place of origin, they were often called "Russians" in Poland. They did not like this nickname because it put all of them into one national category to which none of them actually belonged (the same problem was revealed in Andrzej Furier's findings, see 1998: 113; and in Julia Gorbaniuk's findings, see 1998: 94-95). They were Poles rather than Russians, and they came from various sovereign countries. Who are, therefore, their compatriots? Students from the whole former Soviet Union with whom they shared the "eastern accent of Polish," a common kind of childhood experience, and the common experience of the reactions of people of the host society? Or rather students from their own, now sovereign nation-state?

Bearing in mind all this complexity of the issue, we asked our respondents to tell us about their relations with native Poles, with other foreign students and with their own compatriots. They told us only about those things which were the most important in their perception. It is very difficult to build a typology of their answers. Primarily they laid stress on their relations with Poles (which is not very surprising if we remember the numerical demographic proportions) and talked less about their contacts with other foreign students. In the literature on the subject, it is often underlined that all kinds of friendships in a host society are important for the general satisfaction of the sojourner (see, e.g., Klineberg 1980) and that participation in

small groups coming from the student's country of origin is particularly significant (see, e.g., Spaulding and Coelho 1980). According to that literature, foreign students who live in dormitories maintain close relations mostly with people from their own countries of origin and of their own gender (see, e.g., Bochner, Buker and McLeod 1976). It is difficult to disagree with a general thesis on the significance of friendship, but the other observations mentioned above were not supported by my own study. Moreover, my study does not support the observations by Julia Gorbaniuk in Lublin, where students from the former Soviet Union constituted nearly three fourths of all the friends of the interviewed students from the region (1998: 93). Additional research would be needed to explain the differences.

At the beginning of this text, when writing about the social roles played by foreign students, I mentioned that in the literature the role of "ambassador" of one's own country or one's own culture, is stressed. I was curious if this situation would also take place in Torun. Therefore, I inquired if our respondents were asked during their stay in Poland, asked about their country of origin by their university colleagues or other Polish acquaintances. We received twenty one responses.

I will distinguish between three general situations. In the first, the foreign student does not say anything about his/her country of origin. Its one type could be described as "passing for a Pole," where a Pole is a person who has always lived in Poland. We met only two such cases. A student from a Baltic state told us that being a true Pole, he could not be considered a representative of the culture of his country of origin. Even if asked, he would have nothing to say about it. It was just a coincidence that his totally Polish family has lived in that country; they have really been Poles—her citizens. Another student, coming from another Baltic state, was not recognized by anybody as a person from outside Poland, so nobody asked her about her country. Another type of this general situation takes place when the foreign students (from Lithuania, Belorussia, Kazakhstan) "simply" did not say anything about their countries. They were of the opinion that their Torun milieu was not interested in their personal life histories.

In the second general situation, the Torun milieu is actively interested in a foreign student's country of origin or (regardless of any such interest) the student feels that he/she should be telling people

about it. Let us look at some examples. A student from Lithuania told us that she was aware of the fact that in Poland she represented all the inhabitants of her country (and in particular her Polonia). At the beginning of her stay in Poland, she was even afraid that she was giving people a bad impression of her native country. She often and willingly told her colleagues about Vilnius. Another student from Lithuania said that Poles knew very little about her country so she willingly told them about life over there. She felt herself to be an "ambassador" of Lithuania. A student from the Ukraine said that in the eyes of the Poles in Poland she simply was a representative of her country. Therefore, she would think twice before doing anything. She took pains to study details of the history of the Ukraine in order to be able to correct mistaken interpretations by Poles. Another student from the Ukraine was of the opinion that her important role was to propagate Ukrainian culture in Poland. In particular, she kept reminding the Poles that the Soviet Union no longer existed and that the Ukraine was sovereign now. A student from Belorussia was very often asked to tell "how it was out there." She felt herself to be an "ambassador" of her country.

We can also find in our empirical material a third situation: playing the role of "ambassador"—in different cases with different intensity. I have already mentioned this general situation: students from the former Soviet Union were treated in Poland as "Russians," regardless of their actual country of origin. These students felt, then, obliged to correct the stereotypes and to stress the individual character of their country, even if they would have had no intention of doing this without being "provoked." In our interviews, I met this situation several times.

To sum it up, we can, in my opinion, say that a large part of the aggregate of Polonia students, whatever their emotional attitude to Poland and their life aims (I will return to them later) felt obliged to play the role of a representative of their countries of origin.

One of our informants from Kazakhstan said that he avoided the problem of telling his Polish colleagues something interesting and important about his country, because he had not been there for a long time and did not exactly know what the situation over there was anymore. This seems to be a good introduction to the next issue: the types of contact with the country of origin and their intensity. Let us

first look at the contacts of those students who were just presented as willing "ambassadors" of their countries. Among those nine people, only one student (from Belorussia) said that she went back home regularly only for the summer vacations (and rarely for other Christian holidays), that she wrote and phoned her home less and less often, and that her real ties with her country were quite weak. Another, one of those students (from the Ukraine) was of the opinion that the intensity of her contacts with home was decreasing. However, that person called her home once a week and wrote and received letters. The remaining seven "ambassadors" kept steady, regular contacts with their relatives and friends "back home." Those contacts consisted of visiting home as often as possible (particularly if the students came from Vilnius or Grodno, they visited home between once a month and several times a year), and phoning home every week or every second week. One student from Kazakhstan called home 2-3 times a month, wrote letters every week, and went home every year.

Generally speaking, the Torun students from the East keep a strong contact with their countries of origin. Therefore, they are good mediators between cultures, regardless of whether they played this role willingly or not. Simultaneously, however, I do not think that they are particularly homesick in Poland. Among the 14 people who spoke to us about this issue, seven were actively looking for information about their countries in Poland (which does not mean that they were able to find it) and the remaining seven were not looking for such information. Rather, they learned what "was going on" from letters, telephone calls or when they went "back home" for holidays.

Foreign sojourn is, most of the time, a situation of stress. One of the stress ("culture shock") indicators is the general state of health (see, e.g., Nowicka 1993: 31). We asked our informants about that and all of them presented their opinions. Eighteen of them considered their health as being good or very good. Another indicator of stress is the perception of everyday life troubles. Our interviews did not reveal a high level of such perceived troubles by the Torun students from the East. They seem to have been well-prepared for their sojourn in Poland.

Without being directly asked, some students (5 or one fifth of the sample) underlined that in their opinion all people coming to Poland from the East (the former Soviet Union) are treated in an unpleasant

way. In various cases, the level of perceived "discrimination" is different. A student from Lithuania told us that she was never directly discriminated against but that she often felt a stranger. Another student from the same country said that in Poland Westerners are treated much better than Easterners. A student from Kazakhstan told us that at the beginning of his sojourn he felt discrimination against him due to his Eastern accent in Polish. Westerners, he said, unlike Easterners, could do in Poland "whatever they wish." A student from the Ukraine "sometimes felt a barrier between herself and the inhabitants of Poland." Her compatriot said that "the people here did not like those from the East." It should be remembered that all those students consider themselves to be of Polish nationality.

### *The Picture of Polish Society*

In the study presented here, I was interested in whether Polonia students participated in the public life of their host society and in their opinions on Polish everyday culture and artistic culture. Out of 23 people who presented their views on this issue, an overwhelming majority read Polish newspapers (mostly local dailies, the largest Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and tabloids) and watched Polish television. Unfortunately, we did not collect enough information on the topics they looked for in the newspapers, radio and TV programs.

More or less half of our sample had an opinion on Polish artistic culture. The second half either did not say anything about it or clearly stated their lack of cultural competencies or interests. I will limit further analysis to the first half. They did not present very elaborate opinions and only some of them mentioned any family names of Polish artists (and in these cases, only of movie stars and pop singers). Their opinions, for example, "Polish culture has a high standing," or "Polish culture is quite average," were left without any justification. In sum, I think that Polonia students in Torun had rather weak cultural interests.

About two thirds of our interviewees presented any opinions on Polish culture of everyday life. These views and commentaries go in various directions. We will divide them into commentaries which are basically positive, basically negative and of a mixed positive/negative character.

I found four positive opinions: people in Poland exchange gifts during the Catholic holidays; they like public life, are industrious, are patriots, and like their national history; they are more affluent than people in other post-Communist countries; Poles are kind, open to other people, and spontaneous. I also found four negative opinions: there is a lot of intolerance in Poland (we heard this opinion *twice*); Poles are aggressive and unpleasant to others; children in Poland have no respect for adults. The "mixed" commentaries ran as follows: people in Poland are not kind to each other, but they are more affluent than other Eastern Europeans; Polish culture is richer than that of the country of the respondent; Poles often smile, but they are too talkative; people here are nicer than in the interviewee's country but they are sometimes aggressive and vulgar; people are kind, but they drink alcohol excessively in public; Polish youth is carefree; culture is rich in Poland, but there is a lot of arrogance here.

As I have already mentioned in one of the former sections of this article, since our respondents used to come to Poland quite often in the past and the present sojourn had also lasted so long, it was very hard to reconstruct the opinions about differences between Poland and their countries of origin which they had before the present longer stay here. We can show, however, what those opinions are now. Unfortunately, we did not learn much more than we did earlier in the interview when we asked about Polish culture of everyday life. Therefore, I will not discuss this topic for the second time in an elaborate way. It is necessary to say, though, that the difference most often presented between Poland and the countries of origin of our respondents was a difference in standard of living. It was directly pointed out by 10 people—6 from Lithuania, 2 from Belorussia and 2 from the Ukraine. One student from Lithuania "had known for long that Poland was a rich country and her sojourn here strengthened this opinion." Another "Lithuanian" had been told at home that "life was better in Poland" and that proved to be true. Yet another student from Lithuania stressed that the Polish economy was better developed than that of Lithuania. The fourth "Lithuanian" paid attention to the fact that, unlike in her country, small business was growing fast in Poland. Two other "Lithuanians" thought that Poland was simply like the Western European countries which those students had visited before coming to Poland. A student from Belorussia stressed that (unlike in his country)

the state (political system) is strong in Poland. His compatriot emphasized poverty in Belorussia while, in his view, there was no poverty in Poland. Another interesting commentary, by a student from Kazakhstan, is that in Poland, unlike in his home country, many people were well educated.

Some of our respondents underlined cultural similarities, though: Poland and the Baltic states belong to the same Christian culture, so differences are only superficial (although a student from Belorussia stressed differences between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and a student from Kazakhstan between Christianity and Islam); a student from the Ukraine thought that similarities of Slavic cultures are very important.

#### *On the Attractiveness of Poland and Fear of the Contact's Final Phase. Conclusions*

In this study, I wanted to know if Polonia students aspired to full participation in Polish national culture (by Polish national culture, I mean here the culture of Poland and not the ethnic culture of Poles abroad), that is, how much were they attracted to it. We have already learned that the students were well prepared for their educational visit to Poland; that some of them initially experienced a cultural shock that seems to be over now; that they were interested in Polish public life, although quite superficially; that about a half of them were interested in Polish culture, though equally superficially; that they saw numerous negative aspects of Polish culture of everyday life, but, on the other hand, they also saw positive ones; that they would prefer to be treated in Poland as if they were native Poles; that they clearly saw that the Polish standard of living was much higher than that of their own countries of origin.

At the beginning of this section, it is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, one's identification with Polish national culture and, on the other hand, declarations of one's intentions to stay in Poland permanently, whether immediately after graduation or a little later. As we will see, in the aggregate of our respondents we see all sorts of situations, from cultural identification with Poland without the intention to stay here, to identification with the culture of the

country of origin and simultaneously the intention to become, as soon as possible, a Polish citizen.

Let us start with the "aspirations to cultural Polishness." I will divide the whole aggregate of students (actually, 21 people presented opinions on that matter) into three parts. The first group are people who have already fully identified themselves with Polish national culture (11 persons—one from Latvia, one from the Ukraine, two from Lithuania, three from Belorussia and four from Kazakhstan). The second group are students who, at that moment, had no clear cultural identity and, depending on the situation, could in the future become either Poles or Belorussians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, etc. of Polish descent (there are 6 people like this in our sample—two from each of the countries mentioned above). The third group are people who identify themselves with the culture of their countries of origin (we have 4 students here—two Lithuanians, one "Lithuanian" and one "Belorussian"). We will look closer at some examples of the first attitude and all the people having the latter two attitudes.

The first category are people identifying themselves with the Polish national culture. The "Latvian" said that he was fully assimilated in Poland, and that he felt at home here. One of the "Lithuanians" had felt strange in Poland earlier, but now she thought she was as much Polish as Poland's natives. One of the "Kazakhs" felt that she had become "Polonized"—she had even forgotten some expressions in Russian (the language she used at home), and she wanted to become a full-fledged Pole. Her compatriot fully identified himself with Polish culture. A "Belorussian" was of the opinion that Polish culture already was her own culture. A "Ukrainian" considered himself a Pole, and identified himself with Polish culture.

The second category are people without a clear national identification. A student from Lithuania has never actually felt very strange in Poland, and subjectively has always belonged to Polish society, but when he had come here for longer, he realized that he was not accepted as a Pole; in Lithuania he felt a little strange because he considered himself to be a Pole; in Poland he felt a little strange because he was treated as a Lithuanian. Another "Lithuanian" felt strange in both countries. A student from Belorussia was at least partly assimilated in Poland, and thought he behaved like a Pole although neither did he reject Belorussian culture. Another "Belo-



russian" has accommodated well to Polish life and she felt better and better in Poland, but on the other hand she was of the opinion that her place was in Belorussia. A student from the Ukraine initially intended to assimilate in Poland, but she realized that Poland was very different from her native land and that due to her eastern accent she would never melt into Polishness. Another "Ukrainian" student did not feel like a Pole; she felt better at home, but on the other hand she has already assimilated some important aspects of Polish culture and in her country had been always considered a Pole.

Finally, in the third category, we have two ethnically Lithuanian students whose Lithuanian national identity was obvious to them. However, we also have here one Polonia student from the same country who, from the very beginning, did not feel well in Poland: Lithuania was her homeland; she would never feel like a Pole. Our last example is a "Belorussian" who felt himself to be a Belorussian and did not want to give up the culture of his country.

Now, we can analyze students' declarations concerning a planned permanent stay in Poland. During the interview, we did not ask directly about this matter. It came out "by itself" when we were discussing aspirations to Polish national culture. Possibly staying in Poland was even more interesting a topic to our interviewees than the former topic. Students who hesitated to talk about their national (cultural) identification revealed their future plans willingly. Nine of our respondents had already definitely decided that they would stay in Poland and apply for a Polish passport. Interestingly, a student from Belorussia who had declared very strong ties with Belorussian culture and Belorussian citizenship intended to apply for a Polish passport (as his potential second one) due to economic reasons.

One student from the Ukraine who did not know if she was more a Ukrainian or a Pole was sure that she would return to her home country. A student from Kazakhstan who thought that she had become "Polonized" and who wished to participate in Polish culture as much as possible wanted to return eventually to her country of origin.

Twelve respondents were only making plans (though they had not made a final decision yet) about staying permanently in Poland. Three Lithuanian students of non-Polish descent are among them. In other findings on the Polonia students from the East, like those

educated in Poznan and presented by Andrzej Furier (1998: 113), we also find intentions of staying permanently in Poland.

Many students of this category revealed a fear of return home, a fear of the final phase of culture contact. As we have seen before, the last phase was not to appear at all in the group discussed in the second to last paragraph. They will not return to their country of origin, or will go there only to settle their affairs. The students of the last group will probably experience a new adaptation crisis after returning back home: a post-contact culture shock.

To conclude, it seems to me that Poland became, in fact, a second, or perhaps the first (meaning the most important), homeland for almost all Polonia students from the former Soviet Union. Most probably, it will never be their *only* fatherland. If students who have already made a decision to stay in Poland make their plans come true, and if students who have been undecided but who are seriously considering becoming Polish citizens eventually apply for this, then the sphere of "third culture," mentioned at the beginning of this article, could become realized.

A political and moral problem will appear, however. Would the assimilation of Polonia students in Poland be a good solution for the post-Soviet countries of origin of these students and for the Polonia groups in them? It is true that not these countries of origin but Polish society paid for the education of these students. Brain drain is quite obvious, though. Poland and her post-Soviet partners are not the only countries which face this problem, nor are they even typical cases of brain drain. It is a problem of all countries educating foreign students and sending their citizens to study abroad. In the past, Poland "exported" thousands of people who were highly educated both in Poland and abroad, but now, as one of the consequences of the post-1989 systemic transformations of Central and Eastern Europe, it has begun to educate and import foreigners, in our case foreigners of Polish descent.

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