

STEREOTYPES OF REFUGEES AS PRESENTED IN THE MEDIA AND THE REALITY OF PROBLEMS LINKED WITH CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN.

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Abstract

The situation of refugees living in Poland depends not only on legal aspects. A very important role is also played by social factors, which optionally condition and influence the status of foreigners in our country. One of them is undoubtedly the way of presenting the described phenomenon in the media, as well as the attitude of Poles to refugees, and how our country guarantees them protection and enables them to find their place in the new reality. Analysis of the problems of immigrant families in Poland may provide valuable information to research the problem of refugees in a European context.

Key words: refugee, migrations, protection, stereotypes, child, assimilation, legal acts

Introduction

The 21st century will certainly be recorded on the global history pages as the age of migration. This phenomenon has deeply altered the global society. Today's migration trends are significantly different from their historical counterparts. At the present moment, they influence both domestic as well as international politics and have clear effect on social perception and attitudes [Castels, Miller, 2011, p.211]. This paper alludes to current events linked with the notion of international migration and offers an analysis of the issue of the media stereotypes distorting the actual genuine picture of problems related to cultural adaptation and social integration of the children of immigrants.

The article focuses on the theoretical approach to the problem of refugees and an attempt to organize terminology related to the above topic. It also concerns the attempt to link the way in which refugees are presented and their problems in the media with real

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obstacles that they face in the country to which they migrate. It is also an attempt to explain whether the stereotypes shown have an impact on the integration problems of refugees, in particular by focusing on their children. The methods used during the preparation of the article were mainly the analysis of literature and the compilation of content contained and a case study referring to the situation of refugees in a particular country, in the case of an article, it refers mainly to the situation of refugees in Poland.

Analysis of concepts.

A broad discussion of the media stereotypes of immigrants requires attention to be paid to terminology. Migration is currently one of the most popular topics in political and social life in Poland as well as across Europe. Regardless of culture, or religion, the migration motive trespasses the majority of aspects of our everyday life. It is connected with the scale of the discussed issue and the context of its influence on social behaviours in the 21st century. Migration, previously regarded solely as crossing borders between the countries, now has to be considered as part of the social process [Castels, Miller, 2011, p.214]. An ideal example illustrating the scale of the phenomenon may be the sermon delivered last year by Pope Francis during the Midnight Mass at the Vatican's Basilica which alluded and, it can be surmised, was supposed to sensitise the audience, and through TV broadcast, the global society of the entire world, that migrations as such date back to Biblical times. The migration phenomenon is regarded as the key value moulding the social reality of the world of the 21st century. Because it has a global dimension, its consequences are felt by each country making it a sending, accepting or transit organisation for individuals in migration flows. In this context, a number of positive aspects can be observed deriving from migration such as a positive influence on economic growth, counteracting pejorative consequences of the aging of societies, increased power of certain states, as well as increased quality and standards of living, generating development conditions, transfer of knowledge and technology and various cultural exchanges. At the same time however, particularly in the last few years, in the ongoing debates on public for a, issues linked with the adverse aspects of the migration have been more and more frequently raised, e.g. problems on the labour market, availability of social benefits, difficulties linked with the immigrant assimilation or integration, risks to national identity, development of organized crime, or terrorism.

Migration and refugees are certainly the phenomena treated in a multidimensional way. Undoubtedly, one of their most important features is variety. It would be very difficult to identify specific migration types. Each individual case will be different with different consequences.

Migration processes are closely linked with the ongoing demographic changes. Currently, the growth of the population is observed outside Europe. On the Old Continent, the demographic situation reached the critical level some time ago. A negative birth rate has been noted in as many as 17 European countries. Also, the fertility rate is alarming; in all EU countries it is now significantly below the replacement level. Today, Africa can be regarded as the country with particularly high growth rate which exports its population surplus to Europe in a natural way. If this trend continues at a similar pace, then, according to projections, by 2025 the global population will increase to 8.5 billion with the growth observed primarily in the Middle East and North Africa. In the perspective of the subsequent decades, international migrations will become a dominating factor moulding the population size.

During the initial analysis of the international migration problem, attention has to be drawn to the factors which mould it. Two approaches can be distinguished to the discussed issues. The first one, i.e. the micro approach is focused on factors pertinent to individuals. It concerns people, human systems of values, but also aspirations and desires of individuals. The other approach, i.e. the macro approach, focuses on the economic, political and demographic situation in the country.

It is worth noting that migrants can be divided into refugees and economic immigrants and both phenomena have been observed in Europe for many years now. A good example are inhabitants of the Balkan region, who migrate to Western Europe for economic motives. Only few of them apply for a refugee status. This trend is characteristic of the migration from developing countries to developed countries. Poland, which also copes with the inflow of immigrants, is regarded as a transit country. A separate example are refugees from Africa and Asia escaping from internal military conflicts, dictatorship and lack of economic development perspectives. Various analyses show, however, that apart from the citizens of Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria, the majority of migrants from those regions are regarded as economic migrants.

The migration problem in Europe escalated in 2015 and since then this phenomenon has been termed as the migration crisis. In the analysis of the topic, it is worth using the statistical data aimed at explaining the scale of the phenomenon. According to the statistics published by the European Statistical Office, in 2015 the total of 4.7 million migrated to one of the member states in comparison with at least 2.8 million migrants leaving one of the EU member states. The data described do not include the EU as a whole, but are divided into individual countries. Out of the 4.7 million of immigrants, approx. 2.4 million originated from non-EU states and 1.4 million were residents of other EU country than that from which they migrated; ca. 860 thousand of individuals migrated to an EU state whose citizens they had already been (e.g. returning citizens or citizens born abroad) and ca. 19 thousand were stateless individuals. In 2015, the largest number of immigrants was accepted by Germany (1 543.8 thousand), followed by the United Kingdom (631.5 thousand), France (363.9 thousand), Spain (342.1 thousand) and Italy (280.1 thousand). The greatest number of immigrants was noted in 2015 by Germany (347.2 thousand), followed by Spain (343.9 thousand), United Kingdom (299.2 thousand), France (298 thousand) and Poland (258.8 thousand). In 2015, generally, in 17 EU member states higher level of immigration in relation to emigration was noted while in Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania, the number of emigrants exceeded the number of immigrants. In Poland, until June 2017, nearly 3 thousand foreigners applied for international protection, i.e. granting the refugee status or additional protection; 89 thousand people applied for residential permit in Poland².

At the time of drafting this paper, an analysis of documents governing the international protection should be carried out. Historical data regarding this issue are certainly not something to be proud of. Until the 1970s, many countries were very shy in promoting immigration policy. Foreigners were readily admitted to compensate shortages of labour force or to balance demographic shortage [Castles, Miller, p.228]. With time, some of the illegally admitted immigrants were covered by the abolition programmes which, in vast majority, were perceived as a way out for the governments of the individual countries to undertake other action. Currently, following Art. 1 of the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the New York Protocol, a refugee is an individual who satisfies the following conditions: lives outside his/he country, fears religious, ethnic or belief persecution and because of that does not want to stay in the country of his/her origin; has not be prosecuted for crimes regarded as contradictory for the purpose and principles of the UNO. The refugee status is granted upon an application being served by a foreigner through the Border Guards. Privileges deriving from the procedure are considerable and ensure dignified stay outside the country of origin. Refugees receive a residence card and may not be expelled from the country; they also receive the "Geneva passport" authorizing him/her to travel abroad. He/she may also work under the same rules as each Polish

² These are the data published by the Office for Foreigners and concern only the individuals applying for legal stay in the territory of our country. Statistics concerning individuals illegally crossing the border are surely much higher.[Source: EUROSTAT, on-line January 2019]

citizen which means he/she does not need a special work permit and is also entitled to undertake a business activity. The key issues linked with the said Article concern the following rights of the refugees construed as families with children, i.e. the right to social benefits, education at any school type in Poland, health insurance and use of integration programmes. Prior to being entitled to the aforesaid privileges and during the period of application for the refugee status, foreigners are also offered opportunities of a dignified stay – a possibility of being accommodated at a special centre throughout the period of waiting for the granting of full rights.

In further pursuit of the topic of the study, the key assumptions underlying the protection of refugee families in Poland and, to be more precise, families with children which enter the territory of the Republic of Poland are also worth analysing. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10th December, 1948 proclaims all men to be born free and equal in terms of their dignity and rights and all man have the right to live, to be free and safe. Furthermore, under Article 13, everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state and the right to leave any country including his/her own and to return to it³. It is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16th December, 1966 which stipulates that each man has the right to leave any country including his/her own. In reference to the foregoing – everyone has the right to life in dignity, even outside his own country. Changing the country, a migrant may become somebody else, make his/her life different and even be reborn. Each migration leaves a lasting mark on the psyche. Migration allows to create a materially different image of oneself, another face or a „mask”, as Gombrowicz would have it. Questioning the identity becomes an incentive for self-determination and redefinition of the current identity. A migrant discovers that he/she is *tabula rasa* and a longer stay in another country activates mental processes which affect the entire personality.

Stereotypes in the medias

In the analysis of media stereotypes of migration, the multiplicity of studies linked with the topic is worth looking at. Research into this phenomenon has not been very popular in Poland and surely has not been sufficiently discussed until the early 21st century because the contact with the phenomenon of migration was relatively small. This situation is very easy to explain because at that time, Polish society was focused on the economic crisis while migrants regarded Poland solely as a transit country on their way to Western Europe. Maciej Mrozowski's publications of 1996 and 2003 research into this topic as well as its continuations are very interesting. In his thesis, Mrozowski points out that in the Polish media migrants appear only in the context of other described phenomena and are not an object of the statement as such. In his initial research, Mrozowski shows that the picture of migrants is stigmatised with negative connotations often linked with trafficking or illegal employment. Lack of source studies also stems from the fact that an average Pole did not have much contact with the phenomenon of migration especially at the end of the 20th century⁴. Articles of the discussed topic were published in the press but they were mainly based on limited information concerning migration and presented the phenomenon as a curiosity. The harbinger of the breakthrough in this area was the year 2004 when Poland joined the European Union; however, the data of the Office for Foreigners do not show any material increase of migration and what follows, the media were not dominated by this theme. After several years of informational regression, there came a deluge of facts. In the analysis of the discussed issue, I tried

3 [Source: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10th December, 1948, http://www.unesco.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Powszechna_Deklaracja_Praw_Czlowieka.pdf, on-line: January 2019]

4 According to the reports of the Office for Foreigners' Affairs for the years 1992-2010, in Poland barely 2.5 thousand foreigners received the status of refugees.

to go back in time to my first encounter of the migration problem as I started thinking and analysing it a little deeper. It was the summer in 2015 and the information services, especially those still on top in the majority of ranking with respect to viewership such as "Fakty" TVN, made alarming reports about a wave of immigrants storming Europe. In the background, they presented photos of young, well dressed men proudly walking the many kilometres separating them from their most desired target. I myself – little aware at that time – did not pay any attention to this unnecessary TV manipulation. There were no families, husbands, wives or their children to whom the migration offered a hope of a better future. Lack of objectivism and reliability leads to a situation where migrants are presented through the prism of being different and by instilling their simplified image as lazy people, avoiding work, using social security system and having inclinations towards violence. Those stereotypes are reinforced and multiplied. The image moulded by the media has a considerable effect on the manner of perception of the phenomenon. And it is not just speculations because they can be supported by relevant studies. It is logical that not every Pole had a chance of contact with an immigrant; therefore, according to the opinion poll of 2016 commissioned by the International Organization for Migration, the majority of us used information about the phenomenon from the media, not based on personal observations. According to professor Michał Bilewicz from the Centre for Research on Prejudice, Warsaw University, the phenomenon termed "the refugee crisis" on Poland is a consequence of lack of personal contact with refugees and as media reports which directly or indirectly influence the public opinion. Another reason is lack of clear separation of terminology used by the media. We often encounter lack of differences between an "immigrant" and a "refugee", which were more broadly discussed in the first part of the article.

Going further, I also wish to focus on a dissonance between the image of a refugee moulded currently and the genuine problems with which immigrant families have to cope, particularly their minor members.

Attention should be drawn to the most important issue: what is the attitude of the Polish public towards migrants and what is their perception of migration movements? Looking for an answer to this question, I did not intend to delve into specific studies devoted to the topic; instead, I conducted a short interview in my own environment. The group I asked for answers consisted of barely 10 participants. It was relatively little representative, yet I think that it may offer a minimum background for the answer regarding our attitude towards migrants. I only asked two questions: "What is your attitude towards people migrating to Poland and do you think that they are any threat to our nation?" Replies were fairly consistent. Eight participants expressed their negative feelings against the immigrants and the same eight participants believed the immigrants to pose a risk to us. The result of this quasi study does not seem very glorious yet it seems to be representative for other members of the society. At this point, it is worth considering whether or not our images of refugees are unjust in relation to those who are least noticed among the immigrant groups, i.e. children.

The term a child – "a forced refugee" is the most adequate description of the situation in which it finds itself. The child did not choose such a life. Its experiences are the consequence of its parent's decision to leave to find a better life. One of the basic duties of the family is to ensure its members a sense of clear safety and stability. Satisfaction of these aspects is possible, among other things, through demonstration of particular cultural and family models by the family members in their everyday upbringing practices. It is particularly difficult to achieve in the new, migration reality. The migrant families often have to face problems deriving from a clash between the previously cultivated cultural models and those accepted in new environment which is linked with the fact that in the new country the family often has to combine the older values derived from their fatherland and those from the new country. In children, the change of the place of living, necessity to adapt to new conditions, and cultural clashes lead to tension and even

stressful situations. They cause disorientation deriving from being unfamiliar with certain behaviours, raise various emotions – from enthusiasm, or excitement up to sadness, or anger. In the case of refugee children their traumatic experiences in their fatherland before departure and during the escape have additional influence on the adaptation process. After the arrival to a foreign country, the child is unaware of its situation. Everything is new and foreign to the child. And it is the child that deserves the greatest attention and understanding and help in finding its way in the new conditions.

Legal protection of migrant children and issues related to education.

The law binds Poland to ensure minors' access to schools and to cover expenses related with their education. Children of foreign origin attending Polish schools can be divided into children of refugees and children of immigrants of various status. Children of refugees, leaving their country usually in very dramatic circumstances and having equally dramatic experiences, usually have problems with the establishment of relations, limited motivation and abilities to learn, which is manifested by educational difficulties. Additional difficulty is their lack of knowledge of the majority of Polish inflection. Although, their legal situation is fairly clear, the majority of refugee families treat Poland as a transit country on the way to Western Europe and do not treat the education of the children very seriously so majority of them do not attend school at all. Immigrant groups include the children arriving from the countries of our Eastern neighbours and from Asia intending to stay in Poland permanently or only for work. Those children usually attend schools, and easily assimilate with their Polish peers. A difficulty in the fulfilment of the educational path is usually unclear legal status of their parents [Górska, Korczak, 2014, p.18]).

Key studies and documents regarding education developed in recent year emphasise the importance of lifelong education for everybody, especially with respect to individuals whose access to education is difficult. UNESCO, which specialises in those issues, determines the most important functions of contemporary school in a simple slogan like: to learn, to know, to act, to be and to live together. This learning and learning to "live together" also mean care for the education of foreign children of other nationalities. School may therefore be an important environment promoting multiculturalism and openness [Kowalska, 2009, p.13].

In this analysis, the psychological aspects related with the influence of the school environment on the shaping of the attitude to life of minors are also worth mentioning. Many years ago, in his studies, Robert Steiner, Austrian creator of anthropo-philosophy, postulated that: anything which we say to a child, what we teach does not constitute yet is another experience in itself. The way a country accepting refugees behaves towards children, how it will shape their personalities and lives through its actions will have effect on what kind of people they will become in the future. Cultural and linguistic differences are part of European educational structures. Reforms and actions of the Polish educational system based on the reforms look ahead to such aspirations.

Currently, according to the policy of the European Union and the Council of Europe, a foreign child has the right to free education in a new country. Art. 70a of the Polish Constitution stipulates that education is compulsory for everybody, also children of foreign origin.

Experienced educators have developed two models of teaching the language of the accepting country – *an integration model* and *separation model*. The former assumes participation of the immigrants' children in regular integration classes with the whole group where additional, introductory classes of the language of the country where they have just arrived are held outside the regular hours. The latter model assumes separate education of the immigrant children. The classes are usually held within a separate group, also termed as the preparatory class, where they spend around a year until they

have sufficient knowledge of the new language. Both models are fairly demanding for both: the children and the teachers, have their advantages and disadvantages and striking a balance in this case seems to be rather difficult. The choice of a specific model depends on state authorities; educational experts in a particular country decide what is best. In Poland, the integration model of education is applied. It means that children of foreigners are required to participate in normal classes at school regardless of their knowledge of Polish while additional language classes are held after the regular hours as per the *Act on Educational System and Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 4th October, 2001 on accepting individuals who are not Polish residents to public kindergartens, schools, educational centres for teachers and other educational centres*. Additional Polish classes are organised by individual municipalities in the form of preparatory course or additional Polish classes. The education is free and may last no longer than 12 months [Mazurowska, 2006, p. 66].

Children encounter a number of obstacles rendering proper integration and education difficulty. The language barrier seems to be the major difficulty. Despite additional language classes offered by the state, immigrant and refugee children do not often use this opportunity in an adequate manner and sometimes those classes seem to be insufficient to learn the language at a communicative level. For those who have no difficulties learning Polish, the difficult thing is adaptation to the regime of the school system; they fail to obey the rules, and are frequently in conflicts with their Polish peers. Others are unable to find their places at school as an institution requiring punctuality and systematic work. Unfamiliarity with the regulations concerning the educational duty especially on the side of the parents is often a serious obstacle (blockade) in commencing education by the minors while the fear of cultural differences intensifies these feelings considerably. Polish teachers admit that they lack preparation in inter-cultural teaching and working materials prepared by the Ministry of National Education are insufficient. They also realise that it is important to relay to Polish students the elementary knowledge on traditions and culture of the country of the arriving foreign child as well as presenting potential schooling experience related with the specific nature of the educational system of the country of the child's origin. A person facilitating integration of foreign learners with the local school community is the intercultural assistant. He/she activates refugee children and their parents encouraging them to take active part in the co-creation of school life, performs the role an interpreter and inter-cultural mediator [Żyła, 2018, p. 156].

Any kind of support from the environment will lead to a smooth transition of a child into the new educational system and determine its success in Polish school despite the obvious difficulties that it is bound to face.

Leaving the problems of the migrant children aside and returning to the medial image of refugees for the last time it is worth mentioning one other issue. In 2015, a joint informational action on the Polish media was held "More information, less fear". Over 40 editorial boards in Poland decided to publish a common bulletin developed under the auspices of the Office for Foreigners. Because the refugee topic has been one of the leading news on all media and related discussions show the importance of the phenomenon couple with lack of adequate and reliable information, this study which has a clear character and is supplemented by details data may be used as an introduction to the analysis of the above-discussed phenomenon.

Conclusions

We cannot limit ourselves to a uniform approach to cultural contrasts between migrants and European communities. As many studies show, immigrants as well as Europeans vary from the ethnic, religious as well as social status perspectives. The studies also show considerable differences between European societies and their outlook on the world; for example, differences between Poles and Syrians are not as dramatic as differences between the Swedes and Syrians; therefore, migrants choosing Poland as a

transit country feel much better here thanks to common historical and cultural ties. The inflow of migrants into Poland poses a challenge to the integration policy of the state. The duty to integrate the incoming migrants as well as the need to propagate the information about the new civilisations in the accepting society may be one of the key and current political as well as social issues. Looking at the issue from the perspective of a broader analysis, it can be stated that the aging Europe should be interested in enriching its demographic and intellectual capacity by making an adequate use of the variety. Finding good solutions will protect us against deeper conflicts deriving from temporariness and xenophobia.

The future is marked with global migrations. The picture of migration issues, knowledge of the problem, social attitudes and preferences are moulded by the media, which convert the picture into an unreliable and inadequate one. Cultural and religious differences are the sources of fear and anxiety in face of integration difficulties. Migrants and refugees – all the people who escape in fear of real danger in search of safety, or better future should be allowed to fully participate in the life of the accepting society. They are a treasure chest of their native cultures and aspirations which may enhance the life of their target countries.

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