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(...) *The significant issue is the “fences” in our minds,
in our external and internal narratives around refugees (...).*

Interview with Professor Jerzy Nikitorowicz¹: On the Challenges Resulting from Modern Migrations

The interview was conducted by:

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Prof. zw. dr hab. Jerzy Nikitorowicz – educator, head of the Department of Intercultural and Elementary Education of the Faculty of Education Educational Sciences of the University of Białystok, long-time dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, rector of the University of Białystok (2005–2012), chairman of the Pedagogy of Culture and Intercultural Education Team of The Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (KNP PAN), member of the presidium of the KNP PAN. For years, he has been involved in the activities of the Association for Supporting Intercultural Education. Member of the Polish Pedagogical Society, International Academy of National Minorities Research, editorial and programming bodies of scientific periodicals, e.g. *The Educational Review*; *Pogranicze. Studia Społeczne*. Author of many monographs and articles in the field of regional, multi- and intercultural education (*Intercultural education in the perspective of the paradigm of coexistence of cultures*, (2020), Białystok; *Etnopedagogika w kontekście wielokulturowości i ustawicznie kształtującej się tożsamości*, (2017), Kraków; *Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka. Wyzwania edukacji międzykulturowej*, (2005), Gdańsk; *Pogranicze – Tożsamość – Edukacja Międzykulturowa*, (1999), Białystok. Organizer of cyclical conferences in the field of intercultural education. For his work in the field of intercultural education, he was awarded e.g. laureate of the “Zasłużony dla Tolerancji” award (2012) awarded by the “Tolerancja” Ecumenical Foundation.

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W.T.D., A.M.-S. Professor, the issue of the 2022 year POLJES publication concerns international mobility. We aimed to present the multi-faceted nature of migratory movements from at least two perspectives. On the one hand, mass movement of people is motivated by the desire to improve their standard of living. On the other hand, it is a result of armed conflicts, wars, threats to life, and the need to find a safe place for adults and children. These movements not only require reorganization of the actions of migrants, but also the need to build a shared space for the host community and newcomers.

What social challenges (faced by representatives of institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies), but primarily individual challenges aimed at supporting newcomers, do you, Professor, observe?

J.N. The problem of the presence of a large number of refugees and related civic attitudes should, in my opinion, be considered in the context of ongoing changes in consciousness and numerous socio-political conditions, as well as the power of media influence, the use of positive sociotechnics (persuasion, facilitation), or negative sociotechnics (manipulation). I emphasize this because it seems particularly important now: how the influx of refugees and their origin, from which part of the globe, were presented, how our perceptions of them were shaped, resulting in attitudes full of negative emotions combined with ignorance in terms of knowledge, operating on prejudices, negative stereotypes, etc.

In our country, on the one hand, we had a negative image of refugees presented in public media, an image that triggered fear of them, their culture, which is not related to ours, information and messages indicating an uncontrolled flood of foreigners into Western countries who disrupt the lives of residents, do not follow the law, do not respect norms, and are guided by values that are incomprehensible to us. In this context, negative attention was drawn to refugees crossing our border with Belarus. Many spontaneous actions taken by good people, organizations, associations, and foundations were not noticed, ignored, and even negatively evaluated, indicating that they put our country at risk, engage in terrorist activity, etc.

Looking at the refugee issue procedurally, I would like to point out that it does not disappear and will not disappear, but rather increases and will continue to increase. Hence the helplessness in managing refugees in many countries has led to fencing, building increasingly larger fences, both literally and figuratively. On a global scale, there may already be around a hundred. The problem of "fences" in our minds, in our external and internal narratives around refugees, is significant. The fencing process continues and grows. I think it can be said that there is a constant fencing of the world. For our region, which is a natural and cultural borderland, fencing is a particularly important problem, the negative consequences of which may be long-term, dif-

ficult, or even impossible to repair or compensate for. The consequences are already clearly noticeable in the context of partitioning the forest. Protests by local residents and ecologists have not stopped the construction of the barrier/fence. There are many questions, such as how numerous species of animals that could previously move freely will cope. More and more often, inhabitants of the forest surroundings report that, for example, bison are leaving the forest, that there are more of them outside their natural habitat, and that they do not return to it.

Fencing of the cultural borderland is also already being noticed in the context of a lack of direct meetings in the borderland region, a lack of interaction, exchange, constant borrowing, opportunities to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices that have existed since the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (of many nations), etc. Stereotypes and prejudices that have been silenced for years are returning, building understanding on the basis of "good memory", social and national divisions are growing, and redefinitions of identity, mutual accusations of the situation arise. In this context, I would like to draw attention to the crisis of "political correctness." We cannot pretend that we do not notice it. It is becoming increasingly visible in the face of growing migration, especially businesses related to smuggling, trafficking, and the business carried out by growing mafia systems in many countries (e.g., bringing migrants to Italy by ships under the flag of a certain country). Whole families contribute to sending at least one member to "paradise" to support subsequent people in their exodus. On the one hand, citizens of receiving countries no longer expect but demand that the rights and norms of newcomers be respected, and they protest more and more clearly about the non-fulfillment of their expectations. On the other hand, voices of opposition to the influx of immigrants, including refugees, are increasingly heard. They do not accept the expansion of human rights to social rights, etc. In any case, social resistance is becoming increasingly apparent, and more and more narratives concern cultural security, bonds, communities, obligations, and citizenship.

W.T.D., A.M.-S. Does our Polish engagement in helping refugees from Ukraine stem from an internalization of openness towards other people, or rather have an active (situational, spontaneous) character? And do unquestionable attitudes of openness (at least at the beginning of the war) give a chance to change the previous direction of Poles' thinking about newcomers?

J.N. The problem of the Belarusian border and the tragedies playing out on it seem to have moved to the background, and certainly to the second place, after Russia's attack on Ukraine and the appearance of millions of Ukrainian citizens at border crossings to Poland. I am convinced that in this case, the behaviour of our citizens deserves special recognition. It was a natural human response. Out of good, non-coercive will, millions

of Poles have participated directly and indirectly in providing assistance, financial support, providing food, housing, psychological support, etc. What was the reason for our individual involvement, and then the government's organized help for refugees from Ukraine?

I am also convinced that in the first positive emotional response, there was a natural need to help a neighbour. After all, we have a centuries-old tradition of local self-government associated with direct assistance, neighbourly support for people affected by fire, people affected by floods, in wartime, etc. In the face of this, can one be insensitive, not help one's neighbours, not alleviate their suffering and tragedy in a situation where our common eternal enemy-Russia-has attacked them!

I believe that Poles know the history of the Ukrainian people very well, their centuries-old struggle for independence, support for Józef Piłsudski's camp when plans for Polish and Ukrainian independence were being made, and Ukraine's self-determination, which ended in failure. I am convinced that there is a special recognition of the Ukrainian nation in our consciousness, perhaps not expressed very clearly, for heroism, bravery since the time of the Cossacks, for determination in the fight for their freedom. And now, Poles have seen in Ukrainians people who steadfastly defend their dignity, who stand for the same values, the values of European civilization, opposing the Soviet legacy whose burden lies on the whole life of Ukraine – social, political, cultural, existential. The guardian of this legacy was the previous ruling elite, inhibiting changes, conducting sterile discussions about the emblem or the spelling reform that would erase the distinctiveness of Ukrainian spelling.

The ongoing war in Ukraine leads to a clear reflection: **we live in very difficult times**. Our thinking and actions, our identity, have been affected by the tragedy of war. The war initiated by Russians in Ukraine, the genocides committed by Russian soldiers against women and children, make us aware of the destruction of the established ideas and principles of peaceful problem solving, the paradigm of coexistence of cultures created for many years. I have repeatedly pointed this out in my publications, emphasizing that dialogue and peace-making is the most essential challenge of education. It was shaped and developed, there was scientific cooperation, people and intercultural exchange, etc. On our eastern border, we initiated a dialogue starting with "good memory" in contacts with Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and also Russians. That is why our University established an informal branch in Grodno, then a formal one in Vilnius, etc. This cooperation brought us closer, gave us the opportunity and chance to move towards analyzing and settling accounts with "bad memory".

Why did Russia cancel the great educational work instead of developing and expanding joint actions towards peace, constantly proclaiming these slogans, why do they not want to support Ukraine in its pursuit of autonomy and independence, why did citizens, intellectuals and scholars of the Russian Federation allow and still

allow a person with delusional thinking about power, with slogans like Orwell's "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength," to come to power; how did it come to this barbaric attack on a sovereign European state; how did it come that the propaganda carried out "put to sleep" the Russian people, so afflicted by suffering in history; how is it that the long-term educational work in the area of peaceful problem solving, dialogue between nations, showing children and young people the richness of different cultures, symmetrical exchange of cultural values, did not lead to opposition, appeal to dialogical interactions, analysis of the conflict's underlying causes, creative insight into the problems of an open, global world in which a person can develop and realize himself/herself with dignity, take an active and creative part in negotiating conflicts peacefully?

There are many questions... Even if some of them can be answered based on knowledge such as historical or sociological, there still remains a question arising from lack of understanding. In formulating these and many other questions, I am convinced of the need and necessity to meet the challenge we have taken on with regard to Ukrainians. In my opinion, special attention should be paid to the following social issues: areas of social life:

1. **To highlight the values of Slavic culture, cultural community**, including (freedom-equality-brotherhood, for Your freedom and Ours). At the end of the 19th century, Ivan Franko pointed out that there were no two nations in the Slavic world that were so closely linked, with so many knots, in political and spiritual life, yet still so distant from each other. Currently, we are changing the second part of this statement, showing from the beginning of the war in Ukraine that **we are with you**, we are one family, we do not take sides, but invite and support, according to the principles – as President Zelensky pointed out – principles governing his home in Kryvyi Rih – **to receive, warm up, feed...**
2. **To indicate – to raise awareness of common Christian values**. Many examples can be presented in this area, such as the letter that Metropolitan Andrzej Szeptycki addressed to the Poles in 1904. He emphasized that a Christian is obliged to love his country and take care of the good of his nation. One thing is forbidden to him even under the guise of patriotism, to hate, and even more so, to harm another person. Hatred is always wrong, regardless of whether it is collective, national, or personal. Collective or national hatred is worse than personal, because collective hatred is an epidemic disguised in the clothes of honesty and blinds people. In 1941, he refused to sign a declaration of cooperation with Germany and a telegram to Hitler.

3. **To portray our common fate, suffering and history of our nations**, attempting, as for example Krzesimir Dębski did and still does, to explain the mystery of his grandfather's-doctor murder, his burial place in Volhynia.
To point out individuals who, out of their own conviction and choice, respect Poland and the Poles, listened to Niemen or Grechuta, read Lem, Tuwim or Różewicz, know Polish literature and art, read and still read Polish magazines. Similarly, on the other hand, what shapes the sense of Slavic, neighborly, and European community that changes our mutual perception.
4. **Point to the history of the Cossack spirit, to the common spirit of democracy, freedom**, independence, brotherhood, and the spirit that opposes authoritarian rule, orders, and enslavement. Emphasize that the current drama in Ukraine is not a struggle between Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians. It is a drama between the most active, aware, and educated part of society, which wants democracy and the rule of law, and the authority that tries with all its might to maintain an authoritarian-neototalitarian form of governance based on the Soviet regime. Hence the Orange Revolution as a victory of what is human over inhuman power, opposing the authority that indicated that Europe does not want Ukrainians, despises them, that they are strangers to Europe, etc. I am convinced that since this event, the awareness of our partnership increases, to which I drew attention in the text "What past does the future need in the Ukrainian-Polish partnership." I believe we have a chance to revise our shared nationalist habits and have a public debate on this topic.

W.T.D., A.M.-S. *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one), this Latin phrase adorns the Great Seal of the President of the United States and expresses one of the fundamental principles of this country and nation. Although the "migration tradition" of this country and Poland is decidedly different, we also begin to have experiences of a country that receives – in our case – refugees. Studies show that we accept help for Ukrainians, but most Poles do not believe that refugees from the Polish-Belarusian border deserve help (CBOS 2018). There is a clear selectivity regarding people from countries where religious and cultural differences are greater than in the case of Ukraine.

What do we need to do to make this idea understood, internalized, and implemented by Poles?

J.N. Contemporary multicultural Europe and the world currently need tolerance for many cultures in one person, tolerance for the new person characterized by dynamic intercultural and transcultural identity, a person representing and respecting many cultures at once. Intercultural identity, as opposed to cultural identity, is the result of using other cultures' offers in development, drawing on and borrowing from other

cultures. The modern man increasingly functions on the borders of other cultures, increasingly consciously selects and synthesizes. Not cultivating the “in-between” area allows for instrumental treatment of culture (and cultures) issues, ignorance, and a return to outdated, “expired” and therefore harmful categories.

As a result of many years of research conducted by Department of Intercultural Education, University of Białystok, I observe that “being intercultural” is no longer enough. Therefore, I emphasize the need to create a transcultural individual who renounces a single view of the world with permanent cultural divisions. I connect the category of citizenship with this, as a way to eliminate nationalism and create a new quality of patriotism that manifests itself in a multi-layered identity, starting from family, local, regional, ethnic, religious, national, to European, continental, and planetary. From my many years of research on the northeastern border of Poland, it follows that a new educational policy in this area is necessary, a policy that leads to every citizen of the earth becoming aware of the value of ethnic, religious, or worldview diversity. The educational policy of multiculturalism should lead to the acquisition of skills for overcoming the borders of one’s own ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, understanding and reaching agreements with Others. Meanwhile, the governments of many countries have left education in this area mainly to non-governmental organizations, focusing on saving the economic, banking, and military system, without noticing the decline of civic attitudes and the loss of faith in democracy, in the sense of European and planetary solidarity, in the common good that creates dialogue and peace.

W.T.D., A.M.-S. You have pointed out the need to build a new educational policy, based on developing the attitudes of a transcultural human being. In one of your publications in 2013, you wrote that the essence of patriotism can be interpreted, among other things, as a moral value that excludes negative attitudes towards others, such as hostility. It includes openness and respect for the patriotism of others, which excludes a conflict-prone character in building a common space (Nikitorowicz, 2013, p. 39–40).

In your opinion, what new tasks for education arise from current experiences of displacements, but also those that we know are inevitable, such as climate migration?

J.N. As I previously noted, the task of developing dialogue skills in multicultural communities (groups) is one of the most urgent tasks of education at all levels and in all dimensions. I will repeat: it is no longer enough to “be intercultural” and education towards intercultural. It is necessary to have an educational policy of multiculturalism and education for multiculturalism.

I believe that the new tasks for education are:

1. To eliminate fear and move away from a culture of fear, among other things by familiarizing oneself with the biography of President Zelensky, e.g. based on the book by Wojciech Rogacin, a biography published in 2022. There is an indication there that says, "if I engage in a fight, I will not retreat. I may ultimately lose, but I will not run away. No, the White flag is not my flag!" (p. 24).
2. To point to role models who demonstrate that nothing can take away a sense of dignity and inner freedom, and not to fuel hatred towards persecutors. After many years in Soviet labor camps, Barbara Skarga pointed out that the persecutors were poor and had power over us, but were even afraid to think about being victims of the system, a monstrous machine that physically and spiritually crushed people, broke their characters, distorted their consciences, and brainwashed them – in other words, Sovietizing people.
3. To intensify dialogue free from propaganda, because only dialogue is a chance for understanding, cooperation, and collaboration. For many years, we have had fruitful cooperation with many Universities in Ukraine, Ukrainian dormitories organizing periodic scientific meetings – the Ukrainian Forum, publishing joint works, as well as holding joint meetings of the Pedagogical Science Committees of Ukraine and Poland. The goal is to develop a bridge-building capital for our nations, overcome barriers and divisions, share resources, and work to highlight our common cultural heritage. In the territory of present-day Ukraine, there are descendants of Polish Republic who are aware of their heritage, just as in Poland there are Polish citizens who identify with Ukrainian heritage.
4. To engage in intensive educational activities that eliminate a culture of cynicism, manipulation, and exploitation of others' trust, their natural, selfless goodness, and to not allow a culture of indifference, self-interest, and selfishness to develop. To be vigilant against the "culture of impatience," which manifests itself in the primacy of short-term pragmatic actions, geared towards "getting ahead" in the world, motivated by thoughtlessness and selfishness.
5. To shape heterological thinking and responsibility for the Other. A person who perceives and interprets the world heterologically can combine citizenship and national, state, European, and civilizational patriotism, perceive cosmopolitanism as an idea of equal goodwill towards small homelands. To undertake joint actions with Ukraine to provide educational support to Russian citizens in their thinking and in verifying the "feeding" of their ideology that Russia is defending Ukrainian citizens against a fascist authority, to awaken them from their slumber, from the narrative of greatness, power, and Putin's care for the Russian people, etc.
6. To mitigate the effects of aggressive propaganda in People's Poland, shaped over the years by negative stereotypes depicting soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as bandits and murderers, with an authentic relation from a soldier of this

army. An example can be Omelan Płeczeń, a UPA soldier who hid for nine years 1947–1956 in bunkers and forests in the regions of Przemyśl, Sanok, and Lesko. In his memoirs, he offers a different interpretation of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in 1945–1947, which frees us from the “black hatred” shaped in People’s Poland by the repeatedly published *Łuny w Bieszczadach*. His ancestors, who were deported, had lived in these regions for centuries. Who helped them? Poles and a few Ukrainians from mixed families. It can be said that humanity prevailed, and the known words that there are no good or bad nations in the world, only good or bad people, are and always will be relevant.

7. Building energy-generating communities that can find and revive energy, strength, and resilience in themselves and others to fight for the values and principles of democracy within the national and European family, integrating national and European actions. Developing a new paradigm for energy acquisition (wind, solar, hydrogen banks), so that education should transition to creating intercultural and transcultural identities, ensuring the formation of a paradigm of coexistence of cultures and nations on the planet, shaping awareness of responsibility for the development of future generations in addressing common problems of securing humanity in food, water, climate change, etc. These energy-generating communities should be shaped by “moralizing” individuals and groups to understand the idea of justice and to shape a noble and sensitive identity.
8. Directing education towards the emancipation of national memories. Every country has the right to have its own vision of the past and to pursue a certain historical policy, but it is important to have a connection with the past, which is a significant element shaping citizens’ awareness. When presenting our history and identity, highlighting national pride, we should confront the facts. It is not important whether they are convenient for us, for our national identity. What matters is not being indifferent to them, not resorting to falsifying images from history, and not repeating past mistakes. Education cannot give up a fair assessment of the past, showing experiences from both sides and making us aware of the importance of memory as a source of mature human reflection.

W.T.D., A.M.-S. Thank you for giving an interview and for your reflections on the current challenges arising from intensifying migration, for another contribution to the necessary discussion around changing societies.

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