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"Ethnicity of Childhood" in the Reflection on the (Un)Memory of Childhood (the Case of Kashubian Childhood)

„Etniczność dzieciństwa" w kontekście refleksji nad (nie)pamięcią dzieciństwa (przypadek dzieciństwa kaszubskiego)

KEYWORDS

ethnicity of childhood, Kashubian childhood, memory, places of memory, Stanislaw Janke

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the text is to recognize the importance of childhood ethnicity for the cultural construction of ethnic children's identities, and thus for their cultural survival in the ethnic community. The author shows the problem of ethnicity of childhood based on the analysis of the experiences of Kashubian children as preserved in the memory of Kashubians. These experiences are important for the construction of Kashubian cultural heritage and for the sense of Kashubian identity. The theoretical basis for the discussion is: (1) the theory of childhood culture (Hannah Arendt, Romana Miller and Jerzy Nikitorowicz) and (2) Pierre Nora's theory of memory and sites of memory. The article consists of four main parts: The first is a reconstruction of the concept of "cultural childhood"; while the second is an attempt to reconstruct the past of childhood present in Kashubian memory. The essential texts of this part are selected literary works by Stanislaw Janke, which became the basis for the reconstruction of the utopia of Kashubian childhood. The third part is a summary and closing thoughts.

SŁOWA KLUCZE

etniczne dzieciństwo, kaszubskie dzieciństwo, pamięć, miejsca pamięci, Stanisław Janke

ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest próba rozpoznania znaczenia etniczności dzieciństwa dla kulturowego konstruowania tożsamości dzieci etnicznych i tym samym – dla ich kulturowego trwania w ich etnicznej wspólnocie. Autorka podejmuje problem etniczności dzieciństwa na podstawie analizy doświadczeń dzieci kaszubskich, które zachowały się w kaszubskiej pamięci. Doświadczenia te są istotne dla konstruowania kaszubskiego dziedzictwa kulturowego i są ważne dla poczucia tożsamości Kaszubów. Teoretyczną podstawą namysłu są: (1) Teoria kulturowości dzieciństwa (Hannah Arendt, Romana Miller, Jerzy Nikitorowicz). (2) Teoria pamięci i miejsc pamięci Pierre'a Nory. Tekst składa się z trzech części: Pierwsza to rekonstrukcja koncepcji kulturowego dzieciństwa. Druga jest próbą rekonstrukcji obecnego w pamięci kaszubskiej dzieciństwa przeszłego. Najistotniejszymi tekstami tej części są wybrane dzieła literackie Stanisława Jankego. Twórczość autora posłużyła do rekonstrukcji utopii dzieciństwa kaszubskiego. Trzecia stanowi podsumowanie i jest próbą końcowej refleksji.

Introduction

The struggle for the recognition of social memory of minority groups is the next stage of ethnic emancipation. It no longer has the makings of a typically antagonistic minority-majority dispute, but stems directly from the minorities' insistence on their right to have an autonomous culture, which, as Zbigniew Kurcz (2022, p. 13) notes, is a matter of diverging interpretations of a shared past and of how it is remembered. Nonetheless, I am interested in a particular dimension of social memory, which I refer to as "childhood memory" for the purposes of this essay. Hence, the objective of the article is to identify the significance of the ethnicity of childhood (Kashubian childhood) for the cultural construction of children's identities and thus for their cultural persistence in the ethnic community. These issues are all the more important because social memory is also a question of what, as Pierre Nora (2020) remarks, has been forgotten.

The essay consists of three parts. In the first, I discuss the cultural dimension of childhood. In the second, I attempt to reconstruct the childhood that is present in Kashubian memory and its possible utopia. The most relevant texts of this section are selected literary works by Stanisław Janke.[1] In the last part, I return to the research problem and attempt a conclusion.

[1] Stanislaw Janke (born 20 March 1956 in Kościerzyna) is a journalist, poet and novelist, translator, writer and historian of Kashubian literature. He uses the pen name s.j. He published in such magazines as

Childhood as a culturally produced category

In Romana Miller's words: "it is not irrelevant what kind of world a child is introduced into, how he or she distinguishes himself or herself from it, and what kind of self-image he or she produces" (1981, p. 21). The author's line of thinking is akin to the views of Ruth Benedict (2005, p. 117), who argues that it is impossible to participate fully in culture if a person was not raised in it and was not taught how to live according to its rules.

Cultural learning is what constructs images of the world, social order and the self in the child's consciousness (Miller, 1981, p. 73). Children – being people at a particular moment of their cultural and social development, people in the first years of their lives – are uncritically "submerged in culture" – supplied by adults – as long as they are incapable of (critical – my note) autonomy (Miller, 1981, p. 76). This peculiar inability of children to be critical, many adults feel, creates the need to impart, or even impose, cultural values and rules on them, as Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2007, p. 82) states. Still others, like Hannah Arendt, write about a concern, which is not so much a concern for the child, however, as for culture, which comes from an almost natural necessity, "required as much by natural needs, the helplessness of the child, as by political necessity, the continuity of an established civilization" (1994, p. 114). This, of course, must leave its mark on the development of the child's personality and the makeup of his or her identity (Miller, 1981, p. 76). In other words, it must lead to the fact that, as Benedict writes, before the child learns to speak, he or she is already a product of his or her culture (2005, pp. 79–80).

The above reveals the proper meaning of Miller's statement that "human children always have ancestors and are themselves descendants" (1981, p. 76). This is not a new thought in the humanities, as we can identify it, for example, in the works of Arendt (1994, pp. 210–213; 2000, p. 13), who writes that the special condition of human

Pomerania, *Gazeta Gdańska*, *Pielgrzym*, *Wieczór Wybrzeża*, and *Kurier Wejherowski* (where he was editor-in-chief). The author publishes his works in Polish and Kashubian. He made his debut in the pages of *Pomerania* in 1977. In 1988–1989, he published the Kashubian-language novel *Łiskawica*, which is based on his biographical experiences. Three years later, the short story *Psë* came out. However, it was not a good time for Janke's Kashubian-language work. The political events of the time were far more important to Kashubians and Poles than cultural events. Both short stories were noticed and found a wide readership only after their re-release in 2015. For many years, Janke wrote mainly in Polish. His new Kashubian-language novels – all based on biographical plots – were not published until the 2020s: *Cësk* in 2020, *Mòrzkulowie* in 2022, and *Bënë bùten* in 2023. The author also creates poetry for children: Żużónka jak mrzónka (1984), *Krôjczi pôjczi* (1997), and *Alfabet dlô dzôtkôw* (2021). Janke is also a translator. Among others, he translated *Pan Tadeusz* and *Crimean Sonnets* from Polish into Kashubian. He has received numerous prizes for his literary achievements and was awarded the "Meritorious for Polish Culture" medal by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in 2015. He is a member of the Association of Polish Writers, as well as the PEN Club.

beings is that they appear in a pre-existing world, "created" by those who were in it before. Moreover, a person appears in the world of people only as someone new and, as Arendt (1994, p. 114) claims, simultaneously as someone alien. Thus, each newly arrived generation is introduced into an already formed world.

Thus, human existence is always an existence in the world, and a person can only inhabit the world on the condition that they share it with others. This, in turn, generally speaking, makes it necessary for that person to appear in the shared world not only as "I,' but more importantly as "We." "We" sets the conditions for human beings to be communal, as only the we-community can create a world that is both shared and grounded in its historicity, because the world is older than people. Each new generation must make this common world historical in itself: in its consciousness (Arendt, 2000, pp. 13 and 202; Arendt 1994). Therefore, the point is to refer to a past which is not necessarily described as history or tradition: a past which can only last as memory in a shared world. But forgetting the past, losing the memory of the past robs human life of its depth, while the depth of existence, according to Arendt, is one of the dimensions of human life, and opens "in man only through memory" (1994, p. 116).

Learning culture is a matter of educational processes, Miller (1981, p. 108) argues, which involve two things: "individual generations," concerned with the persistence of their world, and "the transmission of culture," which is passed on to the child, since this is the only way the world of people can survive. In this process, Nikitorowicz (2005, p. 28) writes, the "micro-world of the child" is constructed by grounding its present in the past. The author notes that the child's micro-world determines their first cultural identity. As a result, the child carries the culture of their community and brings this community/social-cultural dimension into all social relations. This causes the child to feel/perceive himself or herself as someone who is similar to some and different from others.

Notes (from) ethnic childhood: a Kashubian case study

Pierre Nora (2020, pp. 104–106, 109) makes a distinction between direct memory, which lies buried in human action, and new memory, which can only be accessed by a person from the outside, and thus is not something that is experienced. It has the property of constructing itself, as it is the "tangible proof" of its existence. Another property of it is that it comes to a person from the outside, and thus ceases to be what is social, and perhaps this is why it is experienced as a compulsion.

It is the compulsion of memory, the obligation to remember, the retrieval of memories – all of which stem from a powerful need to "reclaim belonging" and involve the exigency to "identify with oneself"(Nora, 2020, p. 111). A person thus becomes

responsible for remembering because they feel compelled to be someone who belongs to a larger community (Nora, 2020, pp. 111–112). Importantly, however, remembering, as Nora (2020, p. 137) points out, does not mean memories, but is a general management of the past in the present.

People produce memory sites that, notably, are the effect of unnatural action, since spontaneous memory does not exist in society. Perhaps this is why minorities in particular must create enclaves of their memory, must enviously guard them, and must turn memory sites into bastions, since history (e.g., majority history – my note) tends to appropriate memories, which it then distorts, transforms and fashions "in its own way" (Nora, 2020, p. 104). And memory sites are what they are because they escape history and, paradoxically, offer a different perspective on history, and become what (re)constructs an understanding of modern history (Nora, 2020, pp. 125, 150). In effect, new forms of memory can emerge, which Nora (2020, p. 154) links to the decolonization of societies and the emergence of formerly appropriated minority (e.g., ethnic) communities. This is a process not only of reclaiming memory, but also of reclaiming identity. Hence, in the decolonization movement, it has become so essential for minorities to link identity with memory, or more precisely with a recovered and (re)constructed past (Nora, 2020, p. 157).

The example I have chosen is Kashubian childhood, which has been marked by oblivion. Kashubian childhood is the part of Kashubian culture that has been erased from the memory of Kashubians, which can be associated with the breakdown of generational transmission of the Kashubian language in Kashubian families. Remnants of this memory have survived in the form of sparse scholarly studies, few memoirs and modest literature that addresses the issue. Photographs are still kept in home archives, but fewer and fewer people remember the circumstances, situations and emotions of these images of frozen memory. In fact, until the early 1990s, no studies of Kashubian childhood had been written. Admittedly, the teaching of Kashubian language and culture at school had been vigorously discussed since the 1980s, and even curricula had been developed as part of the so-called regionalization of teaching, but there had been no research on Kashubian childhood, which I would like to reiterate.

The first author to write about the cultural and social injustice of the Kashubian child was Jan Drzeżdżon (1992), who made a direct link between the tragedy of the Kashubian child and the school as something that – due to ethnic/cultural difference – is alien and even socially hostile to that child. For this very reason, the ethnic child is in a way excluded from education, to which they do not belong culturally, yet are socially and politically (by the state) obliged to attend school. The root cause is the "clash" between the separate and alien "value systems" of the child and the school (Drzeżdżon, 1992, p. 35). Drzeżdżon, however, locates the problem not in the clash of cultures itself, since it is not cultures that generate conflicts, but in the clash of

norms/stereotypes/societal viewpoints. It is societies that use conflicts to place cultural value on other-ethnic individuals and groups. This is precisely what Drzeżdżon calls the cultural valuing of a person, and what consequently causes the other-ethnic person to relinquish their ethnic culture – either by force or voluntarily. This is what the tragedy of the ethnic child from a minority group within another, stronger culture entails. The dominant culture persuades the child to abandon their own culture in favor of the stronger one and take up a different/new life in a culture that seems more universal or more homogeneous, simply because its population is larger than the child's ethnic community (Drzeżdżon, 1992, pp. 44–45). The tragedy of the ethnic child is also constructed through the language of the clash of cultures. When the child's language/the language of his/her home differs from the language of the school, the former becomes gradually replaced by the latter in the child's communication. The reason for this is usually twofold: first, the school is always organized in the state language (which is usually the language of the strongest ethnic group in the state), and second, the school does not nurture the language and culture of the other-ethnic child.

The tragedy of the Kashubian child during the communist era was exacerbated by the "scientific" study conducted in the early 1970s by students (sic!) of the Medical Academy in Gdańsk and students (sic!) of psychology at Jagiellonian University. Under the guidance of their academic supervisors, they "scientifically" proved that the Kashubian language is the cause of "mental retardation" in children. As the study allegedly showed, as many as 70% (sic!) of the children in the study group of two hundred (Sikorski, 1973) purportedly "suffered" from "mental retardation." The findings reinforced the stereotype that the Kashubian language (then considered a dialect) is an inferior, peasant variety of Polish. And that proficiency in this language (then dialect) impairs not only the social functioning of children, but also affects their intellectual development.

In my opinion, the most valuable sources of knowledge about Kashubian childhood are the Kashubian-language novels by Stanisław Janke: Łiskawica[2] (2015), *Cësk*[3] (2020),

[2] Łiskaw*ica* (lightning/flash) – the protagonist of the novel is Môrcën Kluka, an orphan child who was raised by his grandmother. The novel is set in 1968–1970, and the story takes place in the small village of Piekło [Hell]. The author vividly describes the childhood of Môrcën and his friends at school, at home and at the playground, and shows that it is not just an isolated world. It turns out that the connections to the world and its politics are acute for Môrcën and his family: an uncle is killed in Gdynia during the events of December 1970. While the uncle's body is shamefully buried under the cover of darkness in Gdynia, Môrcën sets Piekło on fire.

[3] *Cësk* (fear/attack/influence) – the main character is Gùst Kaszëbòwszczi. The novel is set between 1908 and 1956, initially in the village of Ustarbowo, and later in Wejherowo. The protagonist's biography is representative of many people whose ethnicity was non-Polish and who were born in the Prussian partition. As a child, the protagonist attended a Prussian school, then a Polish school. The choice of Polish citizenship and taking the side of Poland determine the fate of Gùst Kaszëbòwszczi: he takes part in the September campaign, and escapes from being shot in the Piaśnica Woods (the place of execution of Kashubian and

Mòrzkùlowie[4] (2021), *Bënë bùten*[5] (2023), as well as a collection of Kashubian-language poems for children entitled *Alfabet dlô dzôtkôw*[6] (2021a). Mere superficial semantic and structural analysis of the novels makes it possible to reconstruct two dimensions of Kashubian childhood: life at school (public) and at home (private). Today, the first dimension is mostly a "story" about a past childhood, the tragedy of which was due to the fact that a Kashubian child would start school most often without knowing the language of instruction. The second dimension is primarily a utopia of Kashubian childhood, which is a kind of manifesto/opposition to the present tragedy of a Kashubian child who, when stepping into a state/Polish school, no longer knows (even passively) the language of his ancestors. These areas complement, intersect and determine each other. However, there is no Kashubian childhood without recognizing what Kashubianness/kashëbstwò is in each of these areas.

Memory/dimension of Kashubian childhood at school

Kashubian identity is not something simple and ordinary. In Łiskawica (2015), Janke locates the plot in the village of Piekło [Hell]. The name is, in the author's words, "an allegory of Kashubians in the world." "We were a very real island in the sea of Germanism, Germanization, Germanness. And we are still to some extent this

Pomeranian elites). At the end of the war, he is captured by the NKVD and deported to a Siberian gulag. He returns to Poland several years later. After the October thaw of 1956, he is full of hope, but the events of March 1968, December 1970 and June 1976 convince him that things will not get better.

[4] *Mòrzkùlowie* – the title is the name of the community and the equivalent of Kashubian people. The story takes place in the 13th century, and the main character is Wòda, who is born in a small village to which Christianity has just been introduced. However, the old gods and old beliefs are vividly present in the consciousness of the inhabitants and also in the practice of everyday life. Wòda has many unique qualities (one could even say that he is "chivalrous"), so he attracts the attention of Prince Barnim and becomes his faithful advisor. In addition to his political tasks and duties, Wòda also leads a personal life with its typical worries and joys. The biography of the hero is not only about his personal life, but also about being part of a community. It is also a description of the process of gaining wisdom as a result of special events as after each event the hero is born again.

[5] *Bënë bùten* (bënë – inside/ for example, inside of that in which one lives; bùten – outside/outside of that in which one lives/backyard, for example) is a novel that is actually a literary representation of the author's childhood. Many of the characters have prototypes. The main character is Ceszk (Czesôw) Drgas. The plot takes place in the 1960s and 1970s in a fictional village of Dibòwò, modeled on Lipusz. The plot centers on the description of peasant life, seemingly carefree, which is filled with Kashubian and Polish elements. The protagonist's childhood ends with the death of his father.

[6] *Alfabet dlô dzôtkôw* [Alphabet for Children] – a volume of poems, as the title says, for Kashubian children. Inspiration seems to have come from two worlds: writing and everyday life. Each poem is inspired by a different letter of the Kashubian alphabet. Their themes are not only letters and words, but also elements of the everyday world: plants, animals, colors, and seasons. The essential part, however, is people and the home that only they can create.

island in Polish culture. ... although at the time when it was happening [the plot of the novel takes place between 1968 and 1970], this island was more real than now in a democratic system, and then in a totalitarian system" (Janke, 2018).

This positioning of Kashubianness always either in German culture or in Polish culture has had and continues to have political consequences for Kashubians. This means, for example, that a Kashubian child is bilingual, but Kashubians also remember that there was a time when their ancestors were trilingual as they lived in a multilingual society (Janke, 2020, p. 38).

Command of more languages was mainly the outcome of schooling. Regardless of whether a child attended a German school or a Polish school, they usually started education knowing only Kashubian. German school and Polish school (until recently) were "always" foreign languages for a Kashubian child, but it was the only way to get an education. In many Kashubian homes, they wanted the child to "become someone better" (Janke, 2020, p. 38; 2023, p. 98), but the price of such an education was high, because learning in German school and in Polish school did not serve to produce bilingual or trilingual competence in Kashubian children, but to assimilate them into German or Polish language and culture.

The more comprehensive the educational system, the more stringent the didactic methods, including corporal punishment and verbal abuse, which translated into a violent teacher-student relationship. For example, in Łiskawica, Janke writes about a teacher, Irmina Domianowa, who told a student (Môrcën) that his language was "parchata mòwa" [scabrous speech], which she – the teacher – "biôtkòwała swòją drewnianą szablą" [fought with her wooden sword] (Janke, 2015, pp. 44, 64). The road to school itself was traumatic, as each Kashubian child had to leave behind his or her speech, which he or she had been speaking from an early age and understood better than the language of the primer (Janke, 2015, p. 43). In *Cësk*, on the other hand, Janke writes both about Polish teachers/Polish priests (religion teachers) who used violence to teach Polish and about German teachers, such as Ebeling, who beat students to force them to learn German (2020, p. 23).

We should add that while in their memory Kashubians can understand the "logic" of beating children in the German school of the times of the Prussian partition, to this day they cannot understand why their children were beaten in the Polish school of the interwar period or in the school of the People's Republic of Poland. In their memory, being beaten in a Polish school "hurts" them more than being beaten in a German school[7] (Janke, 2020, p. 35).

The public/school-related aspect of childhood went down in Kashubian memory as hell/trauma/suffering for Kashubian children in German and Polish schools as

[7] Kashubians have identified themselves with Polish statehood in their history since the 19th century.

these were oppressive in different ways. Each of them, through two forms of violence (physical and psychological), led to the denationalization of Kashubian children, by stripping them of their ethnic culture. Consequently, we can speak of symbolic violence, as, for example, the Polish school "told" Kashubian children that their speech was only a Polish dialect, i.e. some folk version of Polish, which was/is an inferior speech of uneducated peasants from Kashubia (cf. Synak, 2010). This message became the driving force behind the communist school education, which was highly effective in assimilating Kashubian/ethnic children and de-nationalizing them, robbing them of their ethnic culture. This campaign was so fruitful that its effects are still observed today. Despite the fact that Kashubian language instruction has been present in Polish schools for more than 30 years (since the transformation), the process of Kashubians becoming silent in their language has not been reversed. First the children fell silent, and now successive generations of Kashubians are falling silent.

Memory/dimension of domestic Kashubian childhood

The most complete project of ethnic/Kashubian childhood was provided by Janke in a volume of poems entitled *Alfabet dlô dzôtkôw* [Alphabet for children] (2021a). As it seems, the only possible dimension of Kashubian childhood is its Kashubian language. It is essentially a manifesto for the Kashubian present and a pedagogical project-utopia that is embedded in the memory of Kashubian childhood.

Janke's manifesto/utopia unremembers Kashubian childhood and reminds us what it is and what it should be. It is a blueprint for a democratic world in which a Kashubian is once a Pole and once a Kashubian. This results in a coherent state-ethnic identification: "Jo jem i Pòlôch, i Kaszëba!" [I am both a Pole and a Kashubian] (Janke, 2020, p. 36). One obtains such identification through maturity in Tatczëzna and maturity in citizenship [Żëcé, p. 71][8] . Citizenship (òbëwatelstwò) is a matter of the country in which one lives and the changes occurring in it, which is perhaps best expressed in the words of Gùst Kaszëbòwsczi from *Cësk*: "Më szlë z tatkã za dëchã czasu" [Me and daddy were going with the times] (Janke, 2020, p. 40). For Janke, in turn, Tatczëzna [Fatherland] is an area of strong ties to the Kashubian community and to the culture of that community, which is most clearly conveyed in the words of the father of little Ceszek Drgas from the novel *Bënë bùten*, who, when asked by his wife why he cannot give up some habit of his, replies: "Jo jem tak przënãcony i kùńc" [Because I'm so inclined, as simple as that] (Janke, 2023, p. 16). Both areas are filled with responsibility, because both worlds – the state/Poland and ethnicity/

[8] I've enclosed in square brackets the title of the poems and page number, from Janke's book *Alphabet dlô dzôtkôw* (2021a).

nation/Kashubia – require growing up/maturing and responsibility. These are places where a person encounters both joy and sorrow. One should live a good life and help others. A child should give respect to elders. In Janke's thought, childhood passes quickly [Żëcé, p. 71] and must be a time of intense learning of the world in its ethnic/cultural and civic dimensions.

Kashubian childhood in Janke's conception is organized through the term "Tatczëzna," [Fatherland] which the author understands as that which is ours, local, native, and also as a place to which one returns when one temporarily has to leave one's Kashubian homeland to live elsewhere [Bòcón, p. 10]. Tatczëzna is what connects people in the present and what connects people of the present with those who lived in the Kashubian homeland in the past. In both cases, people are united by language which is the cultural as well as social nucleus of Kashubianness.

Language is important because of the ancestors, because it is from the ancestors that language inherited its sound. Sounds came first, and it was from them that letters emerged, and from letters that words and sentences emerged [*Alfabet*, p. 5]. In turn, writing, which emerged from words, is also a legacy from the ancestors, and is what is important to children also because of literature, as it carries cultural lessons [*Alfabet*, p. 5]. The children's task is to learn to write, and this is a skill that the child acquires at school [U, p. 61; Y, p. 66], but in this project the school is clearly subordinate to the needs of Kashubian culture, if only because the linguistic awareness of the Kashubian child is developed there [*Alfabet*, p. 5; Ôrt, p. 51; Ùbrzeg, p. 62; Ą, p. 7; U, p. 61; Y, p. 66].

Janke describes the world to children in Kashubian and makes this world meaningful only in Kashubian, which highlights that Kashubian is the only way to include the child in Kashubian culture. In this sense, Kashubian world equals Kashubian language. In the Kashubian world/Kashubian language there is no *ogród* [garden], but ògród. There are no colors here, but *farwë*. There is no *tęcza* [rainbow], but *tãga*. There are no *ryby* [fish] and no *brzeg* [shore], but only *rëbë* ë ùbrzeg. And there is no Hel Peninsula, but there is only *Elskô Blewiązka*. There is żëcé *Kaszëbów* – but no życie *Kaszubów* [Kashubian life]. However, there would not be this Kashubian world if it were not for the people who speak Kashubian, because it is the Kashubian language that allows them to name everything around them in Kashubian. Language connects people in immediacy, because it is what is between people. Language is also what a mother surrounds her child with and nurtures her child in its growth with (literally: "Jãzëkã je wëcérô"). Language is what the mother addresses the child in. [Celąteczkò, p. 12]. Language is important for people because it creates a space in which they can be together with each other in a certain/linguistic way. Janke shows the child who reads his poetry that people meet in and through language. What is still needed is a place for these meetings. People need somewhere to live together and create this

Kashubian common world, and this common world is Tatczëzna, because, after all, "Nôlepi w dodomie mie je." [I feel best at home] [Dodóm, p. 15].

Toward a conclusion: leaving the discussion open

These analyses – although they deal with selected elements of the memory of Kashubian childhood – exemplify other cultural areas in which the memory of childhood is an important part of cultural heritage. Childhood is socially produced and has a cultural character, which makes it significant in the process of producing a person's cultural identity. As Jerzy Nikitorowicz notes, the cultural nature of childhood determines a person's first identity and has a considerable role in the construction of later personal and community identities.

When reading Janke's Kashubian-language texts, the reader is struck, page after page, with the idea that it is not irrelevant whether a person is born a Kashubian, a Pole or something else. One can, of course, debate whether a person is already a Kashubian, a Pole or something else at birth. Identification comes first and foremost from the fact that a person is born into a certain family, and their relatives identify themselves in a certain way. Therefore, they steer the child towards a certain type of socio-cultural relationship only for the child to later become a full member of a certain/their ethnic/national community. In this sense, too, the first identity is what one inherits from one's ancestors.

Thus, it matters at what time, in what place, in what society and in what culture a person's birth happens. And it is this conditioning of birth by time and place that makes a person unique, albeit sometimes in a painful way. Yet, as Sándor Márai notes, "it is not something accidental where a person sets out from" (2016, p. 8). Somehow, then, this conditioning allows one to ponder the meaning of life, and the memory of one's communal past gives, as Arendt argues, depth to one's life. Such thinking about life, such a search for meaning in life, according to Janke (2020, p. 5), is a peculiar characteristic of Kashubians. However, as it seems, this issue concerns humans in general, because it provides an opportunity for reflection about one's being in the world and leads to an awareness of one's uniqueness sooner or later, an awareness of being part of some larger idea or plan.

The above excerpts from the memories of Kashubian childhood give us an idea of what the ethnicity of childhood is for an other-ethnic child in a socio-cultural world organized by those who define themselves as coming from the dominant culture. The fact is that I drew only on the memory of Kashubian childhood, which – perhaps – has been irretrievably lost.

In an optimistic scenario, the ethnicity of one's social group determines a person's human existence in the culture of their ancestors. As I have shown above, there is also a non-optimistic story of ethnicity, from which the child is cast out/disaffiliated. Many Kashubians have experienced a rupture in the generational transmission of their Kashubian culture because they were – as children – cast out/disaffiliated from their ancestral culture. Many do not experience any particular identity discomfort because of this. However, many, as a result of various events in their lives, begin to recast/rebuild their own identity in the process of reinventing themselves as Kashubians. Many become painfully aware of their cultural trauma related to being uprooted from Kashubian culture.

The Kashubian child is one of the many possible examples of the ethnic child, and even this small amount of knowledge about the child's tragedy allows us to understand that many social practices are denationalizing measures intended to uproot the other-ethnic child from their culture. And to take away from a person – child or adult – their ethnic culture means to take away their ancestors, history and memory of the past. To take away a person's cultural/ethnicity means to take away his or her chance to find depth and meaning in life, and to deprive them of the chance to realize their own destiny and their own uniqueness.

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