

Cultural Retention Among Polish Women Who Came to Canada Between 1945 and 1960  
as Displaced Persons or Immigrants

by

Zofia Perlikowski

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Faculty of Social Work  
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## ABSTRACT

Women who came to Canada between 1945 and 1960 as displaced persons or immigrants belonged to the post-war wave of refugees and immigrants from Poland. Displaced persons' experiences of forced migration involved war trauma, deportation, and exile. The majority of immigrants who came to Canada were escaping the Communist takeover of Poland after the War. This group of Polish displaced persons and immigrants differed from those who had settled earlier or who would later come to Canada. They represented a cross-section of all Polish social strata and included skilled workers and professionals. Due to the involuntary nature of migration, the women maintained a strong sense of national identity and patriotism. Many remained in exile for several years before coming to Canada and their long exiles led them through many countries and remote locations in the world. Canada offered them a safe haven where they could reconstruct their homes. Their lives involved a series of adaptations, including the inevitable challenges of aging.

The feminist perspective and phenomenology were selected as the framework for this study of cultural retention among these Polish women, the majority of whom have lived and aged in Winnipeg. The focus of the study was to investigate the experience of cultural retention and its significance on facilitating their future needs as seniors. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted. Six major themes were identified for all the participants: (a) bound by traumatic past, (b) resilience and strength as a historic legacy, (c) women's role in retaining cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours in the family, (d) women's role in promotion of the Polish culture in Canada, (e) voluntary social activity, and (f) belonging to

two cultures. A sense of mission appeared as an overarching meaning of the experience of maintaining Polish culture in Canada by the participants of the study.

The study shows that the Polish women have maintained their culture of origin, but at the same time successfully adapted to the Canadian culture. Their cultural duality indicates cultural retention, but also modification of traditional Polish values. The participants of this study express a strong connection to their Polish cultural heritage but consider Canada as their home.

Findings of this study may enhance understanding of the Polish culture and people of Polish descent who are aging in Winnipeg. Recommendations include an attempt to identify future needs of this aging population and ways to provide social services in culturally respectful ways.



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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the participants of my study, the women who shared their life stories for the purpose of this research. In spite of all the challenges - the war, displacement, exile, adjustment to life in a different culture, and aging - their strength, optimism, and a sense of humour may be an inspiration for the many people who have to come a long way to find a safe haven.

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## Chapter 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### Statement of the Problem

Now Canada is now home to people of more than 200 ethnic backgrounds compared to 25 different ethnic groups in 1901 (Statistics Canada, 2008). More than 13 million immigrants have chosen Canada as their destination over the past 100 years (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2006, there were 6,186,950 immigrants living in this country while of a total population of 31,241,030 (Statistics Canada, 2008). It is the first country in the world to introduce a national multiculturalism law. In 1988 the Multiculturalism Act recognized multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of society and “sought to assist in the preservation of culture and language, to reduce discrimination, to enhance cultural awareness and understanding, and to promote culturally sensitive institutional change at the federal level” (Leman, 1999, p. 6). People of different cultural backgrounds go through a long and complicated process of acculturation in order to adjust to the environment of a different culture while retaining their own cultural heritage to varying extents. In the face of demographic changes and an increasing number of older adults of diverse cultural backgrounds living and aging in Canada, understanding the cultural context of aging immigrants and refugees is essential in addressing their needs.

The participants of this study are Polish women who came to Canada after World War II as displaced persons or immigrants. They have lived and aged in Winnipeg. Winnipeg has been one of the destinations for Polish immigrants and refugees coming to Canada. In 2008, there were 984,565 people of Polish origin in Canada, including 82,360 in Manitoba, of which 58,050 lived in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The participants of this study are a special group of aging women who had to find their niche in Canadian society and make the necessary adaptations while carrying the baggage of war memories, displacement trauma and exile or the experience of fleeing Communism. Now they are facing the inevitable challenges of aging. All these factors had to be considered in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning attributed to cultural retention by this population so that their future needs as seniors may be adequately addressed by helping professions, social service providers, and policy makers.

In 2008, there were 4,074,300 people aged 65 and over living in Canada, including 99,935 people of Polish background. In Manitoba, the total population aged 65 and over was 151,805 people including 10,215 Poles. The total population of people 65 and over in Winnipeg was 89,895 including 7,005 Poles (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2006, 26.2% of immigrants aged 65 and over living in Manitoba came from Eastern Europe (Manitoba Fact Book on Aging, 2008). In order to meet the demands of the future diversified aging population more effectively, social services should recognize the strengths and resources existing in people's cultural roots.

Little is known from earlier studies about the importance attributed to cultural retention among women of Polish descent in Canada and how this knowledge may influence social services provision for aging Polish women. This study may generate an understanding of the importance of maintaining cultural roots by Polish women as well as by women who came to Canada as immigrants or refugees from other Central or East European countries.

Cultural retention among Polish women who came to Canada after the Second World War as children or young women may only be understood in the context of a more than one thousand year Polish history of struggle to maintain independence and national identity with



the Second World War just being one of its tragic chapters. During World War II, “the lives of the Poles were completely uprooted and their nationality directly assaulted. Under these pressures their notions of Polishness were continually tested, developed, and rearticulated.” (Jolluck, 2002, p.xix). Children witnessed their parents’ determination, not only to survive, but to uphold the connection to home and have faith in the future. They could not return to Poland. Forced out of their homes and thrust into deplorable conditions for long years, they dreamt of a safe place, a place they could call home.

Canada offered them a safe place on earth but presented new challenges connected with adaptation to its culture. The women developed cultural duality. Some of the beliefs and values brought from home were retained, others were modified, lost, or replaced by elements from the host culture.

This wave of postwar Polish displaced persons and immigrants to Canada was more patriotic than the Poles who had earlier settled in Canada. Their conscience was shaped not only by the historic legacy of their country - abundant in wars, uprisings, occupations and continuous struggle for national survival, personal experiences of the Second World War trauma, displacement, and exile - but also challenges in terms of adjustment to a new culture and aging in the country of adoption.

### **Research question and objectives**

My main research question was: To what extent have Polish women who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants after the war, between 1945 and 1960, retained their Polish culture?

The purpose of this study was to gain a depth of understanding of the nature and meaning of the lived experience of Polish women who still draw on their native roots but at

the same time have already adapted to a different culture. An insight into our understanding Polish culture and its retention among Polish women could improve the provision of social services for this population, as well as other populations of different cultural backgrounds. I found no previous research which specifically addressed cultural retention among Polish women who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants and its impact on their aging and future social services needs.

By exploring the Polish women's experiences, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. How important is retention of Polish culture and what is the meaning of Canadian culture for them? If they have not retained their culture of origin, what have they replaced it with?
2. Is ethnic culture advantageous for them as aging ethnic group members (e.g., Is their family a source of support for them as is the case in many Polish families)?
3. What role (if any) has Polish culture played in reducing any isolation and marginalization? How do they feel affected by the multiple jeopardy (based on gender, age, ethnic origin)?
4. What is their experience of aging in Canadian culture?
5. What can social work learn from this research to inform more appropriate programs and social services for this and other aging immigrant populations?

A qualitative approach, phenomenology, and a feminist perspective lens were utilized to explore the women's experiences of cultural retention and to attempt to identify their future needs as seniors. Eight in-depth interviews provided data useful in understanding the uniqueness of the participants' experiences but at the same time showed commonalities

shared by other Canadians born outside Canada in terms of their adaptation and cultural retention.

### **Relevance to the Social Service Field**

There is scarce research devoted to the influence of cultural retention among post-war displaced persons and immigrants on their present and future needs as seniors. I hope that the findings of this study may guide the helping professions, social workers, and policy makers in addressing the needs and expectations of people of Polish descent as well as members of other ethnic groups aging in Canada.

It is important to recognize the strengths and resources that can be utilized in provision of effective social services for seniors of different ethnic backgrounds. In 2006, there were 4.3 million people aged 65 and over which accounted for 13.2% of the total Canadian population. This senior population included 2.432 million women (56.3%) and 1.882 million (56.3%) men (Government of Canada, 2007). Between 2005 and 2036 the number of seniors in Canada is projected to increase from 4.2 million (13.2% of the total population) to 9.8 million (24.5% of the total population). In Manitoba, the total number of persons aged 65 and over was 161,885 in 2006 (14.1% of the population). According to the 2001 Canadian Census, 4.6% of senior Manitobans, 65 and over, reported a Polish cultural background (*Manitoba Fact Book on Aging*, 2005).

The social work profession has been committed to serving those who face oppression, marginalization, and social isolation. Minority elders share some common issues, including lack of economic security and resources, higher rates of poverty, poorer health status, and higher levels of mental-psychological issues (Min, 2005). Older adults face barriers in accessing appropriate health care, long-term care or social services due to various reasons,

including language problems, lack of economic resources, cultural barriers, discrimination and insensitivity of institutions (Ibid.). Social work interventions aim at preserving or restoring independence, promoting optimal psychological and social functioning, as well as enhancing quality of life through personal empowerment and effective service utilization (Schalach, Damron-Rodriguez, Robinson, & Feldman, 2000).

In the light of demographic changes, including a growing number of ethnically diverse minority elders, the social work profession will have to develop more effective culturally competent services and re-evaluate the ability and preparedness of the profession to address current and future issues and challenges faced by this population. Interventions should be guided by an ecological perspective and aimed at the fit between the person and the environment. The existing frameworks may fail to address cultural differences appropriately due to a lack of understanding the particular needs of minority elders. Older adults may differ in their perception of illness and disability, help-seeking behaviours, family dynamics, and autonomy. The principles of the social work profession may be incongruent with other cultures' values and beliefs (e.g., the right to self-determination, autonomy, or care preference). Ethnicity may improve coping with the physical and psychical constraints of old age. It creates "a sense of exclusiveness and self-awareness that one is a member of a distinct and bounded social group" (Holzberg, 1981, p. 115). Cox and Ephross (1998) proposed the ethnic lens model of practice with culturally diverse populations. A lens is determined by ethnic identification and membership and is used by members to perceive experiences. All lenses are influenced by cultural meanings, values and beliefs. Cultural factors should be incorporated in the assessment, intervention, and delivery of social work services.

## **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter Two covers a Literature Review including historical background which serves to enhance understanding of the participants' experiences. Poland's complicated history, its constant struggle for independence and maintenance of national identity, has shaped the Poles' sense of patriotism. Five out of eight participants experienced deportations to remote parts of Russia, such as Siberia and Kazakhstan, and spent years in exile. This part of history has been intentionally omitted or silenced in historical accounts for political reasons. A brief historical overview of the circumstances leading to displacement and the winding routes that the participants of this study were forced to follow before coming to Canada have been presented. A description of a woman's role in the Polish family and society before the war sets the stage for the exploration of the women's cultural retention in a new culture.

Chapter Three describes Research Methodology, including presentation of the researcher, research strategy, sample selection and recruitment, research ethics, participant characteristics, the interview process, data collection, trustworthiness of the research, and limitations. The study employed a qualitative research methodology focusing and describing peoples' experience. Phenomenology and a feminist perspective lens were used to explore the cultural retention experience of the women.

Chapter Four presents research findings which include themes, sub-themes and the essence identified through the process of utilizing phenomenological analysis and the feminist perspective. Six main themes include: (1) bound by traumatic pasts, (2) resilience and strength as a historical legacy, (3) women's role in retaining cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours in the family, (4) women's role in promotion of Polish culture in Canada, (5)

voluntary social activity, and (6) belonging to two cultures. The themes' interrelated meanings points to the essence of the experience of the women in retaining Polish culture as a sense of cultural mission.

Chapter Five contains a discussion on cultural retention among Polish women living and aging in Winnipeg and Chapter Six includes conclusions and recommendations concerning future needs of this aging population and ways to accommodate provision of culturally appropriate social services to older adults of Polish descent and possibly other ethnic groups.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Culture, ethnicity and cultural retention**

Culture is a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge of a group of people sharing the same historical past. It organizes our world into a meaningful context. Through socialization or enculturation, we learn patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking, a blueprint for all our life's activities. These are transmitted from one generation to another and become internalized, subconscious, habitual, and taken for granted. According to Huntington (1996), "the heart of culture involves language, religion, values, traditions, and customs." Samovar & Porter (2004) list the elements of culture which distinguish one culture from another, including history, religion, values, social organization, and language.

Ethnicity is a sense of belonging which "patterns our thinking, feeling and behaviour in both obvious and subtle ways, playing a major role in determining what we eat, how we work, how we relate, how we celebrate holidays and rituals, and how we feel about life, death, and illness" (McGoldrick, 1998, p. 22). The cultural bond involves unique patterns of values, beliefs, traditions, languages, and behaviours. Ethnic groups usually exist within a larger culture, have subordinate power and may be subjected to prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998; Mullaly, 2002).

If we are removed from our own culture of origin and introduced to a different cultural context, we become aware of the limitations of our cultural knowledge (Ibid.). Cultural retention is the maintenance of the original cultural values and identity while learning, adopting, and integrating the values and norms of the mainstream culture. Individuals who undergo the process of acculturation do not have to give up their original

cultural practices. Bicultural adaptation skills, bicultural competency, and a bicultural identity developed by an individual lead to cultural integration. However, the longer people are exposed to mainstream cultural norms, ethnicity becomes an identity, a sense of belonging to a group and its history rather than adherence to a unique set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Longress, 1991). Cultural retention involves the continuation of values, beliefs and behaviour patterns, as well as customs and traditions, celebration of traditional holidays, cooking traditional food, participation in ethnic organizations, events, and church activities, collecting ethnic artifacts, and maintaining connection with the country of origin and contacts with relatives and friends in the old country. Language is an essential tool for the transmission of culture.

Acculturation takes place if there are differences between the values, belief systems and worldviews of the immigrant's country of origin and the host country. Acculturation stress includes all the emotional strains involved in migration (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). Immigrants experience all kinds of complex stresses and losses such as their homeland, family, friends, language, customs and rituals, food, music, familiar surroundings, smells, and sounds (Falicov, 2003). The sense of loss is even stronger in the case of people who have experienced the trauma of war, displacement, and the loss of family members, relatives and communities. A sense of belonging and continuity are important psychological needs vital to our identity. Migration means uprooting entire systems of physical, social, and cultural meanings (Ibid., 2003).

Mostwin (1985) attempted to determine personal traits that enhance the adaptation to the host culture. Creative thought, willingness to accept risks, courage, a mature assessment of one's knowledge and the capacity to handle discrimination are enabling qualities.



**Ethnic membership as a resource**

Membership in an ethnic group may be considered as a resource (Holzberg, 1981; Lum, 1995). It is a painful and stressful experience for immigrants who have to cope with the demands of acculturation, adapt to a new environment, and experience prejudice and rejection in their new country. As a way of coping with marginalization and isolation, ethnic groups often reconstruct social networks and create ethnic neighbourhoods (Falicov, 2003). Immigrants and refugees recreate culture-specific households, pass traditions to their children and teach them their language, cook traditional foods, and encourage friendships and marriage within their group. Lack of education, language barriers, and strong adherence to culturally-based norms contribute to immigrants' isolation and marginalization. The presence of community buffers the symptoms of isolation and disenfranchisement. People who rediscover their past heritage may find it useful in coping with present and past life problems (Lum, 1995), including survival issues, uprootedness, acculturation processes, post traumatic stress syndrome, culture shock, a new language, role change, identity confusion, intra- and interfamilial adjustments, intergenerational conflicts, racial oppression, and a sense of bewilderment, hopelessness, and helplessness (Huang, 1995).

Individuals should not be forced to suppress their identity in order to conform to someone else's standards. According to studies conducted in the United States with African Americans, Italians, and Jews, individuals with more secure identities exhibit more openness and flexibility to other cultures, while those whose ethnic image is distorted and devalued develop a sense of inferiority and become aggressive and discriminatory toward outsiders (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996).

Cultural retention is also significant in the lives of elderly immigrants and refugees. It is very important for the aged population to maintain their previous cultural identities. Aging immigrants have recently been included in research studies due to the growing imperative to provide culturally respectful services to this population group in Canada. Rapid growth of the aging population and the increasing diversity of older people are two demographic projections for the coming years (Min, 2005; Torres-Gil & Moga, 2001). Culturally competent social work services will be in even greater demand than before. Cultural retention and the degree to which immigrants and refugees have integrated into the Canadian society will have an impact on the aging process and their adaptation to their golden years.

### **Women and migration**

The role of women in migration has been neglected, ignored, or presented stereotypically (Pedraza, 1991; Hansen, Gama, & Harkins, 2002; Brettell & Simon, 1986; Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Weinberg, 1992). Generally, there is little research concerning women's experiences from the point of view of women's reality; women's experiences are often omitted, distorted, or treated in a peripheral manner (Cummerton 1986; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Harding, 1987; Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983). Male experience has usually been generalized to the whole population (Stanley & Wise, 1983). The process of migration is experienced differently by men and women (Pedraza, 1991; DeLaet, 1999). Research incorporating gender and migration dates from the early 1980s and initially concentrated on "adding women" to the existing migration research (Willis & Yeoh, 2000, p. xi).

Women are considered to be the carriers of culture in the Polish family (Jolluck, 2002). Their traditional roles have become altered due to exposure to the mainstream culture. Canadian society has been influenced by modernization and the women's movement. Many

immigrant women find the egalitarian values and modern gender role preferences more appealing than retaining the traditional patriarchal norms experienced in their country of origin. They can benefit from opportunities for independence and personal growth. This outcome of acculturation often causes disruption in the traditional family system (Robbins et al., 1998) which is likely to influence their role as cultural carriers.

Polish women who came to Canada after the war included war veterans and members of their families, displaced persons, and immigrants. A deeper understanding of their cultural retention requires at least basic knowledge of Polish history and the country's constant struggle for independence and national identity. Their aging should be understood within their cultural context.

#### **Poland's history: a constant struggle to maintain independence and national identity**

History is an important element of culture and the struggle to maintain independence and national identity is deeply rooted in the Polish national conscience (Gross, 1988). Poland's one thousand year long history is abundant in battles, wars, uprisings, partitions, and occupations. The country's geography made it vulnerable to turmoil and political instability. Throughout its history, the Polish nation strove to maintain independence and national identity against all odds. The country ceased to exist on the map of Europe for 123 years (1795 – 1918) after a series of prior partitions carried out in 1772, 1793, and 1795 by its militarily strong neighbours, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The political, economic, social, and cultural oppression of occupants, including the prohibition of the use of the Polish language, were aimed at Germanization and Russification of the Poles. The country regained its independence in 1918, but became again war-torn during World War II.

World War II was the next chapter in Poland's tragic history. The invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany marked the beginning of World War II and violated the Non-Aggression Pact signed in 1934 (Davies, 2006). In spite of its heroic effort, the Polish army could not withstand a crushing force of the well-equipped Nazi army for long and failed to stop the Nazi march from the West. Unexpectedly, the Soviet Army invaded Poland from the East on September 17, 1939, as the result of a secret Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, violating the non-aggression pact signed between Poland and the Soviet Union in 1932 (Montefiore, 2003). The plan was to divide Poland between the two powers. Poland lost its territory and sovereignty although there was no formal declaration of war (Jolluck, 2002). After the military collapse of Poland, thousands of soldiers who survived escaped to France and England to join the Allied Forces. The struggle against the invaders continued mainly through underground military forces including the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) commanded by the Polish Government-in Exile in London, England, as well as units of the People's Army (Armia Ludowa) under the command of Soviet authorities.

In 1945, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin signed an agreement in Yalta which shifted Polish borders to the West and left Poland under the influence and "protection" of the USSR. A new government was formed, consisting of Polish Communist political staff trained in the Soviet Union. The new government took control with the help of the Soviet Army in 1944. The Polish Government-in-Exile never recognized the Yalta agreement and remained active, being supported by Polish refugees and exiles (Radecki, 1979; Davies, 1982).

## **World War II deportations**

The barbarity of the World War II Holocaust overshadowed other war crimes committed on Polish soil. However, the war impacted the lives of all people. The forced deportations of 1939-45 resulted in the migration of millions of Polish people. The fate of hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians and tens of thousands of Home Army prisoners arrested in 1944-6 remains unknown (Davies, 1982). The civilian Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians, Lithuanians, and Germans were forced out of their homes as a tragic consequence of the war.

Deportations occurred as a regular procedure by both invaders, the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and were referred to rather as “resettlement” (Radecki, 1979). Deportation involves “forcible removal of individuals or of groups of people from their usual domicile” (Davies, 2006). As the Nazis used deportation for either clearing the area for military purposes or for racist ideological purposes, Stalin “specialized” in carefully staged mass deportations. The NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) would screen the entire population and act according to special lists of people regarded as “undesirables.” One such list prepared in Lithuania contained twenty three categories, from gamekeepers who could help fugitives in the forest, to philatelists and Esperantists who could send coded information abroad (Ibid.). The category of “enemies of the people” included lawyers, teachers, priests, state employees and politicians. Those with university degrees were sent to the Gulags (the Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Colonies of the NKVD, the Soviet government agency that administered the penal labour camps of the Soviet Union) and their families to the Kazakhstan or the deserts of Central Asia (Ibid.). From one to two million

Polish people were deported to remote locations in Russia, including Siberia and Kazakhstan, to prisons, labour camps, special settlements and collective farms (Jolluck, 2002).

Deportations were used by the Nazis against the Jews living in the General Government who were expelled from their homes and moved to “ghettos.” At the very beginning of the War, the Nazis deported a million Polish forced labourers to Germany including POWs captured at the beginning of the War and those caught in the manhunts carried out in the streets of Polish cities, towns, and villages. In 1945, according to decisions made at the Postdam Conference, some 16 million Germans living to the east of the Oder River in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania were expelled, many of whom managed to flee before the implementation of the decree (Ibid.).

Altogether, 2,500,000 Poles were sent to Germany as forced labour to work at farms and labour camps along with prisoners of war. The Poles in Germany had to wear armbands with the letter “P.” Any German citizen involved in an intimate relationship with an “East-worker” was sentenced to death (Davies, 2006).

The aim of deportations was the Germanization or Sovietization of Poles. Maintaining “Polishness” became a challenge. Jolluck (2002) points to the struggle of Poles in maintaining their “Polishness:”

In exile, the Poles faced unaccustomed mixes of people and encountered daily attacks on their national identity. They endured insults, efforts at “reeducation,” and the prohibition of the practice and transmission of their religious and national customs (p. XIX).

**Women's and children's war**

World War II was often referred to as a “woman's war” (Winant, cited in Davies, 2006). Women and children were affected more than in any other war in history. The war took an enormous toll on children who were killed in bombings, deportations, and the genocide (Lukas, 1994). Approximately 1.2 million children died in the Holocaust. Altogether, 13 million children lost their natural protectors during the war (Wyman, 1998). There were one million orphans in Poland after the war (Davies, 2006).

The harsh policy of deportation affected not only large numbers of prisoners of war but the civilian population, including women and children (Isajiw & Palij, 1992). Children deported with their parents shared their tragic fate by spending their childhood or teenage years in a “hell on earth” (Jolluck, 2002). They were witnesses to the atrocities of war and their parents' helplessness in efforts to provide food, shelter, and protection for their children.

The Occupants' actions were calculated to make people suffer, depriving women of the possibility to fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and nurturers. Displacement imposed restrictions on their roles as cultural carriers which included educating children and practicing religion. They were forbidden to speak their native language and practice religion (Jolluck, 2002). Families were left without the protection and support of men. Women were doomed to the mercy of the Nazi and Soviet police.

**The trauma of women and children deported to the Soviet Union**

There are two reasons for presenting at least a small picture of the deportations of Polish women and children to the Soviet Union. First of all, most of the participants of my study endured this experience. Deportation and long exiles led to their arrival in Canada. It is also important to acknowledge that this part of history had been silenced for many years. The

topic of Soviet involvement in the invasion and annexation of eastern Poland in 1939 was avoided because of the later wartime alliance between the Western Forces and the USSR (Davies, 2006). “The Polish people suffered undescrivable terror during the Soviet-German alliance” (Abarinov, 1993, p. 8; Davies, 2006). There is still a limited number of publications on this topic.

Deportations to the Soviet Union’s remote locations affected from one to two million Polish people, including women and children (Jolluck, 2002). They were “resettled” in remote locations and forced to live and work in deplorable conditions. Many people ended up in overcrowded old barracks with no windows. Others shared huts with the locals or were left in open steppes. One deportee recalled that her family of five had to fit into a two and a half metre space, with her children sleeping on shelves and the parents in a sitting position (Ibid.). In the wintertime, finding heating material was a challenge as people could not afford to buy wood. The sentence for stealing even one board could mean at least a year in prison (Ibid.).

Women and children were decimated by hunger and disease. From time to time they had some soup or a piece of bread, or they collected berries in the forest, mushrooms, nettles, grass, sometimes trapped dogs, cats, or even rats to save themselves from starvation (Ibid.). People suffered from a range of diseases including dysentery, typhus, tuberculosis, diphtheria, pneumonia, meningitis, and malaria (Jolluck, 2002; Piotrowski, 2004; Jackowska, 2005; Lukas, 1994). There was no proper medical care available.

Women had no choice as they became sole providers for themselves and their children. There was no division of labour. Women and children were performed jobs beyond their capacities and many of them were not accustomed to hard physical work. Severe punishments were administered for failing to report to the assigned jobs. The majority of



Poles could not perform the expected 50% of the norm and were soon unable to work at all. The newly arrived deportees were informed that “whoever works eats, whoever doesn’t drops dead” (Jolluck, 2002, p. 57). The grim working conditions included spending ten to eighteen-hour work days on logging, fieldwork, construction, mining or working in quarries and industrial plants. They often had to walk to their work place from ten to twelve kilometers in one direction without proper footwear or barefoot (Ibid.). Many froze in blizzards on the way to work. Those placed in labour camps were escorted by armed guards with trained dogs. The wage for labour was minimal and after paying the government tax, people were left with no means (Ibid.). They had to sell family possessions and steal or beg to support their families.

Displacement imposed restrictions on the women’s role as cultural carriers, including educating children and practicing religion. Jolluck (2002) describes the women’s efforts to celebrate religious holidays, especially Christmas and Easter: “We were forbidden to speak in our native language, but we didn’t pay attention to that, we had gatherings of our own people, where we recited the rosary, prayers and liturgies together... We did not want ever to accept that abnormal life. ... prayer was our entire comfort” (p.134). The struggle for survival became a priority; it surpassed the traditional role of a woman and mother teaching her children the Polish language, history, traditions, and prayers.

The Occupants’ actions were calculated to make people suffer, depriving women of the possibility to fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and nurturers. Women lacked the protection of male family members, many of whom were killed, incarcerated, sent to POW or labour camps, or just vanished (Abarinov, 1993). Many women were subjected to sexual

abuse or forced prostitution in order to survive, destroying their honour as Poles as well as women (Jolluck, 2002).

In June 1941, after the German army invaded the Soviet Union, the Soviet government sought Polish support and negotiated an agreement with the Polish Government-in-Exile, allowing the formation of a Polish army in the Soviet Union which would join Russia and the Allies in an effort against Nazi Germany. It also meant “amnesty” to all Polish citizens on Soviet territory. Some Polish people were never informed about the “amnesty,” while others were denied permission to leave and lacked proper documents. Trains of Poles searching for Polish posts of the newly formed army were purposefully diverted to Kirghizia and Uzbekistan for continued forced labour (Ibid., 2002).

A cruel reality separated children from everything they would otherwise have received. Children were deprived of normal family life and their parents’ protection and care. Mothers who were unable to support their children were forced to leave them in Soviet orphanages. Many children died of hunger and cold. Mothers watched children die in their arms and often had no opportunity to bury them (Jolluck, 2002). The number of Polish children who lost both parents was as high as 400,000 (Wyman, 1998).

### **The psychological impact of war and exile**

War trauma has extensive psychological impact on survivors’ lives. According to Jackowska’s study (2005) on Polish people deported to Siberia, the symptoms experienced by 65% of 100 participants included anxiety, increased agitation, low self-esteem, and depression. The Siberian experience limited their educational opportunities and consequently deprived them of better employment. It had a significant impact on marital and parental roles. The study also indicated a much higher level of anxiety and depressive symptoms in women

than men. The range of stressors included intrusion (barging into homes at night which usually led to imprisonment, interrogation or deportation by the NKWD, the Soviet Secret Police), transportation (in cattle cars) to the resettlement location, living conditions at the resettlement destination, climatic conditions (excruciating cold), hunger, which was the most frequent cause of death of family members and other deportees, exhausting labour, hostility of the Soviet authorities, separation from parents and placement in orphanages, the death of one's mother and/or father, serious diseases (typhoid, malaria, dysentery, pneumonia, food poisoning, emaciation due to hunger), and injuries incurred as a result of beating and torture, and other life threats (Jackowska, 2005, Paul, 1996).

The study also revealed the ways people, including children, developed adaptive behaviours in order to survive. Finding food was the reason why children undertook exhausting jobs, stole, and begged. People experienced constant threat of death, helplessness and humiliation. After returning to Poland, survivors recalled having experienced symptoms of the post-traumatic stress disorder including feeling of alienation, low self-esteem, fear of hunger, feelings of injustice and loss of childhood, shyness, anger, anxiety, sadness and depression, nightmares, lack of trust (Ibid.).

Childhood and adolescence are vulnerable stages in everyone's life. Developing a sense of identity at adolescence is a very important developmental task. It is created through interaction with the social world around. A child experiencing violence and trauma may develop emotional and behavioural problems. However, the presence of one's parents may buffer the harmful effects of trauma. Freud and Burlingham's research (1943) shows that those children who maintained primary relationships were not psychologically devastated. Continuing the daily routine and projecting high morale protected them from adverse

psychological effects of war. However, many children were deprived of parental protection due to loss or separation from their parents.

Social support, as well as strong ideological commitment, have also been identified as a moderating and protecting effect providing the exposure to hardships is not overwhelming (Punamaki, 1996). Yeh, Arora & Wu (2006) argue that a collective identity, a sense of interconnectedness with others who share or shared similar experience, may have an empowering effect, increasing persistence and motivation when facing hardships. Ethnicity shapes the way people perceive and react to traumatic experience (Parson, 1985). The hope or pessimism toward recovery and the attitudes about sharing emotional problems are rooted in the cultural roots of their identity.

Displaced persons are forced out of their homes and communities. There is no agency to take part in the migration process. Those, whose migration has been forced by the circumstances such as war or a threat of political persecution, may continue to experience a permanent state of remembrance and mourning (Sluzki, 1979). They have no possibility of returning to their homeland. The sense of "homelessness" may be very profound (McGoldrick, 1998). Due to the pre-migration trauma involving experiencing and witnessing war atrocities, killing or torture, being incarcerated, starved, raped, beaten or injured, the refugees may be at risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Women belong to the most vulnerable subgroups of refugees who are at the greatest risk, especially those women who lost members of their nuclear and extended families or whole communities in war (Bemak & Chi-Ying Chung, 2002). The challenging process of acculturation occurs in the context of these mental health concerns. During the time of transition, a person has to sever previous ties and transplant their home,

life projects, their memories, and ghosts (Sluzki, 1979) and cluster around the family for support and stability.

### **Canadian immigration policy during and after World War II**

In the first two years after the Second World War, Canadian immigration policy continued to be very restrictive. Immigration barriers did not allow refugees and displaced persons to enter the country. Due to growing pressure from Canadians concerned about the fate of people affected by the War, the eye-witnesses of the war atrocities, the needs of Canada's booming economy, and the call from the Senate's Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour, Mackenzie King's Liberal government began to reconsider introducing a more liberal immigration policy. An Order in Council passed in 1946, which provided for refugees and Displaced Persons, and allowed 3,000 Polish Free Army veterans to come from Great Britain. In 1946-1947, more than 4200 soldiers from General Anders' Second Polish Corps, who fought with the Allies in Italy, came to Canada; they all refused repatriation to Poland as it was then under Communist control (Radecki, 2006). The demobilized veterans were admitted to Canada on condition that they serve one or two year contracts on farms. After having completed this requirement, they were free to search for better employment.

The cooperation of the government with the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IRO), as well as the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (CCCRR) formed in 1947 by six Canadian religious and ethnic organizations, assisted in the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons (The Applied History Research Group, 1997). Displaced persons were required to sign employment contracts in farming, mining, domestic service, railway work, or to perform other manual labour for a period of two years. Orders in

Council passed in the following years allowed the entry of 165,000 refugees between 1947 and 1953. The Poles comprised the largest group, 23% of all the refugees admitted during those years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Immigration teams arrived in Germany and Austria to select able-bodied refugees. The teams comprised of immigration, medical, security, and labour officials traveled from one displaced persons' camp to another and interviewed displaced persons desperate to find a peaceful place on earth. During the period 1946-1952, Canada admitted more than 50,000 Polish displaced persons from Europe. In 1950, an Order of Council which replaced all former Orders, eased the immigration restrictions even more to include healthy applicants who had the potential to integrate into Canadian society (Ibid.) In 1950, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was established. At that time there was little resistance to immigration, and new immigrants were welcomed, especially displaced persons. The only trade union or professional association which officially opposed the admission of qualified labour force was the Canadian Medical Association (Ibid.)

After 1956 special provisions allowed for landed immigrants to sponsor relatives from various parts of the world and directly from Poland. The refugees and displaced persons were helped by two international organizations called into existence to reorganize the lives of millions of people affected by the war: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) up to early 1947, and the International Refugee Organization (IRO) from 1947-1951 (Jacobmeyer, 1990). In 1951, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established and the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted. The Convention defined the legal status of a refugee and mandated the High Commissioner to provide international protection to refugees (Martin,

2004). The aim was to resolve the situation of the refugees who remained displaced by World War II and Nazi persecution.

### **Displaced persons from Poland**

The term displaced person and refugee are often used interchangeably. Some sources refer to displaced persons as a broader term embracing refugees, the internally displaced and forced migrants. According to the definition, given by Johansson (1990), a refugee is “a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his home country, since the political situation in that country renders him liable to persecution for reasons of race, religion, ethnicity, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (p. 234). Displaced persons are designated groups who were forced from their homes due to war (Wyman 1998) and who do not enjoy the protection of international law (Franke, 2008). The UN relabeled the war refugees as Displaced Persons (Davies, 2006).

There were an estimated 3.5 millions Poles displaced during World War II (Okolski 1999, cited in Manderson & Rapala, 2005). After the War, the majority of Polish forced slave labourers, prisoners of war, concentration camp survivors, displaced civilians, and demobilized soldiers in the Allied forces in the west returned to Poland, but nearly 750,000 did not (Radecki, 2006). They feared persecution by the communist regimes. Those who decided to return received a hostile welcome. Due to their connections with the Home Army or the Allied forces, many faced interrogations, imprisonment, torture where even the most private family life was not shielded from state intervention and regulation (Gross, 1988; Paczkowski, 1999).

Displaced Poles who did not return to Poland remained abroad with refugee status in Germany, Italy, and Austria, as well as the countries of the Near East and in British East

Africa. Many were deported and scattered in the vast stretches of the Soviet Union. In 1942, many managed to escape to the Near East. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Argentina, France offered to accept them. The DP camps, run by military authorities, offered shelter to the displaced, but the living conditions were inadequate. Isajiw & Palij (1992) describe the camps as an “attempt to establish normal life under abnormal conditions” (p. xix). They were overcrowded, provided limited food rations and medical care. In spite of difficult conditions, people created schools, theatres, and churches. The selection for immigration was based on a preferential rather than humanitarian basis and, therefore, a number of disabled people, old or “uneconomic” families with many children were not eligible for immigration (Ibid.).

Those who refused to return to Poland never recognized the Soviet takeover of their country. The majority of Poles in exile were anti-communist and came from the eastern provinces. Their homes were lost forever as the eastern territories had been annexed to the USSR due to border shifts decided upon in Yalta by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. Those who stayed in Poland had to adapt to the new repressive system. Some decided to immigrate by joining their families living abroad. No one could have foreseen that all Poles would have to wait 45 years, until 1989, to see their country finally regain its independence and democratic character.

### **Immigrants from Poland (after 1956)**

Immigrants came straight from Poland after the War to join their families who had settled in Canada earlier. The postwar Communist regime sealed Poland's borders. People were not allowed to leave the country or travel. Permission to leave was granted only to those who were to join their families abroad. After the 1956 Polish workers' demonstrations “for



bread and freedom,” the Stalinist authorities were replaced with a more liberal and nationalistic government led by W. Gomulka, which resulted in the relaxation and improvement of relations with the Catholic Church (Radecki, 1979). At that time immigration to Canada included several categories: sponsored relatives, brides of Polish Canadians who visited Poland, displaced persons who remained in Europe after the end of the War, as well as war veterans or refugees who temporarily lived in another country but wished to immigrate to Canada.

Immigrants had to have sponsors and a large number came straight from the war-torn and impoverished Poland after 1956. Those who decided to leave Poland and did not have any relatives in Canada looked for sponsors so that they could immigrate.

### **The second wave of Polish immigration to Canada**

The participants of this study belong to the second, post-war wave of Polish immigration. However, the earliest accounts of Polish settlers in Canada date back to 1752 (Radecki, 1979). The political unrest and turmoil, wars and uprisings, economic or social problems were the main reason for emigration. From about the 1830s to 1895, individual Poles and families settled in eastern Ontario, Kitchener, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Toronto (Turek, 1967). The immigrants, mostly peasants, came from various parts of Poland which at that time was under partition of Austria, Germany and Russia.

Jarochowska (2006) distinguishes four major waves of Polish immigration to Canada:

- 1900-1940: the first wave, connected with Canada’s need for unskilled manpower and comprised mostly of farm labourers, poor farmers, and unskilled workers;
- 1940-1957: the second wave, consisting of war refugees, displaced persons,

and war veterans accepted on compassionate and humanitarian grounds, later also immigrants;

- 1957-1979: the third wave of immigrants, who left Poland due to the political and social unrest of the Communist system at the time when Canada welcomed educated immigrants;
- 1979 – 2000: the fourth wave immigrants who came before and after abolition of Communism.

Many people chose Canada, a land of justice and opportunity, as their destination.

The refugees included ex-soldiers who had served with the Allies, civilians, displaced persons, and orphaned children. Many were well-educated and qualified: army officers, physicians, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and other professionals. Most of them pursued professional careers in Ontario and Montreal. Although their credentials were not recognized, their organizational skills, savings brought with them to Canada, and knowledge of English or French facilitated their resettlement. Those who were farmers became attracted by easy availability of land on the prairies and other opportunities created by a rapidly developing economy. Many of the refugees hoped to be able to return to Poland if the political situation changed. However, they would have to wait for 44 years until Communism was finally abolished in 1989.

The post-war displaced persons and immigrants exhibited patriotism and a strong sense of Polish identity. Most Polish refugees and immigrants coming to Canada and Manitoba knew nothing or very little about the country. Publications like “*Canada fragrant with resin*,” a famous book written by Arkady Fiedler (1937) and read by most Poles, presented the country from the perspective of a tourist: a romantic vision of picturesque

landscapes, the world of trappers and settlers. It did not mention the hardships of an everyday immigrant life and the discrimination that newcomers would face.

Between 1945 and 1956, 64,096 Poles came to Canada from Europe and various parts of the world, from refugee camps, military bases, liberated concentration camps and prisons (Report of Royal Commission, 1970, cited in Radecki, 1979; Jarochovska, 2006). They came under programs which were established outside the existing immigration regulations in Canada at the time. This group was unique in many respects. The post-war wave of displaced persons and immigrants was forced to migrate in search of safety and stability. Canada lacked the proper infrastructure to accept such large numbers of poor and homeless people. The Poles were granted admission on compassionate and humanitarian grounds, but those selected for immigration were required to complete one to two year labour contracts in farming or household domestics. 20% of this group consisted of highly educated professionals, and specialized trades and occupations, including academics, lawyers, engineers, architects, and military officers (Heydenkorn, 1952, cited in Radecki, 1979). On one hand, the importance of preserving Polish culture and interest in the political and economic future of their native country was greater than the case of the previous wave of immigrants, and on the other, this group may be characterized by an "absolute loyalty to Canada ... in a position to appreciate the benefits of democracy and of the freedom. Their reminiscences of the oppression suffered from the German and Russian invaders are still fresh and vivid" (Turek, 1967, p. 145). The integration of this wave of immigrants and displaced persons to the new culture was facilitated by such factors as their educational level and the knowledge of the Canadian official languages. The Poles who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants after the War adapted more rapidly than other Polish

immigrants whose decision to emigrate was voluntary and driven by economic reasons (Ibid.).

Winnipeg was one of the destinations for Polish displaced persons and immigrants. It was the largest urban Polish neighbourhood until 1940 (Radecki, 1980). Between 1900 and 1944, the city was even termed the “Polish capital” of Canada as it had become the center for Polish organizational life (Ibid.). Later, Toronto took over the role of a Polish ethnic centre. In Winnipeg, newcomers settled in the North End where they had access to cheaper accommodation, Polish churches, organizations, clubs, stores and institutions already established by previous immigrants. The proximity of work places such as plants, sweatshops, and other business establishments was another factor attracting the post-war Polish immigrants to the urban rather than the rural areas.

In 2006, 82,360 people living in Manitoba reported Polish origin, and 58,050 of this number were living in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2008). Appendix I contains a map illustrating the Polish population distribution in Winnipeg in terms of mother tongue and ethnic origin according to the 2006 Census.

### **Polish women in Canada**

Most of the publications on the Poles in Canada written by researchers of Polish background concentrate on the history of migration and emphasize the male part of the experience. Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski (1968) depicts the achievements of outstanding Polish immigrants in Canada, most of whom are male. Heydenkorn (1976) presents a selection of topics connected with the presence of the Polish community in Canada. The contribution of women to community organizations is viewed mainly as “auxiliaries to predominantly male associations” (p. 44). In *The Poles in Canada* (1982), Avery and

Fedorowicz present a brief factual compilation concerning Polish immigration to Canada. Turek (1967) provides the most comprehensive historical study of Polish settlers in Manitoba, including the historical background of Polish immigration, cultural life, organizations, educational activities, as well as the process of assimilation. There is scarcely any information on women's experience as immigrants. Other publications like *Polish Settlers in Alberta* (Matejko, 1979), and *Providence Watching (Journeys from war-torn Poland to the Canadian Prairies)* (Patalas, 2003) are historical accounts, reminiscences and biographies of Polish immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons, mainly concentrating on the male immigrant experience.

Jarochowska's (2006) comprehensive overview of Polish women's immigration to Canada is the only recent publication devoted to Polish women refugees, displaced persons and immigrant women, their contribution to the Polish-Canadian community, experiences in the new culture, attitudes toward acculturation, and changes in their status between the old country and the new. The author also gives an account of Polish women's lives in Winnipeg and their involvement in the building of Polish ethnic community and organizing services for immigrants arriving in Manitoba. The stories of immigrant women show different ways they coped and integrated with the new social reality. The process of acculturation sooner or later forces immigrants to replace or modify their old patterns (Jarochowska, 2006). They form new identities, which Lukasiewicz (cited in Mostwin, 1985) called "the third value," the outcome of the dynamics between two cultures.

Anker (1988) points to the strength and resourcefulness of immigrant women who managed the lives of their families in difficult times. The stories of Eastern European immigrant women in Connecticut showed that they were active participants in the migration

process and could not be viewed only as dependents of men (Knorr & Meier, 2000). They are involved in decisions ranging from “where to go, to considerations of who should work and in what jobs, where to live, how to accommodate, when, where and how to resist” (Ibid., p. 23). They play a significant role in creating and maintaining kinship, social networks and cultural patterns. Even more than a century ago, Ravenstein (1885, cited in Brettell & Simon, 1986) called women “greater migrants than men” (p. 3) in his attempt to determine the “laws of migration.”

Employment possibilities for women were limited. The only available jobs were for sales assistants, cashiers, seamstresses, factory workers, servants, or employees of small companies which required people who spoke foreign languages (Jarochowska, 2006). Such employment was temporary and the women’s husbands were considered as the main breadwinners. Due to acculturation, women started to value the possibility of independence, and willingly entered the workforce as a way to escape the life of a housewife and rebel against the patriarchal structure of Polish family life. Larger cities like Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver attracted a large wave of Polish veterans who had fought with the Allies and many displaced persons who came from various displaced persons’ camps spread all over the world. Polish communities in Canada continued the traditions and customs of the old country.

Women continued their roles as family guardians as well as keepers of culture, traditions, and Catholic values (Ibid.). According to the propagated image of an immigrant woman in the Polish community, a woman was expected to cultivate Polish culture at home, pass it on to her children, celebrate holidays according to Polish tradition, participate in community events and become involved in social activities, including organizing Polish

weekend schools for children and English courses, Polish clubs, associations and committees assisting immigrants and the community (Ibid.).

Women who faced the challenges of acculturation became very active in establishing various organizations. They were involved in organizing The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in Canada, The Polish Library in Montreal, The Polish Congress in Toronto, Canadian Polish Research Institute in Toronto, Polish School Boards, Polish Immigrants' Associations, Polish Veterans' Associations, Polish Women's Federation in Canada. Many foundations, charities, and organizations helped Polish people living under the Communist regime in Poland, by supporting various societies, schools, Polish Scouts, and the Polish press in Poland. Labieniec (2006) collected the stories of Polish women involved in the Polish Women's Federation in Canada. The collection commemorated the organization's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Many post-war immigrant women were devoted patriots with histories of heroic war accomplishments. They fought for freedom of their country, experienced deportation to concentration camps, and gulags. Many were sent to Siberia or Kazakhstan. Jolluck (2002) presents an extraordinary account of the women's exile experiences and struggles to maintain their Polish identity. Many Polish women, who came to Canada after the war, followed their husbands as part of an effort to re-unify divided families. They had a great diversity of skills, training, and occupations. Some were well-educated and had a good command of English and other European languages; others were uneducated and language difficulties were an important barrier to finding a job or pursuing a career.

In the 50s and 60s the situation of immigrants and refugees changed due to a shift in immigration law which was modified to improve the life of newcomers. Canada began to

accept more educated people. The obligation to fulfill physical labour contracts was replaced by contracts between companies and institutions and potential qualified employees. New employment opportunities opened up for women who could work as clerks, real estate agents, and accountants. Polish doctors, dentists, nurses, and physiotherapists had to obtain an official recognition of their diplomas or scholarly degrees.

### **Traditional image of a woman in the Polish culture**

The Polish culture is a collectivistic culture in which individual goals are subordinated to the family and the collective. A sense of obligation to the family and connectedness is very important and most families maintain strong ties throughout their lives. Children are taught respect for their parents and the elderly in the family. Family is the primary source of identity and support in times of crisis. In spite of all the economic and social changes taking place throughout the history of Poland, patriarchal privilege is still deeply rooted in Polish culture.

A Polish woman was always considered to be the guardian of the family and the carrier of culture (Jolluck, 2002). Loyalty, patriotism and social mission were a moral obligation for women who often took over the family responsibilities and other social duties while men were involved in warfare (Sierakowska, 2000). During a long turbulent history, women have developed resilience and the ability to adapt to difficult situations.

Before the war, Poland was a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious country. Poland was home to Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Slovaks, and Czechs. Patriarchal ideology and traditional gender role preferences were reinforced by the influence of religious faiths (Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, Protestant, Islamic, and others). According to the 1931 consensus, 64.8% of the population were Roman Catholics, 11.8% the



Orthodox, 10.4% Greek Catholics, 9.8% Jews and 2.6% Protestants (*Encyklopedia Gazety Wyborczej*, n.d.). The war caused significant demographic changes. More than 6 million Polish citizens, including 3 million Christians and 3 million Jews, were killed during the War. Millions were deported to Germany and Russia or forced to remain in the territories taken by the Soviet Union after the War. Poland's population was reduced from 35 to 23 million. The victims included those who were killed, deported, forced to migrate in the West, held captive in Russia, and others whose fate is unknown (Wrobel, 2000).

For those Polish people who were Catholic, the Church determined a woman's role in the family and society very clearly. The traditional division of roles between males and females was considered socially acceptable. Men were the providers, women the nurturers. Women were confined to the domestic sphere and identified with family, and the roles of wife and mother. They were expected to fulfill their roles in a caring and compassionate manner, selflessly sacrificing their own needs.

The conviction that a woman best accomplishes her goals in marriage and motherhood has a long tradition. It is connected with an image of the Polish Mother [*Matka Polka*] or Our Lady of Czestochowa [*Matka Boska Czestochowska*]. The Catholic virtue of commitment, total devotion, and sacrifice has always played a significant role in creating an ideal image of woman (Walczewska, 2006). Women occupied a traditional family position; their voice was respected and valued, however, only in the domestic realm. An old Polish saying "the husband is the head of the family but the wife is the neck that controls the head," implies manipulative skills of a woman and not the access to actual power.

There are two strong motifs in the Polish culture, one is the patriarchal motif and the other, as Walczewska (2006) calls it, a "gentlemen's gender contract" (p.11) which assumes

woman's passivity, lack of independence, and self-determination. Literature supports the model of "the lady and her knight" relationship. The knight is responsible for care, protection, adoration, and achieving goals in order to win his lady's praise and affection. The woman's role is to be a lady with dignity and kindness in courtship, one who is able to attract and keep a man who deserves to be supported and rewarded after warfare (Ibid.)

After WW II, the "gentlemen's gender contract" became more egalitarian. Now, men still kiss a lady's hand when greeting her and let her pass through the door first, but the traditional female ideal and the code of gender relationships is becoming part of history.

Older women have played a significant role in the family. The Polish culture emphasizes respect for the elderly. It is not unusual for Polish families to live in multigenerational households. The elderly are usually involved in family life and decision making regarding family matters. Their wisdom and life experience are appreciated and valued. Formal care and nursing homes are treated as the very last resort. It is the family who bears the responsibility for caregiving regardless of capabilities, skills and personal qualities. Failing to fulfill this role paints the woman as deficient. Aging parents are usually cared for by their children. Senior women remain actively involved in the family life of their children and grandchildren.

### Chapter 3

## METHODOLOGY

### The researcher

My social location helped me gain a deeper understanding of the women's experience. I am a Polish immigrant woman but many of my life experiences differ from those of my participants. I was born and raised in Poland. I obtained my M. A. degree in Linguistics at Gdansk University and taught English as a Second Language. In 2002, I immigrated to Canada to join my husband who found employment in Manitoba.

My immigration experience has been far from the tragic and arduous journeys of women whose lives have been shattered by war. My decision to emigrate was voluntary, whereas all the participants in my study had to follow the scenario written by the War. Although the story of the War has been retold, rewritten, discussed, and investigated in numerous publications, there is never enough said on this topic. People who went through "hell on earth" are bound together by an unspeakable past. Their experiences are difficult to understand for those of us whose lives have never been touched by the experience of war. The complexity of circumstances which led to the tragic fate of so many millions of people can never be fully understood or explained. A motto used by a renowned Polish writer, Zofia Nalkowska, in her *Medaliony* [Medallions] says, "Human beings doomed human beings to this fate" (Nalkowska, 1957, p. 5).

I come from a different generation than my participants. I belong to a generation born years after the Second World War. My generation has never experienced the horrors of war and forced displacement, but has lived in a country controlled by a Communist regime and has witnessed the rebirth of sovereign Poland after the system had been abolished in 1989.

My knowledge of Polish culture and the language has hopefully enhanced my research. My family, like many other Polish families, was affected by the War. My grandfather was among the 25,000 Polish men shot by the Soviets in the Katyn massacre in 1940 (Paul, 1996, Montefiore, 2003). As a consequence, my grandmother and my mother were deported to Siberia and remained there in exile for six years. My mother still remembers the feeling of constant hunger and excruciating cold. Her devotion to creating a happy family life has undoubtedly been impacted by the irreconcilable loss of her father and childhood that she had been deprived of. My grandmother and my mother managed to return to Poland in 1946. I remember my grandmother telling me about their Siberian experiences and warning never to mention it outside the home. The topic of Stalinist deportations was silenced not only by the Soviet regime but also by the Soviet-backed Communist government in Poland. The state's censorship strictly protected the truth about killing over a million innocent and helpless people deported to the steppes of Kazakhstan and Siberia under Communist leadership. For many years the topic of Soviet involvement in the invasion and annexation of eastern Poland in 1939 was avoided because of the wartime alliance between the Western Forces and the USSR (Davies, 2006).

This research is my modest contribution and an attempt to enhance the understanding of experiences of women whose lives have been diverted and uprooted because of war, exile and migration, a tribute to those whose lives are affected by conflicts and wars caused by the big politics and powerful decision makers who apparently have no adequate understanding of the consequences, especially for women and children.

**Choosing a qualitative approach: phenomenology and a feminist perspective**

A combination of phenomenology and a feminist perspective are congruent with the aim of this research: to gain an understanding of the lived experience of cultural retention among women whose lives have been abundant in challenges including war, deportation, exile, adjustment to a new culture and now aging. This approach also appeals to me as a social worker, a feminist, a Polish immigrant woman, and the daughter of a woman who as a child spent six years in exile.

Due to the complexity of human experience, human behaviour and its complex meanings, a qualitative research has more capacity to capture meanings in lives so rich in experience and can describe the phenomenon of cultural retention in ways that quantitative approach could not. Qualitative research focuses on the discovery and exploration of a phenomenon and not testing explanatory theories.

According to Padgett (1998), qualitative research is chosen for the following reasons: 1. there is scarce knowledge and literature on the topic; 2. the topic is of a sensitive nature; 3. the focus of the study is obtaining the participants' perspectives; 4. the focus is on the process; and 5. quantitative findings are insufficient. There is scarce knowledge and literature focusing on the meaning of cultural retention to women of Polish decent who are aging in Canada. A qualitative approach "can effectively give voice to the normally silenced and can poignantly illuminate what is typically masked" (Greene, 1994, p. 541). The phenomenological approach and the feminist perspective allows women to present their own world of experience. I approached the topic from an emic perspective, allowing the participants to voice their experiences in their own words and actions as they may never have had an opportunity to do so in the past. The participant is the expert on her own subjective

reality. The life experiences and the unique world of the participants of this study is a sensitive topic and may not be known or understood to “mainstream” society.

The main tenant of phenomenological method is based on the belief that truth can be found in human experience (Spiegelberg, 1965, cited in LeVasseur, 2003). The phenomenological approach has proved relevant in exploration of the complexity of human behaviour (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). “A phenomenological approach was adopted, because it emphasizes the subjective aspects of social life and provides a guide for the analyses that address some of the issues associated” (Somers-Smith, 2001, cited in Vivilaki, 2008, p. 3). Phenomenologists assume that an essence can be understood and is grounded in people’s lived experiences.

The hermeneutic phenomenological method as described by van Manen (1990) focuses on the “lived experience” and helps to find its essence(s) and its interpretation. Hermeneutics aims at discovering meaning and achieving understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). There is no commitment to generalizability. In research it helps us gain a deeper understanding of the meaning or varieties of meanings of cultural retention for research participants. The focus of a phenomenological inquiry is to know what peoples’ everyday experiences are and how they interpret the world. Each person has “a unique set of experiences which are treated as truth and which determine that individual’s behaviour” (Eichelberger, 1989, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 106). Each account is unique and every person is more than his/her culture (Samovar & Porter, 2004). However, the phenomenological approach also assumes commonalities of shared experiences. A lived experience has a certain essence recognized in retrospect (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology does not offer an effective theory which helps to explain or control the

world, but offers the possibility of deep insights that bring us closer to “the significant world of the human being” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). The lived or existential meanings are described and interpreted to a certain degree of richness. In order to discover the nature of a phenomenon, the researcher aims to discover “what makes a some-‘thing’ what it *is* – and without which it could not be what it is” (Ibid., p. 10) by exhausting the question to its very limit: “that we ‘live’ this question, that we ‘become’ this question” (Ibid. p. 43). A sign of a good phenomenological description is the “phenomenological nod” (p.27), something that we can “nod” to as an experience we either had or could have.

A feminist perspective focuses on the lived experience of women, and allows us to differentiate women’s perceptions of reality as unique (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; van Den Berg & Cooper, 1986; Davis, 1986, Stanley & Wise, 1983). Women’s experiences constitute “a different view of ‘reality’ – an entirely different ‘ontology’ or way of making sense of the world (Cummerton, 1986, p. 85). The uniqueness of a woman’s social world is often referred to as feminist consciousness which implies the consciousness of victimization (Bartky, 1975). It involves awareness of the forces responsible for the unjust treatment created by an oppressive system of sex-role differentiation.

Feminist research aims at validating women’s lives and experiences and enhances understanding their concerns and strengths. Findings should provide a guide for action and social change. Although distinct feminist methods may not exist, feminist methodologies and epistemologies affect our choice and use of methods which may be altered by the researcher (Pillow & Mayo, 2007). Feminist research may use multiple methods but it is important *how* the research is conducted (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist methodology is respectful of the research participants and assumes the researcher’s subjective involvement (Letherby, 2003)

It allows for the development of a collaborative, trusting, and empathetic relationship between the researcher and participants. Participants are invited to take an active part and negotiate the extent of their involvement in the research, its process and the interpretation of findings. The power differential between the researcher and the participant is broken down, at least to a certain degree. The power and the knowledge of the researched is recognized and respected by the researcher. The relationship, as well as the researcher's own feminist consciousness, play an important role.

Research is never value-free or objective. The researcher can never remain isolated from his/her research and its participants. It is always influenced by the researcher's attitudes, perceptions, values, and feelings (Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983). The researcher's experiences become an integral part of the research (Harding, 1987). I hope that my role as a researcher, a woman, an immigrant, and a member of the same ethnic group has only enhanced the research process and continuous self-awareness has helped me present the findings and interpretation of the women's world from their perspective and not my own.

The feminist principle, the personal is political and locates individual experiences in their social context. I hope that my research may bring social change by contributing to a better understanding of the reality of women from their perspective. Their cultural heritage still plays a significant role and has an impact on their well-being in the later stages of their lives. Ethnic identification and cultural values may positively contribute to the aging process. Understanding their experience can guide helping professions and policy makers in delivering services which are congruent to the women's needs and expectations.

The researcher's role in qualitative research is not formal and "objective" but allows for closeness and involvement in the process (Royse, 2008). The interviewer assumes the



role of a learner who is invited into the participant's world. I attempted to build trust and rapport throughout the process. In-depth interviews, more flexible with less structure are rather conversations or dialogues with open-ended broad questions which aim at generating narratives. Such an approach allowed me to conduct research in the least oppressive manner possible and honour the experiences of women who faced many challenges and injustices in their lives. Reminiscence about the cultural past and present, its importance and meaning hopefully had an empowering effect, a positive impact on the women's self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

### **Sample selection and recruitment**

After having presented my thesis proposal to the committee members and obtaining a Certificate of Approval from the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board in the winter of 2007, I began my search for potential participants.

The criteria for inclusion included women of Polish nationality and the Roman Catholic religion, who came to Canada between 1945-1960 as displaced persons or immigrants, willing to participate, and able to articulate their experiences to the researcher. Potential participants were children, adolescents or young women at the time of arrival in Canada.

The number of participants is not specified in qualitative research because "the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity, qualitative researchers sample not to maximize numbers, but to become 'saturated' with information about a specific topic" (Padgett, 1998, p.52). I conducted nine interviews and the ninth interview indicated "theoretical saturation" and revealed no new findings.

I used the snowball sampling method and a poster. Phenomenological studies aim for depth rather than breadth and the sample size usually ranges from 6-10 (Padgett, 2008). A sample in qualitative research should include participants who are articulate and introspective, who are able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences (Padgett, 2008). A snowball sampling technique is recommended with relatively isolated or hidden populations. My knowledge of the Polish community was limited because of my residence outside of Winnipeg and a relatively short stay in Manitoba.

I identified the gatekeepers through personal connections and a literature review of the Polish community in Winnipeg. After having informed the gatekeepers about their role (Appendix B) in the research, I asked them to approach potential participants who met the criteria and provide them with envelopes containing a letter of invitation in English (Appendix C) and in Polish (Appendix C1). The letter of invitation included basic information about the research and ways of contacting me: by mail (a form to be filled out and sent in the provided self-stamped and addressed envelope), by telephone, or by e-mail. The first group of gatekeepers identified only one potential participant who met the criteria and expressed her willingness to participate in the study. I searched for different gatekeepers and this time the result proved successful. The majority of potential participants contacted me by telephone, and one chose to send a completed form attached to the letter of invitation. Three participants learned about the study from other potential participants and contacted me.

The poster (Appendix G) brought no response. The poster was exhibited in various locations most likely attended by potential participants or their families, for instance, the Polish Veterans' Association, Andrew Bobola Church, Polish shops on Silkirk Ave and Main

Street. Letters of invitation were left for pickup in the vicinity of the poster. Both the Polish (Appendix G1) and English version of the poster and the letter of invitation were available.

Two women who met the criteria of selection for this research refused to participate in the research. Time may not have healed their wounds. Recalling their experiences may have been too disturbing. Avoidance and repression of painful memories may be a response to the lived experience of trauma. Although the war experience was not the focus of this research, almost all participants elaborated on the first question about the circumstances of their arrival in Canada.

A brief telephone conversation (Appendix D and D1) with all potential participants gave me an opportunity to seek additional information, assess the person's eligibility, and make arrangements for interview sessions according to individual preferences. All selected participants chose to meet at their homes. The participants were also asked for their preference of language during the telephone conversation and the interviews. Everyone spoke Polish during the telephone conversation. Five women chose to be interviewed in Polish and three in English.

The selected participants were all living independently in the community. In this research I have chosen to concentrate on the experiences of Catholic women. Polish refugees with other religious affiliations were not included in this research due to different issues and experiences which would require a broader study.

Women involved in some social activity were easier to trace and more cooperative, treating my research as their own input in the research on the Polish population. Due to the lack of response from the residents of the Polish Manor (only one participant in this study

was a resident of the Polish Manor), my sample may have contained more affluent women living independently in the community.

All selected participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix F and F1). All research instruments were available in English and Polish and the participants had a choice of language during the research process.

Findings from this sample cannot be generalized. The representativeness and size of the sample is less important than its “richness” or diversity (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2009).

### **Research ethics**

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research and Ethics Board of the University and Manitoba.

The informed consent included all the basic elements recommended by Padgett (1998) such as a description of the study, information concerning the participants’ involvement, identification of the researcher, voluntary nature of participation, voluntary withdrawal, information on the benefits and risks of the study, the principles of confidentiality (p. 35) and comprehension of the information included in the consent by the participants (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986, cited in Kayser-Jones & Koenig, 1994). My participants were informed about the confidentiality principles and measures taken to ensure it. Interviews which lasted from 2 to 3 hours were taped with the permission of each participant. Tapes and identifying information were kept in a locked cabinet in my home office and will be destroyed after the completion of research. Only I had access to the identifying information and no such information was included in the thesis publication. I clearly emphasized to the women that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time or remain silent if they wished not to answer a question. The

participants' names and all the identifying information was changed prior to analysis. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in the transcript of her interview prior to analysis in order to protect her personal information.

Written consent was sought from each participant prior to her interview. The Consent Form was available in English (Appendix F) and in Polish (Appendix F1). I answered any questions regarding the research or the consent. All participants signed the consent forms and indicated whether they wanted to receive a brief summary of the findings, by marking an appropriate box on the sheet attached to the consent form. The participants received a copy of the consent form for their personal records.

The participants were given a choice of the preferred language during the interviews. All research documents were available in Polish and English.

As the topic of cultural retention could have brought up painful memories and triggered emotions, I informed the participants that arrangements had been made with Age and Opportunity, the Cross-Cultural Unit of the Mount Carmel Clinic, and the Holy Ghost Parish. Participants could also call the Klinik's Crisis Line.

After each interview, I followed up with every participant by calling them, thanking them for their participation in the research, and checking if they required any emotional support following the interview(s).

### **Participant Characteristics**

All participants met the selection criteria. They all came to Canada either as displaced persons or immigrants after the war (1945-1960). They were children, adolescents or young women at the time of their arrival in Canada. Although their age at the time of arrival in Canada ranged from 13 to 32, they could still be considered as a cohort as they comprised a

group of people who went through similar experiences. Gelfand & Yee (1991) describe a cohort as:

a group of people who share a common factor, such as age. Each cohort usually experiences a set of historical events and trends, including socialization and educational and cultural influences, during the group's lifetime. These life experiences systematically affect the cohort's attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours (p. 2).

Displacement and exile caused by the War or escape from Communism were the main reasons for their migration. The interviewed women's ages ranged from 61-83. They all have lived and worked in Winnipeg. Three of them were widows, four were married, and one single. All spoke English fluently except for one whose English was limited to basic communication. Three are fully bilingual (both English and Polish are spoken with no accent). All participants lived in a non-institutional setting: six participants lived in their own houses, one owned an apartment and one lived in the Polish Manor, a subsidized seniors' apartment building. One participant completed elementary education, seven completed secondary education and had some vocational training, and two were university graduates. They were all retired. The majority supplemented their pensions with an RRSP plan.

### **Interview process**

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach uses the interview for the following purposes (van Manen, 1990, p. 66):

1. as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and

2. as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 1990, p.66).

Descriptive interviewing is also used extensively by feminist researchers to present women's voices and validate their experience. An interview is a collaborative effort of the interviewee and the researcher aimed at identifying and interpreting the relevant meanings which contribute to the understanding of the topic. One-to-one interviews are easily managed, allow rapport to be developed, allow participants to speak, reflect, and be heard, and are appropriate for an in-depth discussion (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

The aim was to describe the experience and meaning of cultural retention as presented by Polish women participating in this research. Nine interviews were conducted over 4 months, from February to May, 2008. Each interview lasted between two and three hours. One participant, who requested a second interview, prepared more thoroughly for the second interview, including a long set of notes on the discussed topics which provided me with valuable additional information. Some women had asked me to specify the interview questions prior to their interviews, during initial telephone conversations. I felt that providing my participants with interview questions in advance enhanced the older women's abilities to reflect better on their experiences and reassured them about the non-threatening nature of the questions (e.g. use of lay language).

It was important for me to create a welcoming and warm atmosphere which would help me gain trust and rapport. An informal conversation preceded every interview. The time and place of the interviews were scheduled according to the participants' preferences. They all chose to be interviewed in their homes. I was always greeted with great hospitality and in accordance with the Polish custom I could not refuse a treat such as coffee, a Polish cake or

lunch. My interaction with the participants of this study was an open and candid conversation with some degree of self-disclosure on my part. All women asked about my background and a little self-disclosure helped to reduce any perceived power differential. “Resistance to self-disclosure by the interviewer ... can create a feeling of imbalance and increase the distance between interlocutors” (Wenger, 2002, p. 272). According to Oakley (1981, cited in Reinharz, 1992), from the feminist perspective, interviewing requires openness, engagement, and development of a relationship involving a degree of intimacy and self-disclosure. Establishing trust and rapport with the interviewees enhances valid data collection (Ryen, 2002).

I used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) to gather data. Semi-structured interviews have been considered as the principal means of the respondents’ active involvement in the construction of data about women’s lived experience (Reinharz, 1992). The interview guide contained open-ended questions in order to minimize the imposition of structured responses (Patton, 2002). It also allowed me to explore, probe, and ask additional questions which I tried to minimize in order to avoid interruptions. The interview guide provided a framework for developing questions and helped to obtain a greater depth in answers (Patton, 2002).

The participants’ styles varied from direct short answers to accounts of their experiences presented in the form of anecdotes. Digressions made by participants were considered as useful and led to topics which would be not covered otherwise (Yedgis & Weinbach, 2009). The first question “How did you come to Canada?” triggered long responses connected with the experience of war, deportation, and exile. Recalling those memories was emotional for the majority of women. Subsequent questions regarding the



women's adaptation to Canadian culture were discussed with enthusiasm and a sense of humour. The last question concerning aging presented a challenge as the word "aging" translates into Polish as "starzenie," a term which implies negative connotation and may be perceived as offensive, especially to women. I attempted to reword it in order to ask the same question in a respectful way. Wenger (2002) discusses the problem of stigmatizing terminology used to categorize aging people; "getting older tends to be derogated and perceived by others as stigmatizing or embarrassing" and after all "everyone is older than someone" (p. 260). Terms of address, such as "older people," "elderly people," "seniors," "elders," "younger elderly," "older elderly," "the frail," do not reflect the recent norm for many older adults who maintain an active lifestyle after retirement. One of my participants, 83-year-old Julia, was amused when I asked the question about aging. She said, "Who said I was old? I do not have it written on my back or my forehead ... I look as I feel."

Each participant was regarded as the expert in relation to her experience. My intention was to make sure that the women felt respected and validated during the interview process. Apart from obtaining information my intention was also to empower my participants. My participants may never have had an opportunity before to reflect on their past experiences. Some of my participants expressed concern before or after the interview by questioning the value of their contribution to "scientific research." Validating their stories hopefully had an empowering effect on the participants as displaced persons and immigrants, as well as aging women. The overall impression was that the interview was an enjoyable experience and some of the women expressed willingness to participate in my future projects. They shared their experiences generously.

I asked each participant about her preference of language during the interview. Five interviews were conducted in Polish, two in English, and one partly in English and partly in Polish (the participant chose to answer questions about her education and employment in English, but she preferred to speak Polish when discussing values, traditions, and her connection with Poland). I translated those interviews which were conducted in Polish into English. Some women expressed no preference of language, and chose to speak English after learning that the language of the transcriptions used for the analysis of the material would be English. I felt that they wished to facilitate the research process in that way.

Although I obtained the participants' permission to use a recorder initially, the majority of the participants may have felt uneasy and I had to reassure them that the only aim of recording was to facilitate the process of analysis and only I would have access to it. After a while the women became more accustomed to the recording and they seemed to not pay any attention to it. In fact, they were startled when they heard the click signalling the end of the tape. Using a tape recorder helped me to concentrate on the interview, maintain eye contact, and express encouragement through reassuring facial expressions or verbal statements.

I also observed the non-verbal behaviour of the participants and the environment of the interviews, and recorded this information in my field notes. My participants' homes provided me with many clues as to their lifestyles, family, interests and importantly their cultural retention. The photographs of family members and important events in their lives were displayed in various ways in every home I visited. Although houses or flats and their furnishings were typically Canadian in appearance, I was able to see that I was entering the home of a person connected with Polish culture. There were Polish artifacts brought from

Poland such as souvenirs, paintings, books, postcards, tablecloths, tapestry, or other items indicating some connection with the old country. My participants enjoyed reminiscing about the origins of these various artifacts most of which were of significant family and historical value.

After each interview I followed up with every participant by calling them and thanking for the participation in the research and checking to see if they required any emotional support following the interview(s).

### **Data analysis**

The phenomenological analysis involved working with the participants' stories. It is the language that mediates and "transforms lived experience into a textual expression – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). The analysis focuses on "what the text says, its semantic, linguistic meaning and significance ... we try to capture how the text speaks" (van Manen, 1997, p.346). Peoples' experience is identified, described, and interpreted on the basis of their detailed stories, referred to as "thick description." The developed patterns of meaning are recorded in a thematic form. A "theme" refers to "an element (motif, formula or device) which occurs frequently in the text" (van Manen, 1990, p.78). Data analysis uncovered the thematic aspects of the experience of cultural retention in the women's lives. I became immersed in reflection on both the content and the process of the interviews (van Manen, 1990). The researcher engages in a movement between activities, called the hermeneutic circle, which involves reading, reflecting, re-reading participants' narratives, field notes and published literature (Patton, 2002).

Before starting the process of data analysis, I attempted to bracket myself from the narrative in order to maintain a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon and maintain the attitude of a learner. My goal was to achieve the stance of an empathically neutral inquirer who is “perceived as caring about and interested in the people being studied, but neutral about the content of what they reveal” (Patton, 2002, p. 569), one who helps the data tell its own story. Journaling helped me maintain awareness of any preconceptions or biases.

The patterns in the ninth interview became repetitive, and I therefore decided to stop the inquiry and analyze the first eight interviews. Sampling is completed when no additional information is derived from the new sampled units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Patton, 2002).

All interviews were recorded on separate cassettes. I assigned a pseudonym to every participant and labelled each cassette accordingly. I transcribed each interview listening to fragments of the tapes several times. Transcribing the interviews was a lengthy process, but allowed me to become more familiar with the data and focus on the uniqueness of each interview. In order to present the most accurate verbal versions of the women’s experience, I left any grammatical and stylistic errors uncorrected. Those interviews which were conducted in Polish (5) were translated into English. After I transcribed all the interviews, I read the written transcripts and compared them with the tapes to ensure accuracy of the transcription and obtain a better understanding of each participant’s experience. I also organized my field notes which were taken during each interview. Field notes involve elements of interpretation and are an important part of the analysis.

First, I read each interview several times to gain understanding of the overall meaning of the text. I identified potentially meaningful statements which were relevant to my research

question and objectives. I highlighted them to enable tracing and easier access. In determining thematic statements, I followed van Manen's (1990) selective reading approach to uncovering or isolating the themes, which involved listening to or reading a text several times asking the question, "What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (p. 93). The next task was to group these meaning units into constructs or categories. I used the "cut and paste" method to facilitate this stage of analysis. I re-read the collected material numerous times to ensure that all meaningful segments had been identified and belonged to the appropriate category and that the categories were not overlapping. At this point I was able to make an initial judgment as to the themes and sub-themes. Each thematic pool was named. I attempted to capture, as fully as possible, the meaning of the selected material. I identified the emerging sub-themes which were also named. After having read and conducted preliminary identification of the themes, I compared the themes in each interview to search for commonalities and differences. This process led to the identification of the overall themes that best described the participants' perceptions concerning the maintenance of Polish identity and culture. I tried to match the name of each theme with an indigenous phrase that was used by a participant and best reflected the meaning of the theme.

The last stage involved rewriting the themes and describing how they were interrelated. Finally, an attempt was made to understand the "essence," or the underlying meaning of the phenomenon as experienced by the women, which was not an easy task as "the meaning of lived experience is usually hidden or veiled" (van Manen 1990, p. 27). Finding the essence of the phenomenon involves discovering the nodal points, "something

that we can “nod” to, recognizing it as an experience we have had or could have had” (Ibid, p. 27).

The analysis contains the participants’ experiences framed into specific themes. The descriptions, quotations, and examples combined into patterns and textures. They show the uniqueness of each woman’s experience but also the interconnection. My goal was to present the lived experience of cultural retention among women using the phenomenological approach and the feminist perspective. It was important for me to honour the women’s expertise and preserve their own voices describing their experience.

Samovar & Porter (2004) distinguish the following elements of culture: history, religion, values, social organization, and language. In the analysis I used these elements as the framework for exploring the women’s experience of retaining Polish culture and integrating into Canadian culture.

### **Trustworthiness**

There is no consensus regarding validity, trustworthiness, and rigour in qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). It is assumed in qualitative research that there is “no single reality but multiple ways of experiencing or viewing reality” (Royse, 2008, p. 282) and “we should not expect either expert researchers or respondents to arrive at the same themes and categories as the researcher” (Rolfe, 2006, p. 305), but on the other hand, some form of auditability is required. Sandelowski (1993) argues that “in our quasi-militaristic zeal to neutralize bias and to defend our projects against the threats to validity, we were more preoccupied with building fortifications against the attack than with creating the evocative, true-to-life, and meaningful portraits, stories, and landscapes of human experience that constitute the best test of rigor in

qualitative work” (p.1). According to van Manen (1990), human science research is rigorous when:

it is “strong” or “hard” in a moral and spirited sense. A strong and rigorous human science text distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself ... to bring the range of meanings of life’s phenomena to our reflective awareness” (p.18).

As a researcher conducting a qualitative study I was concerned about the quality of my research and I have taken measures to assure its credibility or trustworthiness, terms which are analogous with validity and reliability used in quantitative studies (Belcher, 1994).

In my research I aimed for at least partial reduction in order to obtain clarity of thought throughout the research process. I made a conscious effort to concentrate on learning about the phenomenon from the lived experience of my participants and not my own. Husserl’s use of epoche and “bracketing out the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485) is considered as unattainable by hermeneutic phenomenologists (LeVasseur, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Garza, 2007). Martin Heidegger, the creator of hermeneutic phenomenology, claimed that we always understand through our own experience and involvement in the world (Johnson, 2000). Our perception is selective and shaped by our culture, biases, and interests. Our value system is a framework for interpretation of the world. Phenomenological findings are not neutral or value-free and the researcher becomes an integral part of the research (Koch, 1994). van Manen (1990) questions the view of bracketing by commenting, “If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already ‘know,’ we might find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections” (p. 47). A

genuine involvement and interest enhances the quality of a study. According to Ludwig Binswanger (1963, p.173, cited in van Manen, 1990), “we can only understand something or someone for whom we care (p. 6) and “engagement with rather than detachment from the things to be known is sought in the interests of truth” (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 34).

Credibility increases when the researcher maintains self-awareness by describing and interpreting her experience during the research process (Koch, 1994). Researchers involved in feminist research are encouraged to include their social selves into their research product to ensure that the reader is aware of the researcher’s location which becomes an integral part of research. I described my personal connection and my interest in what I was aiming to explore at the beginning of the chapter on Methodology. I also used a field journal to document my reflections, ideas, comments, concerns, and possible biases. Self-reflection on my personal experience and knowledge allowed me to provide a more accurate account of the findings and increase the credibility of the study.

An additional reflective method involved consultations with mentors and peers (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). I submitted a preliminary draft of the findings to my academic advisor and discussed research issues before writing up the final report. Being able to debrief my findings with my advisor and obtaining valuable feedback from her, as well as an opportunity to discuss the research process and my findings with my peers, was an important source of support.

In order to enhance dependability, I tried to make my research process transparent and open to verification. Sandelowski (1993) argues that validity should not be analyzed in terms of “truth” and “value” but “trustworthiness” which obliges the researcher to make the practices “visible and therefore auditable” (p. 2). Although there is no expectation of full



agreement between the researcher and the reader on the themes and interpretation, the reader should be able to follow the way in which the author arrived at them (Vivilaki, 2008). It is assumed that two different qualitative researchers may arrive at different findings, selecting different categories or themes depending on their own experience and interpretation approach (Royse, 2008). In order to establish dependability, the researcher should leave an audit trail (Koch, 1998) which in my research consisted of tape recordings, journal notes, and memos used during the data analysis. A summary of my decision trail concerning theoretical, methodological choices has been incorporated into this final report.

I used member checking as an expression of a close relationship between the researcher and the participants of the study (Padgett, 2008). Two of my participants agreed to read and give feedback on the findings. There was no disagreement as to the themes and the essence which emerged through data analysis. An opportunity to discuss the findings with the participants gave me more confidence in the accuracy of my findings. Throughout the research process, I constantly reminded myself that my task was “to uncover the meanings in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized, or sentimentalized” and that “the participants can recognize and validate the interpretation” (Benner, 1985, p. 6).

Triangulation involving various sources of data also aimed at increasing the trustworthiness of my study. I used taped recordings of the interviews, observations, and field and journal notes. Phenomenological research method is inductive and descriptive. Presenting rich and thick descriptions of the data may ensure credibility of the research. My analysis was grounded in the “thick description” of the women’s experiences. I tried to include all possible aspects and nuances of the phenomenon. A thick description “goes

beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion .... The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). I tried to select several quotations for each category according to Drisko’s (2005) recommendation to provide the reader with a “sound bite” of data and “use lots of direct quotes” in order to “let participants’ views come alive to the reader” (p. 592). I selected the most significant evidence and detail to allow the reader enter into the situation and world of these women. By using verbatim, I was able to cite the participants’ exact words in the form of direct quotations so that the reader could experience the actual language and individual meanings. Interpretation of the data derived not only from the process of interviewing, transcribing, reading and re-reading, but also comparing findings with other literature covering related topics.

It was also important to ensure the quality of the translation of those interviews which were conducted in Polish. Five respondents chose to be interviewed in Polish, two in English, and one partly in English and partly in Polish (the respondent preferred to answer questions about her education and employment in English, but to speak Polish when discussing the values, traditions and her connection with Poland). I translated those interviews, which were conducted in Polish into English. Although I am a bilingual researcher and I have experience as a sworn translator, I asked Dr. Danuta Stanulewicz, an Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Literature at Gdansk University, Poland, to assist me with the translation and reverse translation of the selected quotes in order to ensure that meanings and experiences of the research participants were adequately translated into English. However, there is always a possibility that some meaning is lost through the process of translation.

As far as transferability of the findings is concerned, the findings of this study may have meaning for other people in similar context. However, phenomenological approach does not aim at generalizability. In Canada, a country of immigrants and refugees, understanding the phenomenon of cultural retention may be a very unique experience for many people and some may find commonalities with their own lives and “fitness” between two contexts. According to Guba and Lincoln (1981, cited in Sandelowski, 1986) “a study meets the criterion of fittingness when its findings can “fit” into contexts outside the study situation and when its audience views its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences” (p. 32)

## Chapter 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Six main themes emerged in the process of data analysis. The subthemes were also identified. They included:

1. BOUND BY TRAUMATIC PAST
2. RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH AS A HISTORIC LEGACY
  - a. Coping with memories
  - b. Coping with the challenges of adjustment to the new country
3. WOMEN'S ROLE IN RETAINING CULTURAL VALUES, BELIEFS, AND BEHAVIOURS IN THE FAMILY
  - a. Religion
  - b. Importance of retaining the Polish language
  - c. Strong family ties
  - d. The role of a grandmother and grandparents
  - e. Visit to the old country
  - f. Maintaining customs and traditions
  - g. The role of the family house
4. WOMEN'S ROLE IN PROMOTION OF THE POLISH CULTURE IN CANADA
5. VOLUNTARY SOCIAL ACTIVITY
6. BELONGING TO TWO CULTURES
  - a. Women's old and new roles
  - b. Independence and connectedness to be continued

- c. Use of social services considered stigmatizing
- d. Need for affordable senior housing as a way to maintain independence and autonomy

The participants' stories were stories of survival and adaptation. The War and exile posed the most difficult challenges. Later, their tenacity, endurance, and optimism allowed for successful adaptation in their new home, Canada. They were old enough to be equipped with the baggage of cultural and historic legacy, but young enough to be open and responsive to acculturation in a new society. Their resiliency enhanced adaptation to a new culture and successful integration. Now they are facing the inevitable challenges of adaptation to aging.

This chapter starts with the introduction of the participants of the study. Later, the themes and subthemes which emerged through the data analysis are presented. The chapter ends with an attempt to capture the essence of their experience of cultural retention.

### **The participants in this study**

The participants of this study may be grouped into three categories:

- five women who were deported by the Soviet authorities to the Soviet Union after the invasion of the Soviet Army on September 17, 1939 and occupation of Eastern Poland
- one woman who was deported to Germany after the Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on September 01, 1939
- three women who emigrated from Poland after the war

It is important to recognize the women's wartime experience as part of their identity.

Women participating in this study came to Canada either as displaced persons or immigrants.

Five of them were displaced persons and had to travel a long way before reaching Canada.

The War left a lifelong imprint on their sense of identity. Witnessing and participating in the struggle for survival developed within them a strong sense of patriotism. The past experiences of war and displacement stood out in the interviews and indicated that the past is still here.

As children or young women, the participants of this study spent several years in exile and their routes to Canada led from one country to another and from one displaced persons' camp to another. They travelled by train, by boat, or walked on foot.

*Displaced persons' routes to Canada*

<b>Julia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Soviet Union (two republics)</li> <li>• Iran</li> <li>• India</li> <li>• USA</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Marta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Soviet Union (two republics)</li> <li>• Iran</li> <li>• Iraq</li> <li>• India</li> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• England</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Jolanta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Soviet Union (two republics)</li> <li>• Iran</li> <li>• India</li> <li>• England</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Anna</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Soviet Union (three republics)</li> <li>• Iran</li> <li>• India</li> <li>• Tanzania</li> <li>• England</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Teresa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Germany</li> <li>• France</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>

The rest of the participants, Ewa, Irena, and Helena, came to Canada as immigrants.

*Immigrant women's routes to Canada*

<b>Ewa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Italy</li> <li>• England</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Irena</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Helena</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland</li> <li>• Canada</li> </ul>

Irena and Helena's families escaped the Communist system imposed on Poland after the war. In Poland, Irena's family was repatriated from their home in Eastern Poland which had been annexed to the Soviet Union and the family was forced to resettle in Silesia, the area granted to Poland after the war. Helena's father had to flee Poland because of his involvement in the Home Army (an underground Polish Army) and later his family joined him in Canada. Ewa spent the war years in Poland, and after her parents' death she left Poland to join her two brothers who, in 1945, were stationed in Italy in the Polish 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps of the Allied Forces. Although these three women were formally immigrants, joining their family members who lived abroad or had settled in Canada earlier, they remained refugees in their own eyes.

The women's ages ranged from 13 to 32 at the time of arrival in Canada. They have shared a common past and similar experiences. Each of the recollections is a unique story, but many experiences are common to victims of war displacement, forced migration, and exile.

**BOUND BY TRAUMATIC PAST**

*"We were dispersed ...straight into the forest"* (Julia)

Five of the participants of this study were among the Poles administratively exiled without being charged with any crime. The Gestapo's [Nazi Secret Police] or the NKVD's



[Soviet Secret Police] banging on the door in the middle of the night shattered many lives and homes marking the beginning of a long and tragic journey. Men, women, children, and elderly people were given only minutes to gather their clothing for the journey to unknown destinations and then spent weeks being transported in cattle cars.

Many women at that time were deported just for being related to prisoners of war or to someone who the Soviet authorities considered as disloyal to the new regime. Those who were arrested ended up in prisons and labour camps (the Gulag deportation camps) dispersed throughout the Soviet Union. They were sentenced for crossing the border, involvement in the resistance organization, or holding positions of authority. Punishment for participation in the previous war was often the reason for deportation. Julia related the story of her family's fate, "We had done nothing wrong but my father was in the army in 1919 as a volunteer and he was in the army just at the time of the war with Russia. This was the most important reason for our deportation." The women were forbidden to speak their native language or practice religion. As Anna recalled, "In Siberia, we could not speak Polish ... but for my parents it was not a problem. They could cope very easily, they knew how, and they always told that 'the walls had the ears.'"

Teresa was deported to Germany by the Nazis. The Polish *Ostarbeiters* [slave workers gathered from Eastern Europe to do forced labour in Nazi Germany] in Germany lived in collective huts in special camps and were forbidden to move freely. The Poles were usually caught in manhunts in the Polish streets and sent to Germany to work on farms and in factories. Labour was exhausting and the pay minimal. Teresa was captured in a manhunt and her war route led from her village in Poland to Germany. She cried when recalling a humiliating experience on her way to a German farm:

They took us to public baths where they shaved our heads and applied an anti-lice medication in order to avoid bringing lice to Germany and as we were leaving some people were praying as we thought we were going to die that we would go to a gas chamber. But it did not happen. They did not kill us in a gas chamber. We were passing in front of the SS-men, I was a young girl and I was ashamed to walk naked in front of men, such healthy guys but one just had to do it ...

Families were often left without men. The husbands and fathers were no longer a source of support and protection. Many people did not survive the deportations. In exile, millions of women and children just perished without food, clothing, and proper shelter, decimated by typhoid, starvation, exhaustion caused by excessive labour. Anna recalled receiving news about her father's and brother's deaths:

Before we left [name of the city in Africa], Mom received the death certificate of Dad's and about two weeks later my brother's, her oldest son ... In [name of the city in Uzbekistan], that's where *Tatus* [dad in Polish] passed away in the army and brother was in [name of a city in Siberia], it's closer to [name of a city in Uzbekistan]... from [name of a city in Uzbekistan] to [name of a city in Iran] and then to [name of a city in Iran] and mom was gravely ill, just gravely ill there, she had a typhoid.

Exhaustive work in extreme conditions took a toll on the men. Julia mentioned her uncle who was killed in Russia because he was unable to perform hard work:

My aunt was a widow and had a little son because her husband was killed in Russia and why did he die? Because he, in 1939, the Russians along with our local Communists were taking people, the Poles, and deporting them to forests, tortured, he had been beaten in the chest. So when we were deported to Russia, so he was ill there and could not work as much as he was expected.

Jolanta lost her father in Siberia. She spoke quietly, "Dad died after eight months, eight months of work, there was nothing to eat so he died of ... exhaustion, of hunger, of hunger."

There was no division of labour and women and children were also forced to perform heavy jobs. Ann recalled her dad's decision to escape unbearable working conditions. She said, "When we came to Kazakhstan, ... we were working on cotton fields and as children so

we were just scratched with those, those pods like [we had] bloody arms and dad said,  
 “That’s enough. We have to get out from here.”

Many of the children who spent the war and occupation in Poland became part of the underground resistance. Ewa spent the war in Poland. She recalled her reckless involvement in the Home Army underground activity as a young girl:

When my father died in 1942, I signed up for AK [Home Army] ... I did not play any important role but I transported fliers in several small villages ... They [fliers] were usually hidden in my bicycle ... When you are 14 years old such risk becomes a challenge. They [the Nazis] either catch you or not, so it was not a big deal for me because I had nobody anymore. My brothers disappeared [in war], my parents were dead and my cousins were partisans so they were staying in the forest. So I was not worried about being or not being alive.

The Poles deported to the Soviet Union were transported to various remote locations, but mostly to Central Asia, Siberia, and the White Sea region which are known for extreme weather conditions ranging from severe winter cold to extremely hot and dry summers. Many deportees were sent to the empty steppes and were expected to build their own shelters.

Julia’s family was deported to [name of a city in the White Sea region in the Soviet Union]:

In 1940, February 10, our family was deported to Russia, to [name of a city in the White Sea region]. We were dispersed, I do not know how to describe it, but there were no buildings, nothing, as we can say straight into the forest and there we had to build something from branches and wood, you know, some kind of shelter so that we could sleep in it, survive, and it was still winter, there was a lot of snow and freezing temperatures, so we went to work right away. We had to go to work, otherwise, we had nothing to live on ... we lived simply just like outdoors, and wearing only what we had on, it was all very sad. Unfortunately, we could not afford to buy anything as we had no money and there was no place to buy anything in the forest.

People lived on minimal portions of food and hunger became their main preoccupation. Jolanta recalled the way her brother managed to find food for his family. She explained, “I remember that Franek was collecting turtles in the mountains ... We ate turtles and I remember when my mom would pour boiling water on them in order to force them out

[of the shell].” People had to learn to steal or beg for food in order to survive. Jolanta recalled the ever-present hunger. She explained, “I do not remember food in Siberia at all. I only remember salted water, water and salt, that’s all I remember ... We received no parcels, my mom sent me to beg.” Julia described the food rations as minimal for people performing labour beyond their capacities. She said, “If we went to work, we got ... one kilogram of bread, and if we didn’t go to work we got 400 grams.”

Malnutrition, exhaustion, and deplorable living conditions made people even more susceptible to diseases. Marta recalled, “We were deported to Uzbekistan and that’s where my Mom worked and we were both seriously ill. We had typhus. She was in hospital but somehow we managed to survive it and later we left for [name of a city in Iran].”

In June 1941, after the German army invaded the Soviet Union, the Soviet government sought Polish support and negotiated an agreement with the Polish Government-in-Exile, allowing the formation of a Polish army in the Soviet Union which would join Russia and the Allies in an effort against Nazi Germany. It also meant “amnesty” to all Polish citizens in Soviet territory. Some Polish people were never informed about the “amnesty,” while others were denied permission to leave, lacking proper documentation. Julia said, “We knew we wanted freedom, but not one like in Russia ...” Women and their children were disoriented as to which direction to move. Jolanta had tears in her eyes when recalling her family’s arduous journey:

So we were walking on foot from one village to another and we practically had nothing. Frank, as the oldest boy, 14 at that time or even 15... made sleds to carry me on, and my mom sold everything she had taken from Poland. We were left with only one feather duvet, so I was seated in the sleds and Jozek and Franek [her brothers] were pulling and Marysia [her sister] was pushing and that’s how we were travelling on foot for three weeks.

Jolanta's mother walked from camp to camp, from village to village, in search of information, food, and shelter, looking for possible protection from the Polish government when the 1941 "amnesty" allowed them to return home, except that there was no home they could return to. She remembered her mother saying, "If I get killed, I will know that it will be on the way to freedom." She continued:

And we walked on foot for almost three weeks through Siberia to a station [railway station] ... When we reached the station, Gehenna! Jesus, hunger, lice, it was terrible, I remember that, I was already 7 years old. I remember people in the railway car. We slept on dead bodies. They were dying in terrible conditions ... Some of them had typhoid. Many people lost eye-sight because of the lack of vitamins and I remember how we were lying on dead bodies. ... When the train stopped, my mom would jump out of the train and she would say, 'Oh, there is some wheat' so she went there and she was caught three times for theft, for the wheat, for the salt, for water, she was looking for water.

Among the countries that accepted displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe were Canada, the USA, Australia, Israel, the United Kingdom, France, Argentina, Brazil, Belgium, Venezuela, Paraguay, Chile, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, French Morocco, Norway, as well as other countries (Isajiw & Palij, 1992). For those who managed to leave the Soviet Union, the joy of freedom in a country that accepted exiles was sometimes bittersweet. Many people were ill or almost starved. It took some time to recover and to be able to function as normal human beings who had regular access to food. Julia spoke of the time when she, her mom and siblings set off on a voyage from [name of a city in India] to [name of a city in the USA] and then to Mexico:

A seven-deck ship or vessel was taking the injured, the cured, and those to be treated in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. We joined this group of about 700. ... We reached [name of a city], a port in the United States, and ... the voyage was good and we were well fed but experienced dizziness and vomiting and some could not walk, some were walking, others could not. My Mom was almost dead.

The recollection of the women's routes to Canada triggered painful memories of war, displacement, and exile. Their long and arduous journeys to Canada were marked by the trauma of deportation, loss of home, loss or displacement of family members, and deplorable living conditions in exile. Deported people, including women and children, were forced to perform exhaustive labour. Many died of hunger, exhaustion, diseases, while others just vanished. Those who remained in exile for many years, as well as those who lived through the war in Poland, engaged in a struggle to survive and maintain their national identity, language, and religion.

### **RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH AS A HISTORIC LEGACY**

*"I'll be successful as everybody else" (Anna)*

Strong bonding to the past indicates that the tragic past is still an important part of these women's identities. War and displacement experience and a long struggle for survival seem to have made these women more resilient and equipped them with extraordinary coping skills, determination, and endurance that would later prove useful when facing numerous challenges connected with the adjustments to a new society and the new land that offered them peace and opportunity. A sense of collective identity and interconnectedness with others who shared the experience of war, displacement, and exile increased the women's resilience, the motivation to face various life challenges.

Marta still keeps in touch with the people she met in the displaced persons' camps. As she said, "It is the 'Siberian family.' ... When I went to Australia, I did not have to inform anyone in advance. Everyone knew that I was there, a member of the family. Everyone was so hospitable ... Poverty and misery bond people."

Past hardships and traumas hardened the women. They developed a sense of independence, determination and self-esteem. As Anna described:

Because of traumas that I went through as a child and it's sort of when you are left again all by yourself ... I have to find a place of belonging and ... I guess age has a lot to do with it because you just forget many things and you say, 'Oh, no, I'll plow right through, I'll be as successful as everybody else and' ... nobody could intimidate me .... I found in my early years that nobody would speak up for me. If I'm hungry, if I'm sick, if I'm destitute, I have to look after myself, I have to open my mouth, I have to stand up, I have to see that my child is well or my husband or my mother, that nobody is going to run us down because I'm not doing anything wrong .... Have respect for me as I have respect for the others. That's what I demanded and I received.

She expressed her admiration for her ancestors who in the past strove to maintain their Polish identity despite efforts made by the Russian occupants during Poland's partition and occupation. She said:

I looked at my grandparents, I was amazed at their achievements when they were under oppression of the ... Russians when Poland was divided and they managed to teach their children Polish. ... How did they manage when the whole family could have been killed if they found out that they spoke Polish or practiced religion. And when we were in Siberia, we could not speak Polish ... only Russian.

Ewa graduated from two colleges in England and two universities in Canada. Most of her career she spent teaching Inuit people in the far North. Her adventurous spirit prompted her decision to accept a position as a teacher of English in [name of a settlement]. As she recalled, "I knew that it will be connected with hunting and the bears walking around, and the seals will be sitting over there, I will have a house by the shore somewhere ...." She looked for a more challenging place. She recalled:

It really was like being in heaven and I did not want to be in heaven forever, so I asked ... the superintendent, 'Give me the toughest place anywhere in the Northwest Territories. ... Think about it' ... He replied, 'I don't have to think about it, it's [name of a settlement].

Julia's optimism and a sense of humour was an important part of her resilience. She recalled:

For me, there are no gates. ... I always managed, better than others, and regardless of the situation, there was always a smile on my face. I was never worried what would happen tomorrow. Sometimes people would tell me, 'You only dance or have fun [laughing] and think of nothing else.' I said, 'If I come to a party I want to have fun. When I go home I will cry.'

Adaptation to the new culture was a way to successfully integrate into the Canadian society. Jolanta admitted that there was no other choice but to adjust. She said, "We had no choice. One had to adjust. I had no choice. I was able to manage, whether it was a store or Tupperware or whatever. The language was not a problem."

Survival through the War, displacement, and exile required challenging adaptations. Adverse life conditions shaped the women's independence and tenacity. Their future life decisions in a different culture were influenced by a sense of determination and high self-esteem.

### **Coping with memories**

*"How can you still laugh without bitterness?"*(Anna)

In spite of their past traumatic experiences, the respondents exhibited hardiness and persistent optimism. Anna's daughter once asked her, "Mom, I don't know how you can still laugh without bitterness ...and [after] what you went through ...."

Marta expressed a lifelong connection to the other war victims who went through similar experiences. She stated, "It is beautiful when friendship may survive for so many years. It is wonderful. I have a great number of friends whom I had met in the camps and whom I kept in touch with, whether it is in Australia or Poland or England."

The memory of war is still vivid. In spite of several visits to Poland, Anna never decided to see Oswiecim [Auschwitz, now a museum]:

My uncle, my Mom's brother perished in Oswiecim, in Auschwitz and the same with my late husband's father too ... My Mom said, 'Anna, I don't think, I'll ever forget.



We went through horror but that one...’ so I never went to Oswiecim, I never did. I said, ‘I don’t want to, I don’t want to see anymore, I really don’t, I couldn’t, it is bad enough for me to live through the ... when they were burning around, when the planes, when there were raids ...

Ewa donates a percentage of her pension to Sue Rider’s Homes, an organization which established senior homes in England providing hospice and palliative care for concentration camp survivors, and orphaned and handicapped children. She stated, “I wrote to that Sue Rider that if I make money one day I will donate a percentage of my earnings to her. And here I have a new letter, now when I was preparing my will, I instructed to have that www [page] found and simply update everything.” Many of Ewa’s relatives and friends were victims of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Many of them perished, some survived. Her former fiancé survived Auschwitz, Dachau, and Buchenwald. She visited the museums there several times, being unable to comprehend the enormity and barbarity of those places. She said:

I collected at least 2 kilograms of information from all my visits to the camps: information, literature and pictures and I took hundreds and hundreds of photographs I took of those ovens ... I will never forget a whole mountain of ashes ..., those glasses, children’s shoes ... I have given it all away through a Jewish woman ... to a Jewish Museum ...

The women’s resilience also helped them to cope with the memories of war which left a lifetime impact on their conscience. Most of the participants reported a sense of connection with other people who went through a similar experience. Some preferred to put the memory of war atrocities behind, while others chose to contribute to organizations providing care for the war survivors.

### **Coping with the challenges of adjustment to the new country**

*“The first priority was to earn money to put food on the table and roof over your head”* (Irena).

After arriving in Canada, each woman faced many new challenges connected with transition into a new life. Some of the challenges included the harsh climate, settlement problems, discrimination, and finding their niche in the labour market. Winnipeg greeted Jolanta, her mother, and three siblings with freezing temperatures and snow. She remembered that first day very well:

We came here, to Winnipeg, first to [name of a city in Canada], then from [name of a city in Canada] to Winnipeg by train ... It was New Year's Eve and you know what the temperature was? 50 below zero! 50! ... I was only wearing an overall coat and shoes and when we got here, my God, Siberia, Siberia ... We had no money. We could not go to a hotel so we slept on the train ... We walked from there [CN train station] to Portage Ave to a shoe shop and my mum wanted to buy boots and I remember walking in snow in shoes. We reached the shop and my mum wanted to pay and she had no money, everything she had [was gone] and the owner felt pity for us and gave us the boots, for my mum and me for free.

Marta's first impression was similar. She admitted, “When I came here ... it was cold and a lot of snow. I was wearing shoes from England ... I thought, “My God, where did I come?” ... I did not mind it [the weather]. Right away I went to buy a pair of rubber boots.”

The women were eager to start a new life and put the exile and displacement experience behind. The term a “Displaced Person” implied a pejorative meaning for people who had been labelled that way. Anna was able to joke about it:

I am nothing second of anybody, I'm as equal as anybody else, you know, in here. And because they ... used to call, ‘Oh, you DP,’ I said, ‘Well, thanks a lot for telling me that I'm Distinguished Person or Delayed Pioneer.’ I said, ‘Whichever comes first.’ ... I am not any displaced person, I am immigrant and I'm as equal,” I said, ‘I'm as distinguished as you are people, so don't, please don't upset us. Have respect for me as I have respect for the others.’ That's what I demanded and I received [*laughing*].

The women of this study, just as many other women who belong to minority groups, have experienced their share of hardships, unequal relationships, and discrimination. Those who came to Canada as young adults rarely had an opportunity to obtain university level education. The immediate need of newcomers to Canada was to support their families. Those who had no command of English or French were usually limited to low-level, poorly paid jobs, often in positions which did not use their skills or training. Marta said, "The worst was the fact that I could not attend a school and I was young." In order to find employment, the women had to combine their traditional mother-nurturer role and their new role as an employee. They were hired by sweatshops where Polish was spoken. Marta obtained vocational training in order to start a career. She recalled, "When I came to Canada I worked in a sweatshop ... I hated sewing so I went to a hairstyling school. I finished a one-year course and I became a hairdresser. It was my best decision in life. ... I had no difficulty finding a job. There was no such competition as today."

The beginnings were also difficult for Anna. She stated, "I was constantly searching for a better job and better money." Being pregnant was a serious barrier in finding employment. Anna found a way to hide her pregnancy. She recalled, "Nobody would hire a pregnant woman ... I got interviews, but I was sitting in a coat and they said, 'Aren't you hot?' and I said, 'No, no, I am not hot,' but I would not let anybody know that I was expecting a baby." Anna commented on the difficult times for the Polish community and barriers in obtaining employment:

Everybody had as much as we did, nothing ... Some people had a bit more than others, but we were all in the same boat ... and it was difficult to find a better job. Nobody wanted to get immigrants, really, they, as soon as you opened your mouth and ... the application forms when we had to fill in, you had to fill in your parents' names, where they were born, where you were born, what religion you are, absolutely

everything .... They knew, and looked, and they said, ‘Well, we don’t have a job for you’ (Anna).

The parents often had no opportunity or time to obtain higher education, but they tried to ensure that their children had an easier start and access to education. Irena’s father insisted on his daughters’ obtaining higher education, an opportunity he had never been given:

[M]y father felt very strongly that although he could not establish himself socially and economically here because language was a barrier, there weren’t the opportunities to learn, the first priority was to earn money to put food on the table and roof over your head. ... He recognized the fact that his children had the opportunity to make something of themselves.

The women who had learned English during their stay in the displaced persons’ camps in England, or were young enough to be placed in the Canadian school system after coming to Canada, had a better chance of finding employment. The process of adaptation was influenced by the women’s age. Helena was 15 years old at the time of her arrival in Canada. She recalled her early days in a Canadian school. She said, “I remember that everyone liked me. I cannot say that anyone rejected me or pushed me aside. My best friend was a very nice Black guy whom I went to school with. We both walked [to school]. So I really cannot say that I had any difficulties.”

For most of the newcomers, the beginnings were difficult in terms of learning a new language. Language proficiency is an important factor in successful resettlement. It allows individuals to adjust better to life in the host society, leading to employment, higher socioeconomic status, and broader social participation. Lack of language competence may lead to limited options. Helena had a ready response to teasing comments about her English. She recalled, “If someone had any comments about my English pronunciation, I would always ask them to repeat *chrzaszcz brzmi w trzcinie* [a popular Polish tongue twister] and if

someone is able to pronounce *chrzaszcz brzmi w trzcinnie*, then he can laugh at me.” Irena obtained two university degrees and pursued a successful career in education. She was 13 at the time of arrival and remembered well her struggles while learning English:

I came here not knowing any English whatsoever. ... The younger ones went into the mainstream immediately, the older ones, we were placed in an ESL class to learn English. ... The language adjustment was always ... maybe not a total hindrance but definitely a sense of frustration because at that time I was still thinking in Polish and translating it into English, hence a lot of my expressions would come out sounding awkwardly compared to the language, to the English language sentence syntax ... because I would be revising adjectives with nouns and ... that sort of continued until university.

The respondents’ experiences associated with adaptation included climatic conditions, ability to find employment, learning the language, and discrimination. Younger age and the knowledge of English were pivotal to quicker and smoother transition. Education facilitated some women’s upward social movement and integration.

#### **WOMEN’S ROLE IN RETAINING CULTURAL VALUES, BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS IN THE FAMILY**

*“I wanted him (son) to feel proud and not pay attention to the jokes about Polish people”*  
(Marta)

The family can play a major role in the way its members integrate or maintain ethnic customs and mores. The children are more likely to retain cultural behaviours if their parents model such behaviours and encourage involvement with the ethnic community. Cultural retention is usually attributed to the mothers.

#### **Religion**

*“Religion was important to me. It was important to pass that on to the children”* (Irena)

The significance of Catholic religion in the lives of the women was a recurring theme in every interview. For Anna, religion has provided emotional support over the years. As she

admitted, "I attribute a lot [to] deep faith and the religious upbringing, ... There is God above and you have to sort of trust ... and do the best whatever there is and hope for the best."

Visiting places of religious significance for the Catholics, such as Czestochowa and Jasna Gora in Poland, is an important religious and spiritual experience for Roman Catholics. Jasna Gora is the third-largest Roman Catholic pilgrimage site in the world with the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. It is also the national shrine of Poland and the centre of Polish Catholicism. Marta was proud to take her son to Czestochowa and share the experience with him:

Jasna Gora was a wonderful experience for my son. For me it was the second time, but he ... it was his first time. It was an eye-opening experience. I was very happy to have taken him so that we could go through this experience together so that he could experience it as the son of Polish parents ... I wanted him to feel proud and not pay attention to the jokes about Polish people. And I say, 'If you don't see it, Andrew, you will never experience it in your life. You have to see it with your own eyes.'

She added, "And I will take Martin as well. And my plan will be accomplished if my middle son visits Poland. I will have the peace of mind." On one of her visits to Poland, Ewa followed the Pope's trails [the Pope was known to like mountain trekking and skiing]. She recalled that emotional experience with tears in her eyes:

I asked whomever I was there with, to leave me there on my own and I followed the Pope's trails which were marked. So I walked alone, a little touched .... The Pope was in Augustow and it turns out that I have a family in Augustow ... I only remember the boats and rushes and Czarna Hancza [a picturesque river]... I have pictures going through the Augustowski Canal with all those locks.

Another of her visits to Poland included Wadowice [the city where the Pope was born which has become the destination of pilgrimages]. It was her aim to see the place which gained such great importance to Poles in Poland as well as those living abroad:

The aim will be [was] to see the museum and the skis and I took photographs of the Pope's throne. I remember, one year there were those famous *kremowki* [cream cakes once mentioned by the Pope in his speech to a crowd of worshippers during his visit

to Poland, the cream cakes he remembered as his favourite] so we went to try them. We lit candles for everyone .... My family attended Mass at his church when he was still a bishop or archbishop.

Priests carried out multiple roles serving Polish communities abroad, and always remained authority figures for their parishioners. For Irena, it was important to acquaint her future husband with her family's parish-priest especially because her fiance was not Catholic. Traditionally it was important to marry a person of the same ethnic origin and religious affiliation. She said, "Father Nowakowski, he knew us from almost the first day when we arrived in Winnipeg. He says, 'We'll have to meet with him and talk to him and find out if he is a believer ...' She continued:

He was a Lutheran, his grandfather was a Lutheran minister, so religion was very strong in his family, but ... I wasn't willing not to get married in my faith and we were the first couple in [year] being married at [name of a Roman Catholic Church] which is a very traditional, strong Catholic church ... and Father Nowakowski ... agreed to have their minister from their church come and attend the marriage ceremony ... He didn't marry us, but he, at the end of the ceremony, he was able to give us his blessing.

For Irena, passing on religion to her children was part of her motherhood mission. She stated, "Religion was important to me. It was important to pass that on to the children ..." However, attempts to pass on one's religion to children were not always successful due to factors such as intermarriage which played an important role in maintaining religious commitments. For Jolanta, it was not easy to accept her son's choices:

I tried to pass it [Catholic faith] on to my children, but you know, my son, because he married an English girl, she did not practise any religion and she started to attend the Church, they quit going to church ... and my husband could not cope with it. There were terrible rows. ... I have come to terms with it and I only pray for him to return to his herd.

Religious commitment to Catholicism has been maintained by all participants of this study. It was also important to pass the religion on to their children. Some women had to

negotiate their religion with spouses having different religious affiliations. Religion has been a significant source of emotional support in difficult times. The respondents' visits to places of worship in Poland indicate strong connections to faith.

### **Importance of retaining the Polish language**

*"I have three sons ... they speak and write Polish"* (Marta)

All the participants spoke fluent Polish, some with no accent, in spite of having lived in Canada for more than 50 years. They all indicated the importance of passing on the language to their children. Those who married non-Poles had a lesser chance of retaining fluency of the language. Polish spouses, close contacts with the community and church organizations, as well as access to the Polish media and press, helped Polish displaced persons and immigrants retain the language. Most of the respondents reported having subscribed to Polish magazines, such as *Czas* or *Zwiastowiec*, owning Polish books, or borrowing them from Winnipeg libraries. Some listen to Polish radio or watch a Polish program on television. Teresa lives in Canadian Polish Manor, a subsidized apartment building for seniors where most residents are of Polish background. She said, "We have a Polish television [channel] downstairs. Our manager has arranged for us to have a Polish television."

The majority of the participants' children attended parochial Polish primary schools. They were encouraged to participate in social activities organized by the Polish community. Marta's three sons are fluent in Polish. She said, "I am proud of the fact that my boys, I have three sons, graduated from a 7-year program in a Polish school. They speak and write Polish. They may not be that fluent because they are not married to Polish women so they do not use the language." Polish is spoken in Teresa's family even though her son-in-law does not speak



Polish. She insisted on communicating with her children in Polish. She commented, “He [son-in-law] is a very good man. He would never tell me to speak English in his presence. I have the right to speak Polish to my daughter. He never made any remark about it.”

Visits to the old country provide an opportunity for the children of immigrants and refugees to practice the language. Teresa encouraged her son to visit Poland. She said, “My son improved his Polish when he went with me to Poland for four weeks. He spoke Polish with his cousins and it helped him a lot.”

Being bilingual allows one to function in two worlds and switch from one to another depending on the circumstances. For Irena, fluency both in Polish and in English, has been an asset in opening doors. She stated, “I spoke fluent English and fluent Polish, so I could travel between the two worlds without noticing that I could make a speech in Polish and fall into English without skipping a beat.” Her dream to establish Polish language courses at the University of Manitoba became a reality. She said, “This is ensuring that Polish language, history, culture is studied at the highest institution in this province.” Language retention, according to Irena, should remain in the interest of the community. She was involved in collecting necessary funds. She commented, “If your cultural traditions are important to you, then it behooves you to maintain them and not be out there asking the government, ‘Give us money and then we’ll have our heritage language school.’” Julia persisted in her use of the Polish language too:

I have always fought for the Polish language and if I heard someone speak, a Pole speaking Ukrainian, I would tell him on the side, ‘Listen, have you forgotten your native language?’ And some people would tell me, ‘You are not ashamed to speak a broken Polish?’ [I would reply], ‘I prefer to speak a broken language rather than give up my own language.’ My children spoke Polish ever since they were small children. ... Today, my grandchildren speak Polish very well.

Ewa, now 80, left Poland in 1945, lived in England, and since 1960 in Canada, but never intended to lose her Polish accent. She admitted, "I do have an accent. ... And I never wanted to lose it." She recalled an experience when teaching Polish in a parochial school:

If I could not have the contact with Polish people in Poland, then I would teach in a Saturday Polish school for instance. ... I remember mothers coming and saying [in English], 'Michael, hurry up, I don't have a whole day.' I said, 'Look, I am teaching your kids, you send the kid to a Polish school, I am teaching him Polish and you come with your English, telling him in English, the same Michael, so how does it work?'

Anna's daughter attended Polish Saturday school and was involved in social and cultural events. She recalled, "She could not speak English at all when she went to grade 1, ... and then from grade 2 she went to a Polish school. She was always master of ceremonies and the *Akademie* [events commemorating national anniversaries] when she was small ..." Jolanta's sons speak and write Polish. She said, "When Saturday came, they knew there was *Katechism* [religion lessons] and the Polish language class. They attended it for seven years so they both hold certificates of having completed the seven years. So they can read and speak Polish."

Language is the main tool used for cultural transmission. All respondents expressed their concern about the preservation of the language and passing it on to their children. Access to media, press, and books, as well as involvement in the Polish community, enhanced their language retention. Intermarriage proved to be an important factor hampering language proficiency.

### **Strong family values**

*"When my family comes, that's my happiness"* (Jolanta)

Cultural forms are maintained in the context of a family. Cultural patterns determine family roles, obligations, and rights. Family provides practical and emotional support during

difficult times and crisis. Family buffered the women's experience of war, displacement, exile and adaptation to a different culture. Family carries a special meaning for displaced persons and immigrants. The war, displacement, exile, and migration ruptured the women's families, their extended families, friends and community networks.

Most of the participants lost family members in the war, during deportation, or exile. A close-knit family gained special meaning and value. For Anna, "the family is the key." She continued:

The family is the key for me because ... I missed a lot of the extended family ... I never knew my grandparents and to me it's ... such a joy to be a grandmother and when I went back to work ... and then they asked me why I was leaving, I said, 'Now I have become a full time grandma and that's all I want to be.'

Marta expressed pride in her family. She said, "I have a wonderful family. God really gave me an extraordinary family. Henry and Joanna [brother-in-law and his wife], Jan [husband] has been gone for so long, their children and his sister's children, I am very close to them... My cousin's daughter took me out for breakfast yesterday." Contacts with children and grandchildren are also important for Marta. She admitted, "I really like when my family comes, and that's my happiness when they all gather there and we all enjoy ourselves and I think, 'My God, how lucky I am.'"

In a traditional Polish family, mother and daughter maintain a close bond. The majority of participants reported such a relationship with their mothers. Marta could not have imagined her wedding without the presence of her mother. She stated, "She came to Canada before my wedding. Otherwise I would probably not have gotten married."

Members of the Polish community were likely to marry someone from their own community. Parents encouraged their daughters to find a "nice Polish boy." In the past, children sought their parents' approval regarding the choice of a future spouse. When Irena

decided to marry a fellow student from the university who was of German-Dutch background, she had to persuade her “mom and dad, strong Catholics, very nationalistic Polish people, very anti-German and anti-other biases” to accept her future husband:

There was one very strong and entrenched divisiveness too between us because of our ethnic or our national origins, me being Polish and him being German, although originally the family originates in Holland. ... My parents fully expected me to marry one of my Polish friends that they saw me socializing with, as my girlfriends were marrying, you know, nice Polish boys.

Although Irena’s parents accepted their son-in-law, they could never communicate well or develop a close relationship with him:

They’ve regretted the fact that he didn’t speak Polish because their English was very marginal, so there wasn’t the opportunity for them to really grow and develop a strong relationship because of that, and my Dad loved to discuss politics and history and he would have really loved to have been able to communicate with my husband on those topics, but it was impossible.

Although Anna pursued a successful career and struggled to reconcile her role as a mother and a professional, she pointed to the family as the most important source of happiness and satisfaction:

I have a greatest enjoyment of the [my] daughter and of the step-children and the grandchildren and of course of the grandson and ... to me it’s the most important. ... I drop everything, ...if I’m busy, and he would say, “*Babcia* [grandmother], can I go? Before I used to ... drive him from school ... so the whole car would be full of children...

However, Ewa, another respondent, had never imagined herself being confined to the traditional roles of a woman. After her mother’s death, her father suggested that she should take over the household duties:

When the maid left and my mother died, my father says, ‘Now you have to do what your mother and the maid did.’ So, you know, cleaning all the time and there was even a carpet-beater. I was really not suited for that. One has to like such things.

The family in Polish culture has been associated with support, harmony, and mutual solidarity. The supportive role of the family, as well as community, is deeply rooted in Polish history of the struggle for independence. The women's accounts indicate that they have maintained strong bonds with their families. Current advancements in global communication allow the women far more frequent interaction with family members through telephone or the Internet. Constant interaction is a way to preserve family unity among family members living at great distances from each other and enhances preservation of culture.

### **The role of a grandmother and grandparents**

*"My mom has contributed so much to the upbringing of my children"* (Marta)

Most of the respondents' mothers and grandmothers were willing to undertake grandparental and housekeeping duties to help their daughters maintain their employment. They had assumed the usual roles of persons of wisdom and experience, teachers of cultural heritage for younger generations, and assistants in childcare and household chores. This traditional role had been preserved in the majority of the households. There was clear evidence of a close relationship between mothers and daughters as well as between the grandmothers or grandparents and their grandchildren. Marta emphasized her mother's significant contribution in bringing up her children, passing on the language, and teaching prayers. She said, "She stayed here [at home] with me ... I could say 80% is her contribution, teaching them prayers, how to pray. My son, when he was six, he could already tell his beads. Polishness... She may have known something in English, but she was pretending she did not in order to make the children learn Polish." Marta explained she was now a grandmother too and her role was important in keeping the family united. She stated, "My grandchildren's best memories are from Winnipeg, and everyone is waiting to come here. I

really appreciate the fact and I do my best to unite my family at least once a year.” Her mother provided invaluable help in difficult times:

I don't know, without her, I wouldn't have been able to manage, really. It was very difficult, the beginnings were very difficult because my husband worked very hard, I had children and he, after coming to Canada, as a young man of 21, was unfortunate to suffer from ulcers that he had developed in Russia. The ulcers perforated, so he was seriously ill and the problem was that he did not have [insurance] coverage.

Anna also emphasized the importance of her mother's role in the upbringing of her children. It allowed Anna to seek employment and contribute to the family's income. She said, “My mom was always [there], that's why I could work because mom was with us ... Because again of mom, she [Anna's daughter] was fully bilingual in reading, writing ...” Irena's parents and parents-in-law joined forces in taking care of her children so that she and her husband could continue their careers without long interruption:

I had the support of my parents and my in-laws. My mother-in-law had retired from working and she agreed to come to the house and stay with Andrew every day while I went to work. ... My parents and Larry's parents took turns. They saw it as an opportunity to spend time with their grandchildren and it wasn't a long time, a couple of hours, and it was a long distance. [It was a] sacrifice on their part because we lived in [name of a neighbourhood in Winnipeg]. From the North End it's half an hour trip but they came diligently. There wasn't a day that somebody missed. Grandmas came, the kids loved seeing them, it developed a bond, a special bond.

Jolanta also enjoyed the support of her mother, who lived with her daughter and her family.

Such an arrangement facilitated her mother's life in Canada as she had never learnt to speak

English:

My mom had always lived with me. ... My mom did not speak [English] at all. She was in Canada for 28 years and she didn't speak English. She bought everything in the North End, in Polish stores. She only went to places where Polish was spoken and because I did my business from home, my mom would answer the phone. I only taught her to say, 'Jolanta not home. Jolanta at six o'clock.' And my mom would say, 'Jolanta sex o'clock.' So, my clients would laugh.

Close family ties have been maintained by all the respondents. The bonding between mothers and daughters as well as grandmothers/grandparents and their grandchildren was emphasized by most women. Grandmothers or grandparents actively participated in the upbringing of the respondents' children, including passing on the language and religion. Their involvement allowed their daughters to maintain employment.

### **Visit to the old country**

*"I didn't know Poland but yet it was very close to me" (Anna)*

The participants of this study all left Poland at a young age and a visit to the place of their ancestors was an opportunity to rediscover their roots. The frequency of visits differed and mostly depended on the economic situation of the family. Anna, who left Poland as a young woman expressed a special connection to the old country. She said, "I don't know Poland, I didn't know, but yet it was very close to me ... Mom went first in the 60s, and then I went in the 70s with my daughter to Poland, so that was quite an experience for the two of us ..." Anna's visit to Poland was an opportunity to meet family members she had never known before:

I wanted to know my roots. I wanted to find out whether my mom was right or not telling me the stories ... When you tell the story, it's always more rosy than things are, but I was so nicely surprised ... surprised to tears almost, how good, what a good family it was ... what mom was saying, she did not exaggerate it one little bit, that it was a very loving, very close-knit family ...

Marta took all her sons who were all born in Canada to the country of their ancestors:

My youngest son, I took him for a visit to Poland. He had never been to Poland before. He was so delighted with Poland ... He says, 'Beer tastes best only here in Poland, in Zakopane [a mountain resort].' He said, 'Mom, it was the most beautiful holiday in the world. I am glad you took me to Poland.' And now my middle son is going with me to Poland.

She was happy with her youngest son's first impression of the old country. She recalled, "He says, 'It is a beautiful country and the people are wonderful.' ... We met great people while just sitting in a café or a plaza."

Visiting places of historical significance, especially those connected with the participants' traumatic past was often an emotional experience:

So many attractions in Warsaw, my God! *Pomnik Sybirakow* [a monument erected to commemorate people deported to Siberia during World War II] made a great impression on me. I saw on television our Pope kneeling in front of this monument during his visit to Poland. He was kneeling and praying. I knelt and prayed in the same place. It had special significance for me as a *Sybiraczka* [a woman deported to Siberia] and it made a huge impression on me.

A journey to Poland was also an opportunity to visit or meet family or extended family.

Marta met her husband's family for the first time. She said, "Wroclaw, the city where my husband's family comes from, they call me and write to me ... I have a very warm relationship with them." Irena visited her family's old house in Poland where she was able to recall her childhood memories:

I have visited my cousins in Poland ... 15 years ago when I went to the place where I was born and my cousin, one of the cousins lives in that house there ... It was good to see it, but I had sort of childish impressions of what it was like and I have felt for a very long time a Canadian, a Canadian with Polish background.

Ewa, orphaned at the age of 14, left Poland and joined her brothers, a pilot and a doctor in the Allied Forces, who had arranged for her arrival in England. After the war, due to her brothers' military service in the West and her wartime involvement in the underground movement, she was prohibited from visiting Poland for a long time. She stated that "the only [thing] that was missing was the contact with Poland." After 1964, she visited Poland seventeen times.



The old country was a place which connected the women with their memories as girls or young women, their houses, friends, family graves, and moments of joy and sadness.

Going back to their roots also involved searching for relatives and old friends. Ewa used to live in Rzeszow before the War in an apartment building whose inhabitants were later spread all over the world. They searched for each other after the war:

I remember that the Jews that had lived in the same apartment block in Rzeszow ... found me ... through the Red Cross in the Scottish school ... They were older than I so they remembered when I was born ... They were also, survived concentration camps ... We promised ourselves that ... we will meet, they will come from New York, one lives in New York, the other on Long Island and we will meet in Warsaw and go together to Rzeszow and search for any tokens of remembrance and we actually found all people, in fact some six different families living in the same apartment block ...

Ewa closely followed historic turning point changes taking place in Poland over the years and remained deeply concerned about the political developments there. She felt obliged to participate in them at least symbolically. One such event was connected with a protest against the introduction of martial law (1981-1983) in Poland. Martial law was introduced in an attempt to crush the political opposition against Communism:

I am sitting in [name of an Inuit settlement] and I am watching TV showing the Poles are arranging on Krasinski Square next to Długa, a cross made of flowers and later it gets cleared away and the very next day Poles again [lay flowers] and the Militia [the Communist police] clears them away and again. So I say to myself that I have to go there and add flowers to that cross. So it must have been 1980 or 1981 ... I just know that the plane from London to [Warsaw] was almost empty [travelling was restricted at the time of the martial law] but someone distributed the Solidarnosc [anti-Communist movement which led to the abolition of Communism] tags, these badges, and then we took them off in Warsaw not to irritate the Militia men. ... I am holding my camera and there is already a crowd and the cross is already there and all the time someone is adding [flowers] and more people arrive and they sing songs. ... I cannot reach the cross and I say, 'I came all the way from Canada, if you could,' and a man offered his help, 'Please make way for this lady. She is from Canada. She wants to take a picture.' He told me, 'Please take many pictures and tell abroad what we are going through here in Warsaw.' Everything was so touching [*crying*].

Ewa searched for her roots as well as the graves of family members whom she had never met. She recalled, "The first visit in 1964, it was just as going home, visiting family graves, my brother's grave. He was born in 1912 and died in 1920 before I was born and he was buried in [name of a town in Poland] and ... I have finally found his tombstone ... I remember my parents' graves ..." She also mentioned visiting various places connected with Polish history, religion and culture such as Wieliczka, Zakopane, Cracow, Warsaw, Gniezno, Lichen, and Wroclaw. Photography was Ewa's passion, and all of her visits led to her large collection of photographs of historical places and monuments:

The Warsaw Monument, I was obsessed with it. I must have taken at least a hundred pictures of this monument because it was constantly being changed [redesigned] by adding things I did not like. It used to be a nice PW [*Polska Walczaca* – Fighting Poland, a unique symbol of the capital letter P shaped as an anchor, used by the AK, the Home Army during the Nazi occupation and especially during the Warsaw Uprising of August to September 1944; it symbolized [the] hope of the Polish people to regain independence] on the wall, and the boy exiting the canals [people were searching for ways to escape through the city's canals]... they were such great photographs and enlargements that I used to have and I distributed all of them. ... I do have several small insurgents [small boys who fought and were killed in the Warsaw Uprising].

The old country is changing its character. Now a democratic state, a member of the EU, with a flourishing economy, the old country is transforming into a modern European state. Poland is no longer the same country remembered by the participants of this study.

Irena was struck by the changes:

The changes that have happened in Poland in terms of, almost negative. I was walking in Warsaw down Marszalkowska and all I would see are big American or Canadian big stores, whether it is HVM or whatever, that clothing thing, and ... English rock blaring inside and outside ... or Nowy Swiat. I mean those are all very expensive boutiques, thousand dollar handbags ... I thought, are there people in Poland who can afford stuff like that?

Jolanta and her mother went on a pilgrimage to Poland. It helped them realize that Canada is their home now:

My mom always used to say that she would like to return to Poland to retire, not to die here but in Poland. ... We went on a week-long pilgrimage and visited different places including Warsaw, Cracow, Czestochowa, Torun. We travelled all over Poland. ... It was a great experience for her, but she says, 'My child, it is not the same' ... When she came back she made arrangements regarding her funeral and the place of burial ...

For some women, a visit to Poland was a chance to show the country of origin to their Canadian-born children. For others to visit or meet the family whom they had never met before, observe the changes that had taken place over the years, and visit family graves, places of historic and religious significance. Although today's Poland appears different to them, there is still a curiosity or nostalgic longing for the country of their ancestors.

### **Maintaining customs and traditions**

*"Let's finish this because we are going to eat flaczki"* (Jolanta)

Different occasions to celebrate customs and traditions reinforce family and extended family ties and stress commitment to kin. They create an opportunity for the family to reconnect and reunite. As in many other cultures, the observance of holidays involves family, religion, customs, and rituals, as well as the preparation and sharing of food. Many Polish customs and traditions are connected with religious holidays.

Food plays an important role in Polish culture. The Poles are known for their hospitality. During the interviews, women greeted me with traditional Polish food that they had either baked or cooked. Jolanta prepared a traditional Polish soup *flaczki* [tripe soup] and rushed to the kitchen at the end of the interview. She said, "Now, let's finish this because we are going to eat *flaczki*." Marta made special Polish donuts. She said, "I wanted to prove [continuing Polish customs and traditions] to you by baking these 'paczki' and Jolanta [who had been interviewed earlier the same day] had fed you so well."

The tradition of Polish cuisine is passed on from mother to daughter. Marta said, “I make *barszcz* [borsch] and *uszka* [dumplings in borsch], pierogies, the basics, food that my mom has taught me [to make]. *Golabki* [cabbage rolls], I even send them to my children.” Irena stated, “I make the soups, the traditional *barszczyk*, *kapusniak*, and *bigos* and that sort of stuff, I don’t make *pierogi* because I get them from my mother.”

The participants of my study admitted that the preparation and consumption of traditional Polish food was generally limited to holiday occasions or special events. The women had modified their cooking according to taste and convenience without strict adherence to traditional Polish recipes. Irena liked the idea of adding some variety to her cooking. She explained, “I have expanded my culinary tastes and incorporated different ... I’ve taken Chinese cooking classes. So I use ... quite an eclectic approach to cooking but I would say the focus ... is tempered with my Polish influence.” Apart from the holidays, the cuisine was adjusted to the women’s lifestyles. Anna admitted, “I do prepare Polish food which we both like ... but mostly whatever is convenient. When I was working, whatever [was] fast [*laughing*].”

Christmas and Easter are always celebrated in a solemn manner. Some of the traditions connected with these holidays are very unique. All participants mentioned the significance of celebrating Christmas and Easter according to Polish tradition. Marta said, “I definitely maintain [Polish customs and traditions]. During holidays, Christmas, I take the Holy Wafer [thin, white round biscuit used in religious ceremonies] with me when I visit my boys or send it to them and they also maintain this tradition.” The Polish *Wigilia* is a traditional family meal on Christmas Eve, on December 24th. The term *Wigilia* comes from Latin *vigilare* meaning “to await” and is a meatless meal which follows the fast preparing for

the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a family gathering and arouses deep feelings of kinship among family members. Anna's husband is Scottish but *Wigilia* is always celebrated the Polish way. She said, "When it comes to *Wigilia*, it has to be Polish, only Polish. The same at Easter time." Jolanta stated that she always prepared a Polish *Wigilia*, but the carols are sung in Polish as well as English. She said, "I always prepare a Polish *Wigilia* and I always have a Christmas tree and we sing. We begin with *Dzisiaj w Betlejem*, a carol which they [Jolanta's children] remember and they also know *Lulajże Jezuniu* and Silent Night which we sing in Polish and English."

Family artifacts and souvenirs brought from Poland are often cherished and passed on from one generation to the next. Marta's son kept his grandmother's cross. She said, "I still have an original cross from Poland that my mom brought with her and now my son has taken it with him, after her death." Anna brought souvenirs from Poland which she displayed at home. She said, "Mom and I had some ... crystals and carvings when we went to Poland. When [my] daughter was involved in the Polish community, she was always on the stage so she had her costumes too [that] were brought from Poland ..."

Polish customs and traditions have been maintained by the participants of this study through the celebration of holidays, preparation of traditional food for special occasions and religious holidays, collection of Polish artifacts and souvenirs, and participation in community events.

### **The role of the family house**

*"I like my house very much"* (Marta)

When the participants of this study arrived in Winnipeg, their families lived mostly in Winnipeg's "North End." Now, people of Polish descent own houses in different parts of the

city. The participants' houses were comfortable and well-maintained. They were full of family pictures, souvenirs, and family memories. It was not uncommon to find Polish books and souvenirs displayed next to Inuit soapstone sculptures. For the women of this study, a house had a broader meaning than just a place of residence. For many newcomers to Canada, owning a house had remained beyond reach for many years. It was a symbol of accomplishment they worked hard for, a place where they raised their children, and a place where memories of hardships, as well as happiness, were kept.

For Marta, it was difficult to imagine living in a different place than her beloved house where she stored family memories. She admitted, "I am alone, I don't have my children around. So I like my house very much and I would like to live here until I am unable to manage on my own. If a moment comes that I really won't be able to do that, then it can't be helped. Then I will have to search for a different solution." She added, "Therefore, I still keep this house because they [children] feel so good here, it brings memories, their childhood." Helena also emphasized her attachment to the family house. She stated, "For the time being I am healthy, but once problems start I would prefer to stay at home ... On the other hand, spending all day home, I don't know. I cannot imagine that." Irena and her husband had worked hard all their lives and now enjoyed a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment:

I know my humble beginnings. I know what I went through to get where I am now. Both my husband and I, both parents immigrants, both parents didn't have much. When we got married, we had nothing. We started working and building a life together and you know, starting with a small house, then buying a second house and finally buying this house. We have a cottage, we're comfortable. We worked for it, nobody's given it to us.

Although the participants' homes and their furnishings appeared typically Canadian, every home had some Polish elements, from Polish paintings, tapestry, figurines in national

costumes, Easter decorations (some of the interviews took place just before Easter holidays) to Polish books and magazines. Polish accents were often displayed next to Canadian artifacts, such as soapstone sculptures. The presence of elements from both cultures was evident.

## **WOMEN'S ROLE IN PROMOTION OF POLISH CULTURE IN CANADA**

*"That's the legacy that I leave behind"* (Irena)

The women in this study have not only retained and passed on their cultural heritage to their children, but valued opportunities to promote Polish culture among other Canadians.

Marta was proud of the Polish traditions and enjoyed sharing them:

The Holy Wafer in fact is perceived as an extraordinary tradition by members of other nationalities. So, no matter who you are with, regardless the nationality, everyone asks what it is. ... I explain that it is our tradition, not only Roman Catholic but a Polish tradition as well. When you exchange holiday greetings [by sharing the Holy Wafer] you connect with other people, 'I want nothing for myself but I wish you all the very best.' And it is a beautiful tradition.

Polish Easter also involves a tradition which appeals to people of other cultures. It is called *Swiecone*. Every family prepares a basket full of food, including eggs, bread and salt, sausage, and pastry, which is then brought to church to be blessed and then eaten at home during the Easter meal. Marta initiated this tradition in her church:

Even the priest in the English church introduced this tradition. There has never been *Swiecone* in that church before and now ... the priest said, 'We have to bless [Easter food] because this church gathers not only Canadians, but others who celebrate this tradition. Therefore, if someone wants to have the food blessed, please come on Saturday at 2 pm, I will be giving the blessing.' ... And the Canadians bring it now because they consider it to be a beautiful tradition. ... I must have been that Polish woman to introduce it, [I told the priest], 'I cannot travel as far as the Holy Ghost Church as I have no transportation and I would like my *Swiecone* to be blessed here.'

Irena had been actively involved in many immigrant organizations, including the Manitoba Ethno-Cultural Advisory and Advocacy Council and the Winnipeg Chinese Cultural

Community Centre. Her dream of establishing the Polish language at the University of Manitoba became a reality. There are two permanent courses offered not only to people of Polish background, but are also attended by Canadians who intend to work in Poland:

It also is an opportunity for others that are interested in learning about Polish culture. We have a substantial enrolment in the program, 30 students, which is really high for a language program and ... we have some scholarship money from another source so that to encourage and reward students that are studying Polish. That's the legacy that I leave behind. My children may not directly benefit from it but who knows maybe my grandchildren.

Julia enjoyed being able to "spread Polish culture" by contributing to the arts and crafts exhibited at the Manitoba Museum:

I belonged to the Manitoba Museum because they always needed someone to show handicrafts ... because we had our small business at home, I was able to get involved [in other things] during the day and leave my work for the evening and go to the Museum for an hour or two. It gave me satisfaction and first of all, I passed on something Polish. Mrs. Szalfarska leaves her job, leaves her children, everything and goes away for two days to show the handicrafts, to spread Polish culture.

She recalled the humble beginnings of her involvement:

Not too far, south of Winnipeg, we were in two places ... where farmers live. I had my exhibition, a decent one, and a lady comes up and asks, because I was displaying embroidery and crochet work ... she asks, 'You have such beautiful things. Do you have a Polish museum?' I say, 'No, we don't.' 'How come?' ... After dinner she showed me how they organized their first room, and says, 'The government gives money, helps. I want you to put your heart into it, the establishment of a museum.' And the museum was established [tears in Julia's eyes].

For Julia, as well as other participants, passing on the Polish message meant more than just "making pierogies." She said to other Polish women at a meeting, "We have to do something. We will only sit and make pierogies or drink coffee and that's it? We have to do something." She also mentioned her volunteering at the [name of a hospital] where she taught crafts and enjoyed story telling. She recalled, "I used to go there to give sort of handicrafts lessons. I visited, told stories, read books, [gave talks] on Polish history."



Ewa spent twenty two years teaching in different locations in Canada including the Northwest Territories. On one of her seventeen visits to Poland she was accompanied by an English friend whom she had prepared for the visit by providing information on Poland prior to the trip:

I say to my English friend who studied with me at the university, 'Let me take you to Poland to show you what Poland is like.' ... Before going to Poland I gave her a book on the history of Poland in English and ... we are sitting at the market square, the flowers around, Mickiewicz [monument of a Polish national poet] and it's so beautiful around... it is just before 12 and she says, 'Now we are going to hear the *Hejnal*' [a call played by a trumpeter from the tower of St. Mary's Church in Cracow commemorating a historic event when a trumpeter warned the city about the approaching raid of the Turks. The call was interrupted when the trumpeter was shot down from the tower by a Tatar soldier]. So my cousins looked at her and say, 'How do you know about *Hejnal*?'

Ewa was working in the North when one of the Inuit students from her school learned about the election of the Polish Pope:

I am in [name of a settlement] and one day, the Pope had already been elected and one day a boy by the name of James, maybe 10 years old ... is following me. I slow down, he slows down, from the school down to my house ... At last I stop in front of my house and I say, 'Are you following me, and you have got a question?' and he said, 'Yes, Ewa, are you from Poland?' I said, 'Yes, I am from Poland.' Then, 'Is Pope your father?' So I said, 'Well, let's say a cousin ... and my family goes to his church.' ... I say, 'Is that all you wanted?' He said, 'Yes.'

After one of her visits to Poland, Ewa brought T-shirts with the Solidarity [Polish political movement which led to the abolition of communism in Eastern Europe] logo for her Inuit students in [name of a settlement]. She had to smuggle the T-shirts through the luggage control in Warsaw [to prevent authorities from confiscating them]. Her cousin in Poland was worried:

We had talked about the Eskimos [Inuit] and how many children there are in my class, 25, so, 25 T-shirts. [The cousin asked] 'How will you smuggle them?' 'I don't know.' I said, 'Listen Renatka, I would smuggle anything.'

Promotion of Polish culture in Canada shows that the women take pride in their cultural roots and ethnic affiliation. They enjoy sharing their heritage with other Canadians. They regard some unique elements of the culture as worth preserving and promoting among Canadians of non-Polish background, including, for instance, craftwork and some religious customs. It is also important for the women to share their knowledge of Polish history, especially pertaining to political and social developments which led to independence and autonomy. Most of the participants reported their involvement in some type of cultural promotion of Polish culture in Canada.

### **VOLUNTARY SOCIAL ACTIVITY**

*"I will always be involved in some capacity"* (Irena)

The majority of respondents reported their continuous involvement in social activities in their Polish ethnic and/or non-Polish communities. They have been volunteering for the mainstream organizations and institutions, such as hospitals, nursing homes, immigrant organizations, seniors' resource centres and museums. They were proud of their volunteering experience and emphasized willingness to continue their involvement for as long as possible.

In addition to the usual roles attributed to a community, the communities in Poland played additional roles. Family and community interdependence was a historic necessity in turbulent times of wars, uprisings, partitions, and occupations. It led to the development of networks that provided shelter, food and safety. Families who came to Canada after the War had experienced many losses of important networks of support, family members, extended family, and community.

After their arrival in Winnipeg, most of the respondents and their families sought contacts with the local Polish community and its organizations. Their active involvement

continues. The mentioned organizations included the Combatants Association, the *KUL* [*Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski* – Catholic University in Lublin], the Canadian-Polish Congress, the Polish-Canadian Women’s Federation, a dance ensemble, St. John Kanty’s Fraternal Aid Society, the Polish Scouting Organization, and the Holy Ghost Church Choir. Polish is spoken in most of these organizations. The Polish Veterans’ Association (SPK) started as a fraternal society and later took on the role of promoting Polish culture in Winnipeg. It has been hosting the Warsaw Folklorama Pavillion and is home to Iskry, a dance group which has won many international dance competitions and has toured Canada, the US, and Poland. It has been supportive of many youth activities. Some of the participants mentioned the great effort put into the construction and renovation of the Polish Combatants Association’s quarters. Julia recalled, “My husband ... after the surgery, participated in the construction of the buildings and we devoted our life to it. I have always worked for SPK.” Julia commented on her family’s commitment to attending events organized by the Polish community. She said, “We never miss them [Polish events]. We used to say that if we stay home, then dear God, it will be the end of our Polishness and that’s it.”

When Irena drifted away from involvement in the Polish community because of her studies, a non-Polish spouse, and building a career, she admitted missing the connection to her Polish roots. She described her return to the community:

I kind of got re-introduced to my Polish community ... and it developed and blossomed into totally complete involvement in the Polish community, but this time the entry was as an adult ... armed with experience and knowledge, with self-assertion, and a very critical eye on the community in general.

Irena decided to contribute to uplifting Polish community’s image. She saw the potential to revitalize the community:

I saw other communities flourishing, developing and being recognized as almost ... full partners in the multicultural mosaic and then the contributions they were making, the community in general, I felt that my community was kind of behind, that we couldn't put our best foot forward. Somehow we didn't have the best people that we had and I know that we had educated people that would represent the community. ... I wanted to shake things up.

For Irena, active involvement in the community had special meaning and made her aware of its importance for future generations. She said, "It reawakened some pride in my roots, I guess, because now I have kids and wanted them to be proud of who they are and where they come from. ... I focused on my marriage, my career, children, ... I don't know where I found the energy but I did." Julia has also found enough energy to share her time with children, career, and social activity outside the home. She shared, "You can imagine ...the household and children, and I had a job too. ... When there was something to be done in English or to give a lesson, other ladies could not have attended. Who was contacted? They passed on my phone number. I never refused." Now, at the age of 83, she stated that she had no plans to retire from social activities, "... I will always find something to do. I will always find some occupation" [*laughing*]. Irena also asserted that she would stay connected in spite of early retirement. She said, "I will always be involved in some capacity ... I know I'll always keep an eye on what's happening ..." Helena admitted that her life would be incomplete without involvement in voluntary organizations, "I would never even imagine not to be involved in a Polish organization, a group, or a church ... it was just a "must." She volunteers with seniors at the Polish Manor. She reported, "I go to the Polish Manor and I [name of activity] with the ladies there. ... It brings great enjoyment because I benefit from it and I feel that I am doing something for those ladies. When I finish ....they are delighted, so am I."

The majority of the respondents reported that they participated in an important cultural event in 2008, the performance of the Messiah. All women were proud of their contribution to the performance which took place in Holy Ghost Church on March 16, 2008. It was a joint effort of the Polish community, members of the Holy Ghost Church Choir, students of the University of Manitoba, and Canadian opera singers. The performance was met with great interest and applause from the Winnipeggers.

Several respondents have been involved in volunteering outside the Polish community. For Julia, who volunteers for one of the hospitals in Winnipeg, it is a source of satisfaction and social connection. She stated, "It all gives a lot [of satisfaction] because one always meets people, regardless of nationality, but they all are human beings." Ewa, 80, volunteers for seniors at a nursing home and [name of an organization] in Winnipeg. She is concerned about the future of the seniors she volunteers with. She admitted, "I am really worried because I do not leave here [behind] anything valuable. My biggest concern [are] my older people ..." She devotes much time to learning about their medical problems:

I can sit on the Internet for hours looking for anything connected with the ailments they have, ... like the Alzheimer is one, ... depression my friends have very often, a lot of cancer, breast cancer, ... everything interests me, everything connected with aging. And actually, I think it's a beautiful, like the way, I'm really happy with my life.

The women reported deriving genuine satisfaction from their involvement in voluntary social activities in the Polish community, as well as mainstream organizations and institutions. Volunteering provides them with meaningful and gratifying experience. The majority of respondents have remained active in the Polish community since the time of their arrival in Winnipeg.

## BELONGING TO TWO CULTURES

*“I feel very, very comfortable in either milieu” (Irena)*

*“Two nationalities in one person” (Julia)*

The participants of this study exhibit a strong sense of ethnic pride, but also emphasize their connection and devotion to Canada, the country they call home. Statements such as “I am proud of ...,” “I love,” “I’m integrated” “this is my home” “two nationalities in one person,” “comfortable in either milieu” indicate pride, satisfaction, and contentment with a sense of belonging to both cultural worlds. Jolanta, her children, and grandchildren are proud to have Polish roots:

I am always proud to be Polish and I noticed that my sons, too, and not only my sons, but also my grandchildren and although their mothers are English, they still feel very Polish. Alice [granddaughter] says, “I am proud I am of Polish descent” and Ray [grandson] the same. I will have to take her [Alice] to Poland ... She says, ‘That’s my dream.’

Julia and her family have also been proud Poles. She said, “They were both proud, my son as well as my daughter. They were not and are not ashamed of their background. Everywhere [they say] I am Polish, I am a Pole.”

Although the respondents report their strong connection to Polish roots, they clearly indicate that their home is here, in Canada. Home has a special meaning for displaced persons who were forced out of their homes and categorized as homeless. Irena’s journey to Poland reaffirmed her identity and notion of home:

I have felt for a very long time a Canadian, a Canadian with Polish background ... I’m deeply rooted in, this is my home here, this is the home of my children ... I don’t have that longing to go back and, which initially I did and my parents did, I think the first five years my parents always talked about, ‘Oh, we’ll save enough money and we’ll go back.’ ... I was there like a tourist rather than somebody who is going back home and I was seeing Poland through the eyes of an adult rather than the memories that I had as a child. As a child everything seems so big and tall when I went there, it wasn’t anymore.

Marta was impressed with the beauty of the old country, but expressed her devotion to Canada too. Her roots are here in Canada. She admitted, "I love Canada dearly. When I went to Poland, a beautiful country, really beautiful, you can go sightseeing, but I grew up here and my children were born here. I could not live in Poland because I would have to change my lifestyle completely and I have my roots here." Marta's mother also loved Canada, "She loved Canada. It reminded her of Poland, those little houses, white wooden fences. It is just like in Poland. She felt well here." She added, "So if someone comes here today and complains, I think, 'My God, stop it, you don't appreciate what you have, what this country is offering you.'" Canada attracted Anna and her family as a land of freedom and vast countryside. In occupied Poland travelling was very restricted, and coming to Canada was an eye-opener for people who could not enjoy freedom back in Poland. She stated, "We came because of the vastness of the country and because we did not have to carry any documents with us to identify ... I love the freedom ..." Helena appreciates the recognition and acceptance of diversity in Canada. She said, "There is no problem at all to be any nationality in Canada. And we have to take advantage of the fact that we can maintain our "Polishness," our nationality ... I have never been laughed at or teased about my background."

The women's two selves have gradually become coexistent. Irena is competent in both cultures and moves back and forth between the Canadian and Polish culture depending on the circumstances:

I wouldn't say I'm assimilated ... but integrated, where I feel very, very comfortable in either milieu. If I am in ... a Canadian setting, I don't feel like a second class citizen. I feel like I can hold on my own with the best of them and at the same time if I am in a Polish setting, I know that I can also hold my own with the best of them and I have. ...I am still very proud of my heritage, very proud of my roots. I never hide it, deny it. If anything I kind of wear it on my sleeve.

Ewa, now 80, who had obtained university level education in England and Canada and who had pursued a successful professional career, retained a profound “Polishness,” in spite of the 15 years spent in England and 48 years in Canada. Irena, who had a satisfying life and career admitted that her life was incomplete without involvement in the Polish community, “Yes, you can adapt, you can adjust to your new circumstances ... but there is always something in you that, that is nagging and that’s missing. I didn’t even realize at the time how deep the need was.” Individuals may differ in their adherence to cultural values. Ewa described herself as “kind of Polish inside” but “outside I made English friends.” She said she appreciated and admired some of the qualities that Polish people shared. She said, “It’s nice how Poles ... fall over each other, you know, the flowers you brought me, and this hospitality ... It’s something about Polish people I really admire ... I think we have some special qualities ... I think it never dies. ... I think people will be like that. It’s still there ...” Anna described her sense of belonging to two cultures and drawing on her cultural competence, depending on the circumstances:

I’m more of the Canadian of the mainstream. If I need something to do, I don’t look back as being Polish or some kind of the ethnic group. I go as the Canadian individual, ... because this is my home. This is the longest place that I stayed ... I feel total sense of belonging to a mainstream of the Canadian society ... [but] the Polish roots are there and they always will be, ... I am extremely proud of my heritage, of my grandparents and parents, grandparents I never met them, I never knew my grandparents ... I never knew the extended family because we were just yanked out of [the country], so we were by ourselves. But the roots are remaining there.

Julia identified herself as a Polish woman, “Everywhere [I say], “I am Polish. I am a Pole. My children ... are not ashamed to speak Polish.” Although her roots are now in Canada, it is important for her to contribute to the Polish community:

[I am] two nationalities in one person. I cannot describe it differently. ... I realize that here in Canada, I got ... my home, a job, bread, assurance. This was the most important thing and still is, and here we have settled, the family, and yet there is a



connection with Poland and I do my best to contribute to the “Polishness,” my continuous involvement in the organizations and I have always spent time in the museum, except for this year due to my husband’s poor health.

Some participants expressed a sense of belonging to Polish-Canadian as well as Canadian senior communities. Jolanta, 75, leads a very active lifestyle and is involved in many activities:

I always think of myself as of a Polish woman, especially now when I am a pensioner. I belong to a social club at the Holy Ghost Church where only Polish is spoken but I also belong to seniors, because I attend the line dancing, so I belong to the English speaking seniors, so I am here and there as well. But I rather feel Polish.

The women of this study identify with both the mainstream and the ethnic culture. They expressed a sense of belonging to both cultures. Poland was the land of their ancestors, but Canada was now home to them, their children, and grandchildren. Canada offered them a safe haven, a place to lead a peaceful life, to work, and raise children. Canada also allowed them to be proud of their roots, to preserve and promote their heritage.

### **Women’s old and new roles**

*“When I decide to have children, they would be my responsibility and then I would not rely on a man to support me” (Irena)*

The respondents’ traditional Polish values have been modified in the context of Canadian culture. Traditional roles as mothers and nurturers have been maintained, but new ones, such as breadwinners and professionals, acquired. They became independent, assertive, professionally and socially active women with entrepreneurial spirit. Long distances have separated many of them from their children and hampered close family ties. They have had to adjust to their children’s employment mobility, but have never fully accepted it. They enjoy their independence but long for a closer relationship with their grandchildren.

In Polish tradition, women were assigned traditional roles within the family realm. For Irena, being offered a prominent position in one of the Polish organizations came as a surprise. Traditionally, authority positions were predominantly offered to men:

It's a great honour and prestige and obviously, you know, highly regarded position in the community ... I thought, "Who, me? Little Irena? ... It was male dominated and it was mostly men well into their 60s and 70s. At that time I guess I was in my mid thirties, so I felt like a child and I guess they also saw me as a child that they could probably manipulate ... The previous presidents were speaking with broken heavy accent English and ... if you can't speak the language of the country, you're not anybody I need to reckon with, but if you meet an MP or an MLA and you are able to dialogue with them on their level about issues that are confronting the society in general ... it's a totally different conversation that you're having.

Independence has guided the participants of this study in their choice of living arrangements. None of the eight interviewed women live with their children or provide regular support to the younger generation other than on a casual basis. Four women are married and live with their husbands. The three widowed women and one single woman all live independently. All of the participants expressed a preference to remain independent as long as possible and not to live with their children. Jolanta's grandson used to live in his grandmother's house:

My grandson lived here for a year. I did not like it because he wanted to return home at 1, 2 or 3 am, I did not sleep. So I told him, 'Jim, you've got to be on your own. I can't stand this, I cannot deal with this. The way you live, you have to be on your own two feet.' And he had to move out.

However, the women's independence does not imply detachment. Family bonds have been maintained, but the women regretted that family ties were not as tightly-knit as in the past, due to factors such as their children's employment mobility. Marta recalled her husband's reaction to their last son's departure. She said, "I and my husband could not get over it. When my last son was leaving Winnipeg, my husband says, 'How on earth could that have happened? We have nobody here.' She commented, 'And it is a little sad, I think.

Families are separated. I love my children so much and my grandchildren, I have eight of them, but I do not see them. ... There is absolutely no bond. I have bonded with other people's kids more, really. ... Separation breaks the bonds.'

In terms of economic status, the women of this study are more affluent than their mothers were. Seven out of the eight participants own their homes. They have secured additional assets for their golden age. Their mothers who came to Canada as adult women had no language skills and therefore their choice of training and employment was limited to jobs which provided minimum pensions. The majority of participants of this study, for whom English language was not a barrier, had better access to education and training. They were able to earn substantial incomes. Their role was no longer limited to the traditional care of home and children. They all found their niche in the labour market. They maintained the traditional role as guardians of family customs and values and became involved in the promotion of Polish culture among other non-Polish Canadians.

The women's paid work most likely increased their power and independence at home and altered the relationships with their husbands. The women of this study have often taken over the role as breadwinner if circumstances created a need for such shift in roles. Julia started working soon after arriving in Winnipeg. She recalled, "I was never afraid of anything, faced challenges. As soon as I came here, I said right away, 'I have to look for a job.' My parents were afraid to let me go on my own but I was old enough. 'No you won't go to work,' and ... I say, 'Who will feed us? We have to earn a living.'" Later, already married, Julia quickly obtained a driver's license to be able to assist her family. She reported, "I learned to drive and when my husband could not, it was me who drove, to church, drive children to school or to the Polish language classes."

Some Polish men who came to Canada postwar still lived with diseases incurred during the War or exile. Therefore, the women took over the breadwinner role while their husbands recuperated. When Julia's husband required a six-month recovery period, she managed to face the challenge. She recalled, "Because my husband said he would return to work and I said, 'No, you cannot go to work because,' he was told at least 6 months until he was allowed to walk but could not bend ... So I say, 'You have to keep it that way and I will do the rest.'"

Irena came to Canada at the age of 13. After finishing high school, she and her sister were encouraged by their parents to obtain university education. Irena obtained a diploma in education and decided to pursue a career in teaching before fulfilling her role as a mother.

My sister and I both have completed university and I went into education and got my second degree, Bachelor of Education as well. I also recognized the fact that I would ensure my own financial independence ... When I decide to have children, they would be my responsibility and then I would not rely on a man to support me whether the marriage ... broke down due to illness or divorce or death ... Education ... would provide me with a decent paying job and ... not the basic, minimum wage.

While she was obtaining her degree and later pursuing a career, her friends were facing different challenges:

I was in university. Most of my friends were married, having babies. That was exciting but I never envied them, I was happy with my chosen path. ... When I think back to the friends that I have had and how many went on to the university, probably can count them all, say, out of thirty there is maybe five that went on to post secondary education.

Anna had to reconcile her professional and family duties. She recalled, "They [the employers] really liked my work ... but at least one of us [Anna or her husband] was always with the child because I felt that I needed to stay home to be with my daughter because she was growing faster ..." For Teresa, fulfilling her role as a mother always remained a priority.

She said, "I would only wish the best for my children and I only live for them because I wanted to have children so much, ever since I was young."

The women's independence and sense of autonomy led to their choice of an independent living arrangement. Polish children are socialized to respect elders and many take on the responsibility of caring for their parents when they grow old. In the past it was not unusual for a three generation family to live in one house. Irena commented on the general tendency in the living arrangements of Polish seniors in Winnipeg:

I would say probably 90% of senior citizens ... are living outside, not with their kids.... A lot of them are living in senior homes, whether it is the Polish Manor or another one, but they are living on their own. In those settings they are lucky, if the kids are around to help them out.

The traditional obligation to elder parents has been modified. The families have adopted different forms of fulfilling filial duties. Children take on some of the responsibilities connected with care. Irena and her sister rotate to care for their mother, who lives independently. She said, "I have taken over her medical needs. I take her for her doctor's appointments, I monitor her medication, make sure that ... prescriptions are renewed ..."

Most women maintained their roles as wives, mothers, and carriers of culture. They have added new roles of breadwinners and professionals, social activists, and now independent grandmothers. In a society which values achievement, self-sufficiency, and independence, their expectations and attitudes have been modified or changed due to economic reasons and acculturation. They maintain close family ties, but prefer to live independently.

### **Independence and connectedness to be continued**

*“I hope I will live long without needing any help from anybody” (Marta)*

All the women stated a desire to remain independent but still maintain their close connections to families, friends and communities. An 83-year-old participant of this study, Julia, said she did not identify with old age at all. She said, “And one does not think, ‘You are old.’ I say, ‘Who said I was old? I do not have it written on my back or my forehead that I am old.’ I say, ‘I look as I feel.’” For 66-year-old Helena, aging did not appear to be a significant concern either. Her response was, “I hate to disappoint you but I have no problem with it.” However, she admitted that in case of serious disability, her lifestyle would have to change:

If suddenly I have a stroke or my husband, everything will change. If we cannot live at home on our own but have to either move somewhere to a senior or nursing home ... but we do not have financial worries and thank God we are healthy ... I know that I can count on my children, I know, I am 100% certain that they would do everything if there was a need. We have a very close relationship with them.

The assumption that traditional Polish values regarding the parent-child relationship in which strong family ties create interdependency, may no longer be viable resources for support. All of the participants expressed a preference to live alone rather than face cultural conflicts and difficulties in generational adjustments necessary in families with two or three generations living together. Jolanta separated her problems from her children’s. She said, “Now they have problems, but those are not my problems.” Marta, 75, preferred to maintain her independence rather than be a burden to her children who “have their own lives.” She continued:

I am very independent. I have always been independent. And I hope I will live long without needing any help from anybody. ... They have their own lives and I would not like to make it more difficult for my children. This is a country, this is such a wonderful country, Canada. I don’t have to be dependent on my children.

She added:

I have to mention to you that I have wonderful neighbours. They are [like] my children ... Such good people. If anything happens to me or I need anything, if she does not see me for a few days, she calls me. ... I really am a blessed woman. I have such good people around me. I always meet extraordinary people and I stick to them like a leech and I am happy.

Ewa had never been married and had maintained independence all her life. She admitted feeling lonely at holiday times. She preferred to visit her Polish friends who were spread all over Canada or spend the holidays with seniors rather than stay at home. She said, "I like to visit seniors and I like to associate with seniors and this [name of an organization] people then I feel like adopted and ... I'm never here [at home]." Ewa also remarked about weakening family bonds nowadays:

I do find sad, the old age, specially, if people ... if people are married and have wonderful husband and wonderful fifty, sixty years after the wedding, if the children are elsewhere, having the families, because basically, all those people I'm dealing with now, that's a senior's home, and they do have children but they are not there, or they are not for them or they have families somewhere, so that's the sad thing.

Most of the participants were reluctant to speak about aging, health problems, and future issues. However, Ewa had been making arrangements in preparation for her "last chapter" for some time:

During the time I retired, in 20 years, I visited every single friend, ... from Montreal to Ottawa, to Niagara Falls, to Vancouver. It's kind of say good-bye. I may, you never know, at 80 ... When I was 79, 78, 79, I never thought about it, but when I hit this 80 this year I am very conscious that I need to be tidy enough and have everything in place like the will and ... where the things go. And I went to the doctor.

She had given away her possessions and limited her belongings to valuable personal items:

I took a great number of photographs but I do not have a single picture, I sent them, gave them away, because ... as the years go by, when I die it will not mean anything to any Canadian nor an English person. ... I had probably about ... hundreds of dollars worth of the carvings, something maybe over a hundred and I don't have a single one. ... All my photography ... three big, fat albums of photographs which

were published, everything was given to the Manitoba Cancer Care. Every single one is either in the museum or back again to the settlements I got them from.

She stated that she wished to be assisted only by medical staff during her final moments. She said, "I don't have anybody close. People ... want to hold hands and whatever. There is nobody ... The people I really loved and who loved me are not here. I don't want anybody to hold my hand but ... let the hospital staff do whatever they need." She also expressed a concern whether her will resolutions would be carried out. She said, "I am concerned. It's a big unknown. If the people will do what is in the will because basically there are two friends I was teaching with, Tina. We have a joint account. She has the power of attorney and the executor of my will is in her hands ..."

The respondents stated their desire to maintain their independence as long as possible. Some were uncomfortable with the topic of aging, but others were open as to preparation for their "last chapter." They clearly expressed a preference of living independently, but also emphasized the significance of close ties with their family, friends, communities, and other seniors.

#### **Use of social services considered stigmatizing**

*"I do not expect or need anything"* (Julia)

The ability to access resources lies in the skills and behaviour toward external resources developed during socialization in the cultural context. Obtaining resources in the form of social services and from helping professions may be stigmatizing for the Poles. The women contended that they perceived themselves as independent and they were proud to have maintained independence against all odds through war, displacement and exile experience, as well as adjustment to a new culture. They stated that it was important for them to maintain a self-sufficient lifestyle for as long as possible. Marta explained her disapproval



of people taking advantage of the welfare system available in Canada. She said, "People do not appreciate it. They come here and this is wrong and that, and they're on welfare, and it is still not enough. I don't understand it." Anna was proud of the fact that she had never used the welfare system. She stated, "I was not waiting for any handouts from anybody. We had to earn ... and I was proud of it." Marta expressed trust in the Canadian system which would be available to meet her needs as a senior. She said confidently, "I know that this country will take care of me, I hope, that when I reach the age when I will need care, that it will be accessible for me. I do not think about it and I am not worried about it."

The Canadian Polish Manor is a subsidized residence for seniors 55 and over with lower pensions. Many of the residents have no knowledge of English. Irena remarked on the reluctance of Polish seniors to access social services and participate in activities organized at the Canadian Polish Manor:

We have ESL classes for seniors, free, twice a week, in the area where a lot of them live that they could just walk over there and take part. No interest. We try to start something going at the Polish Manor, educational lectures on whatever topics ... I think part of it is the, the socio-educational background of people. ... Their standard of living and their comfort level with accessing various government programs and such, is not there. They sort of feel that they're more independent in terms, 'I have what I need' and they're not aspiring to get more.

Helena confirmed the lack of interest in sports activities among the residents. She stated, "They have a library there and a bingo once or twice a week. Right now they can participate in exercise classes. If we take into account the fact that there are about 168 apartments and only 16 ladies come by taking turns. There is little interest in it." Jolanta, 75, felt the option of moving to the Canadian Polish Manor as unacceptable:

I would never go to the Polish Manor. God help me. People there live only on their pension. I have some, I have secured my old age. I worked all the time. I paid into the RIF [Registered Retirement Income Plan]. I take money from RIF and I have an

advisor. Mind you, I lead a decent life, not from one pension to the next, like I see that my sister does.

Advanced age may increase the risk of dependence and the need for social assistance. However, the participants of this study who claim to be in good health express no need for assistance at least for the time being. Julia, now 83, stated that she and her husband had maintained an active lifestyle so far and they would require appropriate assistance only in case of a disability. She said, "I do not expect or need anything unless I cannot walk anymore or something. Then I'll need help. But otherwise, I am still walking, I still participate in meetings, I still hold some positions, and for the time being, I and my husband do not need anybody." Ewa, now 80, responded similarly:

I never really needed anybody very much ... The hospital doesn't suit me and if somebody would like to help me I really will resist. I will be very difficult, I will not be rude ... I really never wanted any extensive things from the hospital or doctors ... I will be avoiding hospitals as long as I could possibly, because of the hygiene ...

Although Irena, like most of the respondents, does not need to be concerned with her economic future, she commented on her parents' generation and their approach towards securing the golden years. Her parents came to Canada after the war as immigrants and relied totally on the state's assurance to provide financial security to seniors:

These are people who simply are living off their pensions. Their generation did not think about putting money away for the golden years. ... When I tried to talk about it with my parents, my dad says, "Oh, it will be provided." ... My Dad had an opportunity to have a company pension and he opted out not to take it because he would have to pay into it.

She added, "With my pension and the government pensions and my husband when he retires we will be able to maintain our standard of living and the RRSPs that we have will provide for our two, three months in the sun in the wintertime ..." Helena and her husband also planned their future as seniors, "We, about 20 years ago, first we bought some land ... we

sold the land and I, in fact, persuaded him to buy an apartment block ... It pays itself back and how can you not take advantage of it?" However, not everyone's future was secured. When Anna's husband died, she had to manage on her own and decided to continue working longer than she had initially planned. She admitted, "When I took an early retirement, I was spending more than I was earning. ... I said, "Gee, I have to go back to work because I just need the money."

Most of the participants of this study have secured their future as seniors. There is some reluctance to discussing their potential needs as seniors due to the perceived stigmatizing nature of social services. They associate social services with financial subsidies rather than with services such as home care, counselling or transportation. There appears to be limited knowledge of available forms of social services.

#### **Need for affordable senior housing as a way to maintain independence and autonomy**

*"We don't need big. We need somewhere to put our heads down"* (Anna)

Having access to appropriate housing in order to maintain independence and autonomy appears to be the concern for several women. They wish to remain in their own houses or seniors' housing arrangements. Jolanta viewed the option of living with her sons' families in the future as unacceptable. She said, "I do not see myself living with either of my sons. It is out of question. I hope that as long as I can, I will live here because I had waited for this house, I feel very well here and I'd like to change many things, as we say, to upgrade. I'd like to change the windows." A personal care home placement is a frightening prospect for her as well. She exclaimed, "God save me from it! I already told the boys, 'God save me, if I ever lose, if I am unable to think, you have to do something to prevent sending me there [a personal care home].'" Anna stated that people who came to Canada after the War may

have a sense of accomplishment. In the past they successfully met the challenges of difficult times. They managed to educate their children. Affordable housing would improve their lives as seniors. Anna said:

As the senior, I would love to see some government involvement in building of the facilities ... The people who came in that era, in the 50s, we went through very, very difficult times. We managed very well. We educated our children, I don't know whether there is a family that does not have a university graduate. When there was no ... minimum wage and ... no medicare ... but the housing would be the utmost important, affordable, because we don't need big. We need somewhere to put our head down in a bed, something comfortable.

According to the respondents, the Canadian Polish Manor, a subsidized apartment building for seniors lacks proper facilities and caters to the needs of low-income seniors. Marta emphasized a need for availability of sports and leisure facilities for seniors:

It is not a place for everyone as it is built so poorly, not even a small balcony. In Lions Place ... they have everything there, trips organized. They have their own canteen, although Polish Manor also has a canteen. ... For me, ... it is extremely important to have a place where one could exercise, for example, a treadmill or bicycles or something like that, access to a swimming pool which they [the residents of the Canadian Polish Manor] don't have.

She had specific recommendations regarding sports and leisure facilities that should be available to seniors in such living arrangements:

If I had a choice, I would look for a place where I could use such [facilities]. It is necessary for a human being, especially an older person, who should engage in some kind of exercise, do something, even get into warm water and get a massage, right? It is very important. ... I would even prefer to pay more. It would not require much funding in order to equip such a place. ... It would be more expensive to transport these people to another location where they would have access to it. There are buildings that are being built now that are designed for 55 and over. ... A person is transferred from the 55 and over, when one is still young and independent enough to care for herself, but as one ages one is moved to a different building with more care if she cannot manage on her own.

For Anna, the two factors of primary importance regarding future living arrangements were safety and the proximity of people who shared the same values. She commented, "Safe, ...

the same kind of middle class like us, the same values ... whether there will be mostly Anglo-Saxons or any other [nationality] Polish, or Germans or Jews, or whoever. It would not bother me, provided that I'm safe."

Generally, the respondents' main concern as seniors is access to affordable housing. Safe location, access to sports and leisure facilities, and an environment of people sharing the same values were mentioned as important factors which would enhance the quality of living.

### **THE ESSENCE: A SENSE OF MISSION**

I have attempted to capture the "hidden" meaning or the essence behind the themes that emerged in the study. An essential meaning to the phenomenon makes the phenomenon what it is. The description must be "thick" enough in order for the essence to be found. The identified themes represent the manifestation of what makes this experience what it is and without it, it is a different phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

In my study, the essence appears to be a sense of mission. Four generations of Poles have been involved in a cultural mission: the parents or mothers who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants, their daughters who were the participants of this study, and their children and grandchildren born in Canada. The mission continues.

Mostwin (1979) describes ethnic elders' longing to leave a part of the inner self behind, as expressed in the famous statement made by the Roman poet, Quintus Horatius Flaccus, in his ode "Non omnis moriar" [I shall not wholly die]. Cultural retention is part of the women's mission, a mission to maintain identity as women of Polish descent who are interwoven into the Canadian cultural mosaic. The values and traditions transmitted to their children and grandchildren, as well as other Canadians of non-Polish background, is a cultural message they will leave behind. This message, along with other ethnic groups'

legacies, will enrich the multicultural society of Canada, the country that so many immigrants and refugees, including the participants of this study, now call home. Thoreau's words "All the past is here" aptly capture the connection between the past and present, the past cultural legacy of many Polish generations, and the present amalgamation of two different cultures. The women of my study found a way to integrate successfully into the Canadian society without losing their Polish cultural heritage, to combine the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, and the national and the multicultural.

### **Limitations of the study**

I have identified some of the limitations of this research, although others I may not be aware of. My intention was to minimize them as much as possible, my research may be impacted by the following factors:

- Due to a small sample, no generalizations to all Polish refugees in Canada or Manitoba can be made. Although the themes identified in this study were unique to the lifeworlds of its participants, other people may find similarities to their own experiences, especially immigrants and refugees living in Canada. Some findings of this study were supported by the published literature. The purpose of the use of hermeneutic phenomenology is to gain deeper understanding of the quality of experience rather than hypothesize about generalizations. "The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 22).
- Participants identified by the gatekeepers may have been more active in the Polish community. Those who may be isolated and need the support of social services may not have been identified.

- Examination of the existing literature on the topic at the very outset, prior to commencing data collection as part of the proposal literature review, may have developed some preconceived ideas on the topic, making it more difficult to suspend my interpretive understanding. A researcher should “address the phenomenological meaning of phenomenon on one’s own first” (Ibid., p. 76).
- My knowledge of the culture and history of Poland, as well as commonalities that I share with the participants may have had some impact on the research process. The researcher creates meaning and interpretation through his or her own experiences which has influence on every aspect of the research process from conception to interpretation (Coffey, 1999, cited in Trask & Marotz-Baden, 2007). I attempted to fully understand, interpret, and present the women’s experiences and at the same time maintain awareness of my influence on the research process.
- I realize that my description can never be “full” and “final.” I have attempted to “accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld,” but I have to “remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal... full or final descriptions are unattainable” (van Manen, 1990, p. 18).

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

Findings from qualitative interviews conducted with eight Polish women who came to Canada between 1945 and 1960 as displaced persons or immigrants were presented in Chapter 4. Their experience of cultural retention was summarized in the form of a thick description which was organized into thematic units. Finally, an attempt was made to capture the essence of the women's experience.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings in reference to available literature related to the topic. The aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the Polish culture and cultural retention among aging Polish women in order to provide culturally relevant services to this population and possibly to members of other ethnic groups.

The women maintained elements of their heritage culture, but also managed to integrate into the Canadian society. The culture of origin served as a reservoir of strengths and resources which helped the women adapt to a different culture and may now help to meet the challenges of aging. Understanding the extent of cultural retention and acculturation may inform health and social services providers in addressing their needs as seniors.

### **ADAPTATION TO CULTURE AND AGING**

#### **Adaptation and the role of resilience**

Enduring a traumatic past and having a successful adaptation to a new culture suggests the respondents' resilience. Both living and aging in a different culture require adaptation. Adaptation refers to a process which takes place when an individual or groups respond to environmental demands (Berry, 2003). Some people are more capable of facing challenges than others. Some emerge even stronger when challenged by adversity. However,



“resilience does not occur in spite of adversity, but because of it” (Walsh, 1998, cited in Waller, 2001, p. 290).

A combination of a historic legacy of a struggle of survival and national identity passed on from one Polish generation to another, personal qualities, and being thrust into traumatic life experiences at a young age have equipped the participants of this study with extraordinary coping skills, perseverance, endurance, and tenacity. As children, adolescents or young women, they witnessed their parents,’ or mothers’ struggle to survive the war, deportations, exile, and life in displaced persons camps, or efforts to escape persecution from the hands of a political regime. Maintaining national identity was part of the struggle. The findings point to a sense of survival and the importance of passing it on to their children and grandchildren.

Resiliency is defined by Masten, Garmezy, Tellegren, Pellegrini, Larkin, & Larsen (1988) as the ability to recover from adversity and restore stability and functioning. Garmezy (1993, cited in Phan, 2006) defined it as “the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning, or competence despite high-risk status, chronic stress, or followed prolonged or severe trauma” (p. 428). Some research suggests that resilience is a response to a specific traumatic event, while others define it as stable coping style and the ability to maintain competence and coherence across the life span (Masten, 1994). For example, resilient individuals can manage daily stress by relying on supportive relationships (Ibid.).

Although resilience is often discussed in terms of personal characteristics, the ecosystemic perspective allows us to place personal experiences within a wider social context of the person. Gilgun (1999, cited in Hildon, Smith, Netuveli & Blane, 2008) argues that resilient people who have been exposed to multiple adverse experiences during their lives

develop a set of skills useful in combating adversities. For example, Vietnamese parents define their resilience as the sacrifice and the previous generations' struggle for survival and the futures of their children (Phan, 2006). Many Nazi Holocaust survivors have shown resilience in reconstructing their lives "out of the ashes of the past" (Greene & Graham, 2009).

## **ADAPTATION TO A NEW CULTURE**

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation is a complicated process of adaptation to a different culture. The Polish women's acculturation in Canada was largely influenced by factors such as age at the time of arrival, the status of a refugee, involvement in mainstream education and labour, in some cases, intermarriage, and the role of parents or mothers as cultural carriers. Resilience has also played an important role in successful adaptation to the host culture.

According to the classical definition, acculturation "comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). Immigrants or refugees face the challenges of cultural adaptation which allow them to function in their ethnic groups as well as the mainstream society. *Acculturation* is a process which involves adaptation to the mainstream culture, while *enculturation* is a process of adaptation to the ethnic culture (Knight, Jacobson, Gonzalez, Roosa & Saenz, 2009). Depending on the developmental stage of the individual, socialization produces changes in knowledge, behaviours, values, and beliefs which become internalized and form ethnic and mainstream identities including "the degree to which the individual perceives herself or himself as a member of an ethnic group and/or majority" (p.

11). During adolescence and young adulthood, changes of social behaviours are manifested through self-chosen preferences (e.g. speaking native language or English, interacting with ethnic or mainstream individuals) and values (e.g. familism) (Ibid.).

Berry (1997) distinguishes four types of adaptation or acculturation strategies involved in psychological acculturation:

When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the *Assimilation* strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the *Separation* alternative is defined. When there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups, *Integration* is the option; here, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination) then *Marginalization* is defined (p. 9).

Acculturation is a combination of a sociocultural and psychological adaptation.

Psychological adaptation involves a sense of identity, good mental health, and a sense of achievement and well-being in a cultural context, whereas sociocultural adaptation refers to the ability to function in areas such as family life, work and school (Berry, 1997).

Psychological adjustment may be treated as one of the facets of the overall sociocultural adaptation and may involve specific coping strategies such as task orientation (Berry, 1997).

Individuals vary in the extent to which they adapt depending on multiple factors existing prior to acculturation and during the process. Factors which may exist prior to the process of acculturation include demographic and social characteristics such as developmental stage of the individual (Phinney, 1990), gender, education, personal qualities, cultural distance, including differences between the culture of origin and the host culture, and the reason for migration (Berry, 1997). Factors which may play a significant role during the

process of acculturation include social support, a task-oriented coping style, willingness to accommodate (positive attitudes, lack of prejudice and discrimination), involvement in both cultural communities, and having a flexible personality (Ibid.). Most studies indicate that the key to successful adaptation lies in the existence of supportive relationships in both cultures (Ibid.).

Acculturation leads to adaptive outcomes. The motivation to adapt among the second wave of Poles who came to Canada after the war was stronger than in the case of other waves of Polish immigrants and refugees (Turek, 1967). They had arrived with their baggage of war, displacement, and exile experiences. The term “displaced person” carried a pejorative meaning for people who were labelled that way. They suffered multiple losses: their homes, family members, friends, and communities. Their homes and possessions in Poland had been confiscated. The perception of being “homeless” had a great impact on their sense of self-perception and self-esteem. Canada, the country they now refer to as their home, offered a precious asset, a safe environment that all refugees and displaced persons dream of, a place where they could lead normal lives, a place free of trauma and oppression. Here, their status changed; they were not “homeless” or “displaced” anymore. ” A “home” has a symbolic meaning for one’s place in the world; it is “the space where we could all belong ... strengthened by what we take from those who have come before us, creating a safe haven for those who are with us in our time, and insuring that we leave a safe space for our children and all those who will come after us” (McGoldrick, 1998, p. 216). This safe space was an additional motivation for integration into the new society. The meaning of home changes over time, place, and the life cycle (Heinonen & Harvey, 2001).

The values instilled in early childhood have been constantly renegotiated and reinterpreted. The evolving nature of ethnic culture results in constant changes and alterations of its meanings. Findings show that some of the traditional Polish values and beliefs, which the participants and their parents had brought from the old country, have been modified when confronted with the mainstream cultural values and alternative models of family relationships. There was further the impact of formal education, employment, media, and peer group pressure to conform to norms existing in Canadian culture. They faced a typical dilemma whether to pass on the culture of origin to their Canadian-born children or to allow them to become fully integrated into the dominant culture in order to have better lives.

Isajiw (1990) argues that one of the ways to become integrated into a society is by developing a new identity. A successful immigrant or refugee ultimately manages to synthesize two cultures and adapt to a new environment without losing his or her self. Integration “involves the selective adoption of new behaviours from the larger society and retention of valued features of one’s heritage culture (Berry, 2003, p. 31). New behaviours and inclinations are acquired through growth and development. Mostwin (1985) suggests that the “third value” is created as a result of the synthesis of two cultures.

### **Integration and development of dual identity**

Most respondents expressed a sense of belonging to both cultures and feeling “very comfortable in either milieu.” Although they strongly identify with their culture of origin, maintain contacts with Poland, and pass on the language, traditions, and religion to their children and grandchildren, they refer to Canada as their home. These women are citizens of both cultures.

Integration is the most optimal and successful type of acculturation strategy which requires a social context which recognizes and accepts cultural diversity. The host society has to create favourable conditions to allow refugees and immigrants integrate into the society. An open and inclusive orientation allows refugees and immigrants to integrate. Some of the conditions include: presence of “multicultural ideology” and “mutual willingness to change” (Berry, 1997, p. 29), lower level of prejudice, positive attitudes among cultural groups, and a sense of belonging to the whole society manifested by all groups (Kalin & Berry, in press, cited in Berry, 1997). Canada’s national multiculturalism law allows freedom of choice in one’s extent of acculturation and supports cultural retention of valued ethnic features. Integration “requires nondominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, and at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt its national institutions (e.g. education, health, labour) to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society” (Berry, 2003, p. 29).

Acculturating individuals are labelled as “ethnics” and often experience discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization. A person belonging to a marginalized group is:

blocked from opportunities to self-development, is excluded from full participation in society, does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned a second-class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category. (Mullaly, 2002, p. 28)

However, the extent to which discrimination is perceived depends on personal traits such as self-esteem (Phinney, Santos & Madden, 1996, cited in Phinney, 1996).

Bicultural competency involves a process of evaluation and integration of positive qualities of the culture of origin and the dominant culture (Lum, 1995; Harris, 1998). One’s

acculturative status may vary from situation to situation. The bicultural self may be used according to the situation; for example, an individualized self may be applied to work related situations or politics, while the familial self may be reserved for family relationships or the ethnic community (Rolland, 1988, cited in Rolland, 1994; Berry, 1997). Greek, Italian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents reported that their feelings of being ethnic varied depending on the situation, as well as the people they interacted with (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985).

Findings of this study suggest that several factors have played a significant role in the process of developing cultural duality: age at the time of arrival in Canada, the cause of migration and one's status as refugee, in some cases intermarriage, the role of parents, especially mothers in maintaining their children's bonding to the culture of origin, and participation in mainstream education and labour. The respondents came to Canada as children, adolescents, or young women. The initial socialization of the participants to the Polish culture was carried out by their parents, school, and peer groups in Poland. For the majority of women, this important stage of life occurred in unique circumstances - the War and exile. In Canada, those women who entered the Canadian school system were subjected to the influence of teachers, peers, and social groups outside the family and ethnic community, and developed a more profound mainstream social identity. Those who arrived as young adults with families had to face challenges common to people who are limited in their opportunities due to the lack of language competency and/or education. Their priority was to support the family and educate their children. Therefore, the generation of the participants of this study differs considerably in many respects from their parents' generation.

Identity and a sense of belonging is a dynamic and multi-dimensional process which is never complete, a continuous dialogue between the individual and his or her environment (Hall, 1990). Successful integration is often attributed to bicultural competence involving a “wide behavioural and attitudinal repertoire that facilitates successful negotiations in both cultures” (Cheung-Bluden & Juang, 2008, p. 22).

## **CULTURAL RETENTION**

Samovar & Porter (2004) list the elements of culture which distinguish one culture from another and includes history, religion, values, social organization, and language. Cultural retention involves the continuation of values, beliefs, and behaviour patterns, as well as customs and traditions, celebration of traditional holidays, cooking traditional food, participation in ethnic organizations, events, and church activities, collecting ethnic artifacts, maintaining connection with the country of origin, and contacts with relatives and friends in the old country. Language is an essential tool for the transmission of culture.

The participants of my study, Polish women who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants between 1945 and 1960, demonstrated having retained many elements of Polish culture and have promoted this culture to other Canadians. Their cultural retention can only be understood within the context of their migration experience and also the historic and cultural heritage of their country of origin, Poland, and its long history of struggle for survival and maintenance of national identity, a legacy that was passed on from one generation to the next.

The women’s cultural retention was manifested by their retention of language and their strong commitment to the Roman Catholic religion. They emphasized their attachment to their country of origin and ancestors with pride, satisfaction, and contentment. Their



connection to their ethnic community varied from deep involvement to none and depended on individual circumstances and preferences. Some participants maintained a strong connection to the Polish culture without direct involvement in the ethnic community. Strong ethnic identity may be maintained even when there is limited direct cultural involvement. This has been termed as symbolic ethnicity or ethnic loyalty (Phinney, 1990).

Adherence to Polish customs, traditions, food, and cooking was described as rather limited to holidays and traditional celebrations held in ethnic organizations. All participants retained the Polish language and expressed a concern in passing it on to their children and grandchildren. Most women spoke fluent Polish and some had a slight English accent. The use of the Polish language at home depended on the spouse's cultural background. Polish was spoken to spouses of Polish background and/or to children. Involvement in the ethnic community, contact with the Polish language through media, TV, radio, books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as visits to Poland and maintaining connection to their families back in the old country, contributed to the retention of language. Language retention enhances bonding with the ethnic community (Pigott & Kalbach, 2005). Some researchers suggest that the ability to speak an ethnic language is a form of ethnic identity retention and argue that there is a strong link between linguistic acculturation and a decrease in ethnic identification (Kalbach & Kalbach, 1999, cited in Pigott & Kalbach, 2005). The participants' children attended Polish parochial schools and participated in ethnic community events. The majority of women indicated that they had encouraged their children to visit the country of their ancestors which was an important part of their cultural mission as Polish mothers. Their visits to Poland also contributed to their retention of language.

Traditional values and beliefs were subjected to changes and modifications due to economic reasons and acculturation. Some family roles and expectations were modified in order to adapt to the Canadian context. The women took on new roles, most obtained education or vocational training, entered the workforce, and maintained active involvement in their communities, ethnic or/and mainstream. Reitz (1980) and Sandberg (1974) claim that the higher the education and socio-economic status, the more extensive the assimilation of members of ethnic groups. Findings of this study do not support such an assumption.

The participants emphasized the significance of passing on language, religion, customs, and traditions to their children. Preservation of culture depends largely on the role of parents as cultural carriers. In a study of the role of parents in the maintenance of cultural behaviours of second generation Vietnamese, Killian and Hegtvedt (2003) point to an increased likelihood of adult children to retain cultural behaviours if their parents model such behaviours and encourage involvement with co-ethnics. Children's willingness to accept the parental values and adherence to these values depends on the quality of the parent-child relationship (Cheung-Bliden & Juang, 2008). The majority of the participants of this study emphasized the role of their mothers in passing on the cultural legacy to the next generation. Cultural retention is usually attributed to mothers, who are responsible for upholding traditions that socialize their children to maintain cultural behaviours (Alba, 1990; Killian & Hegtvedt, 2003).

### **Connection to the past and the old country**

The findings point to the women's sense of belonging to their traumatic past and the country of origin. Deportations, displacement, and exile broke these women's family and community bonds. Exile is a rupture of personal history, an involuntary process of

transplantation that is followed by a period of mourning for the loss of social belonging, experienced by the exiled as a conflict between the bond with the country of origin and the need to integrate into the host society (Munoz, 1980, cited in Majodina, 1989).

The women emphasized their cherished connection with their country of origin and their ancestors. Although frequency of visits to Poland varied according to the family's economic situation, all participants returned to their country of origin and encouraged their children and grandchildren to do so. Visits to Poland allowed the participants to connect or reconnect with their Polish roots, meet family members they had never met before, travel to places of historic and religious significance, visit family graves, and search for lost relatives, friends, and neighbours. Most participants were accompanied by their parents or children on their visits to Poland. Sharing the experience of a visit with children was an opportunity to help them develop a sense of pride in their ancestors and the old country. Some participants remarked about the differences between the image of Poland they and their parents retained over the years and the present state. For some women, every visit to Poland was an emotional experience triggering recollections of past experiences, places, and people. Others reported to have perceived the old country from the perspective of tourists admiring its beauty but at the same time realizing a sense of belonging to Canada, the country in which they invested their youth, raised children, and pursued careers, the country they call home.

### **The role of religion**

The importance of religion was emphasized in all the interviews numerous times. Religion was mentioned as an important source of emotional support by these women whose lives had consisted of many traumatic experiences and constantly required adaptations.

The respondents reported their strong connection to faith and continuous involvement in the church community. Most of the women belonged to the church choir and participated in performances held within the community, as well as large musical undertakings such as the Messiah, an important cultural event in 2008 which took place in Holy Ghost Church on March 16, 2008. The participants' children attended Saturday parochial schools and many of them completed a seven-year program at the primary school level. The children often joined their mothers on visits to Poland which included Catholic places of worship. The women stressed their and their mother's role in passing the faith on to their children.

Religion has always been an integral part of Poles' identity (Folwarski & Marganoff, 1996). Traditionally, the majority of Polish families have maintained close contact with the Roman Catholic Church and priests were considered an important authority for the family. The Roman Catholic Church "embodies the most ancient and the most exalted ideals of traditional Polish life across the centuries" (Davies, 1982, p. 225). The Roman Catholic worldview has merged with patriarchal society, creating an idealized symbol of *Matka Polka* [the Polish Mother], the Holy Mother of Poland modelled on the Mother of Jesus. Women were assigned the task of caring for the family according to Christian values. A proper Polish upbringing meant "discipline, respect for the authority of elders, Christian resignation, courage, altruism, patriotism, and absolute selflessness vis-à-vis the fatherland, even if that required the sacrifice of the family" (Jolluck, 2002, p. 90). Its support during some of the most difficult periods in the history of Poland has played an important role in the maintenance of Polish national identity, uniting all the social classes of the Polish nation from the peasants to the social and cultural elites (Olszewski, 1996).

Polish parishes and religious organizations abroad have played an important role in the preservation and maintenance of cultural distinctiveness. A parochial school system was developed largely within the Polish Roman Catholic parishes. Polish part-time schools (Saturday schools), choirs, and youth clubs, as well as other forms of cultural activity, were organized by the church. In the past, it was very important for Polish newcomers to Canada to have their own parish with a Polish priest. There was an expectation that the parishes to carry out religious as well as community roles. They reflected the community life once left behind and the clergy, in addition to their religious roles, were also “teachers of the Polish language, organizers, social directors, legal representatives, and generally propagators of Polish culture” (Radecki, 1979, p.98). The church community became an important source of information, material support for the newcomers, and a force in the life of Poles abroad, unifying isolated cliques and helping to maintain the cohesion of the primary group (Swastek, 1967, cited in Sandberg, 1974).

Although this study included only women of Catholic affiliation, it is important to note that not all people of Polish descent are Catholics and not all Polish people are religious. According to the 1931 Polish Consensus, 64.8% of the population in Poland was Roman Catholic, 11.8% was Orthodox, 10.4% Greek Catholic, 9.8% Jews and 2.6% Protestant (*Encyklopedia Gazety Wyborczej*, n.d.).

### **Involvement in the ethnic community**

The respondents’ participation in voluntary Polish organizations has played a crucial role in the women’s cultural retention. Their families were involved in establishing some of the Polish ethnic organizations in Winnipeg, building the Polish Combatants Association headquarters, and contributing to the organization of social and cultural events organized by

the Polish community. The majority of participants reported an active involvement in the Combatants' Association, the *KUL* [*Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski* – Catholic University in Lublin], the Canadian-Polish Congress, the Polish-Canadian Women's Federation, a dance ensemble, St. John Kanty's Fraternal Aid Society, the Polish Scouting Organization, and the Holy Ghost Church choir.

A voluntary ethnic organization provides its members with a special status, access to certain services, and interactions which are not available to others. A connection to one's culture of origin is associated with lower stress (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The aim of such an organization is to meet various social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political needs of an ethnic group. Members may enjoy "protection, duty, honour, affection, identity, acceptance, and support" (Radecki, 1979). Dances, picnics, and various social events provide an opportunity to meet and socialize with other members of the same ethnic group. Polish organizations focus on transmitting cultural heritage by celebrating national or patriotic anniversaries, providing entertainment, recreation, or just a place to socialize. During the War, Polish organizations provided help to victims, orphans, and prisoners of war. After the War, these organizations joined forces in an effort to assist in the arrival of Polish political exiles and refugees. The largest women's organization established in Canada, the Canadian Polish Women's Federation, focuses on maintaining strong family traditions based on Christian principles, propagating maintenance of Polish customs and traditions, democratic ideals, Canadian citizenship responsibilities and encouraging closer ties with the mainstream society (Ibid.). Generally, the activity of Polish organizations is aimed at culture maintenance through encouragement of Polish schools, libraries, scholarships, sponsoring Polish artists, organizing events to commemorate patriotic anniversaries and maintaining contacts with the

old country. They also provide support to those in need and may serve as important resources for aging Poles.

### **Significance of strong family ties**

The significance of the family was a recurrent theme in the interviews conducted with the Polish women. The emphasis on the family, rather than the individual, appears to be one of the findings of research conducted on families of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003). The support of a family, and its protective and nurturing role was especially important in the lives of the Polish women who came to Canada after WWII as children, adolescents, or young women. The protection by the parents, or the mother especially, buffered the impact of war, displacement, and exile trauma. Later, families, often incomplete, provided support during the process of adaptation to a new culture, and now the women enjoy close bonds with their families while adapting to aging.

Familism is an important value in the Polish culture. It is defined as “a strong identification and attachment with nuclear and extended families as well as feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity” (Triandis, Marin, Betancourt, Lisansky, & Chang, 1982, cited in Marin & Gamba, 2003). Some studies suggest that in spite of acculturation, the extended family structure is maintained by individuals from a migrating culture (Padilla, 1980, cited in Marin & Gamba, 2003). However, refugees who come from war-torn countries often arrive in the host country without extended family and even the nuclear family arrives without all its members. The loss of family members happens in the course of war or displacement and exile. Those Polish women, who managed to survive the long arduous journey and safely arrive in Canada, had to rebuild their lives and reconstruct their nuclear and extended families. As displaced persons or immigrants, they had lost their homes

literally their homes, their sense of safety and stability. Home was a realm traditionally assigned to women. The loss of home meant a threat to their identity. In Canada, they had an opportunity to recreate their homes.

### **Cultural differences in family patterns and values**

“If traditional ethnic values are to be found anywhere, they will be found in the family” (Mindel, Habenstein & Wright, 1998, p. 9). Family can play a major role in the way its members integrate or maintain ethnic customs and mores (Borrie, 1959, cited in Radecki, 1980). The family is an integral part of identity in collectivistic cultures and is a major source of support and care for its members (Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006). The role of family, extended family, and a strong bond with the community played a pivotal role in people’s lives throughout the numerous turbulent periods in the history of Poland.

Common characteristics of Polish families before the War included “the dominant position of a patriarch, pervasive influence of religion and priests on family life, and strong bonds of affection or obligation between family members” (Radecki, 1980, p. 45). The children were expected to obey family rules and parental expectations, and accept at times strict punishment. The family’s purpose was a shared effort in achieving family objectives and aiding family members in difficult times. Marriages were often arranged, spinsterhood was stigmatized, and widows and widowers usually remarried (Ibid.). In a traditional Polish family, the parental choice or approval of marriage partner was crucial (Ibid.). Couples were encouraged to have many children. The father of the family was expected to act according to his role as the head of the family and decision-maker. Such a position was considered “superior” to the woman’s role which was the mother of children rather than partner of the man (Ibid.). Household tasks were divided into men’s and women’s work. The woman’s role



was to care for the home and the children. It was also her role to maintain traditional family customs and values. The women were usually the keepers of family ties (Bromberg, 1983; Jolluck, 2002). Older adults were respected and remained incorporated in the family when aged.

Western cultures are believed to focus on the importance of the individual who is viewed as independent, autonomous, and self-contained. The individualist cultures rank independence, self-reliance, and mastery of one's own fate high in the hierarchy of values (Adler, Towne, & Rolls, 2004). The individual is rewarded for achievement and initiative rather than the family or group. Early independence of children is encouraged and considered progressive. These values contribute to the avoidance of dependency in older age which is perceived as negative or even shameful. Independence, on the other hand, allows for self-determination and higher self-esteem and is regarded as a virtue. In terms of productive capacity, in a society where self-sufficiency and achievement, of which income and occupation are the most important indicators, the value of an old person may appear low (Markson, 1979). The value of productivity, independence, hard work, endurance, and self-sufficiency is congruent with the dominant Western ideology and Protestant ethic.

The individualistic approach is more flexible and liberal. It was created in a dynamic industrial society where individual achievement, self-sufficiency and independence are highly valued. Dependence on others is avoided even in the case of one's own children (Sugiman & Nishio, 1983). In an era of modernization and fast technology advancement, the knowledge of the aged is less valued. The individualist ethics focus more on the present and future rather than the past.

Such an approach contrasts with the traditional Polish values connected with the central role of the family. Some of the patterns and values have had to be modified in order to adapt to the Canadian geographic, social, and cultural reality.

### **Adaptation to cultural differences**

The findings of my study indicate that acculturation has modified certain aspects of family relationships among Polish families. The changes have affected the traditional family roles and have been caused by external factors such as migration, economic mobility, or intermarriage. Traditional authoritative and patriarchal norms and values are often replaced with the urban Canadian more equalitarian and flexible norms (Killian & Hegtvædt, 2003).

The changes in Polish families may have to some extent resulted from the adaptation to the Canadian cultural context, but also because of economic reasons such as the necessity for both spouses to contribute to the family income or employment mobility leading to geographical separation of family members. This finding is consistent with research on ethnic families in Canada, including Asian Indians and Pakistanis (Siddique, 1977). The ethnic press in America, as well as in Canada, have reflected on the transformations of family roles and relationships in Polish families. The editor of *The Polish Worker* published in Chicago, described the situation of Polish immigrant women in 1930s:

The modern, independent working woman, possessing political rights, cannot allow that she be treated as 'in the good old days.' Then she was completely dependent on her husband economically, her life was confined within the four walls, by the family hearth. The method of keeping house, of housework, must be changed. The relationship of men to women based on the slavery of women is antiquated. The matter of bringing up children demands complete change (cited in Kojder, 1985, p.138).

A study of 60 families in Toronto in 1970 (Radecki, 1980) indicated a significant change in power and authority relations. All important decisions concerning such matters as

their children's education were shared by both parents and, in many cases, involved a mutual agreement between the parents and children. The study also showed females as respected and gentle, but still perceived as helpless and needing protection, incapable of assuming responsible tasks and responsibility.

Most studies indicate that although the length of the acculturative process leads to modification of traditional values, some dimensions of a cultural value are maintained. "Attitudinal familialism," including a sense of loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity is less subjected to the influence of acculturation than "behavioural familialism," which involves visiting patterns which are rather influenced by migration, marriage, and economic mobility (Marin & Gamba, 2003). Although research on the influence of acculturation on traditional cultural values of minority families is scarce, some researchers suggest that the core values or beliefs in a culture are retained in spite of acculturation and generational changes (Ibid.).

These changes have important implications in terms of providing social services which address the cultural needs of ethnic elders. Values do influence people's behaviour and actions (Marin & Gamba, 2003). Therefore, health social service providers should take into account any modifications in values resulting from acculturation when designing culturally appropriate interventions aimed at changing behaviours and relationships. It is also important to note that the extent of acculturation may vary from one individual to another and from one family to another.

### **Modification of women's roles. Self-determination and independence**

The findings of this study demonstrate changes in traditional gender roles, especially women's roles. The traditionally assigned roles as mothers and nurturers were modified. The women gained independence, pursued careers, and maintained active involvement in the

Polish as well as Canadian communities. In this respect the women have followed life paths which are not congruent with the traditional Polish image of a woman. This finding is consistent with studies of Polish-American women and in contrast to mothers in Poland who were traditionally involved in their households and childcare (Lopata, 1977), now the situation has been changing as well.

Changes in the traditional roles of family members have taken place due to economic reasons and acculturation. It is important to note that the motivation behind the changing role of a woman of Polish descent in Canada, her active participation in the labour market, and her independence may be different than for Canadian women. In the Polish tradition, motivation may derive from the importance of the family and the close ties of the woman and her family, whereas values of self-actualization and independence are rooted in individualistic cultures.

The women sought employment to supplement the family's income, often taking over the role of breadwinner when their husbands were unable to work due to health problems. The economic factor played an important role. Their parents, parents-in-law, or widowed mothers who often lived with their daughters, provided child care for the grandchildren and fulfilled the role of cultural carriers passing on the Polish language and Roman Catholic religion. While relieved from many of the household duties, the women were able to maintain employment or pursue professional careers. They have also managed to secure their future as seniors.

Paid employment of these women has most likely increased their independence. Husbands often lose their male privileged roles and the employment of women usually results in the modification of power structure and family roles. Exposure of an employed

person to the host culture accelerates acculturation (Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003). Some of the participants of this study chose to pursue a career first and then plan family life and children. According to a Toronto study on Polish families, Polish-Canadians often postpone having children in order to complete their education and enter a career path (Radecki, 1980).

The transition from the patriarchal, extended family system of Europe to the nuclear family pattern dominant in North America has been highly disruptive, leading to personal disorganization, dissolution of communal and familial solidarity and the loss of parental influence (Sandberg, 1974; McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996). However, in spite of changing family roles, independence and lack of interdependency, the family and the home still remains a priority in the lives of the Polish women who participated in this study. According to the memoirs of Polish immigrants and other sources, once family relationships are reconstructed and stabilized, the traditional strong family bonds are maintained in the new society (Wankowicz, 1973, cited in Radecki, 1980).

As demonstrated in the findings, the participants perceive themselves as independent women. They are proud of their self-efficacy and value personal autonomy. Access to material resources enhanced their independence and may offer more choices for their future as seniors. However, their wish to avoid dependency on their children may be rooted in the family orientation and commitment to children. The women may shun the dependency on their children because they place the family's and children's needs over their own.

## **ADAPTATION TO AGING**

### **Challenges of aging**

Older adults experience changes in social roles, status, and support networks. The loss of spouses, family members, and friends are traumatic experiences. The termination of

employment and a sense of lower social status may be frustrating. Retirement limits opportunities for social interaction. In culture which places emphasis on youth, self-reliance, autonomy, and independence, old age is often associated with incapacity, inactivity, weakness, and dependency. The process of aging is shaped by ageist stereotypes implying physical and mental decline as well as social losses. Stereotypes of old age devalue individuals' dignity and worth and may be internalized by older people through development of a negative self-image, low morale, lack of confidence and higher morbidity (Mullaly, 2002). The respondents of this study do not identify with old age. Older adults often resist ageism and construct new norms and perceptions. This denial may be rooted in the participants' reluctance to any kind of dependency.

Elderly women now face a declined age of retirement, increased life expectancy, and are more likely to become widowed (Rubin, 1997). The image of a senior is changing. It is projected that seniors will remain active through continued employment, new careers, a return to school, volunteering, travelling, or becoming involved in the care of their grandchildren (Government of Canada, 2007). Adaptation to aging depends on "personal attitudes, the presence of a social support network, and the environmental context in which the elder grows older" (McInnis-Dittrich, 2005, p. 82).

### **Adaptation to aging and resilience**

Aging is the last stage in the life cycle and is comprised of biological, psychological, and social changes which require adaptation. According to the ecosystemic perspective, "human development is a continuous process of adaptation and accommodation between individuals and their environments" (Germain & Gitterman, 1987, cited in Waller, 2001, p. 290).

Old age should be interpreted within one's life-course and historical context.

The capacity to adjust to challenges of later life may be predicted by the degree of adaptation in younger years (Palmore, 1969, cited in Pettibon, van Hasselt & Hersen, 1996). Coping styles developed earlier in life provide adaptive attitudes and skills in later life (Pfeiffer, 1970, cited in Pettibon, et al., 1996). Personal characteristics which may enhance adaptive qualities include intelligence, creativity, a sense of meaning, existence of support networks, an ability to gain perspective, and ability to seek help (Hilleboe DeMuth, 2004). Others emphasize the existence of a nurturing and stimulating environment as a factor which provides older people with tools to cope with the challenges of old age (Baltes & Baltes, 1993).

Many people do not identify with old age and many experience fewer psychosocial problems than expected. Despite the assumption that old age is the time of losses, some researchers point to the fact that most people in their older years are able to live satisfactory and active lives, do not suffer from long-term depression or loss of self worth (Polisher, 1997), consider themselves happy in spite of the challenges and hardships (Schaie & Willis, 2000; Hilleboe DeMuth, 2004), are able to cope with change and take on new learning (Valliant, 1993), develop adaptive gender roles (Gutmann, 1997), and maintain good health and active mind (Hogstel, 2001, cited in Hilleboe DeMuth, 2004).

Resilience is important in the process of successful aging (Baltes, 1997) and helps to maintain coherence or continuity of one's life story (Borden, 1992) Findings show that the Polish women participating in this study demonstrated resilience across the life span. The women's resilience is rooted in their Polish culture, their personalities, and life circumstances which may provide helpful resources enhancing adaptation to aging. Older age is the time

when many adults return to their roots. According to McGoldrick (1989), “there is burgeoning evidence that ethnic values and identifications are retained many generations after immigration and play a significant role in family life throughout the life cycle (p. 70).

There is a need to utilize resilience-enhancing models which help maintain independence and well-being of older adults. Peoples’ inner strengths, often rooted in their cultural backgrounds, may increase their capacity to successfully overcome the adversities of older age. Interventions can be built on survival and coping skills that older adults already have in their repertoire. The degree of cultural retention and acculturation can guide the helping professions in designing appropriate interventions. Aging refugees and immigrants may draw not only on their ethnic resources, but, depending on the degree of acculturation, utilize their strengths and coping strategies available through adaptation to the host culture.

#### **Culture as a resource for aging Polish women**

Aging takes place in a cultural context. Aging is the last stage in a series of life stages that compose the life cycle and involves tasks and expectations which are specific for the person’s sociocultural context. This stage of life, just as any other stage, is fluid (Jendrek, 1994) and varies and is a unique experience for every individual. According to systems theory and the ecological perspective, human behaviour is embedded in a cultural context, and includes aging. “Cultural values, transmitted through the family and community, inform the way in which each person manages the gains and losses in every stage of life... including expectations of how life should be at that stage” (Hilleboe DeMuth, 2004, p. 66). The challenges posed by adaptation to aging, just as adaptation to a new culture, may be buffered by drawing on the strengths and resources deriving from one’s cultural background. It is



important to identify the protective benefits of cultural maintenance and its significance when conducting assessments and designing interventions.

Aging is the time when many older adults review their lives, attempt to resolve past problems and conflicts, and search for meaning in life. Ethnic identity, regardless the level of acculturation, remains important in the lives of refugees and immigrants (Phinney, 2003, Rogerson & Emes, 2006). Returning to one's roots may be part of the process of adaptation to the last chapter in life. Landrine and Klonoff's (1996) research on African Americans points to "the principle of return" which implies that aging refugees and immigrants return to the values and customs of their culture of origin when aging regardless of the extent of adaptation to the host culture (Chun & Akutsu, 2003). "[E]thnicity may help overcome some of the ambiguity, normlessness, and identity loss that is often associated with growing older" (Hendel-Sebestyen, 1979, cited in Holzberg, 1981, p. 116). Ethnicity may be a resource, a buffer, and an antidote, especially when contrasted with the different values and beliefs of the dominant culture.

People age within a cultural context, and this context determines their perception of aging, their strategies, and coping skills used to buffer the challenges of this transition. The participants of this study report a sense of belonging to both Polish and Canadian cultures. Both cultures may provide resources and coping strategies to utilize in their lives so rich in challenges and adaptations. Integration into mainstream culture enables fuller participation in society's life. The women's access to education or training led to better employment opportunities and the ability to secure their golden years. Financial security opens up more options for seniors, including living arrangements and leisure. The knowledge of the

language and the ability to socialize, not only in the ethnic environment, makes most of the available senior programs and services more accessible.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDERS**

### **Social networks**

The findings indicate that social networks for the aging Polish women include their families, friends, neighbours, and the church community. They have also continued their involvement in ethnic and mainstream organizations. Resilient older adults often emphasize the role of social networks and support gained through relationships in their lives (Hildon, Smith, Netuveli & Blane, 2008). These networks provide opportunity to socialize and provide emotional and practical support in the face of adversity such as bereavement or illness. The perceived support can serve as a buffer against stressful events.

The availability of support networks in later life depends on mutual support created life and revised throughout lives due to various events encountered by the individual such as migration. Social networks may provide support, advice, information, companionship, and access to resources.

### **Family**

Patterns of support and expectations for interactions within families develop through historical time (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993). As demonstrated by the findings, the respondents have maintained close family ties. Most respondents referred to their family as an important source of support, providing a feeling of belonging and stability.

This study indicates that the necessity for children to leave home in order to follow their career paths across Canada is recognized but not accepted. The children's educational and professional accomplishments provide their elderly mothers with a sense of pride. One of

the major problems of old age mentioned by Polish-Americans was the loss of contact with the family (Piotrowski, 1973, cited in Mostwin, 1979). Inconvenient distances hamper women's contacts with children and siblings and have a detrimental effect on the health of many immigrant women or even second-generation women (Radecki, 1980). This separation of families results in a decline in accessibility of adult children. The respondents regretted having no opportunity to develop closer relationships with their grandchildren just as their mothers did, but at the same time expressed a preference to remain independent and self-sufficient. Senior immigrants and refugees may be concerned about loosening ties, loss of their traditional roles, and consequently their ability to pass on the culture to successive generations (Becker, Beyene, Newsom, & Mayen, 2003). Elders have to work on maintaining connectedness to the family and most are successful in maintaining close-knit intergenerational ties despite disruptions (Ibid.).

Traditionally Polish children are socialized to respect elders and take on the responsibility of caring for their parents when they grow old. In the past, it was not unusual for a three generation family to live in one house. It was normative for older parents to live with their children, especially their daughters. Family was a source of practical and emotional support during difficult times long before the establishment of social services and community programs. Providing care to aging parents was among the most respected family values in Polish culture (Radecki, 1980). This tradition may be an important resource; however, not every family is able to take on the role of sole caregivers and may feel overburdened by the expectation to provide care for an older member of the family. Although the family, especially children, are perceived as reliable potential providers of help and

support, the participants of this study expressed no expectation to be cared for by their children.

The majority of women mentioned strong affectionate ties with their mothers. The participants' mothers had either lived in one household with their daughters and their families, or actively participated in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Research shows that mothers and daughters often share activities such as shopping, babysitting, and household tasks like cleaning, cooking, mending, leisure activities, and assistance during illness or crisis (Shanas, 1968 cited in Bromberg, 1983). Close contacts, both expressive and instrumental, maintained between parents and their married daughters involve affection, advice, companionship, and material aid (Ibid.).

Filial responsibility is defined as the adult children's sense of duty to provide aid to their aged parents and aimed at maintaining parental well-being (Hamon & Whitney, 2003, cited in Usita, 2006) and may range from emotional to financial and residential support. Filial obligations of children toward their parents may range from including the parents in family life and decisions, helping to meet their economic and psychosocial needs, or to providing care to parents who are unable to function independently. Caregiving relationships tend to be more focused on the female side of the family, with daughters providing most of the help (Hendricks & Hendricks 1977, cited in Stoller & Earl, 1983).

In collectivistic cultures family help is sought mostly within the family system rather than from external resources. Family, extended family, and friends are used as a coping resource and are utilized more often than professionals such as counsellors. In a study on the emotional needs of elderly Americans of Central and Eastern European background, Mostwin (1979) found that the majority of elder Poles identify their children, rather than

governmental help, as their first choice in case of need of financial assistance rather than governmental help. Not all older women of Polish descent or any other ethnic group have had the opportunities and resources to plan an extended period of retirement in terms of financial stability.

In terms of familial obligations, there is no expectation of the parents to be cared for by their children. There is no expectation for elderly parents to live with their children or participate in household and childcare duties. The children from Polish families are no longer expected to look after their aging parents. Aged parents are often “persuaded or forced” (Radecki, 1980) into senior homes. According to a Toronto study on Polish families, changing attitudes and values related to the aging population are caused by various factors such as the wives’ employment, and therefore, inability to care for their aged parents, inadequate space, intergenerational conflicts, and more adequate care provided by institutions (Ibid.). However, it is still perceived that elders are respected by their children and grandchildren and placement in a long-term care institution is a last resort solution justified by special circumstances. Some research shows that acculturation results in lower levels of familial obligations; however, more recent findings indicate that acculturation actually increases familism and enhanced family cohesion (Chun & Akutsu, 2003).

One should be cautious when making presumptions about the likely familial assistance on the basis of cultural generalizations made in reference to people of Polish background. Every family needs individual insight. It is often assumed that the family is the first and only source of support for aging people and that members of minority groups prefer to seek care within their own communities (Conner, 2000). Such assumptions may be erroneous and may lead to avoiding responsibility for designing and providing culturally

appropriate services to older members of ethnic groups. A comprehensive assessment of the availability of social networks within the family, extended family, friends, and the church community may contribute to meeting the Polish women's future needs.

### **Active lifestyle and retirement**

Strong ties to family and other people may have an important influence on one's self-esteem and emotional well-being. Some research (Lenz & Myerhoff, 1985, cited in Mercier, Shelley, & Powers, 1996) suggests that a woman defines her identity in relation to other people in her environment, and maintaining a circle of friends throughout her life helps in adapting to the transitions of old age. The design of programs for seniors needs to make an effort to encourage interaction with friends to increase opportunity for socializing and companionship.

Research suggests that relationships and interactions with others are the number one theme reported by women who comment on successful aging (Strawbridge, Wallhagen, & Cohen (2002). The women in my study enjoyed contacts with a wide circle of friends, Polish, as well as Canadian. Six of the women were over 75 years old and two were in their 60s. All maintained an active lifestyle and followed a busy schedule. Seven of the eight women remained actively involved in Polish organizations, and three volunteered outside Polish community. Two participants attended line dancing at Lion's Place and one mentioned her continuous life-long commitment to exercise programs, such as Shapes. The respondents' leisure contacts were directed both to the ethnic as well as the mainstream communities. All women participating in this study reported active involvement in voluntary Polish organizations and/or Canadian healthcare or cultural organizations. Access to transportation and fluency in English allowed the women to participate in programs outside the Polish

community. They were proud of their volunteering in hospitals, nursing homes, immigrant organizations, seniors' resource centres, or museums. Continuation of a lifetime involvement in organizations may enhance integration with their communities and adjustment to the losses and challenges of older age. As demonstrated in the findings, volunteering may bring a sense of connection and self-acceptance, allowing one to develop compassion and empathy for other people. For many seniors, including the participants of this study, helping others is the main source of satisfaction (Guttmann, 1978, cited in Mostwin, 1979, Koenig & Lawson, 2004).

Enhancing older adults' involvement in social and cultural activities may help to maintain their self-identity and self-esteem. It may lead to the discovery of new interests and help in fostering one's abilities. In a comparative cross-sectional study of personality change across the second half of life among Irish, Italian and Polish-American women, Cohler & Lieberman (1979) showed an orientation towards active mastery styles. The aging Polish women were more concerned with achievement and active and assertive challenge to the environment. Unlike the Italians in the study, older Polish women did not limit their involvement to the family and home. Their interest in social and work-related activities was greater than among women of the other ethnic groups.

### **Religion and the church community**

Faith and the church community may serve as an important resource for older Polish women. Religious beliefs may have an important influence on people's coping (Pargament, 1997; Tweed & Conway, 2006). Spilka, Shaver & Kirkpatrick (1985, cited in Newman & Pargament, 1990, p. 390) describe the role of religion as a "framework of reference for interpreting life events," and "a meaning system." It is utilized in the problem-solving

process, for instance, in defining and evaluating problems, generating alternatives, providing reference to decision making in case of critical life situations, and redefining problems.

Religious involvement may enhance health and life satisfaction (Levin, Chatters, & Taylor, 1995).

Church attendance and religious group involvement may help to sustain social relations for people who may feel isolated and lonely. Emotionally, religion and spirituality may provide older adults with assurance of the value and worth of their lives (Johnson & Mullins, 1989). Polish Catholic women may use their religious faith as a resource when coping with stressful events in their lives and redefining difficult situations. A study on Polish immigrants in Australia (Manderson & Rapala, 2005) shows that many rely on religious values and percepts to find meaning in the transformation of their life transitions. Church communities can be a rich source of emotional support and practical assistance.

Although the participants of this study clearly stated their affiliation with the Catholic religion, not all Poles are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. Other faiths may include: Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and others. Some older adults may not participate in religious practices and still consider themselves religious. Spirituality is not limited to religious affiliation and church attendance. Spirituality may be defined in different ways and include a sense of meaning, purpose, and connectedness (McGoldrick, 1998).

### **Participants' preferences for living arrangements**

The respondents of this study emphasized the importance of maintaining close family ties, but also a preference to maintain autonomy and live independently. Most women also expressed a wish to live in close geographic proximity to their children. The Toronto study on Polish families (Radecki, 1980) indicates that close family contacts and ties are



maintained between parents and children, but there is a change in attitude towards living together.

In the future the participants are likely to consider living in an affordable retirement community providing there is availability of leisure-oriented amenities. Language proficiency allows the women to feel comfortable in an English-speaking environment and language is not a factor when selecting future living arrangements. One respondent mentioned that it was important for her to live in a neighbourhood with “similar middle class values.”

The participants report a clear distinction between seniors whose income is supplemented from several sources and sufficient to maintain their standard of living after retirement, and those who qualify for subsidized living arrangements. Those who had entered the mainstream through professional life have higher aspirations as to their retirement plans. Those who had performed menial, low paying jobs throughout their employment due to lack of education, training, or knowledge of one of the official languages, have to accept a lower standard living conditions and their needs and expectations are different. They prefer to live in an environment which provides them with the comfort of their mother tongue, familiar food, customs, and traditions. Polish senior women living in Canadian Polish Manor have a close proximity of same-age and same-ethnic background residents whom they consider as a source to provide mutual support, opportunities to socialize and share information.

In the past there were no resources promoting independence for the aging population in Poland. Social services were not available in Poland, and even today, older adults do not have access to extensive home care services which would allow independent living or support caregivers. Traditionally, the responsibility for elders had been placed on the family.

Although cultural preferences play an essential role in determining living arrangement choices for minority elders (Himes, Hogan & Eggebeen, 1996), individual choices, unique circumstances, and the right to self-determination need to be respected and taken into account when making assessment and planning an intervention. According to Munnichs (1976, cited in Sugiman & Nishio, 1983), “the degree of dependency which a society will promote depends on the social services it can offer to support independence” (p. 31). Older Canadians have access to the existing social welfare system and a range of services offered to seniors. They can rely on external agencies and choose not to be dependent on their children.

Research on immigrant families in the United States shows that immigrant parents are likely to live with their adult children who have the highest income, but the longer the immigrant parents have lived in the United States, the less likely it is that they will live with their adult children (Glick & van Hook, 2002). Koreans or Chinese elders, however, who are first-generation immigrants, tend to live in separate households and value their independence and individual freedom (Kauh, 1997).

Social services offered to Polish older women need to blend family support, community-based resources, and external resources, such as affordable housing or senior centres offering leisure services for elders, available to the general public. Research shows a rise in number and diversity of older women whose age span is extended and competence will allow them to remain in the community providing there is availability of appropriate living arrangements (Carp, 1997). These arrangements include not only housing but access to services and resources necessary to meet their needs. In the light of shrinking network support, fewer children and grandchildren, as well as family mobile lifestyles which have

resulted in family members living apart, suggests easier acceptance of congregate housing (Streib, 1990) which provides “contact and access to services and facilities that enable residents to meet their subsistence and psychosocial needs and to continue living independently in the community with a high quality of life” (Carp, 1997). Congregate housing is designed for people who do not require nursing home care but rather provision of food, shelter, and some form of non-medical care.

### **Reluctance to receive social services**

The participants of this study prefer to depend on their own networks and resources, if necessary, rather than on external resources. Polish women are likely to prefer their family, ethnic friends, or organizations to any other support systems (Mostwin, 1972). They have been socialized to cope well without external support or assistance and have relied on family, extended family, and friends at times of crisis rather than professionals such as therapists or counsellors.

All the women have emphasized their independence and stated no need for assistance from social services. The use of social services was perceived as stigmatizing and shameful. Intervention by a government service may be experienced as an embarrassment to the family (Alaggia & Marziali, 2003). Poor motivation to use services may also be caused by the perception of counseling therapies as useless. The access to appropriate information on available services is rather limited and social assistance is mostly associated with financial assistance.

The majority of Polish respondents in a study conducted by Mostwin (1979) have identified their children as their definite preference when asking for financial help, which is congruent with the findings of a study carried out in Poland, in which 70% of the respondents

never used public assistance because “there was no need for it” or “it was a disgrace to apply for help when one has children and there are others more in need (Piotrowski, 1973, cited in Mostwin, 1979, p. 267).

Their reluctance to being perceived as dependent may be rooted in their past, their struggle for survival during the War and exile. Challenges of adaptation to life in Canada also taught them to cope with difficult life situations lacking resources, medical insurance, or stable employment. Importance of the family and community for Polish women indicates a strong sense of interconnectedness and would justify coping strategies and seeking support, advice, and guidance from people who share or shared similar experience. Appropriate outreach, comprehensive assessment, and sensitivity should guide the selection of strategies and approaches.

#### **Meeting the future needs of older women of Polish descent**

According to the vision statement of the National Framework on Ageing, outlined by Canada’s Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, “Canada, a society for all ages, promotes the well-being and contribution of older people in all aspects of life; the principles – dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security” should guide all the policies and programs designed to meet the needs of an aging population (Government of Canada, 2007, p. 5). The number of seniors in Canada is projected to increase from 4.2 million (13.2% of the total population) to 9.8 million (24.5% of the total population) between 2005 and 2036. Life expectancy, in 2004, surpassed 80 years of age for the first time, 77.8 years for men and 82.6 for women (Ibid.). Longer life expectancy, better health, and a higher educational level are more likely to characterize future seniors. Seniors will remain active

during retirement either through continued employment or new careers, returning to school, becoming involved in the care of their grandchildren, volunteering, or travelling (Ibid.).

Currently, the participants of my study are in good health and lead active lifestyle. They live independently and have managed to secure their golden years. They wish to maintain their independence for as long as possible. Family, volunteering, and travelling are their most preferred pastimes. However, they will have to face the inevitable, aging. Resilience-enhancing interventions should identify strengths and resources which already exist within the Polish women's cultural context. Their close bond with family, social involvement, faith, a sense of survival, and optimism should provide the basis for interventions. Social interaction and support has been identified as one of the most important predictors of well-being and life satisfaction among older adults (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

Changes in the family and intergenerational relationships resulting from adaptation to the Canadian reality, including the lack of geographic proximity and weakening of family ties, as well as intergenerational support, may affect the lives of Polish elders. They are likely to prefer caregiving practices utilizing a combination of family and community-based resources. In light of demographic changes, the increasing number and diversity of older adults, the existing system may not be able to meet everyone's needs. Therefore, drawing on one's accessible family, extended family, church members, as well as community resources may provide solutions for the needs of many elderly. Cooperation of home care and respite services along with the family, friends, or neighbours' involvement might be an acceptable option for families for whom caregiving may otherwise be a time-consuming, stressful, and costly undertaking.

One's culture provides the context in which interventions should take place.

According to Pedraza (1991), immigrants' preparation for adult roles, including old age, takes place in the country of origin. Interventions should be guided by an ecological perspective and aimed at the fit between the person and the environment. Minority elders may differ in their perceptions of illness and disability, help-seeking behaviours, family dynamics, care preference, and autonomy. The knowledge of available resources, willingness to make use of outside service providers, and the older person's individual preferences should be considered to respond to their needs more effectively.

Ethnicity may improve coping with the physical and psychological constraints of the old age. A competent social worker needs to combine knowledge and skills in the field of geriatrics, engage in culturally competent practice, and still recognize the uniqueness of every individual as "people are more than [their] culture" (Samovar & Porter, 2004, p. 24). Kluckhohn and Murray, (1948,1953, cited in Zelle, 1995) have proposed a hypothesis assuming that universally, every human being is like all other human beings; culturally, a human being is like some other human beings; and personally, like no other human being. In order to avoid stereotyping, culturally diverse families should be better understood in the circumstances of their lives. The individual's family history, migration experience, extent of cultural retention and integration into the host culture, coping skills, and flexibility necessary to face the challenges of aging, need to be taken into account. A bicultural competency may open up more options for the aging women. Knowledge of English and availability of social networks in both cultural environments allows for a wider range of solutions to address the issues of aging.

There is little research conducted on the cultural strengths of aged minorities (Becker & Newsom 2005, Seller, 1994, Williams & Wilson, 2001, cited in Usita, 2007) and the quality of life of older people from different ethnic groups (Moriarty & Butt, 2004). Every society has an age-specific definition of social roles and attributes certain qualities to its senior members (Greene, 1994, cited in Greene & Knee, 1996). It is important to discuss cultural retention as a resource for cultural strengths which may inform services to this aging population. More profound knowledge about diverse cultural groups would reduce the likelihood of the use of inappropriate and irrelevant norms and methods to meet the needs of these groups. It would also help to avoid cultural stereotyping and ready-made recipes which ignore differences among people who belong to the same ethnic group.

The following chapter contains conclusions and recommendations for further areas of research and specific recommendations for social service providers.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

Findings of this research underscore the importance of understanding the role of cultural retention in addressing the needs of aging refugees and immigrants. This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations which pertain to the sample of women who participated in this research.

The participants of my study, Polish women, who came to Canada as displaced persons or immigrants between 1945 and 1960, demonstrated that they not only retained most elements of Polish culture, but also promoted it among other Canadians. Their cultural retention was manifested by their retention of the Polish language and a strong commitment to Catholic religion. They demonstrated attachment to their country of origin and ancestors with pride, satisfaction, and contentment. The majority of participants reported their life-time involvement in the ethnic community. Adherence to Polish customs, traditions, food and cooking was described as rather limited to holidays and traditional celebrations in ethnic organizations.

The participants emphasized the significance of passing on their language, religion, customs, and traditions to their children. Most women also indicated that they had encouraged their children to visit the country of their ancestors, which was an important part of their cultural mission as Polish mothers. The participants' parents, especially mothers, played an important role in the preservation of language, religious commitment, customs and traditions, and connection to the ethnic community.



Some traditional Polish values were modified in order to adapt to the Canadian context. These women not only raised their children, but pursued careers and maintained active involvement in their communities, ethnic and mainstream. Traditional authoritative and patriarchal norms and values became more equalitarian and flexible. The transformation also involved expectations regarding interdependency and filial responsibility. The women stressed the importance of maintaining close family ties, but wished to live independently, even when widowed. The reason may derive from their respect for their children's autonomy and a concern for their children's academic and professional achievement which has led to greater employment mobility. There was no expectation expressed to live with their children or participate in their household or childcare duties. Some women wished they lived closer to their children and be able to participate in the upbringing of grandchildren.

The women identified with both cultures. They described being competent in both cultures and expressed a sense of belonging to both cultures. In most cases, education and employment were more associated with their Canadian self and family and social activity more with the ethnic self. Adaptation to Canadian culture was facilitated by the respondents' young age at the time of arrival, a special type of resilience characteristic to refugees, education, employment, and intermarriage.

The lives of the participants of my study have comprised of a series of adaptations. Resilience has played an important role in their adaptation to the adverse life events and challenges encountered across the life span. Resilience should be viewed as a relationship between the individual and their social context. Therefore, interventions should recognize and build on the existing individual, cultural, community, and spiritual resources. The women's resilience is rooted in Polish peoples' historic legacy of a struggle to survive and

maintain national identity, traumatic personal experiences during war, deportation and exile, as well as personal qualities such as optimism. Integration into Canadian society allowed these women to function competently in both environments, the ethnic and the mainstream.

Now, they are or will be facing age-related changes and challenges. An ecosystemic perspective allows us to place personal experiences within a larger social context. Aging also takes place in a socio-cultural context. The challenging transitions of aging may be buffered by coping skills and strategies which are rooted in one's cultural background. Ethnicity may be treated as a resource for aging people.

The findings indicate that the Polish aging women's priority is to maintain their independence and autonomy as long as possible. Affordable seniors' housing was mentioned as a way to extend such independence. They expressed the need to continue close connection to family, friends and the community. Spending time with family, social activities, volunteering, and travelling were listed as favourite pastimes. The most important predictors of satisfaction and emotional well-being among elders include social interaction, support, and productive activity, and have been identified as the most important predictors of satisfaction and well-being (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

### **Recommendations for future research**

Exploration of the lived experience of cultural retention among aging Polish women who came to Canada as post-war displaced persons or immigrants, has contributed new information to the social service field, although the findings cannot be generalized. There is no research available on the experience of this unique population and the way their cultural retention and adaptation to Canadian culture may inform social services so that their future needs as seniors can be addressed in culturally respectful ways. There is a need for more

research in the area of “cultural gerontology” (Holzberg, 1981) which would help to determine the influence of culture on the process of aging and the extent to which culture may be advantageous to members of ethnic groups.

A comparative study of aging Poles and other ethnic groups, their patterns of adaptation to Canadian culture, as well as adaptation to aging, would provide further insights. An exploration of strengths and coping skills derived from their cultural backgrounds would enhance the repertoire of social work strategies used to address the needs of culturally diverse aging populations. A qualitative study of cultural retention among aging people of Polish descent should be supplemented with the findings from a quantitative approach which would provide data from a broader sample. A comparative study might also focus on the influence of war and refugee experience on the development of resilience and coping skills.

A study focusing on the needs and expectations of low income Polish seniors living in supported living facilities or nursing homes is recommended. Also, the needs of caregivers and their knowledge and access to formal resources should be identified. There may be an assumption that the support is available only to people living alone rather than a person living with a spouse or a child.

An area which requires attention in terms of policy initiatives is affordable adequate housing. There is a need for further exploration of living arrangements and housing assistance available to seniors who wish to maintain their independence and autonomy. A needs assessment regarding preferred forms of recreation and leisure should be carried out in order to address their needs and preferences.

An assessment of the seniors’ knowledge regarding healthcare and difficulties accessing available resources would shed light on the situation of those older adults who may

not be easily identifiable and remain isolated because of the lack of language proficiency, appropriate information, transportation, residence in a distant rural area, or other factors hampering such access.

A study on caregiving patterns among Polish families and their knowledge of available formal supports might also bring insight to the situation of older Polish adults in care. Identifying available formal resources, including home care and respite, may reduce the burden associated with caregiving.

The following recommendations pertain to this particular sample of women who had participated in my research. The experience of migration, adaptation to a new culture, and aging are unique to every individual. Other Polish women who live and age in Canada may have different needs and expectations.

#### **Recommendations for the social services field**

In order to implement effective service provision to an aging population of Polish cultural background, it is recommended to:

- Identify support network among family members, friends, and the church community. Spouses, daughters, and daughters-in-law are usually involved in the care or support for an elderly person. Children may not always be available due to employment mobility or an assumption that children are not obliged to provide care for aging parents due to their commitments to their own families or careers.
- Respect the older adults' preference to maintain independence and autonomy. The priority is to remain in one's own home for as long as possible. Other living arrangements preferred by the participants of this study include affordable senior housing in a safe environment and with access to sports and leisure facilities.

- Promote active retirement, social involvement, and volunteering. Connect or reconnect women who are widowed or feel lonely or isolated with the Polish community. Encourage participation in social activities organized by Polish organizations including women's organizations (e.g. Polish Women's Federation) or the church community (e.g. join a church choir). There may be barriers to accessing these resources, such as lack of transportation. Respect the elders' choices of activities which they define as productive and useful.
- Recognize the significant role of religion. For most Polish people, religion is an important source of emotional support and for many the church community may be treated as an important resource. However, not all Poles are affiliated with the Roman Catholic religion. Other faiths may include the Orthodox, the Greek Catholics, the Jews, the Protestants and others. Moreover, spirituality may not necessarily imply religious affiliation.
- Use outreach workers within the Polish community in order to gain access to the aging population. Older adults may be "hidden" within the community. It is important to consider the stigmatizing perception of the use of social services. Use of service providers of Polish descent might be helpful in accessing and providing of culturally appropriate services.
- Enhance access to information regarding healthcare and social services, including respite services for caregivers, so that they can make informed choices. Such information should be available in English as well as Polish. Social services may often be associated only with financial assistance.
- Use strengths-based and empowerment approaches as well as therapeutic approaches

recognizing individual and cultural strengths and coping skills such as solution-focused therapy. Life review and reminiscence therapy, which are considered as one of the most effective therapies, can inform interventions aimed at enabling the already existing resilience and improving quality of life.

- Avoid stereotyping and recognize the person's migration and adaptation history. The degree of cultural retention may vary. People may limit their connection to ethnic roots only to certain situations or elements. Strong ethnic identity may be maintained even when there is limited direct cultural involvement. An in-depth assessment of the degree of acculturation, changes and modifications in the ethnic values and beliefs should prevent from making erroneous assumptions.

The respondents contributed valuable information that may enhance service delivery and practice. This knowledge may increase cultural competence among practitioners and help them identify the strengths and coping skills derived from these women's cultural context. Understanding the refugees and immigrants' culture of origin and the extent of acculturation informs developing culturally appropriate programs and designing interventions for aging populations of diverse backgrounds.

Although the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population of Polish-Canadian women living and aging in Canada, some the findings of this study may have meaning for other people in similar contexts.

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APPENDIX A

**Interview guide questions**

- 1. Please tell me how you came to Canada.**
- 2. What was it like coming to Canada? What was it like adjusting to Canadian life and people?**

*Prompts:*

- a. What was most difficult for you?
- b. What was your experience with English as a second language?

- 3. How has your life changed after you came to Canada?**

*Prompts:*

- a. How has your life changed in terms of:
  - i. family relationships
  - ii. education
  - iii. employment
  - iv. leisure
  - v. social contacts (Polish people, Canadians, other ethnic groups)

- 4. Tell me please, how important is your ethnic/cultural background to you?**

*Prompts:*

- a. In what ways have/haven't you continued Polish customs/traditions?
- b. Do you:
  - i. read Polish press? If yes, what newspapers, magazines or periodicals?
  - ii. read Polish books? If yes, what books? Where do you obtain them?
  - iii. listen to the Polish radio? If yes, which programs?

- iv. watch Polish programs on TV? If yes, which programs?
  - v. attend parties, dances, or informal social events?
  - vi. prepare Polish food? All the time, or on special occasions?
  - vii. keep artifacts, religious objects, traditional clothing, embroidery, statues, or pictures (paintings) in your home?
  - viii. practise any religious customs?
- c. Are you involved in any Polish organizations?
  - d. Have you had any contact with family or friends in Poland since you came to Canada?
  - e. How do you prefer to think of yourself: as a Polish or a Canadian woman or some other group (e.g., Polish-Canadian or Canadian-Polish)?

**5. How do you imagine aging in Canada? What is your life like at this stage?**

*Prompts:*

- a. Tell me what are your concerns now?
- b. What are your needs and expectations? Are they met? Do you have any recommendations for social services (transportation, meals on wheels, counselling, help with housing, social assistance, etc.) that could better meet your needs?

**6. What brings you enjoyment and satisfaction at this time of your life?**



APPENDIX A1

**Interview guide questions (in Polish)**

1. Proszę mi opowiedzieć jak przyjechała Pani do Kanady.
2. Czym był dla Pani przyjazd do Kanady? Jak odbywało się Pani przystosowywanie się do życia w Kanadzie?
3. Jak zmieniło się w Pani życie po przyjeździe do Kanady?
4. Proszę powiedzieć jak ważne jest dla Pani polskie pochodzenie?
5. Jak wyobraża sobie Pani jesień swojego życia? Jak powodzi się Pani teraz na tym etapie życia?
6. Co przynosi Pani satysfakcję i szczęście na tym etapie Pani życia?

APPENDIX B

**Script of the information the gatekeepers were instructed to say when approaching potential participants**

This is an invitation to participate in Master's Thesis research conducted by Zofia Perlikowski, a Social Work student at the University of Manitoba.

Zofia is looking for Polish Catholic women who came to Canada after World War II (1945-1960) as displaced persons or immigrants. She would like to ask you about the importance of maintaining Polish culture (Polishness) for you, a Polish woman living and aging in Manitoba.

This letter of invitation contains basic information about the research and ways to contact her. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you wish to participate, please contact her directly. You can choose to send her a form enclosed with this letter, call her, or email her, whichever way is more convenient for you.

APPENDIX C

**Script of a letter of invitation which was enclosed in an addressed and stamped envelope and used in approaching potential participants**

**Cultural Retention Among Polish Women Who Came to Canada Between 1945 and 1960 as Displaced Persons or Immigrants**

**This Master's Thesis research is supervised by Dr. Tuula Heinonen, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, and conducted by Zofia Perlikowski, M. A., MSW Candidate**

**Zofia Perlikowski**

**Tel.: [xxx]**

**E-mail: [xxx]**

My name is Zofia Perlikowski. I am a student of Social Work at the University of Manitoba conducting my Master's Thesis research study in which you may be interested in participating. I would like to learn about the experience of maintaining Polish culture ("Polishness") by Polish women who came to Canada between 1945 and 1957 as displaced persons. This research will concentrate on Polish women of Catholic affiliation since including other religious affiliations would require a broader study.

If you are a Catholic Polish woman, who came to Canada as a displaced person after the Second World War, you are invited to participate in this research. You may have been a child, an adolescent, or an adult when you left Poland.

The study may tell us how people keep their Polish culture and may improve the provision of social services to aging Canadians of various cultural backgrounds to meet their needs more effectively.

I would like to invite you to participate in one to two interviews (1 to 1.5 hours each) at a place and time that is comfortable and convenient for you. I will ask you questions

concerning your experience as a Polish woman living in Manitoba and the importance of “Polishness” to you. Our interviews will be taped and later transcribed (typed up) which will help me analyze the material. Your participation in this research is voluntary and confidential. You do not have to answer questions that you feel uncomfortable with.

Depending on the number of people who wish to participate, I may not be able to include everyone who contacts me expressing their interest. You will receive no remuneration for participation, but your participation in the interview may help the aging Canadians populations of different cultural backgrounds who receive social work services.

If you would like to know more about my research, or want to express your interest in participating, you can contact me by:

- phoning [xxx] any week day between 6-9 pm

or:

- filling out the provided form and sending it to me in the attached stamped and addressed envelope

or:

- emailing: [xxx]

Thank you.

Zofia Perlikowski

APPENDIX C1

**Script of a letter of invitation which was enclosed in an addressed and stamped envelope and used in approaching potential participants (in Polish)**

**Utrzymywanie polskosci przez Polki przybyle do Kanady jako uchodzcy lub emigrantki w latach 1945-1960.**

**Praca magisterska Zofii Perlikowskiej, pisana pod kierownictwem Dr. Tuuli Heinonen, Wydzial Social Work, Uniwersytetu Manitoba**

**Zofia Perlikowski**

**Tel.: [xxx]**

**E-mail: [xxx]**

Szanowna Pani,

Nazywam sie Zosia Perlikowska. Jestem studentka Social Work na Uniwersytecie Manitoba i obecnie prowadze badania społeczne w ramach mojej pracy magisterskiej i chcialabym Pania zachecic do uczestnictwa w nich.

Celem moich badan sa doswiadczenia zwiazane z utrzymywaniem polskiej kultury przez Polki ktore przybyly do Kanady w latach 1945-1960 jako uchodzcy (displaced persons) lub emigrantki. Moje badania ograniczaja sie do Polek wyznania katolickiego, poniewaz uwzglednienie innych przynaleznosci religijnych wymagaloby szerszych badan.

Jesli jest Pani Polka, Katoliczka, ktora przybyla do Kanady jako uchodzca lub emigrantka w latach 1945-1960, serdecznie zapraszam do wziecia udzialu w badaniach. W czasie migracji mogla byc Pani dzieckiem, nastolatka, lub dorosla kobieta.

Celem niniejszych badan jest przyblizenie polskiej kultury spoleczenstwu kanadyjskiemu co moze wplynac na polepszenie opieki socjalnej dla osob starszych o roznym pochodzeniu kulturowym, aby skuteczniej spelniala Panstwa potrzeby.

Zapraszam Pania do uczestnictwa w jednym lub dwóch spotkaniach trwających od jednej do półtora godzin w miejscu i czasie dla Pani dogodnym. Moje pytania będą dotyczyły Pani doświadczeń jako Polki mieszkającej w Manitobie i wagi jaką Pani przywiązuje do polskości. Nagranie naszego spotkania a następnie spisanie dialogu, pomoże mi w późniejszej analizie materiału. Chciałabym zaznaczyć że udział Pani w badaniach jest dobrowolny i wszelkie dane oraz informacje dotyczące Pani pozostaną utajnione i tylko ja będę miała do nich dostęp. Nie ma Pani również obowiązku odpowiadania na wszystkie pytania.

Udział w badaniach zależy od ilości osób zainteresowanych uczestnictwem. Być może nie będę mogła uwzględnić wszystkich zainteresowanych. Nie przewiduje się wynagrodzenia za uczestnictwo w badaniach ale Pani udział może pomóc starszym osobom z różnych kręgów kulturowych w zakresie usług świadczonych przez opiekę społeczną.

Jeśli zdecyduje się Pani na udział, uprzejmie proszę o kontakt:

- telefonicznie [xxx] (codziennie od godziny 18 do 21 wieczorem)

lub

- wysyłając email na adres: [xxx]

lub

- wypełnienie krótkiego formularza i wysłanie go w dołączonej kopercie z adresem i znaczkiem

Dziękuję za zainteresowanie i serdecznie zapraszam do udziału

Zosia Perlikowska

Jesli spelnia Pani kryteria i zdecyduje sie na kontakt ze mna droga pocztowa, prosze wypelnic ten krotki formularz a nastepnie wyslac go w dolaczonej kopercie z adresem i znaczkiem.

1. Imie i nazwisko.....

2.  Tak, Chcialabym wziac udzial w badaniach.

3. Przyjechalam do Kanady jako uchodzca (displaced person albo emigrantka) po II Wojnie Swiatowej w roku .....z .....(nazwa kraju z ktorego przybyla Pani do Kanady lub w jakich krajach przebywala Pani jako uchodzca zanim przybyla Pani do Kanady.

4. Prowadzaca badania moze skontaktowac sie z Pania telefonicznie pod numerem..... Najdogodniejszym czasem na skontaktowanie sie z Pania jest .....(dzien tygodnia) w godzinach.....

5. Wole aby moj wywiad byl przeprowadzony w jezyku

polskim

angielskim

APPENDIX D

**Script of a telephone conversation with the potential participants**

1. What is your name?
2. How did you come to Canada? When?
3. Are you willing and able to participate in one or two 1 to 1.5 hour interview sessions?
4. Could we schedule an interview? If so, where and when would you like to meet me?
5. Is there anything else you would like to ask about the research or your role in it?



APPENDIX D1

**Script of a telephone conversation with the potential participants (in Polish)**

1. Pani imie i nazwisko?
2. W jaki sposob przyjechala Pani do Kanady. Kiedy?
3. Czy jest Pani gotowa wziac udzial w jednym lub dwoch spotkan trwajacych godzinie lub poltorej?
4. Czy moglybysmy sie umowic na rozmowe? Jesli tak, to gdzie i kiedy Pani pasuje?
5. Czy chcialaby sie Pani dowiedziec czegos wiecej o badaniach lub swoim udziale?

APPENDIX E

**Face sheet questions**

Please fill out the following information. Please note that you do not have to answer questions which you feel uncomfortable with.

1. Age

.....

2. Marital status

.....

3. What is your spouse's cultural background?

.....

4. What country did you come to Canada from?

.....

5. How old were you when you immigrated?

.....

6. Did you come to Canada with your family or alone?

.....

7. How long have you lived in Canada?

.....

8. Education

elementary school.....

junior high school.....

senior high school.....

vocational school.....

college.....

university.....

9. What was/is your profession or occupation in Poland?

.....

10. What was your profession or occupation in Canada?

.....

11. Where did you live in Canada before coming to Manitoba?

.....

12. Do you have any children?

.....

13. Where were they born?

.....

14. What language(s) do you speak at home?

.....

15. Do your children speak Polish?

.....

16. How would you assess your knowledge of English?

no knowledge.....

poor.....

fluent.....

17. What language(s) did you speak before coming to Canada?

.....

18. Where do you live now? (with family, on your own, or in a long-term care facility)?

.....

19. Do you use any social services? (meals on wheels, transportation, counselling)?

.....

APPENDIX E1

**Face sheet questions (in Polish)**

*Proszę wypełnić formularz pamiętając że nie ma Pani obowiązku podawac wszystkich informacji.*

1. Wiek

.....

2. Stan cywilny

.....

3. Jakiego pochodzenia jest Pani mąż?

.....

3. Z jakiego kraju przybyła Pani do Kanady?

.....

4. Ile miała Pani lat kiedy przybyła do Kanady?

.....

5. Czy przybyła Pani do Kanady sama czy z rodzina?

.....

6. Jak długo mieszka Pani w Kanadzie?

.....

7. Wykształcenie

szkola podstawowa.....

szkola srednia.....

szkola zawodowa.....

szkola pomaturalna.....

uniwersytet.....

8. Czym zajmowała się Pani w Polsce?

.....

9. Czym zajmowała się Pani w Kanadzie?

.....

10. Gdzie Pani mieszkała po przyjeździe do Kanady?

.....

11. Czy ma Pani dzieci?

.....

12. Gdzie się urodziły?

.....

13. Jakim językiem (językami) mówi Pani w domu?

.....

14. Czy Pani dzieci mówią po polsku?

.....

15. Jak oceniłaby Pani swoją znajomość angielskiego?

    żadna.....

    słaba.....

    płynna.....

16. Jaki język (języki) знаła Pani przed przybyciem do Kanady?

.....

17. Gdzie mieszka Pani teraz? (z rodziną, sama, w domu opieki)?

.....

18. Czy korzysta Pani z usług opieki socjalnej? (posilki dostarczane do domu, transport, counselling)?

.....

APPENDIX F

**Consent form**

***Cultural retention among Polish women who came to Canada after World War II as displaced persons or immigrants (1945-1960).***

**This Master's Thesis research is supervised by Dr. Tuula Heinonen, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, and conducted by Zofia Perlikowski, M. A., MSW Candidate**

**Zofia Perlikowski  
Tel.: [xxx]  
E-mail: [xxx]**

**Consent form**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I would like to learn about the experience in maintaining Polish culture ("Polishness") by Polish women who came to Canada between 1945 and 1960 as displaced persons or immigrants. This research will concentrate on Polish women of Catholic affiliation since including other religious affiliations would require a broader study.

You will be invited to participate in one or two interviews, lasting 1 to 1.5 hours each at a place and time that is comfortable and convenient for you. The interviews will be taped and later transcribed (typed up) to enhance analysis. Any identifying personal information will remain strictly confidential and only I will have access to it. Your name will be changed



prior to analysis in order to protect your privacy. The tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home and destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

You will receive no remuneration for your participation, but your participation in this study may help to improve social services for aging Canadians of different cultural backgrounds.

Recalling memories can sometimes raise emotions. If you experience any emotional distress as a result of recalling and talking about such memories, some help is available for you. Arrangements have been made with Age and Opportunity (956-6440), the Cross-Cultural Unit of Mount Carmel Clinic (940-2172), and the Holy Ghost Parish (582-4157) if a need for counselling arises during or following the interview(s). You may also call the Klinik's Crisis Line (786-8686) or a toll free number available for rural callers (1-888-322-3019).

If, during the course of the interview(s), there is a disclosure of harm to yourself or to others, I am required to report it to the appropriate authority.

A summary of the research findings will be available to all participants after the study has been completed (approximately in December, 2008). Please indicate if you are interested in obtaining the findings:

Yes, I would like to have it mailed

e-mailed

No

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood, to your satisfaction, the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor does it release the researchers,

sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. I will be available for any clarification about the research or your participation in it. You can contact me by:

- phoning [xxx] any week day between 6-9 pm
- emailing: [xxx]

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact Professor Tuula Heinonen or the Research Ethics Board Secretariat

. A copy of the consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Researcher: Z. Perlikowski

Participant's Signature

Date

---

Researcher's Signature

Date

---

**Thank you for your participation.**

APPENDIX F1

**Consent Form (in Polish)**

**Utrzymywanie polskosci przez Polki przybyle do Kanady jako uchodzcy (displaced persons) lub emigrantki po II Wojnie Swiatowej w latach 1945-1960.**

**Praca magisterska Zofii Perlikowskiej, pisana pod kierownictwem Dr. Tuuli Heinonen, Wydzial Social Work, Uniwersytetu Manitoba**

**Zofia Perlikowski**

**Tel.: [xxx]**

**E-mail: [xxx]**

**Zgoda na udzial w badaniach naukowych**

Niniejsza zgoda na udzial w badaniach naukowych, ktorej kopia zostanie do Pani dyspozycji jako dokument, jest jedynie czescia procesu jaki musi zaistniec miedzy osoba przeprowadzajaca badania naukowe a ich uczestnikiem. Niniejszy dokument okresla charakter badan oraz zakres Pani uczestnictwa. W przypadku niejasnosci, nalezy zwrocic sie z prosba o wyjasnienie. Prosze dokladnie przeczytac i zapoznac sie z wszystkimi towarzyszacymi informacjami.

Celem moich badan sa doswiadczenia zwiazane z utrzymywaniem polskiej kultury przez Polki ktore przybyly do Kanady w latach 1945-1960 jako uchodzcy (displaced persons) lub emigrantki. Moje badania ograniczaja sie do Polek wyznania katolickiego, poniewaz uwzglednienie innych przynaleznosci religijnych wymagaloby szerszych badan.

Celem moich badan jest przyblizenie polskiej kultury spoleczenstwu kanadyjskiemu co moze wplynac na usprawnienie opieki socjalnej dla starszych ludzi z roznych kregow kulturowych.

Zapraszam Pania do uczestnictwa w 2-3 godzinnej rozmowie (lub dwoch jedno lub poltora godzinnych spotkan) w miejscu i czasie dla Pani dogodnym. Nagranie naszego

spotkania a następnie spisanie dialogu, pomoże mi w późniejszej analizie materiału.

Chciałabym zaznaczyć że udział Pani w badaniach jest dobrowolny i wszelkie dane oraz informacje dotyczące Pani pozostaną utajnione i tylko ja będę miała do nich dostęp. Pani imię zostanie zmienione przed przystąpieniem do analizy wyników badań w celu zapewnienia anonimowości i swobody wypowiedzi. Taśmy i zapis naszej rozmowy zostaną zniszczone po zakończeniu badań.

Nie przewiduje się wynagrodzenia za uczestnictwo w badaniach ale Pani udział może pomóc w usprawnieniu świadczeń pomocy społecznej dla starszych osób z różnych kręgów kulturowych.

Powrót do wspomnień może być emocjonalnym przeżyciem. Jeśli będzie Pani czuła potrzebę rozmowy lub porady po naszym spotkaniu, proszę skontaktować się z organizacją Age and Opportunity (956-6440), Cross-Cultural Unit of the Mount Carmel Clinic (940-2172), lub Parafia Świętego Ducha (582-4157). Można również dzwonić pod numer Kliniki Crisis Line (786-8686 lub pod darmowy numer 1-888-322-3019 dla osób zamieszkałych poza miastem).

Jeśli podczas rozmowy, zostanie ujawniona informacja o zagrożeniu bezpieczeństwa Pani lub kogoś innego, mam obowiązek zgłosić to odpowiednim władzom.

Podsumowanie wyników będzie dostępne dla wszystkich uczestników po zakończeniu badań (prawdopodobnie pod koniec 2008 roku). Proszę zaznaczyć czy jest Pani zainteresowana w otrzymaniu wyników:

- Tak, proszę o wysłanie wyników na mój adres.
- Tak, proszę przesłać na mój email:.....
- Nie, nie jestem zainteresowana.

Pani podpis na niniejszym dokumencie świadczy o zrozumieniu przez Panią informacji dotyczącej uczestnictwa w badaniach. Podpisując ten dokument nie zrzeka się Pani swoich praw ani nie zwalnia to badacza, sponsorów oraz zaangażowanych instytucji od odpowiedzialności prawnej i zawodowej. Ma Pani prawo wycofać się z badań w każdym momencie, i/lub odmówić odpowiedzi na pytania, co nie pociągnie za sobą żadnych konsekwencji. Decyzja o kontynuowaniu uczestnictwa powinna być podjęta równie świadomie jak na samym początku. Proszę czuć się swobodnie zadając pytania i oczekując wyjaśnień w czasie Pani udziału w rozmowie. Będę gotowa udzielić wszelkich wyjaśnień dotyczących badań lub Pani udziału. Może się Pani ze mną kontaktować:

- telefonicznie: [...]
- przez wysłanie email na adres: [...]

Niniejsze badania zostały zatwierdzone przez Komisję Etyki Badan Psychologiczno-Socjologicznych na Uniwersytecie Manitoba (Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board).

W razie wątpliwości lub skarg dotyczących badań, proszę skontaktować się z Profesorem Tuula Heinonen, z sekretariatem Komisji Etyki Badan Naukowych Uniwersytetu Manitoba (Human Ethics Board - tel.: 474-7122)

Kopia zgody na udział w badaniach zostanie Pani wczona.

Imię i nazwisko badacza: Zofia Perlikowska

---

Podpis uczestniczki

Data

---

Podpis badacza

Data

**Dziękuję za Pani udział w badaniach.**

APPENDIX G

Poster advertising the research (in Polish)



**SZANOWNA PANI**

*Może zechciałaby Pani pomoc polepszyć  
usługi socjalne dla starszych osób?*

**Jesli jest Pani:**

**Polka, Katoliczka, która przyjechała  
do Kanady po wojnie w latach 1945-  
1960 jako uchodźca (displaced  
person) lub emigrantka, serdecznie  
zapraszam do wzięcia udziału w  
moich badaniach nad utrzymaniem  
kultury polskiej przez polskie  
kobiety w Manitobie.**



*Proszę wziąć list z informacją o badaniach  
która znajduje się w kopercie poniżej*

APPENDIX G1

Poster advertising the research



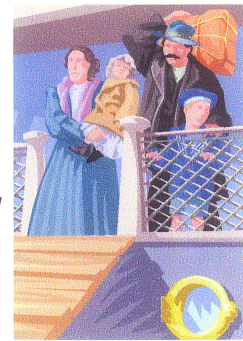
## **DEAR LADIES**

***Would you like to help improve social services for the aging population?***

***If you are:***

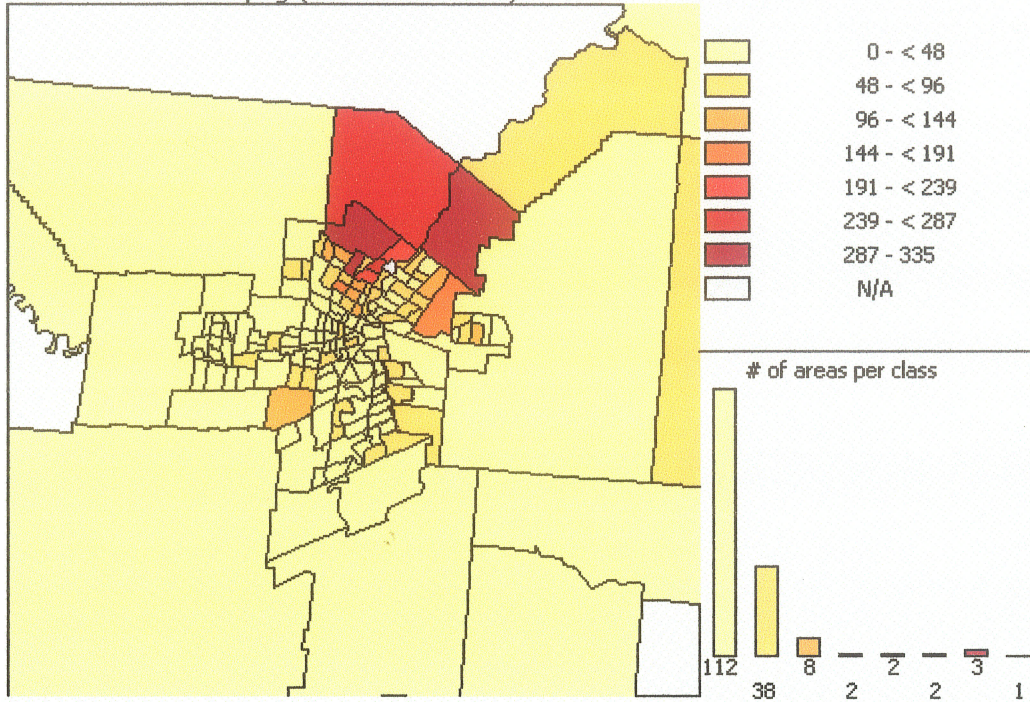
***a Polish Catholic woman who came to Canada after the war between 1945-1960 as a displaced person or an immigrant, you are kindly invited to participate in a research on maintaining Polish culture by Polish women living in Manitoba.***

***You can learn more about the research by reading the letter placed in an envelope below***





Polish, non-official languages, single responses, population by mother tongue  
Winnipeg (168 Census tracts)



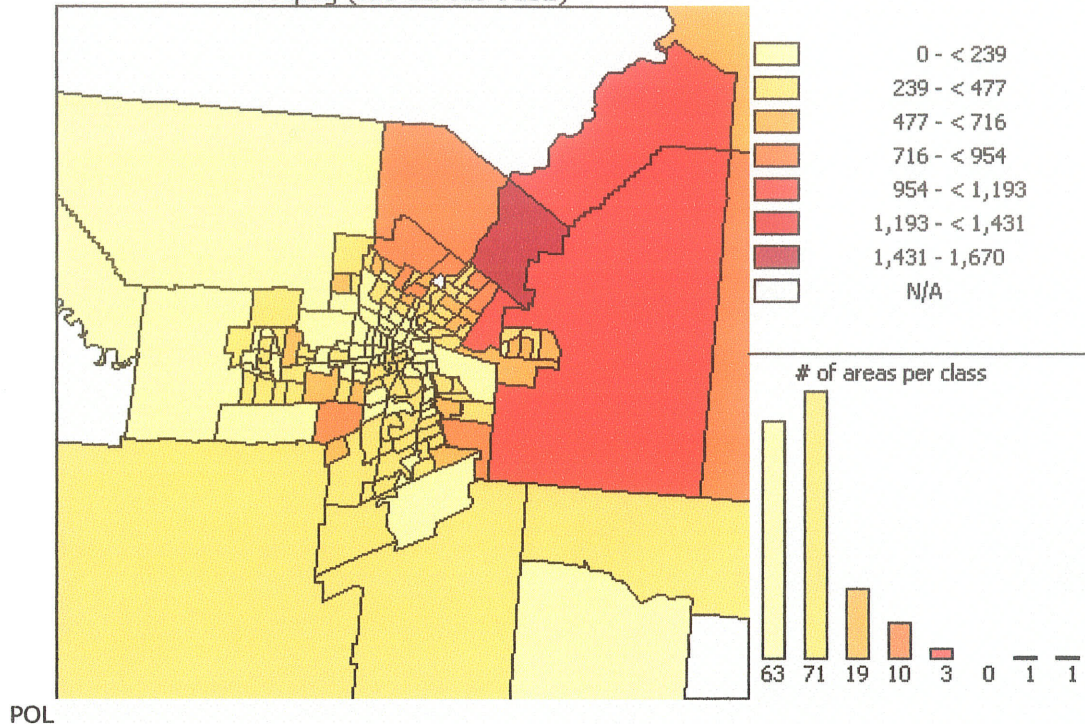
**Source:** Statistics Canada. *2006 Cumulative Profile, Winnipeg (168 Census tracts) (map)*, 2006 Census of Population (48 Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Tracts) (database), Using E-STAT (distributor). [http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcqi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC\\_RR-eng.htm](http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcqi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC_RR-eng.htm) (accessed: February 3, 2009)



APPENDIX H

Population of Polish descent in Winnipeg by ethnic origin and mother tongue

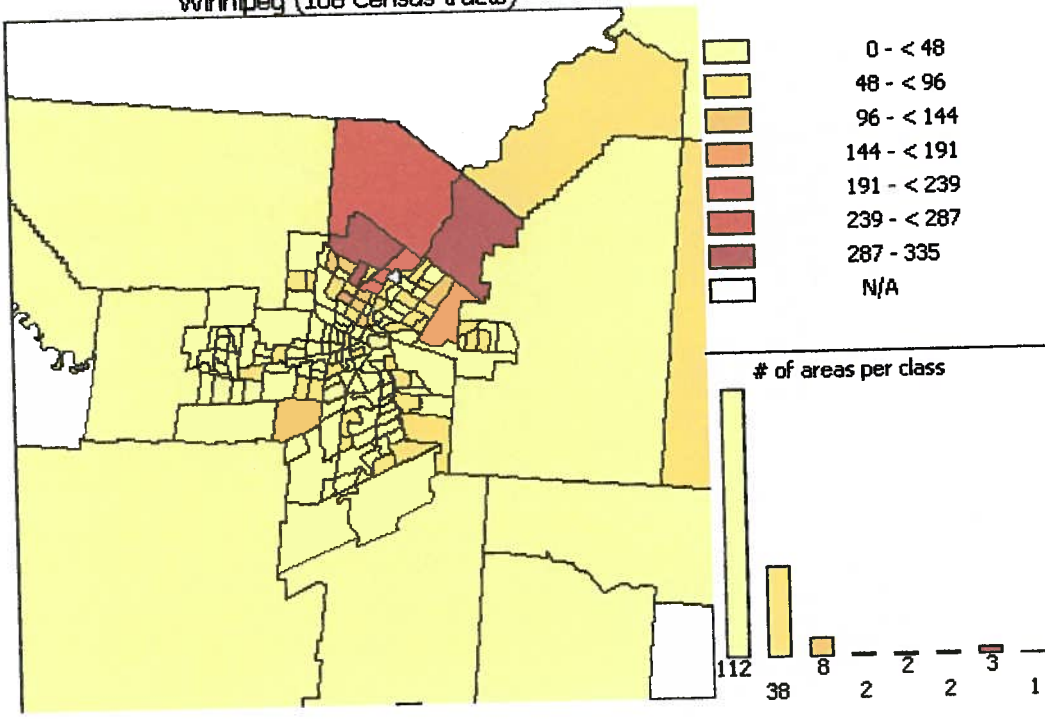
Polish, Eastern European origins, population by ethnic origin  
Winnipeg (168 Census tracts)



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**Source:** Statistics Canada. *2006 Cumulative Profile, Winnipeg (168 Census tracts)* (map), 2006 Census of Population (48 Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Tracts) (database), Using E-STAT (distributor). [http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC\\_RR-eng.htm](http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC_RR-eng.htm) (accessed: February 3, 2009)

Polish, non-official languages, single responses, population by mother tongue  
Winnipeg (168 Census tracts)



**Source:** Statistics Canada. 2006 Cumulative Profile, Winnipeg (168 Census tracts) (map), 2006 Census of Population (48 Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Tracts) (database), Using E-STAT (distributor). [http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC\\_RR-eng.htm](http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat\English\SC_RR-eng.htm) (accessed: February 3, 2009)