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EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY AS A MEANS OF RETURN MIGRATION: YOUNG POLISH DIASPORA MEMBERS FROM THE FORMER USSR

Abstract: Poland has been traditionally a sending migration country. However, in recent years it receives slowly growing number of return migrants. Among returnees arriving from the post-Soviet successor states the dominant group are youngsters who enroll for studies at Polish universities. The purpose of this autobiographical narrative interviews-based study is to present, firstly, the institutional conditions of conducting studies by Polish diaspora members. Particular attention is given to the latter's arrivals as part of Poland's return migration policy. Secondly, the article investigates biographical stories and aims at comparing two young Poles' return paths to the ancestral homeland. It reconstructs their mobility stages in order to specify (1) relations between migration experience and transformation of their national identification and (2) impact of migration experience on their whole biography (biographical relevance). Since they stem from families of multi-ethnic background and relocate to a seemingly known place where only part of their predecessors come from, the concept of "roots migration" is utilised for the purpose of this study.

Key words: return migration, diaspora, educational mobility, Poland, USSR, biographical studies, narrative interview

Introduction

It is estimated that there are up to 18-20 million people of Polish origin living outside Poland, making that diaspora one of the largest in the world (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2014: 4). With the end of communism in 1989 some of *Polonia* members, as the diaspora is sometimes referred to, began to come back to the ancestral country. There are numerous young people of Polish descent from the former Soviet Union among them who enroll each year for studies in Poland.

The article focuses on return migration experiences of the latter group. They are mostly descendants of Poles who were resettled into Russian (Soviet) territories in the past centuries or stayed there after Poland's border changes in 1945. Turbulent history of Polish diaspora members in the former USSR as well as their efforts to come back to Poland raise, however, many conceptual doubts. It is due to the fact that the notion of "return migration" usually refers to "*relocation to an acknowledged homeland*" (Christou 2006: 833), although in fact the students are not "returning" to Poland since they actually never left it (Nowicka 2000: 8). The "return" term is mostly used in migration literature to anal-

yse either voluntary (based on genuine or revised intentions) or forced (expulsions or re-settlements from the country of current residence) counter-diasporic move of first-generation migrants to their native homeland (Lesińska 2010: 6). It might seem then it could be more accurate to utilise other less or more frequently used, but still semantically close terms such as “second- or subsequent-generation returnees” (King, Christou 2008: 1-4), “ethnic migrants”, “ethnic return migrants”, “co-ethnic migrants”, “ancestral returnees” etc. (Tsuda 2013: 172, 186). All terms denote the “return” of diaspora members to the ethnic homeland after a long period of living abroad. These conceptualisations, however, are not fully satisfactory in the analysed cases. Despite maintaining transnational contacts or having experience of short staying in the homeland later-generation migrants do not necessarily perceive their relocation there as return (Wessendorf 2007: 1087). Furthermore, they do not exclusively feel belonging to a given national community as they might be of mixed ethnic background and, thus, migrate to a supposedly known place where only part of their family stem from. The Susanne Wessendorf’s “roots migration” concept answers these conceptual challenges as it refers to “*the migration to a place where members of the second generation originate from, but where they have never lived*” (2007: 1084). It acknowledges then migrants’ intergenerational and ethnic affinity features but does not directly explore the ontology of return itself (Gońda 2015: 70). Therefore, hereinafter it will be used for the analytical considerations.

The paper has three main goals. First, it confronts institutional circumstances (migration policies and higher education internationalisation in Poland) with individual perspectives on roots migration. It analyses available channels of return from the former USSR. Since other homecoming paths are limited, educational migration often remains the only accessible way of moving to Poland (Lesińska 2010: 4-5).

Second, the article tackles the problem of interrelation between students’ experience of migration to a seemingly known homeland and transformations of their national identifications. In other words, how the notions of “Polishness”, “homeland” and “return” are (re)defined by the informants when in the post-Soviet countries and upon arrival in Poland (cf. King, Christou 2008). Does migration lead to confirmation of national identification? Or rather students are experiencing identity tensions that result in rejection of their Polishness? Or maybe migration to Poland appears emotionally neutral to them and, in consequence, facilitates developments of rather hybrid, multiple or fuzzy identities, reflecting in that way the postmodern tendencies in identity transformations (cf. Paleczny 2008)? The issues of y dynamics and identity work, which are the axis for this paper, reflect then the vivid discussions within present social sciences that have lifted the identity problem from the marginal concept being used only to support other analyses to the central and autonomous subject of a key importance in the description of the postmodern world (cf. Bauman 2004). At the postmodern era of fast changes of social, economic and political orders individuals are constantly obliged to redefine their own social identities. It is particularly essential in the situation of migration when an individual is forced to adapt to a new socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, these challenges raise a question about the process of identity negotiations of those who, on the one hand, come to mythologised homeland that is an important source of emotions, common symbols, family narratives or language for co-ethnics, or, on the contrary, those who come to that country only because of educational and professional possibilities being offered there.

Third, the paper attempts to reconstruct the impact of migration experience on returnees' biographies and, on the other hand, to answer how biographical structural processes (cf. Schütze 1987) shape the meaning of migration. In other words, whether or under which conditions the migration experience is biographically significant (impacts the dynamics of students' biographies) (Breckner 2007: 120)? Scholars often consider the process of "homecoming" as the "natural" closure of the migration circle (cf. Boccagni 2011; Koliatis et al. 2013). This hypothesis mostly refers to first- or second-generation returnees who usually maintain linkages with their ancestral countries. It seems, however, that return migration not always leads to the closure or completion that migrants desire. It is particularly visible at the time of growing transnational practices that dismantles the previous attachment to a given place and makes cross-border mobility continuous rather than completed (Ley, Kobayashi 2005: 111-113). How does it look like then in the case of youngsters who come alone (without families) to an ancestral country (often without any prior experience of visiting it or with strongly mythologised image of it) where only part of their family come from? How do they cope in this supposedly known surrounding? Finally, what impact does roots migration have on their further life arrangements? Does it bring the expected sense of finality of migration or is it just the first step on a way to other countries?

Methodology

Since migration is an open process with hardly a definable beginning and end it would be advisable to reconstruct it in possibly broad temporal perspective. The proposed biographical method of data collection and analysis developed by Fritz Schütze (1987) that deconstructs social phenomena from individual perspective seems to be a good methodological and theoretical tool to investigate these issues, irrespective of the number of cases being reviewed (Gońda 2015: 71). The empirical reference of this qualitative study are 60 autobiographical narrative interviews (Kaźmierska 1996) with the investigated students that were carried out between 2010 and 2014 in major Polish academic centers¹.

While qualitative methods have become so diverse and fluid in their use, biographical method is rarely employed in migration studies nowadays (Górny, Koryś 2009: 27-28). Nonetheless the selection of this research approach is justified by a number of theoretical and methodological assumptions. First, migration should not be considered as decontextualized activity but rather as both a consequence of certain individual's decisions and particular socio-cultural, economic or political conditions in sending and receiving countries. Moreover, since migration is undertaken at different stages of one's life cycle, it needs to be explored as continuous throughout life rather than completed at a definitive moment (Ley, Kobayashi 2005: 111). In this sense it has important consequences for the entire course of migrant's life, especially when it is taken at an early age (as in the informants' case).

¹ The research was conducted for the purpose of the author's PhD project *Studenci polskiego pochodzenia z krajów byłego ZSRR. Doświadczenia kulturowe a przemiany tożsamości* (The Students of Polish Descent from the post-Soviet Successor States. Cultural Experiences and Identity Transformations). PhD project is co-financed by the Polish National Science Centre, agreement no: UMO-2012/07/N/HS6/01457.

The biographical orientation answers these challenges as, in contrast to quantitative methods that are predominantly utilised in migration studies, it provides a holistic understanding of migrants' pathways within complex social, cultural, political and economic contexts of both sending and receiving societies. There are not only crucial life decisions and experiences revealed in migrants' narratives but also opportunities and limitations within their milieu portrayed (Davis 2011: 2). Since this approach addresses the entire lifetime and the interrelations between different life spheres it shows how migration experience is connected with dynamics of particular life domains (e.g. educational, professional or family-related ones). It also enables to investigate how the meaning of migration can be differently perceived over the course of time and in relation to different individual and societal contexts by particular members of the same migrant community (Breckner 2007: 118).

Return migration paths to Poland

Highly diversified structure and geographic distribution hinder detailed calculations of *Polonia's* actual size. There are both last years' numerous migrants in other EU member states as well as people born outside Poland, i.e. descendants of Poles who left the country (voluntarily or involuntarily) in nineteenth and twentieth century, whose ties with the ancestral country can be now very weak. In case of Polish diaspora members in Western Europe or Americas they are mostly voluntary labour migrants (or their descendants) as well as smaller number of those who opposed the communist regime in Poland and remained abroad after the World War II (pre-war elites, soldiers, forced labourers etc.) or escaped it later ('Solidarity' movement members, intellectuals etc.) (de Tinguy 2003: 112-128). The largest Polish diaspora groups are noted in the United States (9.7 million), Brazil (1.5 million), Germany (1.5 million), Canada (1 million), Great Britain (800 thousand) and France (800 thousand) (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2014: 4-5).

The origins of Poles in the former USSR are more complex. They are mainly the next generations of ethnic Poles who remained in the "Eastern Borderlands" (pol. *Kresy Wschodnie* that had been settled by the Poles from sixteenth century and nowadays lie in western Ukraine, western Belarus and eastern Lithuania) as a result the post-war shifts of Poland's borders westwards. Polish diaspora in the East also comprise of descendants of people forcibly resettled to the Asian territories of Tsarist Russia and later Soviet Union from the nineteenth century until World War II (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2014: 5). Large number of post-Soviet successor states and lack of appropriate census data make estimations of Polish diaspora's size there difficult. According to the last Soviet census there were 1.15 million Poles in the USSR in 1989 (Hut 2007: 1-2). Research estimations indicate there might have lived 1.3 million people of Polish origin in the beginning of twenty first century (de Tinguy 2003: 115). On the other hand, Polish minority organisations claim the diaspora is twice as much numerous (Wspólnota Polska 2007).

During 1940s and 1950s there were two repatriation operations covering about 2 million Poles from the Soviet territories who were Polish citizens in the interwar period (1918-1939). Return of other Poles (living in Russian/Soviet area earlier) was not possible at that time due to political reasons. The co-ethnics in the East became the subject of

public discourse in Poland after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. However, due to Poland's weak economic condition during the transition period from socialist to market economy, bringing them back was not possible and, thus, the state's support was limited to *ad hoc* aid, mostly preserving Polish culture and language and improving the living conditions of diasporic Poles (Hut 2007: 1-2). Furthermore, despite at the turn of the twentieth first century a number of preferential, in contrast to non-Poles, admission and integration procedures for returnees were introduced, that resulted from the authorities' moral obligations towards the „brothers from the East” enduring Soviets' discrimination based on descent in exile (Polityka Migracyjna Polski, 2012: 8), they have not *de facto* propelled return migration (Lesińska 2010: 4-5; Stefańska 2010: 87). In detail, the Polish Constitution of 1997 and the Repatriation Act of 2000 impose upon the Polish state a duty to provide assistance to the co-ethnics in maintaining linkages with the national culture as well as possibility of repatriation. Furthermore, the Law on the Charter of the Poles of 2007 guarantees the Poles in neighbouring Eastern countries legal recognition of belonging to the Polish nation and a range of rights in Poland (Górny et al. 2007: 158-163). Despite numerous Polish population living in *Kresy Wschodnie*, the Repatriation Act of 2000 promotes arrivals only from Asian territories of the former Soviet Union. Limitations in this respect result from the authorities' will to compensate co-ethnics (and their descendants) who could not take advantage of the post-war returns. Difficult living conditions there are an additional argument for repatriation from those areas in the first row. It appears, however, that the existing naturalisation procedures remain too difficult and time consuming. Moreover, local governing bodies are obliged to cover returnees' reception costs but they are hesitant to fulfill these duties (Wyszyński 2011: 410-416). Therefore between 1997 and 2013 only 6,800 people benefited from the repatriation programme (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2014: 507).

Currently, beside the state's repatriation system (institutional path), people of Polish origin from the post-Soviet area come back to Poland through other two “paths”: individual and educational (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2012: 8-11). Returns from the East are particularly important for Poland's interests, both for historical reasons and in the context of its progressive depopulation. Moreover, population of diaspora members in the former USSR is also shrinking due to even more unfavourable demographic tendencies, assimilation with local societies and migration to other countries, mostly to the Russian Federation (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2014: 4-5). It is hard to imagine foreigners who could potentially easier adapt to the Polish society. Nonetheless, existing economic and organisational circumstances do not allow all interested Poles to return. Therefore, some Poles in the East undertake, similarly to other labour migrants, individual migration to Poland without institutional support (second return path).

Consequently, due to obstruction of repatriation programme and the lack of wider support for individual returns, educational migration is in many cases the only possibility to move to Poland (third return path). As it might have seemed Poland due to well-developed academic infrastructure and relatively low costs of studying could have become an attractive study destination for foreigners after the collapse of communism. On the contrary, despite liberalisation of cross-border traffic and establishment of new (mostly non-public) universities, Polish higher education remained outside of the global tendencies of accelerating internationalisation (cf. Teichler 2004) as no incentives for foreigners to pursue academic career were proposed. Low attractiveness of the local labour

market also discouraged foreigners from settling in Poland after the completion of studies (Żołądowski 2010: 46-47).

However, considering the prospective fall in the number of native students due to demographic decline and their outflow to Western universities, Polish authorities have lately noticed the necessity for wider opening of universities towards foreigners. In order to increase foreign recruitment (mostly in the post-Soviet and Asian countries) a series of activities is undertaken, including broader offer of courses in foreign languages, more intensive international cooperation and new promotional campaigns abroad. In fact, the number of foreigners starting studies each year increased eleven times between 1989 (4,100 students) and 2014 (46,100 students). Nevertheless, their share of 3.1 percent among all students still remains one of the lowest in OECD countries, where it reaches 10 percent on average (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2014).

Importantly, the increase in international students volume can also be attributed to special enrolment programmes for foreigners, in particular scholarships for young *Polonia*. The basic aim of these initiatives was to strengthen the Polish diaspora by enabling studies in Poland and then returning to birth countries and work for the local Polish communities (Głowacka-Grajper, Wyszyński 2011: 8). In the academic year 2010/2011 the latter accounted for 4,117 people, i.e. 19 percent of all foreigners studying in Poland at that time (Siwińska 2012: 1). They are entitled to simplified entry and admission procedures as well as free health service or the right to work or run business without permits. In practice it is also easier for them to extend their stay permission or to receive Polish citizenship. The right to move freely within the Schengen Zone is also important for their further professional development (Stefańska 2010: 117).

Migration as a processual phenomenon

Migration is perceived by migrants and described by researchers as a process with several distinct stages. Roswitha Breckner proposes to subdivide this phenomenon into seven phases (Breckner 2007: 140-141):

1. the time of the initial contemplation of migration and decision-making processes (involving family and „Significant Others”),
2. the stage of „leaving” one’s country as a process of separation from people and places and of termination of institutional, social, and local integration,
3. transitory phases,
4. the stage of „arrival” in a new society and specific experiences during „admission”,
5. processes of „establishment” and beginning of participation in various function systems,
6. phases of restructuring of local references to the country of origin (e.g. by the „transplantation” of symbolic artefacts to the country of immigration, by family members joining, and by journeys home),
7. phases of (re-) consideration of the migration with regard to return, permanent stay or further migration.

Breckner notes, however, that these phases „do not exhibit any externally determinable beginning or any externally definable end, nor are they linearly structured in their sequential progression” (2007: 140). Boundaries between particular phases can be blurred and the indicated order might be also disrupted, e.g. the decision to migrate can be taken either directly after the journey in another country, after longer period or it may never be made, even after few years of leaving abroad. Furthermore, formation of migration experience remains non-linear and non-causal, which means that earlier experiences do not necessarily determine subsequent ones and that experiences in one stage may dominate over others (2007: 140-141). The phase-structured migration experience of young Polish diaspora members will be reviewed in the next chapters.

Before the two selected narratives will be presented, it is worth underlying that each narrator is characterised by contrastive socio-demographic features as they come from different countries and family backgrounds, they are of different age, they came to Poland in different years, they studies in different cities. Consequently, the informants also represent distinct biographical planning schemes and, thus, the position of “Polishness”, “homeland” and “return” in their structures of biographical relevance, i.e. (1) roots migration aimed at regaining own Polishness (Bartek’s story), (2) instrumentally-oriented calculations (Julek’s story). Other return migration scenerios have been discussed in the author’s previous papers (cf. Gońda 2013; 2015).

Bartek’s story: Regaining sacred past

Return migration might be undertaken due to various motives. Within the interviewed students a significant group consists of those who arrive in Poland as a result of symbolical and ideological drives (cf. Gońda 2013; 2015). These motives are embedded in collective identity of diaspora members. They identify the predecessors’ country with a “true home” which becomes the subject of their collective homesickness, nostalgia and longing. In the same time the memory of the homeland is being mythologised through narratives transmitted by older members of the community who either left the country or were recipients of those stories (Safran 1991: 83-99). Even if actual return is not possible, the dream of homecoming is being persisted over generations and becomes an important constituent in the formation of diasporic identity (Datta 2013: 97).

Consequently, the return might be a manifestation of typical second- or later-generation return pattern, when an individual due to emotional reasons makes an existential journey to the source of the self and reunites with the ideological homeland (King, Christou 2008: 17). Several analyses prove that return migration is principally an autonomous decision based on one’s willing to reunite with co-ethnics who share the same cultural and historical narratives. However, since a returnee’s origin create a binding relation with the country of ancestors, return can be considered as an obligation towards previous diasporic generations imposed by the closest social environment (Gońda 2015: 74). Furthermore, return might be also, as also noted by King and Christou, a „*cathartic mission to reclaim its sacred sites and to re-enter its mythic space and time*” (2008: 17). The predecessors’ country is perceived in this case as the “authentic” site of “original” belonging and, thus, returnee’s plan is to relocate the dislocated self and to achieve stability and coherence of past times and places. It helps then to restore the “natural order of things” after decades

of separation by deepening the bonds with the land of ancestors (Boccagni 2011: 471). In this case homecoming is a way to discover the place where one feels he/she most belongs (Basu 2004: 161) and to find “grounded attachment” (Blunt 2007: 687).

That migration path reflects in a story of 25-year-old Bartek from Russia. He has been living for eight years in Poland now, where he has finished history studies and now starts his professional career. He was born to Polish father, who moved to the USSR as a contract worker of a Polish company in the 1980s, and mother of Russian and Georgian origins. Due to his predecessors’ complex cultural background, Bartek could listen to all three languages at home from his early years. However, the process of acquiring Polishness through the channels of primary socialisation and strengthen further through the channels of culturalisation² was very shallow. Intergenerational transmission of knowledge about Poland, so important for one’s national identification, was limited to summer visits to his father’s family in Poland. When the relationship with relatives in Poland had loosened later, he lost the contact with the Polish language. Bartek was not also familiar with Polish culture as his parents followed Russian traditions and customs and he did not have an access to Polish higher or popular culture (literature, radio, television, etc.).

It was the illness and death of his father in 2003 which divided Bartek’s teenage life into two parts and was a biographical turning point (Breckner 2007: 125). The narrator was overwhelmed by the trajectory of suffering, that is, as suggested by Fritz Schütze, an external experience regardless of one’s will, which in consequence turns out to be a turning point in an individual’s biography (Kaźmierska 1996: 42-46)³. A way to escape from that biographical trap appeared to be the attempts to recover his Polish traits. Shortly before the father’s death Bartek began to learn the Polish language and culture at one Polish minority institution. His narrative reveals the crucial role of mother in that decision. It was, on the one hand, an attempt to find a remedy to the father’s deteriorating psychological condition resulting from his progressive disease. Despite Bartek’s parents were divorced, she believed that rebuilding Bartek’s Polishness could have had a positive effect on his father’s health as for a long time he was deprived of contact with the Polish language and culture. On the other hand, in the situation of inevitability of the father’s death, mother recognized the Polish language as a capital to guarantee son’s better future. As it was explained by the informant:

My father was very happy. It was basically a few months before his death, my father got sick and so he died. A few months before his death I started studying Polish, I mean my mother encouraged me, perhaps mom knew... I do not know, maybe she found out that there were good conditions, maybe economic factors were the most important, maybe she wanted me to come back there to met with father’s family again... I do not know. She just encouraged me a lot and after short time I made up my mind and started to learn the language because she really wanted me to. When my father got to know that I began to attend Polish lan-

2 Culturalisation is defined by the Polish sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska as formation of one’s national participation and so being the “introduction and entering in the universe of symbolic culture in general, including the national culture” (2012: 109).

3 According to Fritz Schütze the trajectory of suffering is one of types of biographical structural processes (alongside biographical action plan institutional action scheme, biographical metamorphosis and trajectory) that enables to describe an individual’s life course (Kaźmierska 1996: 42-46).

guage classes he very pleased, and I remember when I was with him he did not let me stop, he spoke to me in Polish, I already told him to stop... And now I understand it was truly sentimental thing for him, very high emotions, because he had long been deprived of opportunities to talk to someone in Polish as he had only colleagues from Russia and did not maintain any contact with someone who spoke Polish... So for him it was a great experience. And until his death he would always speak Polish to me...

An effort taken by Bartek to learn Polish language and culture was also treated by him as a return to childhood times, when he frequently visited his family in Poland. He wanted to restore nice memories of that time:

For me that experience of childhood was very important, those memories were very important. I remembered them the whole time, when I was attending the Russian school I remembered them. Now I recall one day when I was coming home from school and I was repeating all the time "Dziękuję. Proszę. Dziękuję. Proszę" [pol. Thank you. Please. Thank you. Please"]. So it was present in my life all the time, until that time when I started to learn Polish and eventually started to study in Poland (...) I can say that there were my first memories, which were important because they were those first memories. And I remember that trips to Poland as a great time, when everything was so great, when we walked across the street to eat ice-cream, I remember that we took a pot and on the opposite side of a street there was a kiosk with different ice cream flavours, so was the ice cream of various flavors, we took full pot of ice cream and came back home to eat it together with the whole family. I remember watching television at the table, whole family was present. And all of these dances, talks, playing games... So I had some very concrete memories of that time, there were many such important things.

In the next part of Bartek's narrative he explains further that his attempts to learn about the Polish heritage of his family was a natural way to „regain” his Polishness:

Right after school I was attending those Polish language classes, each time with great pleasure. I was always much engaged and wanted to participate in them as much as possible, because I felt and now I feel emotional connection with my Polishness, which at that I time I still wanted to rebuild, to regain. I wanted to learn to speak Polish well, with the right accent, to know those language sounds, to know better Polish culture (...) Looking through the experience of my childhood, when I was in Russia, when friends of my father always called me "a tiny Polyak, a tiny Polyachok" [rus. Polish kid], and all these trips to family in Poland... When I was a little kid I never thought in terms of nationality, belonging, identity... but I remembered about this Polish experience of childhood, I remembered about my origins... But what made me emotionally tied to Poland were those Polish language lessons. When I was learning words I was recalling what I had heard and tried to say in my childhood, I gained more and more vocabulary, it satisfied me more and more, and in this way today I say that I regained that Polishness back as if I were a Pole as a child but then I had to realise and verify it.

While initially he was re-building his Polishness in order to discover the roots of his father and bring back memories of childhood times, he did not make any biding decisions related to the return to Poland. However, after his first after more than 10 years visit to Poland, when he participated in a summer school for young Polish diaspora members, he got much “*inspired*”, as he describes, with Polish culture. He then came to conclusion he wants to study there:

Well I got very inspired after this summer school, even more convinced to learn the Polish language in order to study there in the future or at least return there some day.

At the age of 17 he easily passed the entry exams for studies in Poland (he got the best exam results among all applicants in Russia). Since he was too young to start studies (one has to be 18 years old to study in Poland), he had to attend one-year preparatory course of Polish language and culture in Poland. The time was not, however, wasted as he could “*absorb the Polish culture as much as possible*”. He finally also decided to study history. As he explains:

I decided to study history because at the secondary school I was attending I was encouraged to do so by my teacher of history. And I also thought that it may also help me in some ways to gain more knowledge about Poland and let me broaden the knowledge I had got before.

Although this field of studies was primarily chosen by Bartek to better understand Poland and, thus, to maintain cultural heritage he was given by his father, it appeared that it also became useful to explore his Polish family traits. Soon after settling in Poland he renewed contacts with his father’s relatives. Despite his concerns about reception there after about 15 years of absence, he was warmly welcomed. For the next years until the completion of studies they were his main emotional and economical assistance. Furthermore, in order to deepen these bonds he makes use of his professional qualifications and reconstructs the family’s genealogical tree with support of his regained Polish cousins.

Consequently, as he concludes in his narrative, the return to Poland was not a way to seek better opportunities, as it was planned by his mother, but the real “*return to the roots*”:

Surely my father greatly appreciated Poland, he wanted to come back there, he wanted to come back here... I sometimes tell myself that my father did not come back but I came back... He left Poland but I returned here....

As many research findings prove, return is of particular meaning for returnees’ ancestors who transmit language, culture and traditions to younger generations (Datta 2013: 97-98). Since previously displaced persons often cannot come back to the homeland themselves, either due to their age (physical condition), financial limitations or personal obligations, they often project their dreams of return on next generations. Despite Bartek is not revealing in the given narrative that his father wanted him to relocate to Poland, the informant in fact treats his return there as a tribute given to the father.

Julek's story: Long-planned calculations

Despite symbolical and ideological importance of the ancestral homeland for roots migrants, one can also observe the weight of instrumental and pragmatic drives related to the possibility of studying abroad and further economic advancement and other living opportunities offered by Poland that would be hardly reachable in returnees birth-countries (Gońda 2013: 96-98). It is often followed by romanticised images of “*mountains of gold*” or land “*flowing with milk and honey*” which are collectively transmitted to subsequent generations by family, diasporic community and school (Głowacka-Grajper 2007: 335).

In this case return is not then an attempt to re-build linkages with the ancestral home but pragmatic decision based on calculation of pros and cons of migration that is either taken at the spur of the moment (when the opportunity arises) or results from long-planned intentions of migrants and, above all, their relatives. An example of biographical plan, being in Fritz Schütze's terms an intentional action scheme within which an individual seeks to achieve previously set plan of life goals (Kaźmierska 1996: 42-46), that is oriented on studies abroad is reflected in the story of Julek, a 22-year-old student from Ukraine, who stays for 5 years in Poland. Both father and mother come from Polish families. Their ancestors were involved in the Second World War's Polish fights against the Soviets, which had later momentous consequences for the family history. As they were repressed by the Stalinist authorities they could return to their lands (from that moment already situated in the USSR). In order to avoid further persecutions both families had to change their names and surnames into Russian-like ones and begin to conceal their origins:

At that time it was terribly uncomfortable to have such origins ...maybe not even but simply dangerous ... because after all one could have some problems ... one did not have a chance to have a good position there as they were always observed, investigated... I was just forbidden, I mean, it was forbidden, I mean they had always some problems because of these origins. So no one really needed that, especially if relations with Poland were already completely lost because part of the family died, other part was split...

After collapse of the Soviet Union, Julek's parents established a trading company. Well developing business required their heavy commitment and, thus, he was left almost alone. As he recalls: “*I was raised by myself just thanks to the books that I read*”. From his earliest years he was making plans for the future. He undertook various additional activities (learning foreign languages, taking part in school scientific competitions, playing sports) to verify in what area he could achieve the success and get a reputable university degree and a well-paid job. One of such activities that would potentially give better prospects for the future was learning the Polish language. He was 10 when he decided, as he claims, autonomously to attend weekend Polish language classes that were supposed to, as he believed, open a gate to study in Poland. Since he could not speak that language (his family did not speak it either), he had to study it for next few years before he could take entry examinations for Polish university:

I was somehow devoted to learn Polish, I started in the 9th grade, so the whole high school I was attending this weekend school... But you know, firstly, one hour a week is not much, secondly, I was not attending each class... Because then I just didn't know what to do. At that time I was thinking of studying medicine and therefore I was taking two examinations, one Ukrainian and the second the Polish one at the Consulate so that I could have some guarantee I would study something... So I studied that Polish language but I did not spend much time on it, especially in the first year, right?, and then I just got used to it and simply I was attending that course... So all my friends did not know what to do.. I mean all of us knew it was possible to study in Poland but we did not think about it... We just took part in those classes so that it gave us some additional chances...

As the above narration shows, although he was not initially convinced where to study, he finally came to the conclusion that in the situation of limited possibilities in Ukraine choosing Polish university would be the best choice. Julek even successfully passed exams for medicine in his hometown but then he decided to go to Poland. Receiving a good degree in Ukraine would be difficult as higher education system there was contaminated with high corruption and nepotism. It especially applied to such prestigious disciplines like medicine that Julek was supposed to start studying.

Enrolment for studies in Poland was, as Julek underlines, his autonomous decision that the overworked parents do not intervene in. They were rather thinking of police or army as the proper work place for Julek but they did not object his migration plans. Interestingly, he made that decision although he had to first attend a one-year preparatory language course without any guarantee what he would study in Poland:

I came to the conclusion that as I have much interest those medical-like subjects, like medicine or biotechnology... And I came to the conclusion that I needed to go to Poland, because in Poland at least I would have a chance to achieve something by myself, thanks to my work, my brain... I would not have to pay someone, I would not have to make it up in the wrong way, right? It is not necessary. All you have to do is just to learn hard, pass exams and then get a scholarship...

Finally, Julek undertook studies in chemical engineering. He is now at the fourth year and prepares for the final dissertation. Moreover, thanks to having an internship in a big chemical company he has been promised to get a well-paid job after receiving a diploma. In this sense, since Julek's professional plans seem to realise in the near future, his return migration could be interpreted as a success story. As noted before, the narrator's arrival in Poland was then based on purely pragmatic reasons, i.e. limited chances for finishing studies and getting good job without giving bribes in Ukraine, as well as greater educational and professional possibilities offered in Poland. It was a manifestation of a conscious and planned "escape to" new opportunities, which would not be possible to realise in Ukraine (Kaźmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011: 148)⁴.

4 Kaźmierska, Piotrowski and Waniek distinguished two motives of cross-border mobility in the situation defined by individuals as difficult or unbearable: "Whereas the "escape from" motive refers to oppression and trajectory the "escape to..." motive is related mainly to the opportunity to take

Consequently, Julek's narrative reveals a process of instrumentalisation of his Polish roots. Since he took advantage of the emerging structural opportunities and got into a university in Poland, his Polish roots were then the capital to be instrumentally utilised in order to achieve previously set goals of socio-economic advancement: first, to get a recognised degree and, second, a reputable job. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's concept, the arrival in Poland was an emerging structural opportunity to convert one's cultural capital (based on his Polish origins) into social and economic capitals (1986: 244-250). Not surprisingly, at that time Julek did not have any other but professional and economic expectations while leaving home.

Furthermore, despite tragic history of family during the Second World War, Julek confirms that neither his Polishness nor Poland were perceived by him in terms of emotional affiliation, national community or land of ancestors. They were rather an emotionally neutral attributes of his family background that now offer distinct opportunities to be exploited. It seems that attitude is the result of lack of well-grounded national identity of his family members and, thus, his weak socialisation and culturalisation to the Polish culture during childhood and adolescence period (Kłoskowska 2012: 109). Moreover, despite his family's background he feels belonging both to the Polish and the Ukrainian nations. His binational identification might be the reason he does not feel special attachment to the present county of residence. He claims he „*could live anywhere*” and, thus, he is eager to move to another country. Poland is just another step on his career path. If the opportunity of emigration to another country appears, he will try to use it. His attitude is rooted in more general perception of Poland among the post-Soviet people. Despite it still appears to the Ukrainians and the Poles living there as an area of relative prosperity and, even more importantly, as a part of the higher civilisational order, it above all remains a transit migration country to the “genuine” Western Europe (cf. Gońda 2015: 76).

When it comes, however, to the informant's situation in the hosting Polish society, a series of problems obstruct his adaptation there. The expected higher civilisational order appears to be an illusion. It is worth mentioning here the classical concept of “the familiar” and “the stranger” (cf. Simmel 1908; Park 1928). That fundamental and universal form of categorizing the social world is particularly important in a situation of cultural contact of different groups (Mucha 2003: 170). It can be interpreted both in terms of the objective differences between the culture of a migrant's country of origin and the one in a host country, as well as in subjective terms such as beliefs and opinions on the scale of these differences and mutual attitudes. Migrants may be perceived in fact as strangers by the host society and, *vice versa*, they may perceive this society in the same way. Concurrently cultural distance between those two groups, which is built on previous mutual perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices may diminish or, on the contrary, increase (Nowicka 1993: 19-34).

The issue of cultural distance also applies to the members of the same national community who due to varying circumstances such as migration, deportation or border shifts were scattered and after a long period of separation learn anew. It turns out that the young people of Polish descent face antipathy of the part of the Polish society. The Poles maintain negative stereotypes of the post-Soviet countries' people (cf. Omyła-Rudzka

distance to one's original culture, family and to separate oneself at least temporarily from one's old world and it's suffocating living conditions” (Każmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011: 148).

2012) which the Polish minority there is identified with. The most common symptom of this is labeling derogative terms “*Ruski*” or “*kacapy*” and unpleasant treatment in public situations (Głowacka-Grajper 2007: 335-336). The main reason is their Eastern Slavic accent. Since they are not able to “get rid” of it they often isolate in Russian-speaking groups that, in result, impede their adaptation. Meanwhile language remains a major determinant of Poles’ national identity (Kabzińska 2011: 14-15). Lack of appropriate expertise in this area eliminates then aspiring nation-members from the national community. And despite students do not usually face other (individual or institutionalised) acts of discrimination, this lack of acceptance have a substantial impact on their psychological and social condition upon arrival to Poland. As Julek notes:

Eastern origins are enough to be harassed. It is very simple “You are Ruski” and that’s it. But no one knows that I’m studying here, nobody knows that I’m working here, maybe I came here on a trip, they don’t know that ... Ruski and that’s it... Every Russian-speaking person has these problems, these stereotypes and xenophobia.

On the other hand, strong feeling of alienation is not only caused by unfavourable reception but also Julek’s cultural distinctiveness and feeling of sharing the Soviet heritage with other Russian-speaking students. His narrative reveals a sense of some cultural inferiority of post-Soviet countries towards Poland as a representative of the West. However, the former USSR republics’ difficult historical experiences, similar ways of communication and common cultural references oblige Julek to identify with that area.

These negative attitudes towards incoming foreign students of Polish descent are often accompanied by public ignorance about the neighboring countries in the East, including the Polish diaspora living there. Julek bitterly comments on this issue:

When I had problems it was usually with people of the lower social classes, these stereotypes are popular on a terrible scale among them, this xenophobia is very widespread. I do not know why... All in all we know, it is a result of their low intellectual level, like, for them the whole Ukraine is part of Russia, for them anyone who is from the East is Russian, never mind that he is Ukrainian or Polish, they do not accept that it may happen that a Pole can be born outside Poland. And yet every second one of them goes to England to work.

It is the result of both deliberate policy of disinformation run by the communist authorities before 1989 which was aimed at ousting World War II deportations into the USSR from the collective memory, as well as limited presence of the Polish diaspora issues in contemporary public discourse (Kabzińska 2011: 14-15; Nowicka 2000: 7). Often this lack of knowledge becomes an argument in undermining students’ Polishness and, in consequence, their right to stay in Poland and benefit from the state’s financial support (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2012: 8-14).

Concluding words

Although the Poles and people of Polish origins from the former USSR are beneficiaries of Poland’s diaspora policy, the system of their support remains inefficient. The

most attainable return channel remains educational migration. With regard to the presented narratives the foreign youth of Polish descent arrive in Poland with specific expectations related to either rebuilding their linkages with the ancestral homeland (Bartek) or opportunities for economical advancement and personal development (Julek).

Both cases do not, however, reflect the typical return migration pattern. At the beginning Bartek's attitude towards Poland was different than regular diaspora member towards the remote homeland. Neither he was given mythologised narratives of the homeland or traumatic stories of his co-ethnics in exile, nor did he share special feelings towards Poland. However, the more he got to know his Polish roots, language and cultural heritage, the more his attachment to Poland grew. Consequently, return to the ancestral homeland does not have to be based on some already existing identification or carefully cultivated linkages with the co-ethnics. It might also result from one's (re)discovery of ethnic roots and the following one's will to rebuild a partially-lost identity (Gońda 2015: 82).

The story of Julek is also far from the typical return model and rather reminds of non-Poles' motives of undertaking education in Poland as his motives in this respect are not based on collective identifications (Nowicka 1993: 17). They fit, however, its primary goal when mobility is performed in order to gain new educational and professional qualifications (Gońda 2015: 81-82). The arrival in the ancestral country may not necessarily be then an attempt to restore the links with one's homeland. Young people of Polish descent from the East, who were born and raised abroad, whose families live in exile for generations and are often of multi-ethnic background, do not exclusively perceive Poland as their "homeland" and other Poles as their fellow "countrymen" (Wessendorf 2007: 1087). While the desire to return is embedded in the definition of diaspora, roots migration can be initiated, similarly to labour migration, because of economic considerations. Therefore it should not be only considered as an expression of ideological desire to unite with the nation, but also as an expression of individualistic and instrumental motivation of individuals to improve their own (and often their families') socio-economic situation (Tsuda 2009: 2).

Both roots migrants' narratives have also revealed that the act of homecoming and its consequences became a key element in one's life arrangements, even though it did not necessarily affect single biographies in the same way. Bartek and Julek had contrasting expectations on their arrival to Poland which formed their further experiences and biographies significantly (Breckner 2007: 132). And, *vice versa*, their returns were considerably shaped by crisis experiences of different kinds (2007: 140), irrespective they occurred in different mobility stages, including trajectory of suffering due to the death of a parent (Bartek) and strong feeling of strangeness in the native homeland (Julek).

Nonetheless, in case of Bartek, his mobility process seems to be finalised, as he rebuild his partially lost identity and renewed relations with his family. In his sense the return met his expectations when it comes to his ancestral homeland. On the contrary, the Julek's narrative reveals that arrival in the predecessors' country, that offers greater possibilities than the country of birth, might be only a first step on further migration. His plans to move to another (Western) country, if such possibility arises, are, however, not only facilitated by potentially better professional opportunities but also lack of acceptance for incoming migrants among the members of Polish society who transmits negative stereotypes of Soviet residents on the incoming co-ethnics. Therefore, it must be stressed that the return to the ancestral homeland has not finally lead to the closure of his mobility path.

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