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HOMECOMER. SOME BIOGRAPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS VISITING THEIR FORMER HOMES

Summary

This paper considers some of possible implications of emigrants' visits back home. Alfred Schütz's seminal paper "The Homecomer" provides a theoretical framework for analysis of autobiographical narrative interviews with young Polish people living in Germany. An attempt is made to explore why and how – typical for the emigration processes – a more critical and objective image of country of origin and a growing feeling of strangeness at home deepens emigrants' capacity for reflection on their life and identity. Consequently, most of them painfully realise that they will never fully assimilate with the country of immigration and they no longer find themselves comfortable in their country of origin. This has crucial implications for their biography. The collected empirical data show that some of emigrants plan to immediately return to Poland in order to save their emotional relationship with those back home. Others find their homeland poorer and less prospective in comparison to Germany. This legitimates their residence abroad. And finally, the negative homecoming experience can perform a very important function in the narrators' common-sense argumentation, i.e., this should reduce psychological and biographical costs of their emigration career.

Key words: autobiography, emigration, homecoming, biographical work, marginality, identity.

INTRODUCTION

The considerations undertaken in this paper are based on empirical material comprised of autobiographical narrative interviews with young Poles who emigrated to Germany, which are analyzed according to the principles of the research method developed by Fritz Schütze (1981, 1983, 1984; cf. also Prawda 1986; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1995)¹. Their analysis enabled me to establish the succession of events in the course of immigrants' life as well as the reconstruction of their self-images which accompany these events. Thus, the planning stage of emigration (I decided to label this phase as pre-emigration) which is usually related with perceiving oneself as a citizen of the world, to be someone who feels everywhere at home and is similar – if not the same – to other inhabitants of Europe (or the world). In turn, the sharp and painful realization of conflicts arising from the clash between the native and the foreign culture is characteristic of the initial stage of individuals who live abroad. The most important outcome of these conflicts is the feeling of inner turmoil (Park, 1950: 355) intensified by the sense of national identity and emotional bonds with their homeland which was suppressed or even denied until that point, only then coming to the fore (Stonequist 1961: 121–122). Immigrants notice – much to their surprise – that in their new surroundings they are not perceived on the basis of their belonging to the shared European culture, but as strangers, outsiders or Poles. In Germany, this category is usually negatively charged and constitutes a stereotype which adds to the burden for those who attempt to create their image in the eyes of people with whom they interact. For many immigrants, belonging to a certain national community combined with a sense of being different becomes a pivotal scheme of reference and involve their own self² as well as compels them to give a careful consideration to their own lives. Following the immigration process, the clash of cultures and colliding self-conceptions of individuals – who on the one hand would like to keep their cosmopolitan ideas and, on the other, must face their suddenly discovered sense of identification with their country of origin – bring about understandable tension in their biographies. Their uncertain life abroad remains in sharp contrast to the recently abandoned homeland – the safe, sensible and predictable in respect to both performing everyday actions or the natural course

¹ All the interviews discussed and quoted in this article were carried out in 2001.

² “Me” – the objective aspect of the self which is an interaction-mediated process – is seriously contested. Cf. Kaniowski A.M., 1990, *Wokół pojęcia tożsamości w koncepcji Habermasa*, in: Witkowski, L.. (ed), *Dyskursy rozumu: między przemocą i emancypacją. Z recepcji Jürgena Habermasa w Polsce*, Toruń: Wyd. Adam Marszałek, p. 264.

of events as well as to their familiarity with the language which surrounds them. The common-sense view shared with others in the society, self-evident routines of everyday life seems to be considerably different in the host country. This usually results in an uncertainty, volatility and ambiguity, consequently leading to some confusion, suffering, anxiety or even loss. In the *ex tempore*³ recollected experiences in a foreign country the narrators must face these biographical dilemmas and explain both to themselves and the listener why – in spite of the intensification of their patriotic feelings – they continue with their immigration. For this purpose some of them refer to their experience of paying a visit to Poland, their families and friends. There are at least three outcomes of this experience. Firstly, immigrants may feel a need to return to their homeland immediately, for they feel they are unable to follow the ongoing changes in their original milieu and subsequently become more and more alienated. Secondly, they may strengthen their conviction that they had been right in choosing the other country as a place of residence. And finally, individual visits at home and the negative phenomena noticed there may provide them with – admittedly illusory – arguments supporting their decision of not returning to Poland. This allows them to reduce the profound social and psychological costs of being torn between the two loyalties and responsibilities (Cf. Schütz 1990b).

The experience of homecoming after a long absence as described by Alfred Schütz in his inspiring article ‘The Homecomer’ (Schütz 1990b: 106–119) is particularly of interest here. “Home” is defined here in broader terms and designates one’s homeland – the place which one had left. Referring to the figure of Odysseus, who after years of wandering finally reaches the shore of Ithaca, or veterans returning from a war back to their families the author shows that a homecomer [...] *expects to return to an environment of which he always had and – so he thinks – still has intimate knowledge and which he has just to take for granted in order to find his bearings within it* (op. cit.). In the meantime, however, their intimate relationships, the sense of common time and space as well as the ability to empathize shared with those who had left and those who had

³ *Ex tempore*, i.e., the narrative told without previous rehearsals guarantees that the task set for a narrator, i.e., recapitulating the course of events in their biographies follows certain rules (Labov, Waletzky 1967: 20–21). The constraints present in every narrative, i.e., **the constraint to go into details**, the constraint to condense and the constraint to close the textual form allow us not only to reconstruct the complete picture of events in the narrator’s life course and attendant emotions (Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977: 118–226) but also allow the identification of some false biographical passages and the narrator’s efforts of camouflaging, blurring or disguising some events because of their problematical character.

stayed have been irreversibly undermined. Schütz writes that for a homecomer (...) *the home to which he returns is by no means the home he left or the home which he recalled and longed for during his absence* (op. cit.: 115–116). Moreover, he is not the same person, neither for himself nor for those who await him and, paradoxically, he becomes a stranger in his own home. Although the author refers solely to cases in which individuals return to their homeland for good⁴, I still believe that there are some distinct traces of the homecoming experience in Schütz's terms to be found in the short stays of immigrants at home. In other words, the disappointment with local reality and the inability to understand their household members – which earlier had been practically intuitive – as well as an acute sense of alienation are also experienced by those who visit their native country only temporarily. Contrary to all expectations, home and its residents, as well as close friends are not the same. Experiences of those who had left and those who had stayed have become dissimilar in terms of their nature and extent. They notice different aspects of everyday reality, their hierarchies of values and schemes of reference become altered. For many immigrants, the loss of their deep emotional bonds with their family and friends in Poland brings a sense of great disappointment and sadness. They must acknowledge the unpleasant truth that everything – including themselves – has been profoundly changed. Many of them are surprised by the fact that they are treated with distance not only at the place of their immigration but also in their homeland (Simmel 1975). Living – to some extent – in two societies broadens their intellectual horizons and enriches their knowledge. This makes their opinions more balanced and impartial (Park 1961: xvii–xviii). They become more and more marginalized (Park 1950: 354; Stonequist 1961: 2–3) which initially (or permanently) engenders a feeling of discomfort and annoyance.

Many immigrants believe that coming home only for a short time will enable them to forget – at least for a while – about their painful feelings related to their stay in a foreign country, about the fragility of the world there and the accompanying uncertainty. Unexpectedly, however, instead of bringing some relief their visits at home result in disappointment – the consequence of negative experiences of a marginalized man (Stonequist 1961) torn between conflicting attitudes towards both cultures on the verge of which he lives. Immigrants feel more and more alienated and lost in the country of their origin and among their

⁴ I would suggest that the feeling of alienation depends rather on how long one had been absent and how much one had gotten acquainted with the “alternative” reality, not on how long one stays at home (whether it is for good or just a short visit).

family and friends whom they had left. They learn that their visits in homeland do not solve the problems which arose from their choosing the immigration (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 351–352). Therefore – following Anselm Strauss – the phenomenon of homecoming is considered a turning point (Strauss 1969: 93) in the immigration process. This implies a critical, often shocking understanding of specific changes in one's situation and/or a way of feeling and thinking about one's life and oneself that may also deeply transform one's relationship with others (op. cit).

The subjective meaning which the narrators ascribed to their visits at home (in homeland), the role they perform in their biographies as well as their significance for the development of their identity will be analyzed in the later part of this paper. The collected autobiographical recollections of young Polish immigrants in Germany suggest that there are at least three – dependent on sociobiographical conditions and an individual's reference to the immigration process – possible implications of the homecoming experience. I will show how this experience becomes an important part of their biographical work (Strauss 1991: 342) aimed at accounting for their stay abroad and reducing their sense of guilt caused by leaving their homeland (especially in the context of the “reinforced” or discovered patriotism, declared earlier by narrators) as well as sustaining continuity in their self-image.

THE NEED TO RETURN TO THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

In this day and age, many people leave Poland in order to earn money, improve their skills in the fields which are still deviating from European standards or because they are hoping for an adventure. Many of them plan to accumulate a certain sum of money or enrich their knowledge and then return home. They hardly ever realize that even their temporary stay abroad may change their life permanently and profoundly affect their biography. Focusing on difficulties and sufferings associated with their life in a foreign country, they often forget that at home life continues as well. Their successive visits at home where they find themselves excluded from the daily lifeworld of their family and friends give them assurance that they should return to Poland as soon as it is possible. Worried and frightened, they start to realize that the longer they delay their departure, the

less probable it becomes that they find the home they wish to see and desperately long for⁵.

In this regard it is interesting to look into the narration of Robert – a 27-year-old dedicated horseman, who has been following his passion for several years – also in his professional field of work – in Germany. The narrator intertwines an argumentative commentary⁶ in the flow of his autobiographical rendering with the objective of explaining why, in his current life situation, he decided to return to his native country. Robert comments: Robert (4/22–38)

I say: damn... one should do something at least, settle down in Poland to have something to return to, because... here [in Germany]/ as I was approaching here and and-and/ and-and all these things became not so rem/ not so distant from me, only I was getting to know these sss... that life here, these people, these customs... the whole country, so sss... ehm my relations in Poland those one week long, or two weeks long, or sometimes only at weekends in Poland... ehm were not enough for me to... for a normal life, because hmmmmm I hadn't been here [in Poland] for three months. I came for two weeks, or for one week and... and well, I wasn't able to visit everyone, to talk to everybody again, well I was outside, because/ because / I life's been going on and I...

I: Mhm.

N: I'm of course not there [in Poland], y'know? And it's great, I know all these people further, but ... ehh ... when we sit together, they are talking about something, and I don't know what they are talking about, because, damn, I don't know that last year someone did something, fell from his bike or... something happened to him, y'know?... So, that is unfortunately that/ that/ that problem, that/ that... mc... it's already like, damn, a split personality, similarly, because... or/ or/ Either here to the end, or there to the end.

At the beginning, Robert says that he has to do something and finally settle down in Poland “to have something to return to”. This short sentence implies

⁵ Anslem Strauss observed this process in the biographies of immigrants to America, who coming to visit their homelands unexpectedly notice: [...] *how little affinity they have retained, how identified they had become with America and Americans. Any return home, insofar as have really left it, will signalise some sort of movement in identity. Some people literally go back home in an effort both to deny how far they have strayed and to prevent further defection.* (Strauss 1969: 93–94).

⁶ On the basis of linguistic knowledge about different communicative language schemes i.e., description, narration, and argumentation and their contribution to the reality created in narration, Schütze concludes that if the very narration reflects the processual character of the individuals' life course, in the argumentative part narrators attempt to explain both to themselves and their listener the reasons of their conduct, evaluate the flow of events in their life and give careful thought to their identity.

that Robert is fully aware that as a person who lives abroad and occasionally visits his country of origin he must take steps to save his home – a relatively stable point of his biography – a place where he can always return to. In an attempt to explain this issue, Robert enters a biographical commentary in the form of a very careful analysis of his current situation. The narrator already knows that neither his family nor friends share the same community of time and space with him.⁷ He is also convinced that their common-sense experiences, schemes of interpretation and frames of reference have become materially divergent and, consequently, their mutual alienation deepens. Robert illustrates this process with the following words: *I know all these people further, but ehhh when we sit together, they are talking about something, and I don't know what they are talking about, because, damn, I don't know that last year someone did something, fell from his bike or... something happened to him, y'know?...* Eventually, the narrator comes to a conclusion that he is not able to live in two remote worlds (in the physical, mental and cultural sense). As a matter of fact, his dilemmas reflect the drama of a marginal man: *So, that is unfortunately that/ that/ that problem, that/ that... mc... it's already like, damn, a split personality, similarly, because... or/ or/ Either here to the end, or there to the end.* The narrator's autobiographical rendering acknowledges his marginal position – balancing on the verge of two worlds which is indispensably connected with psychological burden and uncertainty that is colloquially termed a “split identity” by the narrator. In the case of Robert subjecting the influence of the immigration process on his life course and identity (mainly in its collective dimension concerning his “Polishness”) to moral judgments and analysis arises the need of (re)interpretation of his place in the world as well as his emotional commitment to the national collectivity. This happens because the feeling of loss and confusion which occurs *when things usually taken for granted become problematic* (Schütz, 1990a: 231) is experienced while visiting Poland. The narrator afflicted by worry notices that some routine procedures of conduct cannot be applied in his case, he cannot follow a casual conversation of his friends and finds himself separated from the ordinary course of events. According to Schütz, it is one of the most painful experiences lived

⁷ Schütz writes: [...] *community of space means that a certain sector of the outer world is equally accessible to all the partners in the face-to-face relationship. The same things are within reach, within sight, within hearing, and so on. Within this common horizon there are objects of common interest and common relevance; things to work with or upon, actually or potentially.* The author continues: *a community of time does not refer so much to the extend of outer (objective) time shared by the partners but to the fact that each of them participates in the ongoing inner life of the other.* (Schütz 1990b: 109–110).

through a person returning homeland when: *He believes himself to be in a strange country, a stranger among strangers [...]* (Schütz 1990b: 106).

This nagging sense of losing intimate bounds with his home is a turning point in Robert's biography and he decides to return to Poland in order to rebuild his weakened relations with his relatives as well as to have something to return to in general terms. He is motivated not only by the need to find a stable and safe place in the world, but also the wish to establish some sort of a firm emotional "foundation". The narrator adheres to his plan because he believes that if he stays abroad he will lose one of the most crucial parts of his own self – his national identity.

However, it is debatable whether Robert will stay in his native country for good or if he will return to Poland at all.⁸ Other immigrants' experiences as well as the narrator's former life course (he had already left Germany in order to settle down in Poland "permanently" once) make his future choices doubtful. The narrator had already proved to himself, his family and friends that he is capable of returning and in fact, this experience may help him postpone his homecoming ad infinitum.

The case of Robert indicates one of the most intensive internal conflicts experienced by people who left their homeland for years and plan to come back one day. Some original plans of many immigrants are canceled due to the changes taking place in the surrounding reality: while the country of their immigration becomes more and more close or "familiar", their fatherland seems to become more and more strange and incomprehensible.

THE LEGITIMIZATION OF AN IMMIGRANT'S CAREER

The internal conflict, the roots of which can be found in the experience of marginality, may also contribute to making a choice in favor of the country of immigration. This second option will be discussed in reference to the interview with Ela.⁹ In her recollection of her life abroad she explains: *I cannot be concerned about two countries, it doesn't work... to live as if in two countries, it's... hard. In the long run it/ it doesn't work, you know?... I have/ I live here now [in Germany]*

⁸ Robert did return to Poland for one year only. After that, he came back to Germany, at which time the interview was conducted. Although Robert claimed stubbornly that his stay abroad would not last longer than 12 months, when I had a chance to ask about him several years later he was still living in Germany and he was still claiming that he would return to Poland one day.

⁹ At the time of the interview the narrator was a 25-year-old woman.

and I live the life that is here, you know? In order to understand her decision we must take into account some social conditions of her immigration process. First and foremost, we must remember that the narrator comes from the Silesia region. Her father – after providing evidence of his German origin – moved to Germany when she was a one-year-old girl, while her mother, her step-brother and she herself stayed in Poland. When Ela was 6 or 7 years old, her mother changed her mind, for the standards of living in Poland deteriorated significantly¹⁰. In spite of considerable differences in standards of living in both countries, the narrator's mother was not able to adapt to the conditions of living abroad and after a year she took her children and returned to Poland. This led to an irreversible breakdown of her parents' marriage and a herself being cut off completely from her father. A few years later, Ela's brother married a Silesian woman of German descent¹¹ and they left for Germany. Ela used to spend every summer holiday there because she could work and earn a living. When she graduated from secondary school, she decided to stay in Germany for a longer time. At this point, the narrator took her first crucial step on her immigration path which, at the time of the interview, was four years long. For six months, she has lived at her brother's place. Then, he decided that finding a flat for her was necessary. She had to decide whether to take this chance or give it up. This was of critical importance, because Ela had to make her final decision whether she would look for her own place and stay in Germany or come back to the place of her birth. She opted for the former solution, which was another important biographical choice. In her opinion, having her own place obliged her to stay in Germany, for she claims: *You cannot just take it, stand up, and... and quit it all and leave, you know?* Moving into her new flat – Ela suggests – put an end to all her doubts. Her narrative account, however, implicates that she was not yet entirely certain about her decision and only her visit at her friends' place in Poland when she saw their poor conditions of living confirmed her conviction. This experience was a "milestone" (Strauss 1969: 93–94) in her immigration career. When the interviewer asks her what she thinks about her choice now, she repeats several times that she does not regret her decision and then she explains: Ela (17/27–18/48).

¹⁰ It was probably in 1982 or 1983: the time of the Martial Law in Poland when the country sank into a state of poverty.

¹¹ A person having the so-called "red passport", i.e., the German citizenship (which does not necessarily imply one's identification with the German culture or mastering the German language) is mentioned here. Thanks to her (through a formal marriage to a German woman) the narrator's brother could apply for the German citizenship. Unfortunately, there is no space here for additional explanations concerning the highly complex situation of Silesians.

I don't, because actually when I came to visit Poland two years ago/ if I'm not mistaken; I was there two years ago, during holiday, during... Easter in Poland, I actually saw these contrasts, this/ this life that is really hard. I visited my friends (2) which was for me/ if you are here for a longer time, you are not in touch with Poland so often, you know?, so it vanishes somehow/ I can remember how it was in Poland, I know it's hard, I know people earn little ehh but you already have this distance as/ and it deepens/ and then you ehm... you'd rather live this life here. I say it sometimes 'there', 'here' or 'at my place', 'at your place', because it's...

I: mhm mhm

N: for me/ Some people are angry if I say: well, at my place eehh... here... they: 'you come from Poland, you should say here 'at my place', or/ but I live here, I have to... focus on here, cause I live here. I cannot be absorbed in two countries, it doesn't work... to live as if in two countries, it's... hard. In the long run it/ it doesn't work, you know?... I have/ I live here now and I live the life that is here, you know? And I adapt to it. If I am to leave it unsaid... and think, it would be there so and so aah... it doesn't/ it simply doesn't work, you know? This is when I... visited Poland, I met my friends... Generally... these people are totally... they're different/ different than/ than I can remember them. They're so nervous, they're so... uptight. It's all about such trifles that wouldn't matter here, they'd be a small thing here, and there it takes on the proportion of... something really big, you know?... And there were... I actually caught myself doing it all the time, when I visited my friend... mc... She lives with her mother, her sister, she's now married... she's pregnant, and there are only two rooms they live in, you know?, all together. She has a small one, the whole flat is 38 m², you know? (2) And I came to her, you know?, and she was with her husband in this room and she was saying how she'd bought a furniture set, you know?, here/ and there's a fitted carpet and she was describing the room, as if she would live in this room till the end of her life, as if/ as if I'd been furnishing my flat, she was describing this room in this way, you know? And I sit there and I say: 'Well... and I've to change my place, you know, because.. I have no bed/ bedroom, because I can't'/ I have a pain in the spine and always there is only one thing, a large bed. And because there's only one room in my flat, there is only an unfolding sofa there, you know. And you cannot sleep well on the sofa, can you? And I sit there and I talk, you know?: 'Oh, I would find it very useful to have, you know, a bedroom.' This husband looks at me and says:... 'You live alone?... And I say: 'Well'. And he says: 'And you have this flat for yourself, with all these things?', you know? And I say: 'Well'. (I say): 'The flat is thirty square meters', you know?

And he goes: ‘And you’ve no bedroom? You need a bedroom?, you know?... And I say: ‘Well... because on a bed it’s’/ and I explain it to him normally, you know?, I ache all over and this one/ this one room it’s not enough ... ehh ... And they both sit ((laughing till*)) on their couch* and look at me as if I was from another planet, you know? ehh Only then I realized, that they coop up in this one room ((laughing till*)) and I just came... and I just tell them that I need a bedroom, because 30m² it’s not enough for me hm hm* In that moment I felt awful, and awkward, you know?... It means, on the one hand I was ashamed, that I could say something like that, but on the other hand... well, I’d never thought about it (2) you know? There are flats here... In Poland, there were always problems with flats, you know? ehh And here unfortunately there are none. You can have even 100m² and no one would say a word, you know?... In that moment it was... it was totally meaningless for me, what I’d said, you know? And they took it... I really don’t know ((laughing))... And then I wasn’t talking lot, because I was thinking that I had put my foot into it...

I: Aha

N: and it would be ((laughing)) a complete flop ehh... you know. It’s sad/ it’s really sad, when she told me how they used to live from the first day of one month to the next [*when the salary is paid*], that it’s hard... and at work... and... (it/ it) I thought to myself, I can really live here... These problems they have there, it’s-s... well, there’s/ it’s better by far. And on the one hand, I’m not surprised that all these people are so neurotic and so nervous there mmm... because they have to, they have to struggle to live all in all... exactly this way, you know?, especially young people. Older ones usually have their places... from my mother’s generation, let’s say, they’re coping somehow, you know?, but young people just after college... hmmm ... they have little future... I don’t know what it looks like now... eh Well, almost all my friends have children and they’re at home and they are crying their eyes out that from the first to the first of each month and it’s hard and so on ehh... And I, for instance, have nothing to talk about with people from Poland now... It’s hard for me to talk to them, because... well, I/ I always feel as some sort of... a criminal and if I say that I’m satisfied... I feel/ I think I have to find myself guilty/ still... find myself guilty, that everything is going well, you know?... I just don’t want to ehm fo/ force it upon them, and it’s hard when they keep on asking: ‘How is it, how do you live and... and’/ Again, on the second hand, they all think that here... you do nothing, in fact, and all things...one can find in the street... you just pick up the money just like that, you know?... They cannot/ for instance, if I say that I work, that I work a lot, or that I/ they look at me-e... in disbelief. They really think that/ that one can do nothing, and one gets

money. I have to work here, too. It's not easy here. I can't say I just go and and and... I get up for fun to go to work sometimes and and and... I've got a lot of money, because I have to live, I have to pay and... But, for sure, it's not as hard as in Poland, you know?

The quoted passage not only reflects the course of the factual events in Ela's immigration but also gives us an insight into the parallel development of the narrator's internal states. We may reconstruct both her attitude in those days and her current attitude towards her visit at her friends' place in Poland. The narrator maintains that she has already built a stable platform of everyday life in Germany, she is doing well and she is independent and free.¹² Although her decision to have a flat is very important in terms of the consequences which it brings, the narrator still has many doubts about the legitimacy. Her crucial existential reflections were only provoked after visiting her friends in Poland. In comparison with her friends' modest, cramped room in a flat shared with their mother-in-law, one in which – as the narrator believes – they would probably stay for the rest of life – her immigration conditions seem to be incomparably better. She realizes that in Germany she can afford many things that would be unattainable in Poland. While her friends coop up in one room – she is concerned with buying a new bed. Ela finds the difficult and hopeless situation of her friends characteristic of other couples whom she knows and finally associates it with the generally poor and unbearable conditions of living in Poland. By means of her personal experience and through the generalization within the entire Polish society, the narrator can fully justify her decision both in her own eyes and the eyes of the listener. This marks a certain point in her biographical experience when she: *has to take stock, to reevaluate, resee, and rejudge* (Strauss 1991: 322) her life. This resulted in closing certain phases of her biography and starting a new “German” stage. Experiences accumulated during her visits in homeland enabled her to clearly determine her attitude towards Poland. Ela does not want to dwell on what was lost to her after she had left Poland any more, for she knows that the future she wishes awaits her only in Germany. Since that time, her plans, hopes and dreams have been centered in Germany. At this point, the narrator takes the final step

¹² In Ela's biography, this process of becoming self-dependent and having her “own place” is very significant, because from her early childhood she was saddled with many difficult duties: she had to take care of her siblings – twins who were born after her mother left the narrator's father and returned to Poland, as well as support her mother.

– she decides to find her long-estranged father (formally a German) in order to be able to apply for a German citizenship.¹³

There is a reasonable doubt whether the homecoming experience alone may initiate the process of integration with another culture and regain an orientation in one's life. Ela's biography suggests rather that this is a necessary but not sufficient condition for this process. While analyzing her homecoming experience we cannot forget about her Silesian origins, her step-brother who lives in Germany and performs a role of a significant Other – her biographical caregiver (supporting her both in financial and emotional terms) or at last about the Silesian “familiar” enclave where she ended up in while making a decision to stay abroad. There are complex socio-biographical conditions involved in this process which result in consistent and effective elimination of the trajectory potential and in a successful immigration process.

RATIONALIZATION

The notion of “rationalization” is discussed here in reference to ethno-methodology and denotes the narrator's common-sense practices of reasoning and procedures by means of which they make sense of and account for their world of everyday life¹⁴. The following analysis of Marek's¹⁵ case shows that immigrants often touch upon common-sense, minor and depreciating experiences or observations during their visits at home in order to account for and justify for themselves and their audience why – in spite of their revived patriotic feelings – they decided to stay abroad. Moreover, an attempt will be made to prove that an apparent way of coping with this biographical dilemma may result in destabilization of one's immigration career.

The crucial question which shall be answered here is: why some immigrants put so much effort into diminishing the value and importance of their home country? It seems intriguing why people whose biographies disclose their great

¹³ It is very a difficult task for the narrator, because she has not seen her father since she returned to Poland as a child after her mother's unsuccessful immigration. At the time of the interview Ela had a dual citizenship.

¹⁴ Here, I am referring to Harold Garfinkel's concept of creating common-sense frames of interpretation: “the documentary method of interpretation”. See: Garfinkel H., 2002, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 77–79. Cf. Czyżewski M., 1984, *Socjolog i życie potoczne. Studium z etnometodologii i współczesnej socjologii interakcji*, “Folia Sociologica”, vol. 8, p. 90.

¹⁵ Marek told me his life when he was 38 and had been living in Germany for 11 years.

attachment and commitment to Poland and who, whilst speaking to Germans, refer to interpretation schemes characteristic of their native culture, create a negative picture of Poland on the basis of some insignificant examples.¹⁶

This kind of rationalization – as the collected data demonstrate – is untrustworthy, as denial and degradation of one's own country of origin – even in its minor aspects – may lead to questioning one's biography as a coherent whole. Another essential feature of this strategy is that such an internal crisis, which has not been fully controlled, may show its potential and disorganize an immigrant's attitude towards the lifeworld as well as towards his self-concept. Consequently, one may find oneself on the border of trajectory defined by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann (Schütze, Riemann 1992; Schütze 1997, 2004) as disorderly process of suffering in which a person is incapable of sustaining control over his or her life and is forced to surrender to overwhelming external circumstances. This inevitably leads to the end of one's active participation in the reality of everyday life and to chaos within one's world and values. By means of rationalization, immigrants may create some sort of a simplified worldview which allows them to keep the state of a precarious balance (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349–350) and an active relationship to themselves and the lifeworld. Usually, this attempt to solve problematical issues comes to nothing, for constructing some sort of a falsified reality brings only temporary relief and creates an apparent order in one's immigration career. There is, however, a constant threat that in the face of an actual life's juncture (either directly connected with the experiences of marginality or caused by other critical moments in life) this way of accounting for one's willingness to stay abroad will disclose its provisional character and, thus, elicit a painful feeling of a complete loss of trust for oneself and one's interpretations as well as radically change one's sense of self-identity (Berger, Luckmann 1983: 81).

There is a number of things which a Pole who has never left his country would not find bothersome and which at the same time seem frustrate and aggravate an immigrant who has had a chance to become acquainted with a different world. In comparison with the reality abroad, the native country appears unpleasant and even dangerous – here, people swear, cars are stolen, waiters are rude and the drugstore's assortment is of much worse quality (these opinions may be found in the collected interviews). This observation is in sharp contrast to the recently

¹⁶ Looking at one's collectivity from a perspective of an objective outsider (Simmel 1996: 39) is conducive to developing unfavourable and very critical opinions about Poland to a certain extent.

“activated” identification with Poland. It is my assertion that some narrators resort to inconveniences of this kind – thus attempting to discredit their original symbolic universe (Berger, Luckmann 1983: 155–158) and moral order – for the purpose of mitigating or even ‘anaesthetizing’ their feelings of inner turmoil and pain caused by their inability to adjust completely to a strange country. There is a simple guiding principle in the way of their reasoning: if their feelings towards their country of origin have been questioned in a smallest detail – they are no longer obliged to remain steadfast in allegiance to and showing regard for their homeland.

This kind of common-sense reasoning the narrators employ in order to explain the sense of circumstances in which they find themselves, explain the reasons for their actions, evaluate their life course and, lastly, to cope with their problematical identity will be discussed on the basis of a passage taken from Marek’s interview. An attempt will be made to prove that my assertion is supported not only by the content of the narrator’s account (“what” is recapitulated) but also the format of its presentation (“how” these experiences are told). I will pay particular attention to the fact that certain fabricated¹⁷ for one’s immediate purposes clarifications are in contradiction with the real problems of a marginal man. This inevitably results in disorder of presentation reflecting one’s identity crisis.

Marek’s emigration career started at the turn of the 1980’s when his father – an old age pensioner – decided to investigate his German roots and look for his sister in Germany. At that time entry visas were still required at the Polish-German border and people who applied for the German citizenship had to go through the so-called ‘Lager’, i.e., a camp for resettles. As if by accident – accompanying his father throughout this process – the narrator came to Germany and managed to bring his wife with him (although she was very reluctant to go). Then Marek – a recently graduated engineer – put his diploma away and took up a job at an assembly line as an unqualified worker. In the course of time he was promoted to a foreman position, not only because he had learned German in a very determined fashion, but also because of his fluent knowledge of the Russian language (his crew was composed mainly of Russians). It happened by sheer chance that his superiors learned about his engineering qualifications and transferred him to a higher position. Eventually, the narrator was offered a post in a large German company which was about to enter the East market. With his

¹⁷ After Goffman I understand “fabrication” as an individuals attempting to induce a false belief in themselves as to what is happening. See: Goffman E., 1974, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 83.

good command of German as well as Polish and Russian, Marek seemed to be a perfect candidate. At the time of the interview, the narrator's professional and financial position was undoubtedly very good.

The argumentative commentary which will be analyzed below comes directly after the narrator's description of a stereotypical picture of a Pole who – according to most narrators – is widespread in Germany. In general terms, he can be described as a “simpleton” – a seasonal worker who goes abroad and – away from the reference group's control – behaves in an outrageous way, consequently harming the reputation of his fellow citizens¹⁸. The narrator depicts them as people who are constantly swearing. This causes him to be embarrassed whenever he meets them in the street. Marek is afraid that if they speak Polish he may be associated with this group and he may be ascribed – by virtue of stereotyping – their negative attributes – subsequently, he stays out of their way. At this point of his narration, Marek introduces the argumentation line, which is quoted below: Marek (12/3–13/34)

And hmm I must tell you, that I've realised that how much the Polish language ehm... is... eh dominated by these swearwords it is seen when you are behind Polish borders for a longer time. When I was in Norway/ after eight months... of staying there I return/ I was going by ferry from Oslo ehm from Ystad/ I was going from Oslo to/ to Ystad. This is a port city ehm in Sweden and on the ferry or by the entrance to the ferry... I could hear Polish people speaking ehm that our unfortunately terribly injured Polish language. And that is what... I don't know... how you ehm ehm consider it but I've attached great importance to it that I... I cannot hear this/ these swearwords in the street here... There are also some swearwords and vulgarities in the German language, which one can hear, but in comparison with... with these Polish ehm they are really very soft... And that's the ehm thing, which irritates me in Poland very much. That's the thing that partly caused my decision to stay in Germany.

¹⁸ The narrators' common-sense definitions suggest that it is a Pole who steals, wangles and drinks excessively, as well as does not want to establish good relations with inhabitants of the country where he works because he is only there for a short period of time. In my research on Polish immigration in Germany, I combine Park and Miller's (1969) description of an Italian immigrant of a “caffone” type with – in fact convergent – characteristics of a Polish peasant in Thomas and Znaniecki's seminal work (1976). The “caffone” is a simpleton who does not care about his appearance, has no regard for the opinion of others, ignores his surroundings and has only one aim in mind: to accumulate a certain amount of money and return home (Miller, Park 1969: 103–105). Referring to ‘The Polish Peasant in Europe and America’ Park and Miller conclude: men, *removed from the restraining influence of an organized community, tend to follow their immediate impulses and behave in monstrous ways.* (Park, Miller 1969: 288).

I: mhm

N: As I... the more often I was here then... or I was visiting/ or I was visiting/ I started generally visiting the whole world, for... except Norway I was in Sweden and I was in Ireland ehm I was in London and I've se/ I've seen that/ that/ that it might be without these cuss words... () ... I must tell you that the boorishness in the streets which sss... was aaah ubiquitous... in Poland was very disturbing to me... and it disturbs me today; although it has been changed... but... there when I was trying to go to ehm just to have a beer, although today one can have a beer in very cultured pubs and so on. at that time ehm when I was still, let's say ehm I started drinking beer aaah... I had to drink it in this box ehm ehm or in such pub rooms from a mug so I was meeting there ehm people from different ehm backgrounds and I must tell you that ehm I've had different stages... of longing for Poland. I've had/ it was such/ the worst was perhaps 6th year or 5th year of residence here...

I: mhm

N: I've had really serious ehm... ehm... I've been really seriously thinking over, let's say, making a decision of coming back to Poland. Especially as I've had such an opportunity professionally but, among other things... just the fact... that in Poland these streets are so extremely dangerous still... that this/ this cri/ that crime in Poland is still so high and as I've my family and/ and two/ two daughters... that I must say that... that I've started to think whether I should do it, because if not this I might have decided to come back but ehm this country... changes for I... everyday I can see how far it changes but ehm... one thing has not changed... that/ that such boorishness ehm in the street there is still a lot of. Especially in large centres. You come from Łódź, the city of Łódź ehm I don't know, it seems to me that there is also there ehm but there is no need to go to/ to Łódź but it is enough if one goes to any single town in Poland, walks along the street in the evening and see/ sees just guys wearing ehm tracksuits ehm running around in their training shoes and/ and controlling that/ that/ their territories... mmm I often visit Poland by car... and, I must say, that I am so concentrated and so tense when I drive around Poland today so... so no/ nowhere else do I drive so ss/ that is because, I actually c/ at every step eh... perhaps not/ I'm not afraid but... I'm aware that it may happen something to me... something bad. Especially as... I drive a car... which I've ... so/ I'm constantly exposed that someone will want to ... that car from me in any way ehm I don't know either steal or break or destroy ehm I must tell you, that I've no pleasure in it and I drive to Poland often, both on business and privately... so my... I begin to breathe when I'm either, let's say, at my mother's-in-law, when I put the car somewhere away either in a garage or...

in an attended car park because there is constantly this fear that something just may happen in that street . When we walk... around Opole or around Gliwice or around Katowice sp... I haven't (2) I really try not to be distinguished by I don't/ I don't/ I don't provoke, I do not dress in the way that one could see in advance that I just have..... maybe a little bit more money ehm I dress fff as/ as everyone else in jeans and a T-shirt but... in Poland I do not feel safe and this seems to be one... of many eh reasons but one of crucial problems that/ that a man/ that I... have made the decision and it seems to me after talking to others that... it also has disturbed that in Poland there is as it is and that the state... not completely ehm takes care of the safety of these citizens. The subject is much talked about in recent times – that something is to change, that it is improving. Surely, a lot has changed, for instance, border checkpoints today eh eh look completely different than/than/than hmmm 5,6 or 8 years ago... but... hmmm... I must tell you that this country, Germany, is... a very... safe country in the sense that a man may simply feel/ not only financially... but eh in the aspect, let's say, o/of the public security

I: mhm

N: more comfortable tha/ tha/ than in Poland. That is because I'm aware of it that as a citizen of this country I've ... really a lot of possibilities and rights which, let's say, a man who would like to harm me in any way I can very quickly eh eliminate or... cry for help and I'll eh receive the help. But eh I'm afraid that/ that in Poland unfortunately one could still be attacked in/ in the street and/ and others will be watching it and/ and nothing more will happen... So there are surely these things which, which in Poland, unfortunately, hmmm change very slowly...

I: mhm

N: ... very slowly... And having, as I say, children eh because I'm not worried about myself for all in all mm one may hmmm... You know, the fact that someone eh will take my jacket away or eh will steal my car these are all things which one may... still buy later or purchased or even if someone will give me a black eye. If only it came to an end in this way so one is welcome but... but actually I'm afraid of this/ this/ this/ that/ that/ that/ this banditry...

The narrator begins with voicing his irritation with the Polish propensity for using profanities. He noticed it particularly when – having been separated from his native language for some time – he unexpectedly met swearing Poles in Germany or when he returned from Norway where he had been working during summer as a student and heard his fellow countrymen swearing. This account is supposed to be an argument in favor of his choice of living abroad: *And that's the thing, which irritates me in Poland very much. That's the thing that partly*

caused my decision to stay in Germany. This declaration is of great relevance to the dynamics of his argumentation for its preposterous character¹⁹ (disproportionate to its importance), which is perceived just after its verbal production, forces the narrator to provide further explanations to his interviewer. This implausible argument significantly contradicts Marek's biography as a whole. It is unlikely that someone who recalls his childhood and youth in Poland with such warmth, could now question the substantial part of his life with such a – so to speak – “shallow” argument. In this context, “the swearing motive” seems to be incoherent and the narrator is put under pressure to provide the listener (and himself) with a more reliable explication. Marek is trapped within the line of his reasoning. In order to validate his choice of Germany as the country of destination he has to refer to more and more shocking experiences while visiting Poland and thus, he comes to a dead end. Let us systematically analyze his arguments. When the abuse of profanities in Polish turns out not to be sufficient to explain his immigration, he uses a broader category and claims that it is the boorishness in the Polish streets and public places that really annoys him. The narrator's cosmopolitan perspective, that of a person who had visited many countries within the scope of their work, is intended to support the accuracy of his account. However, when he gives an example of a pub the patrons of which come off as arrogant²⁰, he suddenly realises that he can remember these places from the communist times and they may look completely different now. Then, within the background construction, Marek returns to the chain of events in his immigration career and recapitulates the difficult times when he was wondering whether to stay abroad or return to Poland. Again, he refers to the argument concerning rudeness in Poland in order to show that his reluctant attitude towards coming back to Poland – even when it would be profitable in professional terms – was right: *I must tell you that ehm I've had different stages... of longing for Poland. I've had/ it was such/ the worst was perhaps 6th year or 5th year of residence here... [I: mhm] I've had really serious ehm... ehm... I've been really seriously thinking over, let's say, making a decision of coming back to Poland. Especially as I've had such an opportunity professionally.* Marek refers here to a stage in his professional career when he was offered a lucrative post of a commercial manager in one of branch offices of a well-known German company in Poland. The narrator did not use this opportunity. Neither his argument about swearing, nor the one concerning rudeness in Poland

¹⁹ In common-sense thinking, it seems to be nonsensical that a decisive argument for leaving one's country is the abuse of profanities by one's fellow citizens.

²⁰ Marek probably talks about pubs before 1989.

does satisfactorily explain his decision to reject the offer. Consequently, Marek must further degrade the country of his origin in order to justify his choice and by means of the 'but' construction he is forcefully debasing Poland. He depicts it as a place where cars are stolen, people are robbed and killed in the streets for no reason. Simultaneously, the narrator emphasizes that he is not so much afraid of all these crimes as far as he himself is concerned, but because of his daughters (then – primary school first-years). Referring to higher values – a father's concern for his children – should leave no doubts that, as a caring and loving parent, he had chosen Germany as a country which may ensure safety for his daughters. It is difficult to dismiss such an argument.

Another crucial feature of Marek's account is his noticing changes for better in Poland²¹. Being aware of the constantly improving situation in his homeland, its development aiming at reaching the European standards of living, makes his immigrant situation more complicated. The better the living conditions in Poland become, the fewer reasons against returning to homeland the narrator may find. His awareness of similar possibilities for professional development in both countries, and especially the moment when he was offered a lucrative post in Poland as a German company representative, makes him torn and disorientated. His future appears uncertain and his identification either with Poland or with Germany is still complex. For this reason, Marek still struggles with himself and continues to work on his identity. This is defined by Strauss as: *the point where any man is questioning certain important "me's" and finds that he does not know quite how to characterize them, he is "alone" with his experience, wrestling with something that is as yet quite incommunicable.* (Strauss 1969: 38).

In an attempt to control the feeling of psychological discomfort or even suffering after abandoning homeland, Marek attempts to invalidate his emotional bounds and feelings of loyalty towards his native country. Consequently, he must resort to very serious accusations against Poland. The argumentative passage quoted above seems to prove that even now (after ten years of living abroad) the narrator is not able to deal with his problematical identity successfully. By means of forming "apparent" and sometimes "trivial" justifications for his immigration career Marek does not solve the real internal conflict which is bothering him constantly, as its true nature is not discovered. Thus, Marek lives in a constant

²¹ Let me remind you that we are talking about differences between 1990, when the narrator had left his native country as well as the earlier years (the narrator's youth) and the year of 2001 – the time of conducting the interview. One should also bear in mind that I analyze the narrator's subjective attitude towards reality and not the subjectively occurring changes.

state of uncertainty, as if suspended “between” the two worlds. In his everyday life this conflict may be unnoticed, but in biographically significant situations it may come to the fore. Firstly, there may be such critical incidents in biography, which may force him to reflect on painful aspects of his life (in Marek’s case it is caused by his father’s death, which implies some sort of evaluation of his previous life course and makes him to think his future over). Secondly, the dynamics of the storytelling may coerce a narrator into initiating (if ever undertaken) a biographical work. This in turn confirms a disarray of certain biographical threads and the narrator’s marginal identity. All these traits may be found in Marek’s storytelling and “reveal” an enormous tension in his immigration career.

CONCLUSION

Biographical experiences of emigrants usually reach a point in which they come to realize that they will never be fully assimilated with the country of immigration and will no longer feel at home in the country of origin. This acute feeling accompanied by conflict due to tension between two cultures often leads to cracks in one’s everyday life and a sense of anxiety. Definition of life situation and self (mainly their national identity) usually offered to immigrants by others strengthen their conviction that they are not members of a world of normal life (Schütze 1997: 16) anymore. There is a growing set of contradictions within their life course which create chaos and cannot be easily managed. Under these circumstances, many of them endeavor to redefine their identity (Strauss 1969: 93), the world in which they live and expectations of future. Immigrants’ stay at home (in Poland) has crucial implications for their biographically relevant decisions.

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