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## PARADOXES OF LIAISON WORK IN INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES AND THEIR SOCIO-BIOGRAPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

### Abstract

Recapitulated in autobiographical narrative interviews, the experiences of two Polish women: Magda and Ewa constitute the basis for this article on various types of liaison work (hegemonic and symmetrical). They are set within the framework of (*quasi*-) professional work aimed at helping Pakistani immigrant women in Italy and at supporting autistic children in Poland and Belgium, respectively. Thus, both narrators are forced to deal with considerably different cultural patterns rooted in an oriental and Islamic lifestyle, in the former case, and manifesting themselves in the therapies of children with disabilities in European countries, in the latter. An attempt is made to examine the social as well as biographical consequences of introducing a certain type of liaison work, when the recipients are persons afflicted with suffering. Moreover, the study discusses the tensions, ambivalences and paradoxes which appear in micro-situations, including conversations and professional activities, frequently framed by the neoliberal ideology promoted by the educational programs of the European Commission. It seems that they are rarely a subject of critical analysis which takes into consideration the biographical consequences experienced by both sides of the interaction and their social implications, particularly in the area of multiculturalism or intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** professional work, liaison work, mistakes at work, European educational mobility, intercultural communication, autobiographical narrative interview

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## INTRODUCTION

Two autobiographical narrative interviews<sup>1</sup> were carried out with Polish women who – in their (*quasi*-)professional work connected with educational mobility – were faced with the paradoxes and pitfalls of giving assistance to suffering others form the subject of this in-depth study. Firstly I examine the life history of 24-year-old Magda, who went to Italy under the European Voluntary Service and helped young Pakistani female immigrants. Secondly, I analyze the biographical experiences of nearly 50-year-old Ewa<sup>2</sup>, who worked in an inclusive Kindergarten and – while visiting a similar institution in Belgium – compared various ways of dealing with autistic children, while restraining herself from judging which way is proper or more ‘effective’. The objective of examining both autobiographical narrative interviews is to show a sequence of events leading to success or failure in carrying out professional tasks (connected with performing a hegemonic and symmetrical liaison work, respectively). The paradoxes, tensions and mistakes within the scope of the work are then subjected to critical reflections. It is vital to note that it is not primarily about placing one type of work above another, but to demonstrate that an inappropriate choice of work (e.g. ignoring the socio-cultural context and biographical circumstances of the interaction partners) when help is needed can wreck that work and end in fiasco. Much more attention is devoted to Magda’s case, because the Pakistani women whom she helped interacted with her face-to-face, and their cultural pattern seemed to be definitely different. Therefore, she unknowingly made many mistakes, which presumably resulted in grave biographical and social consequences. It also seems interesting to determine the conditions of others’ attitude to clients in her charge. Insofar as the case of Ewa is concerned, we deal with considerations from the point of view of the person who receives help and the recognition of various (although controversial) methods of treatment, while in the case of Magda we are able to observe a “missionary” attitude, relying on attempts to impose or make available specific cultural patterns to the women whom she helps, or, put differently, attempts to “mould” them for a specific European “image and likeness”. This includes a presupposition – not

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to autobiographical narrative interviews conducted and analyzed in accordance with the method proposed and developed by Fritz Schütze [see e.g. 1981, 1984, 2008; also: Prawda 1989; Kaźmierska 1996; 2012].

<sup>2</sup> Both interviews were carried out within the “EuroIdentities” project founded by the European Commission’s 7th Working Programme (2007–2011). The age of the narrators refers to the time when the interviews were held.

always fully realized – regarding a definite hierarchy of actions, value systems, lifestyles, i.e. the preferred European versions versus those strange ones rooted in the Orient and in Islam. Such a simplified understanding of intercultural differences seems to offer schematic diagnoses of the problems of the young Pakistani women, whereas their origin could be elsewhere. The fact that Magda notices their suffering might suggest a need to introduce asymmetrical work – which is not so much focused on bringing together viewpoints and hierarchies of significance, but rather identifies and accepts cultural differences and tunes in to the overwhelming experiences of a marginal person [Stonequist 1961] that are seen, but unnoticed [Garfinkel 2002] by the narrator.

It should also be noted however, that the objective here is not to evaluate the conduct of either of the informants, but to describe the socio-biographical conditions under which their definitions of situations were constructed, to analyze their work, and to present its potential biographical and social consequences. One needs to realize that the kind of intercultural work done by both narrators is not an easy task, although it is seldom recognized and typically underappreciated. Nowadays, understanding the culturally different Other is usually based on a quick, schematic explanation, a superficial interpretation of gestures and symbols and a sketchy recognition of their values and rituals<sup>3</sup>. However his or her cultural patterns, resulting from “vivid historical traditions” [Schütz 1976a], hardly ever lend themselves to such quick and casual transpositions. Their comprehension requires intense work (including examining one’s own interpretation schemes, reference systems, and mistakes in interaction) and does not always lead to overcoming the tensions which arise when juxtaposing one’s own cultural patterns on somebody else’s, even when it is brought to our attention or interest.

It is worth noticing that the famous announcement by Chancellor Angela Merkel that “multilateralism has failed”<sup>4</sup> has not led many European decision-makers or social analysts to look at that situation from the bottom-up perspective – viewed through personal experience of ‘work at the grass roots’ level, executed by many dedicated people (both professionals and volunteers), who – perhaps like Magda – were at least willing to ‘face’ diversity even if she suffered a defeat resulting in a biographical disappointment.

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<sup>3</sup> One dominant way of understanding cultural differences in the field of intercultural management is e.g. the model postulated by Geert Hofstede [2001].

<sup>4</sup> This refers to her statement of 16 October 2010, which took place during a meeting with young members of the CDU.

## PROFESSIONAL WORK AND LIAISON WORK – FRAMEWORK OF PROBLEMS

Professional work, and primarily liaison work, form the major analytical frameworks within which the cases related to giving help and support to people afflicted with suffering (immigrants and children with autism) are considered in this article. Therefore both these notions are outlined below.

Following chiefly the Chicago School of Sociology and its successors, professional work is understood here as a series of actions performed by an individual who has esoteric knowledge, a social mandate and licence (usually resulting from theoretical expertise and long-lasting practical experience) towards a person (client) in need of advice, help or support. Professional work can take the form of manual expertise, e.g. during an operation carried out by a surgeon, or it could be symbolic, e.g. when a priest absolves a sinner from his sins. On many occasions these forms occur together, blending with each other in various proportions. However, the classic professions such as doctors, lawyers or clergymen are not discussed here, but rather the focus is on the more “modest” profession [cf. Schütze 1992: 133] of a social worker (Magda) and a special needs teacher (Ewa). At the same time, I define Magda’s work as *quasi-professional*<sup>5</sup> for two reasons: firstly, because she has no appropriate educational background, expert knowledge, or necessary qualifications or experience; and secondly due to the fact that there was no accountability for the results of her work to specific institutions or superiors. Furthermore, mistakes at work in Magda’s case could not be discussed with senior or more experienced colleagues or supervisors, who might have provided reflections and guidance on her failures in the context of her identity and life history [cf. Granosik 2013: 241–242]. All the factors above do not eliminate dilemmas and predicaments typical for this type of work; actually, quite the opposite, they can augment them.

It should be re-emphasized that the reflections included in this article on work executed by both narrators are aimed at identifying dilemmas, antinomies, paradoxes, and pitfalls of professional work [Schütze 1992: 149–150; Riemann 2010; Granosik 2013], presenting thoughts on systematic errors which appear in it [Hughes 2009], and on recognizing potential weak points and ‘dead ends’ which are often not (or even cannot be) discerned *in actu*.

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<sup>5</sup> This formula is not equivalent with such definitions of social work as half-professional or semi-professional work, as some authors have sometimes labeled social workers’ actions [cf. Schütze 1992: 133]. It does not belittle the efforts by the narrator to build trust and cooperation with the immigrants.

At this point it is appropriate to stop for a little while and look at one of those mistakes, which usually translates into a paternalistic attitude to an individual afflicted with a problem and triggers hegemonic work. This is the result of deeply rooted rules of thumb and stereotypical views of an individual who is receiving help and of the motives for their conduct, which quite frequently direct the actions of social work practitioners, including even experienced professionals.

As regards social work practitioners, an interesting case is a certain German student of social work who participated in a seminar led by Gerhard Riemann. During the course he discussed, together with other participants, the field protocol concerning the case of Mr. Olschewski,<sup>6</sup> which he had encountered during his internship in a family counselling centre. While living in Germany, this Pole lost the right to custody of his daughter and was fighting to get it back before the German court. In his observations concerning this case, the German student commented as follows: "I think that the constellation with exclusively female office-holders [the case was presided over by a female judge – KW] is difficult for an eastern European male with regard to the acceptance of authority. The behaviour of Mr. Olschewski before the court (uncooperative and aggressive) becomes more understandable if you take this into account" [Riemann 2010: 81]. This stereotypical opinion, however, was subjected to critical reflections during discussion in the seminar group, to which I will return shortly.

As regards experienced professionals, it is worth examining the situation related by Catherine Delcroix<sup>7</sup> in a conversation with Lena Inowlocki [Delcroix, Inowlocki 2008]. Seasoned social workers, who could not cope with the rising unemployment and crime in Nantes, France among young immigrants from the Maghreb region, asked her for help and support. In the course of their joint work it turned out that they fixated on one interpretation of the causes underlying that state of things and believed that fathers were to blame because they were isolating themselves and had no authority, which was why they could not control their sons. This 'rigid', superficially obvious, diagnosis overshadowed any other prospective explanations [Delcroix, Inowlocki 2008], systematically deepening the pitfall and creating a sense of helplessness. Additionally, the schematic and dependent on

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<sup>6</sup> Looking for the origins of overblown contrasts between a "barbarian" and "wayward" Eastern Europe and "civilized" Western Europe, Norman Davies points out that as the follow-up to the Cold War two full generations of people in the West grew up with hardly any acquaintance with the eastern part of Europe, and enjoying their newly acquired wealth were coming to believe that they are the only true Europeans [Davies 2005].

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Delcroix is not only a leading figure of the French school of biographical studies, but she is also extremely knowledgeable on Islam history and religion.

a culturally grounded stereotype Europe-centric view on the conduct of the Other (Muslim fathers) turned out to be such a persistent cognitive scheme that even in the course of collecting their life stories (which was proposed by Delcroix) the interviewers (social workers) did not acknowledge, or even pretended not to hear, the conversations when immigrants spoke about their friends or nets of relations with neighbours, because this was contrary to their expectations. It became quite clear from a thorough analysis of the conducted interviews that they consistently asked after their friends and their sense of loneliness (thereby presenting their understanding of the situation), even though the narrators had already spoken about those things [Delcroix, Inowlocki 2008].

That said, in both cases the social workers had opportunities to reflect on the triggered stereotypes.<sup>8</sup> In the first case it was a persistent image in Germany of a traditional and patriarchal Polish family and society, i.e. based on male dominance (being – in the student’s view – very much distant from a civilizational model of equality between a woman and a man);<sup>9</sup> while in the second case it was a widespread interpretation of the history of colonization as a mission on the part of France to bring the noble ideas of the Enlightenment to other countries, which thereby resulted in almost automatic discrediting of immigrants from the post-colonial countries. As we observed, in both cases the students and/or social workers had opportunities to analyze their situations and recognize their own mistakes.

One paradox of social work resulting from knowledge gained and applied by professional assistants should be stressed here, as it is meaningful for our considerations. Mariusz Granosik defines it as follows: “The decidedly unequal division of power and knowledge between a worker and a client naturally introduces a hierarchy to the situation of a professional action. The client’s expectations are quite different though – the client counts on full understanding, cooperation, and some preservation of equal footing. This conflict implies the need for special professional tasks aimed at minimizing the sense of subordination of the client – controlling the trajectory of suffering. Such intentional efforts facilitate a high efficiency of work, which is the foundation of its meaningfulness.” [Granosik 2013: 116–117].

The second significant concept for this study is liaison work. Its origin is in the *liaison communication* introduced into sociology by Everett Hughes [Hughes

<sup>8</sup> They could analyze their own behavior and attitude during workshops, where all participants, i.e. students and mentors, speak on equal terms.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Davies is certainly right that – even in scientific papers on Poland – instead of fair comparisons it is very easy to find many false, exaggerated or unreasonable contrasts between the East and the West [cf. Davies 2005].

1972: 303 at al.]. He was observing the work of a bilingual secretary in Quebec, who relied not only on translating from English to French and vice versa, but also took into account the respective cultures (including the communication styles characteristic for both of them). This concept was further developed by Fritz Schütze to include the notion of *liaison work*, i.e. the work essential in intercultural communication which relies on converting differences in cultural codes (understood as resources of interpretation which facilitate defining and giving meaning to reality), and on defining and explaining the viewpoints of interaction partners [see: Czyżewski 2005: 348].

In addition, Marek Czyżewski's three types of liaison work formulated with reference to the public discourse [Czyżewski 2005: 356–385; 2006: 130–132] are characterized and transferred to the area of experiences of face-to-face contact with the Other,<sup>10</sup> as outlined below.

1) **Hegemonic liaison work** is based on a schematic way of thinking about the Other, it does not include the rule of reciprocity of perspectives, and therefore it is associated with attempts to dominate the interaction. It can take two forms, by either: a) ignoring the points of view of the partner in a communication process, or b) paternalistically treating the partner's outlook on the world, which is pre-defined as incorrect or distorted. More importantly, the persons who perform this work are typically well-intentioned and truly believe they are acting for the good of the Other. As a result, any failure which results in breaking the relationship can lead to social and biographical consequences.

2) **Symmetrical liaison work** assumes equal terms for both sides of the argument and both viewpoints, wherein asymmetrical conditions stemming from a sense of injustice or humiliation do not occur. It has a modern-rational variant (a), relying on reciprocity of perspectives, i.e. considering and recognizing the standpoint of the interaction partner and assigning basically equal significance to his or her schemes of interpretation and values [Czyżewski 2014: 398–399; cf. also Schütz 1976b]. It is also related to an assumption that in wishing to settle some controversy “one should use primary and unvarying criteria of rationality of arguments and aim for a valid synthesis of an opinion” [Czyżewski 2006: 131]. It also has a post-modern-relativistic variant (b), which rejects the assumption above and recognizes the validity of all opinions in efforts to reach consensus.

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<sup>10</sup> Following Everett Hughes and Fritz Schütze, Marek Czyżewski speaks about three contexts where potential misunderstandings in intercultural communication occur. It can happen on institutional grounds, in situations of private face-to-face interaction, and in the public discourse (including the political discourse) [Czyżewski 2005: 348]. The last area is not discussed in this paper.



Juggling various, frequently dispersed and inconsistent discourses, becomes an objective as such and a cultural value [cf. Czyżewski 2014: 399].

3) **Asymmetrical liaison work** is related to thoroughly problematic and primarily asymmetrical experiences of violence, suffering, and humiliation. It requires – as Czyżewski points out with reference to Levinas’s ethics – to learn ‘instructions’, subordination to the Other, giving voice to them (without negotiations or attempts to reach common ground), listening to their story, and respecting their (harmed) dignity in a face-to-face situation [Czyżewski 2005: 364]. Put differently, this type of work is aimed mainly at persons experiencing a trajectory of suffering [Riemann, Schütze 1991], i.e. those who are disoriented and feel increasing chaos in their lives, have lost trust in the world and themselves, suffer from disorders, and are convinced of an inevitable, terrifying fate. It must be stressed that yielding to the dynamics of the trajectory makes one essentially unpredictable both for oneself, one’s significant others, as well as professional assistants. It happens that a person afflicted with suffering seems unbalanced, brusque, argumentative or arrogant, which deepens the interaction anomy and discourages people who bring help, exactly when their help is desperately needed. It requires extreme patience and understanding from their interaction partners, but also entrance into their biographical experiences, which could bring about a “discovery” of enormous significance for their own life and outlook on the world [cf. Czyżewski 2012: 491].

In the text below – based on the experiences of Magda and Ewa – an attempt is made to show the socio-biographical determinants for the choice of a particular type of liaison work, to indicate some crucial points (overlooked or ignored) in its course, and to discuss the consequences of introducing hegemonic and symmetrical liaison work respectively. Asymmetrical liaison work, although it is not considered here as a biographical experience, is presented as an alternative and, in Magda’s case, a recommended way to proceed in the situation of rising tension between diverse cultural patterns. It should be also stressed that this type of liaison work described below can be seen in Delcroix’s suggestion that social workers in Nantes rely on carefully listening to immigrants’ life stories; or for example in the work initiated by Dan Bar-On in a dialogue between the descendants of the Nazi oppressors and the children of those saved from the Holocaust, in which experiences of seemingly indescribable and indisputable suffering are shared [Bar-On 2000].



## HEGEMONIC LIAISON WORK – THE CASE OF MAGDA AND PAKISTANI IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN ITALY

The case of Magda, who tried and failed in her attempt to integrate Pakistani women with the local environment<sup>11</sup> during her work within the scope of the European Voluntary Service, represents a contribution to the discussion on professional work and liaison work in its hegemonic form. The reconstruction of the narrator's efforts and her system of orientation is attempt to account for the causes of her failure, which brought about significant biographical and social consequences.

The interview with Magda was conducted in 2008. She was then 24 and was studying at the university in a big Polish academic centre, where she moved from a middle-size town. Having been prodded by the interviewer and narrative constraints [e.g. Schütze 1984] she started her story with memories of her family, which were still very difficult for her due to her parents' recent divorce.<sup>12</sup> At the same time they were of major significance in Magda's reasoning about the role of women and in her feminist orientation. She underlined that she had always enjoyed gaining knowledge and had been continually engaged in social matters, which she described as follows: *I have always been keen on reading, engaged, and I have always been a leader of something or other*. This scheme of action produced specific results: at the young age of 13 Magda won an English language competition and as a result received a journey to Italy. As she claims, she was delighted by this 'fortuitously' visited country and it became an object of her great affection. Another trip the next year and subsequent travels to many other European towns – due to her engagement in numerous intercultural cooperation programs for children and youth and within the European Voluntary Service – were her conscious choices and are presented in the narration as a biographical action scheme.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> An up-to-date description of the program can be found, for example at: <http://www.eurodesk.pl/granty/erasmus-mlodziez-wolontariat-europejski>.

<sup>12</sup> After receiving the question aimed at stimulating the narration, the narrator suggests that the memories from her childhood are not meaningful for her life story and wants to go on to her university time. At that point the interviewer subtly asked her to go back to her childhood time. Magda concluded these issues are too painful for her, but elaborates on them thanks to the narrative constraints.

<sup>13</sup> 'Biographical action scheme' is one of four (besides institutional expectation patterns, trajectory of suffering, and metamorphosis) biographical structural processes that refer to one's own autonomic plans and the intentional mode of relating to one's life [see: Schütze 1981].

Before proceeding to analyze the history of interaction processes related to Magda's cooperation with Pakistani women immigrants, it is worthwhile to look at her mental space [cf. Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen 2012], which influenced her definitions of situations. It should be recalled that the horizon of mental space of an individual is determined by his or her biographical experiences, which profile a unique stock of knowledge at hand [Schütz 1976c: 281], systems of significance shaped in the process of education, public debates concerning issues important to the individual, or tested methods of coping with external expectations (e.g. requirements of the European Union expressed in the rules of youth programs). Put differently, in trying to answer the question why narrator applied a certain type of liaison work, we should take into consideration what could determine her understanding of the situation in which she found herself back then. In Magda's biographical account we can indicate two main viewpoints which organize her reasoning and system of relevance and, thus, configure her mental space and life attitude. They are: feminism and neoliberalism. It should be pointed out that while the narrator consciously refers to the former 'ideology',<sup>14</sup> the latter is taken for granted as a model of organizing everyday reality and is not subject to her critical reflection.

At this point it's worthwhile to ponder the experiences which Magda associates with her feminist attitude. Paradoxically she traces the origins of her young fascination with *gender* issues back to her days in a senior boy-scout crew, which she joined so she could face specific challenges on equal terms with the other members. Unfortunately, she quickly realized that even there the division of tasks was strictly related to gender – it was assumed that as a girl she would take care of cooking while the male members of the crew would willingly carry her rucksack. The narrator recognizes this form of external expectations of the role of the woman as a pressure which she refuses to accept. It is unclear to what extent this definition of her world is impacted by the relations between the narrator's parents – nonetheless, it ought to be taken into account in further considerations. At the beginning of the interview we learned that her parents were recently divorced. In Magda's opinion, this event was of an emancipatory character for her mother – only after escaping her husband's dominance could she continue her professional career. Moreover, when reconstructing Magda's descriptions, we can trace the beginnings of her attitudes, values, desires and orientations invoked

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<sup>14</sup> It needs to be distinctly stressed that I am not concerned here with sociological interpretations of either of these 'ideologies', but with 'how' the narrator 'knows' and 'defines' them, bearing in mind that the system of one's knowledge is – as described by Alfred Schütz – “incoherent, inconsistent and only partially clear” [Schütz 1976a: 93–95].

and promoted by youth programs (e.g. the European Voluntary Service). Let's look closely at two excerpts where she relates what young people can learn there (e.g. in the course of trips or camps) and what lessons she herself learnt from these meetings:

Then the camp in Denmark... [...] school in Copenhagen [...] <sup>15</sup> (2). The camp was for young people aged 18 years old and I went too early of course ((laughing)), I was 16 years old and I didn't fit in well there because of my age, but I found my feet soon. And it was a camp for... for people from all over the world, there were Asians and people from South America there, the whole world really. Hmm. The camp was organized in such a way that the participants had to work on its programme, the structure of the whole camp err everyday agenda, organized cooking, cleaning and all that. We were supposed to govern the school for three weeks and well... it was our good will if we did something or not... The camp was fantastic, actually full of... stories, getting to know people, sort of voluntary things, so this was// this was the best idea for a camp, just let us act... hmm wonderful thing. [...] It was just a nice camp, good camp, hmm, with interesting people, from whom I learned a lot, that's it! Not in the sense of competences, but I learned from them, hmm, some ideas for life... As a teenager I needed such... sparks.

Next, in response to the interviewer's query how she actually finds out about the possibilities to go to European camps or youth meetings, Magda explains what their participants can learn:

Well, apart from a set of social and other competencies which one [...] acquires there, I think that they also get convinced that they can do something, that if they want they can do something for others... and I... probably thanks to these experiences **I became convinced that, generally I believe in it, that we are the masters of our own destiny**<sup>16</sup> and hmm// and maybe I am, I don't know, so much contaminated or marked with this sort of thinking, but I believe... hmm that we think about our life in terms of some sort of plans short and long-term [plans], and I just schedule every next year, I've got...// It's very embarrassing, but well, I've got a plan for every single year to be carried out, one-year plans...

It should be noted that the informant describes a way of 'formatting' a model of a 'useful' citizen, needed for Europe<sup>17</sup> – an individual who has specific features and competences. She talks about self-organization, self-discipline, facing challenges, reaching for her personal potential, rational and creative time management,

<sup>15</sup> Transcription notation system used here is adopted from Gail Jefferson [see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, ix-xvi]. I: Interviewer; N: narrator; ... short pause; (2) longer pause, lasting 2 minutes; // cut off of prior word or utterance, difficult stressed word or utterance; ((laughing)) nonverbal of preverbal behaviours; [] additional explanations of the researcher or transcriber, [...] avoided parts.

<sup>16</sup> Author's emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> The watchword of the European Voluntary Service is: "Improve your skills and society". See: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm).

adaptation to various situations, responsibility for oneself and others, and skilful management of cultural differences. All this should ultimately contribute to a harmonic coexistence and optimal cooperation in the spirit of personal freedom and independence. However, the narrator does not realize that her way of presenting experiences is essentially the characterization of a person who is an ‘entrepreneur of himself’ [cf. Foucault 2008: 226, Stachowiak 2013: 141–161], which is aptly captured by her own words: *I became convinced that generally I believe that we are the masters of our own destiny*. At the same time Magda was not aware that her autonomy was merely superficial and that she was overcome with mediated and disguised – characteristic for ‘governmentality’ – methods of wielding power [cf. Czyżewski 2009: 87]. This ‘neoliberal variant of the art of government’ – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains following Nicolas Rose – “aims at (...) ‘governing through freedom’ – managing actions of subjects convinced of their own autonomy, independence, and self-determination” [Stachowiak 2013: 144]. Analyzing the informant’s excerpts above, it can be assumed that while working with Pakistani women immigrants she was driven by a particular image of what qualities an individual should have to ‘fit in’ with the Italian society and become a legitimate citizen of Europe. In other words, features such as independence, agency, openness, individuality or equality seemed vital to her, and these were all traits which – according to a common stereotypical view – a traditional Muslim community does not have and which those young women (oppressed by a patriarchal family, in her view) needed to be shown. That’s why her support relied mostly on encouraging them to defy their own religion and culture, which – paradoxically – she hardly knows.

Let’s now proceed to the part crucial for our considerations, the part of the interview in which Magda talks about her one-year stay in Bergamo, Italy, under the European Voluntary Service (her stay took place two years before the interview was held). We will closely examine the sequences of her interactions with young Pakistani women and pay attention to the way both parties to this process defined each other, bearing in mind that negotiating and maintaining own identities (establishing who is who in a given situation) is a fundamental issue for this process and also defines the further direction of the actions of both sides [cf. Czyżewski 1985: 36].

I: And what does one do during the European Voluntary Service?

N: Hmm, many different things [...] many different things because there’re// there are different fields, hmm, in which you can run projects ranging from ecological to youth policy, and for instance the organization of events on their grounds... The Italian comune helps elderly people and works with children etc. And I was supposed to work with children in my

project, but I think I am not fit for it ((laughing)) and that's what I discovered while in this project. I was able to convince my coordinator quickly to change my job schedule... and I could... I could act in a little bit in a different field, I mean I could organize something for// for a little bit older people, for the youth. But hmm (2) well damn! That was the whole year of my life. Very intense, beautiful, well, well, amazing, I think, it has changed me a lot, because... hmm of course, right, one thing is that I got to know Italy and the Italian culture, this is actually obvious, but hmm, I met **my beloved immigrants** errr... from from Pakistan there, too. Because... the cheapest house to rent, mhm, in the surroundings was in the heart of the immigrants' district [...] and Italians have a very strange policy, at least these Ital// at least Northern Italy has a policy of hmm, facilitating immigrants' life. I mean they secure flats for them, hmm, ration out life necessities, but in my opinion it results in segregation, because these people are clustered round one area and they have their Gypsy houses, Pakistanis too, Lebanese and this looks totally like, I don't know, maybe a ghetto, at least for me it looked like this. And that was the place where the centre in which I worked with children was situated, so I could see my **beautiful Pakistani women** every day bri// just bringing their children, and then taking them home, well, and their role... was over in fact, they could not go farther, they were very restricted in terms of physical [surroundings], they couldn't get out of this park which separated their houses and our centre, so they crossed the park, took their children and returned// came back home [I :uhm] well, hmmm, it was a difficult experience for me, because I actually discovered that one may, hmm. such hmm, so strong// that women can have their hands tied tightly and can be so strongly tied to their homes. It's, hmm, because [...] I am talking about girls who were born in Italy and until then//girls, women, hmm, who until then were going to school with Italian children and then because of an arbitrary decision of their families: actually their uncles, fathers, elder brothers at some moment these girls are withdrawn from the schools and well... placed at home. They are supposed to marry quickly, which means that this husband is a find for them, and they are supposed to deliver children and they should bring these children to our centre, that's all... But it is, well, something terrible, because for some time they are under the illusion that they also can learn. Mmm, can study, they can be like other girls. For a moment they are allowed to put on these// western style [clothes] go out in the same fashion as, for instance// as Italian children and then they have to wear these... robes. So we became close, because I was// I was smuggling my mobile and they could call their friends, mmm, luckily, mmm, no men found about this, none of these families, because I would be in trouble, I guess. So for instance, they could not talk to their childhood friends with men because at a certain age, mmm, talking to men is unworthy of a woman. Even though he was their friend in childhood. I know for instance, that these are things one can read about and so on, but... to see it, to see suffering in this woman's eyes it'ssss, it's a different matter... and I with my compassion, with this sensitivity to feminism it was// I felt sorry for them, especially because they couldn't be honest, they could// and it took us a long time to reach them and have some sort of opening up and building trust. Eventually they started to talk about their suffering, that they do not feel well// in spite of the fact that// that they were born in Italy and for some time they could live like other children and then... their hands are tied, so well... it's a strange thing. And, of course, I didn't solve this puzzle, I don't know how it was, I didn't know what kinds of processes take place in these families, but hmm, well, I really felt sorry for these girls and, hmm, they actually disappear from that place. This means that when I came back to Trento, after some time, I came to this place in order to visit them after half a year... yes it was some half a year after my Voluntary Service

there, it turned out that they don't live there anymore, so they were sent to// to Pakistan...so I don't know what happened... I'll never solve this puzzle.

Magda describes her interaction partners/clients as: *my beloved immigrants from Pakistan*, or later *my beautiful Pakistani women*. Their ethnic identity takes the forefront – therefore we are dealing with ethnicization [Czyżewski 2009: 8–9; Nowicka 2014: 249–253], while their characterization is reduced to physical appearance. This collective description of women, as well as the narrator's analysis of their behaviour, tends to significantly generalize – there are no references to individual, separate cases or mentions of singular life stories. Moreover, in speaking about Pakistani women Magda says: *my* or *my beloved*, which indicates a paternalistic relation, sanctioning their subordination. All these ways of linguistic description are markers of a stereotypical (and extremely simplified) image of the Other.

It is important, however, that her interaction partners came from another ethnic group and another civilization zone, which created distinct communicative problems resulting from differences in cultures,<sup>18</sup> incomparably greater than those which can be encountered between people coming from various European countries. This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of historical, cultural and social frameworks determining the attitude of Europe to the Orient, which was thoroughly described by Edward Said, among others. He claims that it still creates the deepest and most recurring images of the Other in the European culture [see: Said 1979: xxvi]. The perception of this region is frequently based on the dogma repeated by orientalists, who presume that there “is an absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior” [Said 1979: 291]. It is similarly defined by Norman Davies, who argues that in the context of the history of Europe, Islam is traditionally treated as the giant ‘Other’, *le grand Contraire* – the opposite, and definition of what our continent is *not*. Frequently Europe and Islam are juxtaposed as the West and the East, indicating Europe as the opposite of Asia, and Christianity as the opposite of the great Islam religion zone [cf. Davies 2005].

Taking into consideration Magda's individual experiences and the general socio-cultural framework, it can be presumed that in the case of dealing with Pakistani women we face a higher risk of an interaction misunderstandings and

<sup>18</sup> This is also related to the substantial limitation on possibilities of applying a basic rule of commonsense thinking, namely reciprocity of perspectives, which is highlighted by Marek Czyżewski [2014: 402] in his considerations on symmetrical liaison work.

a failure in professional work. The problem is that nobody had prepared the (young and voluntary) narrator for her task,<sup>19</sup> and nobody made her realize that contrary to what the European programs required in terms of accomplishing specific objectives – her actions do not have to produce substantial results. In consequence, she was left alone to deal with the nagging mystery that ‘something went awry’.

It is interesting to speculate on how Magda might have been perceived by the Pakistani women. This task is difficult as long as the only source of information about this topic are utterances from the informer herself who, while interpreting action processes of her interaction partners, makes inferences about the role that was imputed to her, and on this basis she positively evaluates both the communication process and the joint actions [cf. McCall and Simmons 1966: 143]. Nevertheless, we are interested here in her subjective impressions and definitions of situations. The narrator emphasizes that she succeeded in building trust and felt she became someone significant for her clients. It could also be inferred from Magda’s utterances that she was primarily (if not exclusively) defined as a ‘European’, and the fact of her being Polish did not carry substantial weight. This is important because, firstly, she could have been perceived (and it apparently happened) as a representative of the West, which forces its civilizational superiority on others, and secondly – at least hypothetically – the emphasis could have been shifted to a shared fate, resulting from the fact of her also being a guest in another culture. In this context it seems interesting that Magda’s actions fit into the role of a European patronizing instructor. She not only proposes some (European) lifestyles to her clients and promotes a specific cultural pattern that is supposed to liberate young Asian women from the ties to their own culture and religion, but also forces a specific model of intercultural communication, i.e. she determines what rules it should be based on and what objectives it should aspire to. This conduct clearly shows the narrator’s disapproval of their cultural otherness.

Now we turn to reviewing how Magda attempted to solve the ‘puzzle’ of her Pakistani clients’ disappearance from Bergamo. She thinks that they had been sent back to their homeland and returned to their (oppressive) families. In her understanding this was caused by the force of culture and religion on Pakistani women, which ‘sucked them back’ after they had been enabled to get a taste of another life and had given an illusory and short-term sense of freedom. This

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<sup>19</sup> This situation is undoubtedly more complex than presented here. It seems intriguing, however, that the work aimed at creating a social order relying on multiculturalism is delegated to young people who are not indigenous members of the culture to which immigrants are to be ‘included’.



event is a source of the narrator's chagrin – she was hoping that with her help her women immigrant clients would emancipate themselves, and become self-determined, self-sufficient, independent, and responsible. We may reckon it was at this point that her feminism and neoliberal ideology (acquired in European programs for youths) started to impact her interpretation of her surrounding everyday reality, and her role as a European volunteer in particular. However, for Magda this failed attempt to 'Europeanize' Pakistani women immigrants (which could obviously be interpreted as an attempt to 'civilize' them) is a significant and fateful biographical experience, which damages her defined preconceptions of the world and 'suspends' her faith in grass-roots work.

It is thought-provoking that the narrator's vision of the world and the common rules of its functioning managed to overshadow other interpretations of the existing situation and triggered a hegemonic-paternalistic modality of liaison work. Undoubtedly Magda recognized the suffering of her clients (she says, e.g.: *to see [...] suffering in the eyes of that woman, this, it is another thing obviously*, or later: *finally, they started to tell me they were suffering*) and she is most sympathetic to them, and this should rather initiate an asymmetrical liaison work. It does not happen though. We can point to several reasons for this state of affairs. First of all, in her theoretical commentary Magda explains the causes of the suffering of the young women immigrants exclusively by the rigidity of the Islamic culture, noting however, that they *suffer, because they were born in Italy and for some time they were able to live like other children and then... their hands are tied*. Yet she does not recognize the real impact of the gap between these two cultures on their lives. However, as might be inferred from the quote above and the following excerpt: *for some time they live under the illusion that they can also learn, err; can study, can be like other girls. For a while they can even dress (...) in a western style (...), and then they have to wear those (...) robes* – the source of their painful experience (unnoticed by Magda) could be their marginal position in the dominant society, that is, experiencing a conflict between groups as their own fault, a sense of inferiority [cf. Stonequist 1961: 122–125], and discovering a stigma related to their race and ethnicity [Goffman 1990].

The informant ignores the tensions which are usually evoked in marginal men by attempts to reconcile competing cultural paradigms, which those people could experience in their lives – raising their sense of dissonance and harmony, repelling and attracting them at the same time [cf. Stonequist 1961: 9]. She does not notice the thing described by Georg Simmel in his considerations on 'the stranger', that is, a person who arrives today and stays tomorrow and does not leave, does not completely resign from their freedom of coming and going

[Simmel 1908: 204]. It is interesting that although she criticizes the Italian policy towards immigrants,<sup>20</sup> she fails to recognize that young Pakistani women as well as their parents aspire to the group (Italian society) continually manifesting their lack of interest, keeping them at bay and preventing them from building trust. Analyzing the situation of Pakistani women described by Magda, two additional things ought to be taken into account: the fact that they are the second generation of immigrants (they were born in Italy) and are most likely entering an early phase of adulthood, which could trigger or exacerbate a conflict between their own biographical plans, expectations of the family, and the requirements of Italian society, creating a special biographical configuration at that point. It can be said that they are highly likely to experience a trajectory of suffering [Riemann, Schütze 1991], which – stressing it ones more – does not have to result exclusively (nor even primarily) from their native country culture, but from their particular position as a ‘marginal man’.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Magda’s relationship with Pakistani women was inevitably headed for a failure because it seems that her sentimental work and most of all trust work was not sufficient [Strauss et al. 1985: 135–136]. Probably this was leading to a sense of disappointment on both sides of the interaction and to a cessation of efforts to work out an agreement between diverse cultures, based on a conviction that reaching such a joint standpoint is impossible. Moreover, it might be presumed that their mutual perception of each other could result in strengthening or even creating negative stereotypes (e.g. attributing to immigrants a reluctance to integrate or assimilate) and prejudices (e.g. due to a conviction of barbarian acts or terrorist tendencies on the part of Muslims). These are very serious social consequences, which could be physically and symbolically strengthened and create entrenched borders between an immigrant *ghetto* and an immigrant-receiving society (as it happened, e.g., in Brussels in its Molenbeek district).

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<sup>20</sup> Criticized by Magda, the Italian strategy of dealing with multiculturalism is similar to the ‘sanctioned ethnic pluralism’ described by Kazimierz Krzysztofek. It “ensures a substantial range of freedoms, but does not generally promote social integration; quite the contrary, it often leads ethnic communities to exclusion from the civic society or even to their ghettoization, bantustan status, subclass (...)” [Krzysztofek 2003: 80]. This attitude contains the conviction that one’s civilization is superior. The narrator seems to be attracted by another model – that respecting the ‘right to be different’ [Krzysztofek 2003: 81] and positive tolerance. She does not take into consideration, however, the uneven status and different situation of her interaction partners.

## SYMMETRICAL LIAISON WORK – THE CASE OF PRESCHOOL TEACHER EWA AND THE CONTROVERSY AROUND AUTISTIC CHILDREN

Now we proceed to the life history of Ewa<sup>21</sup> – a preschool teacher in an inclusive kindergarten, born in 1961 in a large town in Poland. Although when she was merely 2 years old her father started a new family, he always kept up a relationship with his daughters (Ewa and her sister) and together with his new wife took care of them when their mother was in the hospital with a serious heart condition. That fact played a significant role when the narrator was choosing her profession; she wanted to become a paediatric ward nurse, but her mother decidedly dissuaded her from it. In consequence, Ewa became a preschool teacher, although she started her professional education in gardening and took a three-year break (she was working in a dental lab then) related to the closing down of many educational institutions. But she always felt that care of and work with children were her calling. The fact that she did not go on to study pedagogy at the university (the subject she graduated from nearly 15 years later) was related to *the most important priorities to me*, as she says. When in high school she got pregnant and got married.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately she lost the baby in the seventh month of pregnancy and for many years thereafter she was trying to have a baby again. When she finally gave birth to Marcin, he became the most important part of her life. It is interesting that it was from him that she learned how to use a computer and surf the Internet,<sup>23</sup> which enabled her to look for possibilities of cooperation with foreign kindergartens. She initiates contacts abroad and finds them in an institutional framework (within the *Comenius* program of the European Commission), and she has become a pioneer of such actions in her institution, attracting others to them and actively creating an international arena of cooperation, thanks to which teachers from many European countries can exchange their experiences during

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<sup>21</sup> A methodological comment: interviews with Ewa were conducted twice, with a two-year gap in between them, although a return interview with the informant had not been initially planned. The first interview: “Ewa (1)” was conducted during her several-hours breaks at work, which could prevent her from describing some aspects of her life with due diligence, but the interviewer did not have enough time to ask additional questions. Her life history turned out to be particularly interesting to both (Polish and German) teams cooperating in the “EuroIdentities” project and, after analyzing the first interview and outlining specific suppositions, it was decided to ask the narrator about some more issues in-depth. The second interview: “Ewa (2)” corroborated the correctness of the previously formulated suppositions.

<sup>22</sup> Ewa married to a man with whom she still remains in a harmonious relationship.

<sup>23</sup> This is ‘prefigurative culture’, as defined by Margaret Mead [1970].

joint meetings and children can stay in touch with each other via the Internet (e.g. jointly composing and then performing songs), and even thanks to snail mail (e.g. sending drawings to each other).

To start with, the formal features which differentiate the work of both narrators, and their socio-biographical conditioning, which could have impacted interpretation schemes and Ewa's actions are shown.

As for formal issues, it should be borne in mind that insofar as Magda's case is concerned, the misunderstanding occurred between her and the addressees of her (*quasi*-)professional work (between a professional and clients), while in Ewa's case we face a controversy within a specific social world [Clarke 1991, Strauss 1982]. It concerns the way she helps clients (in her case, autistic children). Put differently, there are professionals on both sides of the dispute, and the subject of the dispute is the way of dealing with persons in need.

Secondly, a seemingly obvious explanation for Ewa's successful work and Magda's failure suggests itself – the difference is related to the degree of otherness of cultural patterns which both narrators had to deal with. Simplifying somewhat, it can be argued that Magda faced the remote and strange culture of the Orient, whereas Ewa dealt with the Other, but still within the European methods of conduct (although this does not negate the eastern and western European variants). Nonetheless, it should be noticed that Ewa's successful actions did not simply result from a smaller gap between cultures and action patterns, but mainly from the implementation of suitable liaison work, adjusted to the situation and free from schematic references to the West. It is important to note here that, on one hand, educational and scientific programs of the European Commission promote such constellations of the member states as consortiums on a certain project, whereby the ex-communist states are still supposed to 'learn' from the West (which carries an implicit presumption of intellectual and organizational backwardness of the former), while at the same time Poles feel a sense of moral superiority on one hand, but also a civilizational retardation in relation to the West on the other [Piotrowski 2005: 334]. It seems however that neither of these frameworks determined the actions of the narrator.

Let's begin by examining the passage wherein Ewa speaks about her stay in Belgium within the framework of the Comenius program, where teachers who work with children with autism visit each others' places of work, observe their actions, and share their experiences:

EWA (1)

In these school centres there are stimulating trainings, special programmes for autistic children. We entered the room and the first impression was that we saw children fixed to chairs with braces and for us it was very strange... Here [in Poland] parents would never ever

allow something like that. And there [in Belgium]/ you know, an autistic child just jumps very often. And if from the age of being little kids they are prepared that for some time they will be fixed and must sit at a table... There are signs on the wall -hmm- for example// there were such pictures of what each child is to do now, for example, “now a jigsaw” and a jigsaw puzzle was drawn and the child knew and took a box with jigsaws [...] and the child was composing the jigsaw. When it was finished the teacher hung up “now we will draw following bands”... so the child knew and took a piece of paper. Everything was taught according to some scheme and it’s the best way of work with autistic children because it gets them used to something... I haven’t come across such an attitude here.

EWA (2)

I: and there is a short, short story about autistic children, how they are treated in Belgium

N: uh-huh

I: Could you tell me... what’s your personal attitude towards this therapy, towards [this kind of] help, towards, towards work with such children?

N: Well that’s, I know that for sure it was a great sho// great shock when we entered this place and saw autistic children who were... erm chairs are fixed to the floor and children are fixed with braces... to those chairs. So for us, in Poland we don’t have this at all... erm, and it was a very big shock, thaaat// well we couldn’t imagine that one can (treat) a child in such a way. Erm, and then... observing these relations, being twice, I guess I was three times in Belgium, ... erm, and we see that, well, that still there is some progress with these children... mm, I think that here there is a lack of as such work... with those autistic children as they stress it there... So well, these opinions are mixed. I mean I don’t have one opinion cause, erm, on the one hand each year I have an autistic child... This year I’ve got a teacher who supports me, so Mary is more educated in this direction, and she supports me and, erm, well and at this moment I cannot imagine that I would for instance fix... Tomek to the chair to (make) him work while being fixed, when he must, well, he exudes his great joy, he must move, jump, err, shout a little bit just for himself... mm, and I think I probably couldn’t (fix him)... [...]

I: If I got it right, you saw that nevertheless... that at the beginning this fixing seemed so inhuman, but the development of those children//

N: erm, is bigger

I: is bigger.

N: Well, mm, if there is a method which perhaps doesn’t look nice... mm, not so much sympathetic but it gives big result, so I think that perhaps it’s worth (doing)... cause nevertheless it helps children (3) well that’s like that.

These two interesting descriptions of situations of a different and ‘shocking’ way of dealing with autistic children in a Belgian kindergarten, together with accompanying commentary and arguments, show the incredible work the narrator had to do to face and consider these diverse points of view. She does not resort to a banal statement such as ‘we can do it better, more humanely’, or non-cognitive attempts (i.e. overlooking a specific socio-cultural context) aimed to implement seemingly ‘better’ models from the West, but she stops to reflect and consider a different approach. The practices observed by the narrator are not fundamentally rejected or disqualified, but she refers to them, which is crucial in professional

work, by adjusting them to a specific child (client). This is excellently captured when Ewa says: *at this moment I cannot imagine that I will for instance fix Tomek to the chair to make him work being fixed, when he must, well, he exudes his great joy, he must move, jump, errr shout a little bit just for himself... mm erm and I think I probably couldn't fix him.* Accordingly, it seems that Ewa recognizes and accepts another point of view and other ways of action, thereby creating space for effective multicultural communication – setting the stage for a discussion wherein varied perspectives are considered and compared, but there is no need to work out unequivocal conclusions. At this point the words of Marek Czyżewski come to mind, whose definition of symmetrical liaison work in its rationalistic variant basically overlaps with Ewa's attitude: "It assumes the equal status of both sides of the debate and calls for a dialogue between them" [Czyżewski 2014: 398].

In closing, it is worth considering one more issue, which played a significant role in understanding Magda's failure in her work with women immigrants – namely a vision of reality and a "paradigm of the subject useful for the society" [Stachowiak 2013: 144], as promoted by the European Union programs. Although both informants refer to experiences which occurred quite a long time ago (before the economic crisis) and concerned participation in two different educational programs of the European Commission (currently included within the framework of Erasmus Plus), it seems nonetheless that their ideological foundations have not substantially changed. The programs still aim at developing knowledge about cultural variety and/or learning foreign languages, mainly by means of contact with the other culture, shaping specific skills and competences necessary for personal development, as well as active European citizenship, promoting mobility or creating innovative ways of learning etc. Moreover, they deal with the socio-economic, cultural and ecological challenges faced by Europe, aimed at facilitating social and professional inclusion, promoting self-realization, social cohesion, and citizen activity, and awakening the spirit of entrepreneurship. They will be favoured by "key skills and attitudes (...) such as creativity, initiative, resilience, team work, risk comprehension and a sense of responsibility".<sup>24</sup> It seems legitimate to ask why Ewa does not approach these promoted contents as enthusiastically as Magda? Perhaps the explanation – which I put forward for consideration rather than present as an indisputable opinion – can be found in the

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<sup>24</sup> Here are up-to-date websites of both Erasmus Plus programs:  
<http://www.comenius.org.pl/menu-glowne/o-programie>;  
[http://erasmusplus.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/odnowione\\_ramy\\_wsp%C3%B3l%C5%82pracy.pdf](http://erasmusplus.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/odnowione_ramy_wsp%C3%B3l%C5%82pracy.pdf)

fact that Ewa is an active, resourceful person full of energy and initiative, whereas Magda's problem could result from the fact that a paradigm of the man of agency and entrepreneurship – typical for the neoliberal order – is an imperceptible way for her to take control over chaos in her life.<sup>25</sup> Returning to Ewa, we need to take note of her special education process, system of values 'filtered' most probably by her own experience, which includes a trajectory of suffering and the specificity of the 'modest' profession she exercises while working with children with autism. We may assume that all of the above does not allow her to fall into the trap of schematic attitudes to other persons or follow the same pattern of action.

### CONCLUSIONS

It may be posited that the problems discussed in this article are outdated or invalid, particularly in the light of the European immigration crisis, whose origins date back to 2011 (the breakout of the civil war in Syria). However, an analytical reflection on the failure of Magda's work can be a contribution to considerations on systematic mistakes committed in professional work related to the provision of help to immigrants and refugees arriving in Europe from Africa and Asia, and particularly from countries defined as Muslim ones. It seems that this problem is especially relevant today and is related, on one hand, to the enormous wave of people seeking asylum in Europe (applicable for the most part to Syrians) and, on the other hand, to the threat associated with the Islamic State.

It seems that there is little regard for the bottom-up perspective and that work at the grass roots is ignored, while thinking of Europe exclusively in macro-structural and economic terms does not allow for reaching the heart of the matter. In fact, it contributes to thorough misunderstandings and diagnostic absurdities (e.g. in mistakenly attributed motives and the strengthening of stereotypes). At the same time, it is obvious that resorting to the level of microanalysis does not provide the quick, straightforward and effective solutions sought for shaping European policies. But it may potentially enable the identification of and critical reflection on the paradoxes, pitfalls and mistakes in professional work (even when it is of kind of 'amateur' character).

Ewa's case, on the other hand, shows that opening a space for debate on sticking points, a space which is free from stereotypical thinking about interaction partners (Belgian preschool teachers) and their clients (autistic children) creates an opportunity for understanding and effective international cooperation.

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<sup>25</sup> This concerns an incomplete process of working through the relations with parents.



In closing, it should be stressed that communication failures in multicultural interactions, particularly when we are dealing with suffering and humiliation, result from dynamic interactions between differences in the knowledge at hand and systems of significance (especially when very 'remote' cultures are at play), as well as the type of liaison work applied. In addition, we should bear in mind that multicultural misunderstandings are seldom shortcomings which can be easily and seamlessly amended. Volunteer workers in the European programs are usually unaware of that fact, and for them an inability to reach successful communication can result in a serious biographical disappointment and, in consequence, build a reserve to the challenges of multiculturalism, thus depriving the society of the needed professionals who do liaison work on its behalf.

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## PARADOKSY PRACY POŚREDNICZĄCEJ W INDYWIDUALNYM DOŚWIADCZANIU ORAZ ICH SPOŁECZNE I BIOGRAFICZNE IMPLIKACJE

### Streszczenie

Podstawę podjętych w tym artykule rozważań nad różnymi typami pracy pośredniczącej (hegemonialnej i symetrycznej) stanowią zrelacjonowane w autobiograficznych wywiadach narracyjnych doświadczenia dwóch Polek: Magdy i Ewy. Doświadczenia te osadzone są w ramie pracy (*quasi*-)profesjonalnej polegającej, w pierwszym przypadku, na pomocy młodym imigrantkom z Pakistanu oraz, w drugim przypadku, na opiece nad dziećmi autystycznymi w Polsce i w Belgii. Wymaga to od obu narratorów odniesienia się do znacząco odmiennych wzorów kulturowych, zakorzenionych w kulturze Orientu i islamu oraz związanych z terapią dzieci niepełnosprawnych w różnych krajach Europy. Szczególna uwaga jest tutaj poświęcona społecznym i biograficznym konsekwencjom wprowadzenia określonego typu pracy pośredniczącej w sytuacji, gdy jej adre-

satami są osoby dotknięte cierpieniem. Analiza podjęta w tym artykule obejmuje zatem błędy, napięcia, ambiwalencje i paradoksy pojawiające się w mikro-sytuacjach rozmowy i działaniach profesjonalnych często ramowanych przez neoliberalną ideologię obecną w edukacyjnych programach Komisji Europejskiej. Rzadko, jak się wydaje, stanowią one przedmiot krytycznej analizy uwzględniającej biograficzne konsekwencje ponoszone przez obie strony interakcji i społeczne implikacje przede wszystkim w obszarze wielokulturowości czy dialogu międzykulturowego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca profesjonalna, praca pośrednicząca, błędy przy pracy, europejska mobilność edukacyjna, komunikacja międzykulturowa, autobiograficzny wywiad narracyjny