MARCIN GOŃDA
University of Łódź

Biographical Pathways of Roots Migration:
the Case of Students of Polish Ancestry from the Post-Soviet Area

Abstract: The paper presents, firstly, the phenomenon of internationalisation of Polish higher education, especially the structural conditions of pursuing studies by people of Polish origin from the post-Soviet successor states. Secondly, the article investigates biographical implications of students' roots migration to the ancestral homeland. It concentrates on the individual determinants of their mobility, including socio-cultural background, role of the family and local community, as well as national ideologies and images of Poland and Polishness they have been exposed to in their countries of birth and upon relocation to Poland. Empirical data covers autobiographical narrative interviews with the examined students.

Keywords: educational mobility, roots migration, diaspora, Poland, USSR, narrative.

Introduction

The paper is an attempt to critically reflect on structural factors shaping the educational mobility of young Polish diaspora members (or the *Polonia* as it is sometimes referred to)[1] from the former USSR who are currently studying or have undertaken studies in Poland. They are mainly descendants of Poles who remained in exile as a result of resettlements into the Soviet territory during the Second World War and the post-war Poland's borders shifts westwards. Therefore, the article explores the role of students' arrivals in the return migration processes taking place in Poland since the early 1990s.

Hereinafter the notion of *return migration* refers to the individuals' relocation to an acknowledged homeland (Christou 2006a: 833), although in reality they are not "returning" to Poland since they actually never left it. The "return" term is mostly utilised in the migration literature to analyse counter-diasporic move of the first-generation migrants to their native homeland.[2] It might seem then it could be more accurate to define the investigated group as *second-* or *subsequent-generation returnees* (King and Christou 2008: 1–4) or, alternately, *ethnic return migrants* (Tsuda 2013: 172). Both

---

[1] More about theoretical ambivalence and ideological burdens of using the *Polonia* notion see: Paluch 1976.

[2] Magdalena Lesińska indicates two types of return: ethnic migration (repatriation, second-generation return) and 2) return migration of labour migrants. Additionally, one can differentiate: 3) voluntary return (based on original or revised intentions) or 4) forced return (result of deportation/expulsion from the country of current residence or resettlements covering larger groups of people) (2010: 6).

notions denote the "return" of descendants of diaspora members to the ethnic home-
land after a long period of living abroad.[3] These conceptualisations, however, are not
fully satisfactory either. Despite maintaining transnational contacts or even having
experience of short staying in the homeland later-generation migrants often refuse
to perceive their transfer there as return (Wassendorf 2007: 1087). Similarly they do
not feel belonging to a given national community as they might be of multi-ethnic
background. Researchers show recently a growing interest in return migration but
they do not provide precise terms to describe migrants of mixed ethnicity relocating
to a seemingly known place where only part of their family stem from. Therefore,
in order to analyse the examined students' mobility I propose to utilise and develop
further Susanne Wassendorf's concept of *roots migration* (2007). She refers it to "the
migration to a place where members of the second generation originate from, but
where they have never lived" (2007: 1084). The concept acknowledges then migrants'
intergenerational and ethnic affinity features but does not necessarily explore the
ontology of return itself.

These phenomena are confronted with students' narratives. The paper brings un-
derstanding of biographical pathways associated with their arrival and prospective
settlement in Poland. It investigates the individual conditions that facilitate migra-
tion, e.g. social and cultural capitals, role of the family and local community, as well
as national ideologies and images of the ancestral homeland distributed within the
Polish diaspora. These factors are reviewed not only to define the motives of studying
abroad but also to examine how the notions of *home(land)*, *roots* and *belonging* are
experienced and constructed when in the countries of birth and after arrival in Poland.
Consequently, the narratives on Polishness transmitted to subsequent diasporic gen-
erations are reviewed in order to define their implications for collective identity
construction. In case of roots migrants who straddle more than one national context it
is necessary to investigate the process of identity negotiations in response to appearing
opportunities and constrains during settlement in Poland (Jain 2011: 1316–1317).

The above issues are partly examined within my doctoral project.[4] The empir-
ical basis of the study are 60 autobiographical narrative interviews (Schütze 1987;
Kaźmierska 2012) with the investigated group that were carried out between 2010
and 2014 in major Polish academic centres. There is a significant tradition of case-
oriented migration research, just to mention "The Polish Peasant in Europe and
America" by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. However, while qualitative
methods have become so diverse and fluid in their use, systematised utilisation of
biographical method is no longer entirely adhered to in the contemporary qualitative
research on migration (cf. Górny and Koryś 2009). Since cross-border mobility is
undertaken at different stages of the life cycle, it should be analysed as continuous

---

[3] There is a number of other semantically close terms such as *ethnic migration, co-ethnic migration*, *ethnic
affinity migration* or *ancestral return* but they will not be used either because of their greater ambiguity (Tsuda
2013: 186). For more detailed typology of return mobilities see: King and Christou 2011.

[4] PhD project is co-financed by the Polish National Science Centre. Project title: "Studenci polskiego
pochodzenia z krajów byłego ZSRR. Doświadczenia kulturowa a przemiany tożsamości" (The Students of
Polish Descent from the post-Soviet Sucessor States. Cultural Experiences and Identity Transformations),
agreement no: UMO-2012/07/N/HS6/01457.

throughout life rather than completed at a definitive moment (Ley and Kobayashi 2005: 111). The biographical orientation answers this challenge and enables to trace migration pathways within complex social, cultural, political and economic contexts of both sending and receiving societies (Davis 2011: 2). As it addresses the entire lifetime and the interrelations between different life spheres, it shows to what extent migration experiences are connected with dynamics in particular life domains (e.g. professional, educational or family-related ones). It enables to investigate how migration can be diversely perceived over the time and in relation to individual or societal contexts by members of the same migrant community (Breckner 2007: 118). Giving the fact that analysis of narrative interviews reconstucts social events from the individual's perspective, it seems to be a relevant research method to get a deep insight into the discussed problems, irrespective of the number of cases being reviewed.

Internationalisation of Higher Education and Return Migration in Poland

The internationalisation of higher education systems has accelerated over the last decades. When it comes to its most visible dimension, educational mobility, the number of people enrolled for studies abroad has risen from 800 thousand in the mid-1970s to 4.3 million in 2011, i.e. about 2.3 percent of all students (OECD 2013: 306). As it might have seemed, Poland due to its well-developed academic infrastructure and relatively low costs of studying could have become an attractive destination for foreigners after 1989. On the contrary, despite liberalisation of cross-border traffic and establishment of new (mostly non-public) universities, Polish higher education remained outside internationalisation tendencies. There were no clearly defined national policies and universities were mostly focused on participation in international research programmes, whereas no incentives for foreigners were proposed. Low attractiveness of the labour market also discouraged them from settling in Poland after the completion of studies (Żołędowski 2010: 46–47).

However, with the falling number of native students due to demographic decline and their outflow to Western universities, the authorities have lately noticed the necessity to open education institutions towards foreigners. In order to make them competitive globally a series of actions have been undertaken, including broadening the offer of courses in foreign languages, intensifying international cooperation and launching promotional campaigns abroad. They are mostly targeted at increasing recruitment in the post-Soviet and Asian area. In fact the number of overseas students has increased almost nine times between 1989 (4,100 students) and 2013 (36,000 students) (GUS 2014: 505). Nevertheless, their share of 2.3 percent among all students still remains one of the lowest in OECD countries (OECD 2013: 311).

The slow albeit consistent increase in international students volume can be also attributed to special enrolment programmes, in particular scholarships for young *Polonia*. In the year 2011/2012 the latter accounted for about 4,600 people, i.e. 19 percent of all foreign students at that time (Siwińska 2012: 1). Their arrivals are of symbolical significance since they are mostly Polish diaspora members in the East. As estimated,

there are up to 20 million people of Polish origin living outside Poland, making that diaspora one of the largest in the world. Those in Western Europe and Americas are mainly labour migrants (and their descendants), whereas people of Polish ancestry in the East are subsequent generations of about 1.3 million Poles who remained in exile involuntarily (de Tinguy 2003: 115). Therefore these groups are considered one of the last visible victims of the Soviet regime.

Christian Joppke notes the main reasons for ethnic preference in state migration and citizenship policies are: the easier "assimilability" of co-ethnics, necessity of protection against foreign persecutions, and the expression of historical-cultural community (2005: 23–25). However, despite the Polish authorities' moral obligations to compensate the time of living outside homeland for the "brothers from the East," Poland has not developed any active instruments aimed at encouraging ethnic Poles to come back (de Tinguy 2003: 117). For instance, the Polish Constitution of 1997 and the Repatriation Act of 2000 impose upon Poland a duty to assist them in maintaining linkages with the national culture and possibility of repatriation. The 2007 Law on the Charter of the Pole guarantees the co-ethnics in neighbouring Eastern countries legal recognition of belonging to the Polish nation and a range of rights in Poland (Górny et al. 2007: 158–163). They are entitled to a number of social and economic resources such as free studies, health service or the right to work or run business without permits (Stefańska 2010: 87). However, these amenities do not in fact propel return migration. The repatriation system remains inefficient and prospective returnees must overcome lengthy procedures to get Polish citizenship. Moreover, local governing bodies are obliged to cover returnees' reception costs, but in fact they are hesitant to fulfil these duties (Wyszyński 2011: 410–416). Consequently, between 1997 and 2013 merely 6,800 people benefited from the repatriation programme (GUS 2014: 507).

It seems then a considerable fraction of foreign students of Polish background is not just the result of the offered privileges but also an effective way of getting to Poland. Since other return possibilities are limited, study enrolment often remains the only attainable way of moving westwards (cf. Grzymała-Kazłowska and Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014).

Students' Migration Pathways

Migration is the consequence of a complex decision making process. Advocates of classical migration theories claim cross-border mobility is predominantly of economic nature and migrants' motives are related to labour market opportunities (Castles and Miller 2009). Other researchers emphasise the importance of social factors in migrants' intents formation, such as family and friend ties or professional contacts (Massey et al. 1998). Within the influential transnational perspective the attention is given to the function of social networks, multi-stranded personal relationships, symbolic ties and information channels between those who have migrated and those who remained in own country (Basch et al. 1994).

It does not seem adequate to explain the conditions of roots migration. Naturally, similarly to regular outward migration, it can be facilitated by one's need to improve the economic situation or the will to resolve the discomfort caused by maintaining the status of a stranger in the host society despite years (or centuries) of his/her ancestors' settlement there. When analysing this type of mobility one must, however, also scrutinise historical, cultural, emotional and ideological considerations as it can have a symbolical meaning related to one's reuniting with the ancestral homeland (Nowicka 2008: 11). In this sense it is often perceived by migrants as "a moral obligation or, possibly, a restoration of the natural order of things" (Boccagni 2011: 471).

On the other hand, roots migration is not just a matter of simple coming back *home* for later-generation migrants since they may experience significant uncertainty as to where they really belong. Their conceptualizations of home are often multisited or unclearly stated if it is the area of predecessors' homeland itself or rather a mythologised imaginative construction (King et al. 2011: 485). Lack of confidence is even deeper at the time of transnational homing experiences of migrants who can perceive the home simultaneously as stable and fluid, lived and imagined, localised and transnational (Walsh 2006: 123).

These ambiguities are facilitated by expatriates' subjective sense of *belonging* (*identity*) to a given nation or ethnic group. Antonina Kłoskowska's concept of national identity formation is worth underlining here. She claims all symbols, values, attitudes and habits that are shared by the nation members are transmitted by the closest social environment (family and community members) through *socialisation* and, on the other hand, by institutional milieu (school, church etc.) within *culturisation*, i.e. "the initiation and entrance into the universe of symbolic culture in general, including national culture" (2001: 97). The identity construction is understood here as a dynamic process that is situational, contextual, emerging from particular social and historical circumstances. It is fluid, fragmented and constantly negotiated rather than fixed and permanent (Christou 2006b: 39; Kempny 2012: 57–58).

Education of foreigners in Poland has been a subject of researchers' investigations for nearly half century now (Mucha 2003: 169). It is worth mentioning, among others, the general study of educational migration to Poland by Cezary Żołędowski (2010) and analysis of intercultural relations between the incoming students and the Polish host society by Ewa Nowicka and Sławomir Łodziński (1993) and Zofia Kawczyńska-Butrym (2014). There is also a number of publications on *Polonia* students from the former USSR, including comprehensive collection of articles in the edited volume by Robert Wyszyński (2005) as well as research findings on their national self-consciousness (Dzwonkowski et al. 2002), national identity (Głowacka-Grajper 2007) and culture contact with the Polish society (Mucha 2003). I will refer to these works in due course. It needs, however, to be emphasised that in contrast to the above investigations that are mostly of quantitative character, this study pertains to another theoretical and methodological perspective as it concentrates on biographical dimension of educational mobility in the special context of roots migration.

In detail, the following sections draw on empirical materials which examine diverse levels of intents that the students of Polish ancestry from the former USSR

are driven by. Because of multiplicity of issues available in the interview data it is not possible to deliberately "fit" the informants into given conceptual categories as it would require separating one particular mobility dimension (economic, pragmatic, ideological, emotional etc.) from another. Therefore, the paper intends to illustrate the complexity of cross-national mobility processes rather than to elaborate classification of return motives. Consequently, it criticises overly-rationalist account of agency in (return) migration process that would suggest one's mobility as the result of fully conscious and intentional decisions. On the other hand, it attempts to exemplify the lack of adequateness of existing return concepts that have not recognised enough experience of people of multinational affiliations.

In order to give a snapshot of students' mobility pathways the autobiographical narratives of Darek, Lena and Sonia have been chosen since they organise the analysis of my data collection. Each narrator represents different biographical planning schemes and, thus, the position of homecoming in one's structures of relevance, namely: (1) answering predecessors' expectations, (2) attempting to cope with burdensome roots, (3) making use of ethnic background for self-realisation.[5] Although all three cases are a reference point for more detailed analysis, they are not the only possible scenarios. The development of other pathways is the subject of my further studies (cf. Gońda 2012; 2013).

Answering Predecessors' Expectations

Several analyses prove that return migration is principally an individual choice based on one's willing to reunite with co-ethnics who share the same cultural and historical narratives. However, since a returnee's origin create a binding relation with the country of ancestors, return can be considered as an obligation towards own community (Boccagni 2011: 471). In this sense the homecoming does not necessarily have to be an entirely voluntary decision. Darek's narrative, a 29-year-old doctoral student from Belarus, indicates this duty might be imposed by family and diaspora members—the carriers of ethnic traditions, cultural patterns and national ideologies. Participation in the nation's life has thus symbolical and ideological meaning for both the interviewee and, even more, his relatives. He was supposed to fulfil his predecessors' wishes of coming back to Poland in the situation of limited return possibilities for the whole family.

Darek was familiarised with the Polish language and culture through family, local community and school. As he comes from a Polish household and spent his formative life stage (childhood) in a town inhabited by numerous co-ethnics, he was growing into Polishness from his earliest years. Intergenerational transmission of knowledge about

---

[5] Janusz Mucha has distinguished similar to a certain extent motivation modes of young *Polonia*: (1) motive grounded on strong ties with Polish culture or feeling being a Pole, (2) pracitcal motive related to relative availability of universities in Poland (e.g. being cheaper) and other possibilites (mostly economic) offered by Poland, (3) autotelic motive of studying abroad (no matter where), travelling and learning far from home. Interestingly, as Mucha notes, even if students declared other intents than their ties with Polish culture, the system of insitutional and family relations made Poland their first study destination (2003: 177–178).

Poland accompanied by remembrance of Tsarist and Stalin's persecutions resulted in patriotic upbringing in "the love for the predecessors' country, its traditions and language." It was not until the USSR's dissolution that the Polish minority could express own presence through re-established schools, organizations and Catholic Church. Since Darek's parents were among co-founders of the Polish minority association in Belarus his national awareness was well-grounded. He emphasises their role in creating his strong affiliation to Poland. Enrolment for studies there was his answer to the parents' expectations:

There was no other possibility, I didn't take into account studying in Belarus, and it was out of the question, only Poland and nothing else… It was clear from the very beginning, when I started to think about studies, Poland was the only choice. Dad brought us up that way, as he was saying: "This is your country, your language, your studies, your future."

The return dynamics to the desired homeland is often fuelled by collective nostalgia and memory that are mythologised through stories narrated by diaspora members. Even if actual return is not possible, the dream of homecoming is being persisted over generations and becomes an important constituent in the construction of collective diasporic identity (Datta 2013: 97). Since the predecessors' country is portrayed as the *authentic* site of *original* belonging, a returnee's plan is to relocate the dislocated self and to achieve stability and coherence of past times and places (King and Christou 2008: 17). As Darek explains:

I can't think otherwise, this is the way I was brought up… From the first moment I was thinking of my national belonging, when they explained me what the nation is, it was said I was Polish, there was no other possibility, "You are Polish, your homeland is Poland, your capital is Warsaw."

However, as the narrator's case proves, the homeland's seductive feature is not only grounded on ideological and emotional considerations but also economic advancement due to discrepancies between one's country of settlement and return destination (Wassendorf 2007: 1098).[6] While observing the deepening distance in wealth and availability of consumer goods between the Poles and the Belarusians his aspirations to associate his future with Poland have even tightened:

For us Poland was like a dream… In the early 1990s the West had entered our country, all these tape recorders, music, clothes, and all of them came mostly from Poland… Dad was almost every week in Poland because of his duties in the association, and he brought us some gifts… And when we looked at those colourful packages it seemed to us that Poland was a paradise… This attitude was dominant during holidays there, everything was perfect, accommodation, food, everything was of highest standard, and we were in some shopping malls, museums and we saw that the Poles took care of everything around, that cities looked nice, that cars were nice… It was a different world, a richer and more interesting one… Indeed, Poland was a model country to live.

---

[6] Takeyuki Tsuda claims that ethnic return migration is mostly initiated, similarly to labour migration, by economic pressures. It should not be then exclusively perceived as ideological act of reuniting with one's nation but motivated individualistically and instrumentally to improve returnee's socioeconomic status: *Although the desire to eventually return to the ancestral homeland is invoked in definitions of diasporic peoples, most of their descendants, who are quite rooted in their countries of birth, would not do so without sufficient economic incentives. Ethnic return migrants are generally in search of better economic opportunities, not ethnic roots. In this sense, diasporic return from the developing world initially appears to be another form of international labour migration caused by widening economic disparities between rich and poor countries* (2009: 21).

Darek's statement is an expression of a myth of Poland of *the country of milk and honey* which is widespread among the Poles inhabiting the post-Soviet area (Głowacka-Grajper 2007: 335; Dzwonkowski et al. 2002: 70–71).[7] That image is rooted in a collectively maintained vision of the West as the *Promised Land*. Therefore, Poland is associated not only with an area of Western prosperity and opportunities, which are hardly accessible in their birth-countries, but more importantly as a part of higher civilisational order.

On the other hand, after years of living in Poland now, Darek remarks the vision of homeland that had been reimagined by his father was much idealised:

My parents were thinking about Poland only in the positive way, that it was the homeland and it was one step closer to the West than Belarus… Thanks to dad there is this blind patriotism, he sees no negative features, and when I arrive home and he tells me something I have to correct him and sometimes he doesn't believe me… So as he was going to Poland they had meetings with authorities, so they were socialising with people who were not aware of average Poles' issues, and they saw Poland from that diplomatic perspective… Poland funded them, it is even today that they are financed by the government, so they cannot speak negatively… And my father created this ideal picture of Poland, and with this attitude I came here… So dad created that image and probably it will never be denied… Now I don't want it to be changed, nothing I see here makes me sad…

Nevertheless, the informant opposes changing the mythologised image of Poland he was given. Darek preserves it as, having experience of living in authoritarian Belarus (cf. Mamul 2009), he appreciates freedom and opportunities provided by the Polish state to its inhabitants. His relocation to Poland can be thus considered as a success story of a returnee who managed to fulfil previous expectations and then transform *the ideological homeland*, he was linked to by imaginary beliefs and ideas (Nowicka 2008: 13), into the real place of living. In this sense his mobility fits the traditional pattern of intergenerational return migration.

Attempt to Cope with Burdensome Roots

King and Christou argue that "possession of a strong transnational or diasporic identity is a *sine qua non* for second-generation migration to the 'homeland'" (2008: 16). However, the will to reconnect with the ancestral land does not only characterise individuals of a well-grounded national identity. It might be also a result of one's (re)discovery of ethnic roots and his/her attempts to deepen ties with co-ethnic community. A manifestation of the lifelong ambiguities of collective identity and the following regaining of Polishness is the narrative of Lena, a 36-year-old graduate from Belarus who studied in Poland in the mid-1990s.

Lena comes from a bi-national family of Polish father and Belarusian mother. The family's ethnic origins were initially out of her interests. That issue appeared for

---

[7] Interestingly, Darek's case is in contrast with research findings collected by Roman Dzwonkowski et al. They argue that the more often students have visited Poland before launching studies there, the less emotional they are when it comes to their return motives. On the other hand, students who visit Poland for the first time on the occasion of studies tend to idealise that country. Consequently, the dissonance between their earlier expectations and experience after arrival is also larger than in case of frequent "visitors" (2002: 69–70).

the first time when her boyfriend declared he would have married her if she had not been a Pole. Lena's Polishness was in fact a strong stigmatising factor which caused her alienation among school peers. That stigma raised a question of her national identification. Although she could not decide whether she was Polish or Belarusian, she concluded then the predominance of the Polish factor as, she believed, one inherited nationality from the father.

However, during secondary school she had a bad relationship with parents, particularly with father due to his authoritarian character and, even more, atheist orientation which was an obligation for an officer of the Soviet uniformed services. Since Lena was devoted to Catholicism, the more father forbade her to go to church, the more she was eager to do so. That constant conflict was the reason why she did not accept her Polishness as it identified her with the father. Furthermore, at that time Lena was rather discovering her Belarusian traits, including learning Belarusian language. She was fascinated by the rebirth of the Belarusian independence movement and began to engage in underground politics. It was accompanied by the will to follow the mother and become an artist. As parents did not let her enrol in a high school of fine arts in Minsk because it would not guarantee her adequate living standards, their conflict intensified. Therefore, when Lena got to know about possibility of studying in Poland she decided to relocate there and separate from parents:

In general it was an attempt to escape… I knew I would study in Minsk or in Poland, the further the better, if I hadn't made it I would have gone to Minsk as I was convinced that I didn't want to stay with my parents any more.

On the other hand, Polishness appeared to be a fate which Lena could not avoid. Undertaking studies in Poland was not only an escape from parents' custody but also an attempt to cope with Polish origin that had been a burden in her everyday life. She moved abroad both to fulfil her study-related plans and to learn the Polish culture:

I perceived my Polishness as a disadvantage, I was little ashamed I was Polish… But at the same time I had a feeling that I couldn't get away from that because I had a Polish father and a large family in Poland, even my mother's name was Kowalska so she was probably Polish but registered as Belarusian… I felt this was something I couldn't escape from, so I felt I might have gone to Poland as well.

Although coming back to the homeland is primarily aimed to compensate one's separation from a community of the same cultural and historical narratives, it can also invoke feelings of disillusionment (Datta 2013: 97–98). It usually relates to unfulfilled expectations regarding both social and cultural institutions as well as behavioural norms and practices of the ancestral society. They are founded on homeland's images that are preserved through predecessors' selective memories and narratives (King and Christou 2008: 18–19). These reconstructions may refer to several phenomena. In case of Lena it was her deep religiousness. She moved to Poland as the fervent Catholic with a belief that after religious persecution in the communist-era she would fully engage in her Church's life. Unexpectedly, she quickly noticed that clergy was much politicised, whereas Poles' faith appeared to be shallow. Furthermore, the disappointment was reinforced by negative reception by the receiving society that,

presumably, resulted from Poles' limited knowledge on the co-ethnics' situation in the East. It manifested in their idifference to Lena's initial adaptation problems, labelling *Ruska* (derogative term for Russian people) and questioning her Polish origin due to her Russian-like accent (Pawlak et. al 2005: 292). Consequently, Lena's sense of Polishness that had been based on Catholic grounds was ruined (cf. Kurczewska 2005). The discrepancy between expected and actual attitudes of Poles resulted in a feeling of strangeness in the homeland (Nowicka 1993: 15–42). [8] Therefore Lena did not struggle for recognition of her Polishness among peers but rather started to play the role of "ambassador" of Belarus: she corrected unfavourable stereotypes and underlined individual character of its culture (Mucha 2003: 185).

Lena's story reflects the mismatch between one's expectations and reality after return to the homeland (Dzwonkowski et. al 2002: 76–82). As for outward migration one can anticipate loneliness and other challenges of adaptation, returning home is expected to be relatively easier than other modes of cross-national mobility (Tannenbaum 2007: 170). Paradoxically, return often requires negotiation of one's diasporic origins to make a home within a country that seemed to be familiar (cf. Schütz 1945). [9] It especially refers to later-generation returnees who, despite having some knowledge of the predecessors' country and maintaining cultural contact with the co-ethnics there, have not had in fact any embedded experience of it. Consequently, it may lead to similar feeling of alienation as in first-generation migrants' case (Datta 2013: 97–98).

Despite the fact Lena had not been fully accepted by the ancestral society, every time she was back in Belarus her image of a Pole was still in force. The feeling of strangeness both in Poland and Belarus resulted in her *national ambivalence* that refers to uncertainty and confusion caused by one's experience of two or more national cultures (Kłoskowska 2001: 118). [10] As she wondered many times if she was Polish or Belarusian, she came to conclusion that national identity is much dependent on the local milieu's perception.

Unfortunately in Poland I'm a stranger and in Belarus I'm a stranger… But I can't say I'm Belarusian, I could identify with those who speak Belarusian language, who are conscious Belarusians, but I couldn't identify

---

[8] Ewa Nowicka has observed the dichotomy of being "familiar" and "stranger" in the context of educational migration. Foreign students in Poland act within four circles of familiarity and strangeness that determine the intensity of cultural contact and social distance with the host society. The first circle consists of compatriots studying in Poland, the second are students from the same cultural area, the third is the whole population of foreign students, and the fourth is a wide community of students at Polish universities (1993: 22–24).

[9] It brings the Alfred Schütz's classic concept of *homecomer* that concerns a person coming back home(land) after long absence with great expectations and optimism. He/she does not, however, anticipate how much home(land) has changed or, on the contrary, how much he/she has changed himself/herself. Conseqently, the homecomer finds it difficult to rebuild a sense of security and confidence in relation to the ancestral country, society and culture (1945: 369).

[10] Janusz Mucha argues that Polish-born students from the former USSR may represent three types of indentification with Polish national culture (Polishness). The first group consists of those fully identifying themselves with Poland (who consider themselves Polish). The second group has no clear cultural identity and, thus, might become either Poles or Ukrainians, Lithuanians etc. It often results from lack of acceptance by the host society and, thus, feeling like a stranger. The third group is represented by students who identify themselves only with the county of birth, irrespective of their Polish background (2003: 190–191).

with those who support Lukashenko… And in Poland I could identify with Poles who are non-Catholics and have left-wing political approach… Having in mind these preconditions I can say I'm Polish but not in that traditional meaning… On the other hand I don't think that an observer would qualify me as Polish… And in Belarus nobody would accept me as Belarusian, they would say I'm Polish… Many times I wondered, I still wonder what I feel, and, unfortunately, this is a typical situation that it doesn't matter what I feel but how do they perceive me.

Lena's return to the homeland appeared then to be unsuccessful. Polishness became unavoidable since she had always been identified as a Pole rather than thinking so herself. Thus she made an effort to cope with her Polish roots but it did not strengthen her bonds with co-ethnics. The ancestral homeland turned out to be different than the one she had expected. Furthermore, after nearly two decades of living in Poland she is still perceived as a stranger.

Making Use of Ethnic Roots for the Purpose of Self-realisation

In contrast to the above migration pathways, people of Polish roots may enrol for studies in Poland because of purely instrumental calculations rather than symbolical and ideological reasons. Their motives in this respect are not based on collective identifications. That type of relocation can be hardly described as return migration since it does not differ much from that of thousands of youngsters studying abroad every year.

Exemplification of this attitude is Sonia, a 21-year-old student from Kazakhstan who has been living in Poland for three years. Due to multinational background (father of Polish-Ukrainian ancestry and Russian-born mother) the issue of Polish roots did not raise her particular attention. Interestingly, although her family did not have any longing for Poland and they belonged to a community predominated by Russian culture and language, Sonia was occasionally encouraged by parents to attend Polish courses. They also wanted her to study abroad because of hardening nationalism of Kazakhs targeted at Slavic (mostly Russian) population. Leaving the country was to guarantee her safety. Therefore, when they got to know about scholarship programme for Poles living abroad, they persuaded her to make use of Polish origin and enrol for studies there. These practices of creating various security measures and building one's cultural capital to be exploited in the future seem to be typical for diasporic communities surrounded by hostile environment.

However, Sonia's decision to study abroad was primarily a search for ontological security (cf. Giddens 1991) within a conservative milieu, which did not recognise the values she followed, and, thus, she never had a feeling of belonging to it. At the age of 17 she had got involved in peace and vegan movements. As she became then radical in her beliefs she could not find any soul mates who would share her ideas. Therefore, looking for possibility of further anti-system engagement and finding like-minded people Sonia pursued studies in Poland, where she believed she could accomplish these goals:

I started to wonder what was important to me… I followed that alternative way of life and I realised that I couldn't find people like me, and I began to feel alone. I became vegetarian, it was a very important decision,

but I didn't receive any support neither from parents nor from friend. I felt bad with my approach, but this is how it is when you're young, radical, you follow some ideas and you don't want drugs, alcohol, and then you don't want to eat meat… So when I was selecting a place to study I was thinking a lot whether I find people like me. Of course I wondered what I would do if I didn't study abroad, that I would stay in Kazakhstan but I tried not to think about it because it was terribly painful…Then I thought I would study in Poland…

Sonia's narrative reveals the process of instrumentalisation of her Polish roots. Having a limited chance to find understanding in Kazakhstan, she deliberately took advantage of the emerging institutional opportunities (scholarship programme) and got to a university in Poland. Contrary to Darek, leaving home was not ideologically driven but the result of rigorous assessment of available possibilities.

The informant confirms her pragmatic approach when she explains she does not perceive Poland in terms of homeland, but rather as an emotionally neutral space offering opportunities to be exploited:

Poland is the same country as any other, an area limited by borders. I respect its history and culture, but I don't feel I belong here… I don't belong to Kazakhstan either… I had special feelings towards Russia but it was very abstract, I thought Russia would offer me a better life than Kazakhstan, because Kazakhstan wasn't my country and it was a mistake I was born there… Sometimes I don't know where my home is because when I return to Kazakhstan I don't feel like home, rather like a guest, and when arriving in Poland I feel even more alienated… Therefore I can say I'm homeless.

Despite having Polish roots Sonia does not feel to be a Pole. She did not have a chance to get acquainted with the Polish culture in Kazakhstan and subsequently has not internalised Polish cultural patterns while studying abroad. Moreover, she also rejects Russian and Kazakh affiliations. The dominant feeling of homelessness does not, however, cause high emotional consequences:

In my passport it was written that I was Polish but then I changed it, I didn't want it like that because I didn't know whom I should have identified with, because I lived all my life in Kazakhstan, I have some Polish roots indeed but I've never felt like a Pole… I could say I'm Russian because there was always that division between Russian and Kazakh people in Kazakhstan… But I can't say I'm Russian, because I don't have any special relations with Russia, apart from speaking Russian… I've always had a problem with national identification… Although I live here I certainly can't say I'm Polish…

Sonia had only pragmatic expectations regarding Poland and, thus, leaving home did not entail biographical suffering or disappointment. As she had not identified herself with that country, she also did not idealise it. Therefore, in contrast to Lena, she has not experienced identity tensions upon arrival in Poland. Moreover, apart from her plans of engagement in alternative movements, decision on leaving home resulted from the increasing need for constructing her own life. Studies in Poland appeared then to be Sonia's way of emancipation and self-realisation. Referring to the dichotomy of migration motives in the situation defined as unbearable by Kaja Kaźmierska, Andrzej Piotrowski and Katarzyna Waniek (2011: 148), it was not only an *escape from* oppression caused by unfavourable life circumstances and home community constrains, as in Lena's case, but also an *escape to* the new possibilities of personal development which would not be accomplished in Kazakhstan.

Nevertheless, since alternative groups that she got involved in do not completely fulfil her expectations, Sonia is thinking of moving westwards to look for new experiences and continue the path of self-development. Poland is just another step on her

way to, as she notes, "find a place where I could feel that I am safe and needed." Sonia's experience proves that coming back is not necessarily the end of a migration cycle but a step in further mobility. Ley and Kobayashi (2005: 111–113) argue that return migration concept does not capture the dynamic and temporal nature of migrants' decisions. In contrast to conventional immigration-assimilation narrative of outward migration, which conveys a sense of finality, return migration hardly ever leads to the closure or completion that migrants' desire. It is particularly visible in the era of growing transnational practices that dismantles the previous attachment to a given place and makes cross-border mobility continuous rather than completed. Indeed, if the opportunity of emigration to another country appears, Sonia will try to make use of it:

> My situation is dependent on the fact that I get a scholarship which enables me to survive few years in Poland… I don't know what will be the future but it will be hard to combine a job with my activism. But at least for the next few years I'm confident that I will survive without problems… I can't talk about distant future because I don't know if I want to stay in Poland… I really like to live here but I'd like to see the world… I'm fascinated by Western Europe, I'd love to go to England, maybe to Spain, anywhere, just to experience a different mentality and culture.

Consequently, due to strong ideological foundations of an alternative activist Sonia does not pay attention to national or territorial affiliations. She rather believes in a single human community based on shared moral grounds irrespective of one's ethnic background. Her narrative is an example of one's refusal of auto-categorisation in national terms in favour of *cosmopolitanism* that negates actual identifications with particular national groups (Kłoskowska 2001: 151). The process of individualisation that has been launched with Sonia's arrival in Poland prevents her from affiliating with one country. Therefore her place of living is above all determined by pragmatic arguments: opportunities for self-development, new experiences and finding people she could identify with.

Conclusions

The analysis of narratives delivered by three informants provides a new insight into educational mobility as well as roots migration patterns. It reveals that the interviewees' intentions are multilayered and, thus, cannot be reviewed in purely traditional terms that would suggest the return as based on only ideological and emotional motives or ethnic affinity. It refers particularly to the investigated later-generation returnees of complicated ethnic background who, despite having some knowledge of the ancestral homeland where often only part of their family comes from, have not experienced that country and, thus, often do not have the feeling of belonging to it.

Roots migration can be conducted because of several reasons. Firstly, it might be a manifestation of typical later-generation return pattern, when an individual due to symbolical and emotional reasons makes an existential journey to the source of the self and reunites with the ideological homeland. It can be both a voluntary decision or, as Darek's case indicates, a result of an obligation imposed by the closest

social environment that is also further facilitated by economic incentives. Secondly, following Lena's story, it might be also a result of individual (re)discovery of ethnic roots and the subsequent will to restore a partially-lost collective identity by deepening the bonds with the land of ancestors. On the other hand, despite symbolical and ideological importance of the homeland for the roots migrants, one can observe the weight of instrumental and pragmatic drives. Sonia's example shows that homecoming might become an opportunity for personal empowerment and self-development that would be hardly reachable in migrants' birth-countries. In this sense students' mobility is far from the typical return migration model. It fits, however, its primary goal when it is performed in order to gain new educational (professional) qualification and, in parallel, to launch individualisation and emancipation processes.

Educational mobility by a means of roots migration also influences the returnees' identities. Their transformations are not only dependent on the homeland's image that was nostalgically portrayed by relatives and other community members in the country of birth but they are also a response to appearing conditions upon the relocation there. Once the idealised far-away homeland becomes the real place of living, the examined students, whose privileged status of ethnic returnees does not in fact prevent them from becoming socioculturally marginalised, redefine its meaning as well as their collective sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly, in case of returnees of grounded national identification roots migration is the opportunity for deepening the relation with native country, culture and community. However, for migrants of multiple ethnic affinities roots migration does not necessarily resolve previous identity ambiguities but may lead to further fragmentarisation and deterritorialisation of collective affiliations.

References

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., and Szanton Blanc, C. 1994. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Boccagni, P. 2011. The framing of return from above and below in Ecuadorian migration: a project, a myth, or a political device?, *Global Networks* 4 (11): 461–480.

Breckner, R. 2007. Case-oriented comparative approaches: the biographical perspective as opportunity and challenge in migration research, in: K. Schittenhelm (ed.), *Concepts and Methods in Migration Research. Conference Reader*: 113–152, http://www.cultural-capital.net/reader/Concepts-and-Methods.pdf (accessed 20 November, 2014).

Castles, S. and Miller, M. J. 2009. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Christou, A. 2006a. American dreams and European nightmares: experiences and polemics of second-generation Greek-American returning migrants, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 5(32): 831–845.

Christou, A. 2006b. *Narratives of Place, Culture and Identity. Second-Generation Greek-Americans Return 'Home'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Datta, A. 2013, Diaspora and Transnationalism in Urban Studies, in: A. Quayson and G. Daswani (eds.), *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell: 88–105.

Davis, H., Kowalska, M. and Baker, S. 2011. Educational and other encounters: narratives of mobility and the biographical significance of international study and training in Europe, http://www.euroidentities.org/sites/Euroidentities/Workinprogress/Workingpapers/Filetoupload,210938,en.pdf (accessed 20 November, 2014).

D z w o n k o w s k i, R., G o r b a n i u k, O. and G o r b a n i u k, J. 2002. *Świadomość narodowa młodzieży polskiego pochodzenia z byłego ZSRR studiującej w Polsce*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.

G i d d e n s, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity London: Hutchinson.

G ł o w a c k a - G r a j p e r, M. 2007. "Rodacy-cudzoziemcy. Młodzi Polacy z Litwy, Białorusi i Ukrainy na studiach w Polsce," in: E. Nowicka, S. Łodziński (eds.), *Kulturowe wymiary imigracji do Polski. Studia socjologiczne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Prolog: 329–358.

G ł ó w n y   U r z ą d   S t a t y s t y c z n y. 2014a. *Rocznik demograficzny 2014*. Warszawa: GUS.

G o ń d a, M. 2013. Narratives on Polishness. Identity ambiguities of foreign students of Polish descent, in: M. Banaś, M. Dzięglewski (eds.), *Narratives of Ethnic Identity, Migration and Politics. A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka: 87–100.

G o ń d a, M. 2012. Cudzoziemcy polskiego pochodzenia podejmujący studia w Polsce. «Powrót do macierzy» czy pragmatyczny wybór?, *Centre of Migration Research Working Papers* 57(115). http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/download/1829 (accessed 20 November, 2014).

G ó r n y, A. and K o r y ś, I. 2009. O pożytkach podejścia jakościowego w badaniu migracji międzynarodowych, *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny* 1: 27–46.

G ó r n y, A., G r z y m a ł a - K a z ł o w s k a, A., K o r y ś, P. and W e i n a r, A. 2007. Selective tolerance? Regulations, practice and discussions regarding dual citizenship in Poland, in: T. Faist (ed.), *Dual Citizenship in Europe: From Nationhood to Societal Integration*. Hampshire: Ashgate: 147–169.

G r z y m a ł a - K a z ł o w s k a, A. and G r z y m a ł a - M o s z c z y ń s k a, H. 2014. The Anguish of Repatriation: Immigration to Poland and Integration of Polish Descendants from Kazakhstan, *East European Politics and Societies* 3 (28): 593–613.

J a i n, S. 2011. The Rights of 'Return': Ethnic Identities in the Workplace among Second-Generation Indian-American Professionals in the Parental Homeland, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 9 (37): 1313–1330.

J o p p k e, C. 2005. *Selecting by Origin: Ethnic Migration in the Liberal State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

K a w c z y ń s k a - B u t r y m, Z. (ed.). 2014. *Migracje edukacyjne. Studenci zagraniczni—dwie strony księżyca*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.

K a ź m i e r s k a, K. 2012. *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*. Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS.

K a ź m i e r s k a, K., P i o t r o w s k i, A. and W a n i e k, K. 2011. Biographical Consequences of Working Abroad in the Context of European Mental Space Construction, *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 1(60): 139–158.

K e m p n y, M. 2012. Crossing Boundaries of Self: Multidimensionality of Ethnic Belongings and Negotiating Identities among Polish Immigrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland, *Polish Sociological Review* 1(177): 55–70.

K ł o s k o w s k a, A. 2001. *National Cultures at the Grass-root Level*. Budapest/New York: Central European University Press.

K i n g, R., C h r i s t o u, A. and A h r e n s, J. 2011. 'Diverse Mobilities': Second-Generation Greek-Germans Engage with the Homeland as Children and as Adults, *Mobilities* 4 (6): 483–501.

K i n g, R. and C h r i s t o u, A. 2011. Of Counter-Diaspora and Reverse Transnationalism: Return Mobilities to and from the Ancestral Homeland, *Mobilities* 4 (6): 451–466.

K i n g, R. and C h r i s t o u, A. 2008. Cultural Geographies of Counter-Diasporic Migration: The Second Generation Returns 'Home', *Sussex Migration Working Paper* 45, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=mwp45.pdf&site=252 (accessed 20 November, 2014).

K u r c z e w s k a, J. 2005. National Identities Vis-à-Vis Democracy and Catholicism (The Polish Case After 1989), *Polish Sociological Review* 4(152): 329–347.

L e s i ń s k a, M. 2010. Wstęp, in: M. Lesińska (ed.), *Polityka państwa wobec migracji powrotnych własnych obywateli. Teoria i praktyka*, Center of Migration Research Working Papers, 44 (102): 4–6, http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/news/1289 (accessed 20 November, 2014).

L e y, D. and K o b a y s h i, A. 2005. Back to Hong Kong: return migration or transnational sojourn?, *Global Networks* 2 (5): 111–127.

M a m u l, N. 2009. Narrative Templates of Post-Soviet Identity in Belarus, *Polish Sociological Review* 2(166): 229–249.

M a s s e y, D. S., A r a n g o, J., H u g o, G., K o u a o u c i, A., P e l l e g r i n o, A. and T a y l o r, J. E. 1998. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*. Oxford: Clarendon.

M u c h a, J. 2003. Ethnic Polish Students from the Former Soviet Union in the Homeland of their Forefathers. An Empirical Study, *East European Quarterly* 2(XXXVII): 167–194.

N o w i c k a, E. 2008. Introduction. The Study of Return Migrations, in: E. Nowicka and H. Firouzbakhch (eds.). *Homecoming. An Anthropology of Return Migrations*. Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos: 9–20.

N o w i c k a, E. 1993. Wprowadzenie, in: E. Nowicka and S. Łodziński (eds.). *Gość w dom. Studenci z krajów Trzeciego Świata w Polsce*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa: 15–41.

O r g a n i s a t i o n   f o r   E c o n o m i c   C o o p e r a t i o n   a n d   D e v e l o p m e n t. 2013. *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD, http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20(eng)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf (accessed 20 November, 2014).

P a w l a k, M., K r u p k a, A. and M a j o r e k, J. 2005. Wiedza i wyobrażenia polskich studentów na temat krajów byłego Związku Radzieckiego i Polaków tam zamieszkałych, in: R. Wyszyński (ed.). *Mniejszość polska na rozdrożu. Studenci i absolwenci uczelni polskich pochodzący z Litwy, Białorusi i Ukrainy*. Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii UW: 292–350.

P a l u c h, A. K. 1976, Inkluzywne i ekskluzywne rozumienie terminu "Polonia", *Przegląd Polonijny* 2: 17–26.

S c h ü t z, A. 1945. The Homecomer, *American Journal of Sociology* 5(50): 369–376.

S c h ü t z e, F. 1987. *Das narrative Interview in Interaktionsfeldstudien: Erzähltheoretische Grundlagen. Teil 1: Merkmale von Alltagserzählungen und was wir mit ihrer Hilfe erkennen können*. Hagen: Studienbrief der Fernuniversität Hagen.

S i w i ń s k a, B. 2012. *Studenci zagraniczni w Polsce 2012. Raport*. Fundacja Edukacyjna Perspektywy. http://www.studyinpoland.pl/konsorcjum/pdfy/oraporcie_atudy_in_poland2012.pdf (accessed 20 November, 2014).

S t e f a ń s k a, R. 2010. Policy towards foreigners of Polish origin, in: A. Górny, I. Grabowska-Lusińska, M. Lesińska and M. Okólski (eds.), *Immigration to Poland. Policy. Employment. Integration*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar: 84–88.

T a n n e n b a u m, M. 2007. Back and Forth: Immigrants' Stories of Migration and Return, *International Migration* 5 (45): 147–175.

d e   T i n g u y, A. 2003. Ethnic Migrations of the 1990s from and to the Successor States of the Former Soviet Union: 'Repatriation' or Privileged Migration?, in: R. Münz and R. Ohlinger (eds.), *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants. Germany, Israel and Post-Soviet Successor States in Comparative Perspective*. London, Portland: Frank Cass: 112–128.

T s u d a, T. 2013. When the Diaspora Returns Home. Ambivalent Encounters with the Ethnic Homeland, in: A. Quayson and G. Daswani (eds.), *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell: 172–189.

T s u d a, T. 2009. *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

W a l s h, K. 2006. British expatriate belongings: mobile homes and transnational homing, *Home Cultures* 2 (3): 123–144.

W e s s e n d o r f, S. 2007. 'Roots Migrants': Transnationalism and 'Return' among Second-Generation Italians in Switzerland, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 7(33): 1083–1102.

W y s z y ń s k i, R. 2011. Trudny powrót, in: M. Bucholc, S. Mandes, T. Szawiel, J. Wawrzyniak. *Polska po 20 latach wolności*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW: 409–421.

Ż o ł ę d o w s k i, C. 2010. *Studenci zagraniczni w Polsce. Motywy przyjazdu, ocena pobytu, plany na przyszłość*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW.

Biographical Note: Marcin Gońda is a research assistant at the Centre for Research in European Culture, Institute of Sociology of the University of Łódź. He graduated from sociology and international relations at the Univeristy of Łódź. He is currently working on PhD project on biographical dimension of educational migration of people of Polish origin from the former USSR. He is also an author of a number of papers on migration, ethnic minorities and internationalisation of higher education in Poland.

E-mail: marcin.gonda@uni.lodz.pl