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Is Apostasy from a Family Possible? The Apostasy from an Alcoholic-Abusive Family as a Variant of (Un)Becoming a Daughter – the Case of Natalia¹

Abstract An analysis of the biography of Natalia, a former resident of a Polish children's home who, at the age of thirteen, voluntarily left her biological, dysfunctional family, aims to address a question which is fundamental, but rarely asked by the sociologists of family. Is it possible to completely quit a relation with one's family of origin? What identity and biographical consequences does such a decision imply? This article consists of two parts. In the first, theoretical one, I argue that the process of quitting one's family is a liminal, unstructured status passage, especially, for two categories of actors – adolescents and mothers who decide to pass taking care of children to fathers. I take into account the cultural and institutional basis of the liminal character of their experience. I also explain why, in order to comprehend those difficult instances, I propose using the metaphor of apostasy. The second, empirical part of the article, is devoted to studying the biographical and identity consequences and limitations of the process of apostasy. I analyze them on the basis of Natalia's autobiography, which provided inspiration for those reflections.

Keywords Apostasy; Agency of the Child; Family Studies; Status Passage; Liminality; Apostasy Narrative; Biographical Methods; Authoritarian Family; Working Class; Poland

Sylwia Urbańska, Sociologist, received her PhD at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, where she also graduated and currently works as an Assistant Professor. The focus of her expertise is on sociology and history of families, motherhood, migrations of women, and gender issues. An additional area of her academic specialization is the methodology of sociological research, especially qualitative research – narrative/biographical methods, global ethnography. In 2005-2010, she was conducting ethnographical research both in Polish villages/small cities and in Belgium. She was analyzing experiences of transna-

tional mothering in narrative biographical accounts of Polish women care workers in Brussels (1989-2009). Her doctoral project "Mothering in the process of social change in the contexts of global migrations of women. The Polish case" has also received national recognition: PM Awards for the best doctoral thesis (2012); and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Institute of Labor and Social Studies Award for the best doctoral thesis in the field of work and political sciences (2011).

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The notion of apostasy transplanted into the sociology of the family has the potential to provide valuable insight into the still unrecognized transgressional, or liminal, experiences of family life, such as quitting family relations. This article discusses the biographical consequences of leaving one's family, and, paradoxically, the impossibility of leaving it once and for all, on the basis of Natalia's² autobiography. Natalia is a former resident of a children's home who, between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, made a dramatic decision to leave her alcoholic and abusive family – a family that was neglectful and rejecting, as well as representing an authoritative model of children's upbringing.

Why does the metaphor of apostasy seem indispensable to comprehend the biographical consequences and the specificity of the exit processes? The answer lies in the observations of contemporary social phenomena in Poland which allow showing certain similarities between the status of a family member and a member of the Catholic Church. I shall discuss this analogy in greater detail later in this article.

The first Polish baby conceived in 1987 in a test-tube fertilization, Agnieszka Ziółkowska, announced in 2013, in an open letter in the media, her intent to apostatize from the Catholic Church (Pawłowska 2013). For the first time, in one of the most heated ideological debates of the last decade in Poland – the fight between the proponents of *in vitro* insemination and its Catholic opponents – a person born thanks to *in vitro* fertilization publicly revealed her stance. To Agnieszka, the decision to leave the

¹ Translation by Monika Żychlińska.

² I use the pseudonym given to the protagonist by the interviewer, Dr. Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas.

Church – announced in front of millions of Poles – and its formal finalization a couple of months later, was a form of symbolic protest against the Catholic priests' discourse saturated with hate speech against the *in vitro* babies and their families (Koziołek 2013; Ziółkowska 2013).

Agnieszka was not alone in her act of moral resistance coming from inside of the Catholic Church. The Church, clearly in a crisis, which has manifested itself in the wave of believers quitting the community, has been criticized for its negative attitude towards reforms and a patriarchal *modus operandi*. The apostates themselves have pointed to an interesting problem – the impossibility of leaving the Catholic Church community in both formal and symbolic dimensions.

What is interesting, and what I intend to demonstrate in this article, is that a similar impossibility can be noticed in the situation of quitting one's family community. That is why the process of status passages (*rites de status passage*, Glaser and Strauss 1971) from religious and family communities are best described by the metaphor of apostasy.

I decided to analyze the process of quitting one's family relations as seen through the lenses of apostasy for a number of reasons. From a broad perspective, this allows noticing the processual aspects of the transformation of social bonds. For a couple of decades in Europe we have observed a transformation, legally and ideologically supported, from various types of family relations with authoritarian or patriarchal characteristics towards more egalitarian

ones, based on partnership communication, mutual understanding, and respect for each other's needs; aspiring to become what Anthony Giddens would call a "pure relationship" (2007). Although it might seem that in the twentieth century everything had already been said about the models of a dysfunctional family – and thus, that the subject had been exhausted – it is worth noting that the existing studies are primarily focused on producing a description of relations in such families or on demonstrating its origins against the historical backdrop of social and ideological transformations, or its economic conditions. However, do we know what the process of quitting a dysfunctional, in different ways, family looks like from a biographical perspective? In other words, how do individuals who contest such a relationship – for example, adolescents – manage this situation? Are their efforts not bound to fail and, in consequence, lead to apostasy? Second, this problematization brings us to the fundamental question – is it possible for some categories of actors, joined by blood relationships, to quit their families? What identity consequences does an apostate have to face? I will try to answer these questions in the theoretical and empirical parts of this article based on an analysis of Natalia's biographical account.

Leaving a Family and Apostatizing from the Catholic Church – Is There Anything in Common?

First, let me consider the formal analogies between apostasy from the Catholic Church and apostasy from a family. The term apostasy, which comes from the Greek ἀποστασία (*apostasia*), means defection

and revolt.³ Contemporarily, it is used in two contexts. In the first, it designates the breaking of the formal bond – the disaffiliation – with the Church, the abandonment or renunciation of religion by the apostate. In the second, it serves as a metaphor used to describe the exit process from civic organizations and groups. Here, the meanings attributed to apostasy, seen as a specific role and career, are, according to philosopher Max Scheler, connected with a sense of resentment towards the exited group (Coser 1954). In this understanding, leaving usually takes the form of a contested and/or oppositional exit, and usually implies engaging in a public critique of these organizations. This often involves joining counter-organizations and opposing social movements (Bromley 1998:36). Apostasy is positioned on a continuum – it is the strongest form of a contested exit. Other forms are less engaged in critique, but are nevertheless entangled in negotiating the conditions of leaving with the members of the exited groups (e.g., defector – whistleblower – apostate [Broomley 1998:20]; defector – ordinary leave – taker – apostate [Introvigne 1999]).

The striking similarities between the exit process and apostasy from the Catholic Church make it worthwhile to consider the possibility of an act of becoming an apostate from one's family. Though it might seem that apostasy means the ultimate abandonment of the Catholic Church, it turns out that, according to the *Jus canonicum*, this is not possible. Apostasy does not imply the formal leaving of the Church because the doctrine holds an apostate remains a Catholic until the end of his or her life, ac-

³ See: "Apostasy" in *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 10, 2013 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy>).

ording to the dictum *semel catholicus, semper catholicus* ("once a Catholic, always a Catholic"). Therefore, apostasy does not render one a non-Catholic, though, one is punished by the forfeiture of the right to participate in the life of the religious community and partake of sacraments – such as marriage or funeral – and any other Catholic activities, functions, or privileges. The canonical law defines apostasy as voluntary excommunication. Although church authorities, such as bishops, can, on request, restore one to the previous state, the full return to the community of the Catholic Church is difficult and conditional. It involves a complex ritual accompanied by punishments and penance, preceded by an act of public confession and repentance. Only this way can an apostate erase what has always accompanied excommunication – condemnation and social ostracism. Peculiarly, despite the act of leaving and excommunication, the apostate's data (against his or her will) still appears in the register of Catholics, though annotated with a comment about apostasy.⁴ Here, we can see the nature of the problem – the essentialist understanding of the apostate's status, and consequently, the impossibility of their complete leaving.

An attempt to quit one's family is strikingly similar to committing apostasy from the Catholic Church. As I shall demonstrate, it is similarly doomed to failure. The formal equivalent of apostasy from one's family would be a conscious renunciation of one's parental rights and custody – including contacts with the child in the future – something that is more often done by fathers as compared to

⁴ See: "Apostazja" *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 10, 2013 (<http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostazja>).

mothers or other family members. However, it is worth pointing to less common situations which are nevertheless more and more often observed by the employees of Polish children's homes when – as in Natalia's case – adolescents actively seek and support the efforts of the courts to remove the parental rights from their parents (Gmiterek-Zabłocka 2013). Similarly to apostasy from Catholicism, the formal act of breaking a family relationship in Poland is associated with the reduction of numerous legal rights and privileges. However, an interesting similarity between these two acts can best be noticed in two other problems. First, in the impossibility of fully erasing one's formal status of belonging to a family, and therefore, exiting the community completely, and secondly, in the social consequences of leaving one's family, which are, in fact, similar to the social consequences of excommunication.

Similarly to institutional baptism, which, according to Catholic doctrine, makes one a member of the "Church community," being someone's genetic or biological child or parent is subject to an irrevocable status of belonging guaranteed by genes and/or blood. Furthermore, a number of initiatives in different European countries show an ever-increasing tendency to prohibit total erasure of one's parents' biological or genetic identities from the archives. A growing number of judicial decisions oblige various institutions and hospitals to allow children access to the personal information of their parents. In Germany and Sweden, for example, after famous court trials between directors of sperm banks and *in vitro* children, the latter were granted the right to know the identity of their fathers, anonymous sperm donors (Wielński 2013). In Poland, in

turn, the liquidation of the so-called “Windows of Life” is now being considered. These are points in hospitals and convents where one can anonymously leave a baby, at any time day or night, by putting it into a cradle or a special window in the wall. The proponents of the liquidation of the “Windows of Life,” similar to adult test-tube babies suing clinics, refer to the right to be informed about the identity of the parents as an indelible human right (acknowledged by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), as well as information about such practical issues as health and genetic concerns, or the knowledge about possible siblings that could diminish the fear of accidentally entering an incestuous relationship.

Such mass institutional closings-off of the possibility of erasing one’s status took place when advanced reproductive technologies revolutionized kinship by separating legal, social, genetic, and biological aspects of parenting. Chaos in the ordering of classification systems is best illustrated by “the fragmentation of motherhood that becomes separated from the fact of being pregnant. One hitherto unquestionable category – that of the mother – is now replaced by a genetic mother, a gestational mother, and a social mother” (Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012:331). In practice, this means that for a baby conceived with the help of reproductive technologies, it is possible for one set of parents to be sperm and egg donors, for a different set of parents to initiate this process, and for the baby to be carried and borne by a gestational mother “renting out” her belly (Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012:332). And while highly naturalized cultural relations of kinship are – in the face of modern medical technologies – losing their ob-

viousness and becoming fuzzy, various types of initiatives in the area of legal regulations seek to organize them and to make it impossible to quit the status of a family relationship. In Poland, for example, the question of who a child’s mother is has quite recently been settled by the November 6, 2008 regulation which states that “the child’s mother is the woman who gave birth to them” (art. 61⁹ k.r.o. [*The Family and Guardianship Code*]).⁵

The most interesting analogy between apostasy from a family and apostasy from the Catholic Church, however, concerns the experiential consequences of the apostate’s decision for their identity and social relationships because bonds of kinship come with a number of cultural expectations, obligations, symbolic identifications, idealizations, imagery, myths, and taboos (Yanagisako and Collier 2007). Thus, even contemporarily, in the era of the growing popularity of postmodern relationships based on the reflective model of “pure relation,” as suggested by Giddens (2007), and the increasingly liberal and more inclusive categories of defining family, departing from any formal indicators (Mizielińska 2012:237), a person who leaves a family can experience equally strong condemnation and ostracism from their community as, in former times, a believer excommunicated from the Catholic Church would experience. The breaking of cooperation and the act of a deliberate decision to quit family relations are still treated as a violation of a sa-

⁵ Radkowska-Walkowicz has noted that “[i]n support of the project it has been argued that the regulation is a response to the possibilities of modern medicine which allow for fertilization and conception of a child without sexual intercourse of a human couple, in particular, fertilization that takes place outside of a woman’s organism and results in a pregnancy of a woman different than the donor of the gametes used in the medical fertilization process” (2012:331).

crum, and are socially stigmatized. However, little is known about such experiences as there is almost no research into them. It is, therefore, interesting to go further, beyond the analysis of the moment of apostasy. Since this moment of rapture is just the beginning of a long process of rebuilding one’s identity and re-defining existing relationships, it is necessary to ask: How is the apostate’s career taking shape? As it is impossible to leave the family completely, is it at least possible to do so in the dimension of interaction or identity? What is the nature of identity work when it is so hard to break family relations? In other words, whether, and how, is it possible to leave one’s family?

So Mothers and Children Leave!? **Familiarization of the Liminal Sphere**

First, let us consider what persons or categories of actors can leave a family, if social norms and expectations are taken into account. For whom is it easier, and for whom is it more difficult? And why?

Out of all categories of actors that compose a family in Poland, it is the father’s parting with the children, for example, after the parents’ divorce that is recognized as the norm. The degree to which this is an anticipated schema of events is supported by its social prevalence, and by the well-developed rules and phases (*structured status passage*, Glaser and Strauss 1971), confirmed by quantitative data. In Poland, in as many as 95%-98% of divorce cases, courts grant custody to mothers. According to the *2011 Census* (Narodowy Spis Powszechny 2011), one in five families is headed by a single mother, in comparison with the 2% of families that are headed by single fathers.

Not surprisingly, almost every Pole knows at least a few fathers who have left their families,⁶ whereas instances of a voluntary and deliberate parting of mothers with their children and partner, or children with their parents, seem to be beyond the scope of social imagination. I would argue that such instances are located in the sphere of the strangeness, scarcely known, and that they thus represent an unstructured status passage. We do not know how many people realize such scripts in Poland,⁷ and little is known about the contexts in which they are set. There is no systematic research nor vocabulary to describe such experiences. Furthermore, in the symbolic universe, it is difficult to find symbols, which could help apostates to live and work through their experiences. Those experiences belong to the realm of taboo, which, due to its liminal character, generates strong social emotions and moral anxiety.

Children as Victims; Deviant vs. Hero Mothers: Missing Agency in Interpretative Repertoires

The first reaction to the subject of leaving in various debates is usually a mix of denial and puzzlement: “So children or mothers quit!?” A mother who left her family is, in the first place, suspected to be a deviant – for instance, a victim of an addiction or a mental illness. She is perceived in terms of a temporal emotional or sexual aberration, of incapacitation by a man in the patriarchal setting, or as

⁶ Obviously, the contexts in which fathers leave are complex, and judicial decisions in many cases do not reflect the fathers’ will.

⁷ Though it is possible to access the details of divorce cases and judicial decisions depriving parents of their parental rights, as well as census data, we have to remember that this type of information is biased by the context in which it was generated, which makes the question of agency difficult to interpret. The same rule applies to statistics from children’s homes.

being seduced by money or career rather than being seen as a “normal” person who deliberately and voluntarily decides to part with her children and live in a different household. This phenomenon was illustrated in the interactionist studies of women’s biographies, although scarce ethnographic research and biographical interviews were conducted in the English and American organizations of support for noncustodial mothers who were forced to leave, or who decided to leave, their families for various reasons (Gustafson 2005; Pagano 2006). Explanations of motivations to leave a family are therefore closed within the framework of a one-dimensional script of an ill woman and thus, the potential agency of this undoubtedly complex process is, by definition, completely obliterated.

This observation is also valid for another script in which acts of women leaving the family are presented – that of the woman as a heroic victim. It is best represented in the Polish confessional press, which is full of stories of women from lower social classes who, for example, gave their children up for adoption. Those accounts are always justified within the scope of the hegemonic, heavily exploited script of sacrifice (Stańczak-Wiślicz 2012). Protagonists of these sad stories are always presented as subject to an extreme external coercion which forces them to give their children to other families, which is interpreted as an act of the highest concern for the children’s fate. According to the script, “there are no boundaries to the mother’s sacrifice and devotion” (Stańczak-Wiślicz 2012:388).

Similarly, one-dimensional interpretative repertoires are used to explain acts of leaving by ado-

lescents. The circumstances surrounding such instances are more often interpreted as unfair random events that pull the children out of their parents’ hands by force, violence, or court judgment than seen as elements of the child’s agency. According to popular perceptions, children from abusive families boundlessly love their maladjusted parents, and this is why they never quit or put any conditions on them. Such interpretative schemas find their expression in the Polish language – descriptions of situations involving children are usually formulated in the passive voice, for example, *was taken away from his/her parents* or *was placed in an orphanage*. In any case, there is no acknowledgment of the child’s potential agency, which is taken to be completely insignificant in this process.

Social Work Ideologies in the Functionalist Trap

The denial of the causative element in such instances, which permeates popular interpretations, should not come as a surprise since identical black-and-white clichés can be found in Polish mainstream social research, which locates itself far from the critical paradigm. The contexts in which mothers’ and children’s leavings are situated are not treated as an alternative and legitimate variant in all their complexity but are placed within the sphere of dysfunctional and/or deviant behavior. In Poland, the more or less explicitly articulated paradigm of functionalism still prevails in the mainstream currents of sociology, applied pedagogy, and developmental psychology, which set the ideological foundations for the models of social work and pedagogical intervention. This normative model of a family is based on the tenets of the complementarily and non-

-interchangeability of the sexual, reproductive, educational, and economic roles of the mother and the father.⁸ In this model, the mother is granted universal competence to perform emotional care because of her allegedly natural and biologically rooted caring capabilities. Thus, the mother is always perceived in the context of the child’s needs (Budrowska 2000) as a heroic and devoted caretaker who, if necessary, is ready to sacrifice other areas of her life (Sikorska 2009; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012), or “a brave victim” who combines professional work with domestic care (Giza and Marody 2000). In its modern version, derived from therapeutic culture, a mother is also a manager who – though she can and should work – has to, simultaneously, manage investments in the “Child Project” (Urbańska 2009).

Beliefs about the natural care competence of women who permeate the institutional *modus operandi* are thus combined with a specifically understood framework of caretaking. It is identified with the private sphere and domesticity – a haven from

⁸ The opening of borders after 1989 only strengthened the position of functionalism, already prominent in social work practice during communism. It was thriving despite the declarations permeating communist ideologies that argued for gender egalitarianism in the spheres of work and family. Furthermore, after the transition, the intensification of postmodern transformations in the sphere of family life engendered strong resistance from the Catholic Church and other conservative political organizations, resulting in a multidimensional backlash. Women started to lose their hard-won rights, such as reproductive and abortion rights (Titkow 2001; Graff 2008). Functionalism guaranteed the protection of a conservative model of the family. It is worth noting that the functionalist family models are, in essence, convergent with Catholic patriarchal ideals of a family (Szlendak 2010). On the other hand, the influx of ideas developed in Western countries and the imported patterns of therapeutic culture (the development of self-help markets) strengthened, in practice, the functionalist vision of family roles (Urbańska 2009). Content analysis of various therapeutic programs reveals scripts identical with the functionalist ones, e.g., the belief that the first three years of a child’s life are crucial for the development of their personality and thus, during this time, they should have one permanent caretaker who is, not coincidentally, identified as the mother.

the heartless world (Lasch 1979) – and contrasted with the impersonal relationships that govern the public sphere and the capitalist labor market. Such an understanding of caretaking, as well as of the natural bond between the mother and the child, is associated with unconditional devotion, love, morality, and therefore, also, with indissolubility, which are placed in opposition to the temporality and conditionality of a business contract and the competitive behavior characteristic of business relationships (Collier, Rosaldo, Yanagisako 2007:70). This way, the mother-child dyad, ideologized in institutional practice and social consciousness, is difficult to imagine in alternative scenarios, such as the voluntary departure of the mother after divorce. It is even difficult to “loosen” it a bit in the sphere of the expectations of the norms of caretaking. In Poland, “where the cult of motherhood and the symbolic role of the mother are strong” (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012:10), researchers argue that “sanctions connected to improper performance or to a failure to perform a mother’s duties are incomparably greater than those of the father” (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012:7). In consequence, even if in the public discourse and in care handbooks new models of motherhood and fatherhood appear that would allow mothers to be “good enough mothers,” (cf. Sikorska 2009) in social work (intervention), the mother-child dyad is not subject to any significant subversion. Other models, such as a lesbian mother, a transnational mother, or a noncustodial mother, are forced to operate in the liminal sphere. A mother’s apostasy from family is therefore impossible without enormous social and legal, as well as biographical and identity, repercussions which bring to mind those related to excommunication.

The same applies to children. Supervisory institutions define them in terms of deficit and medicalization, due to developmental psychology, which sees children “as potential subjects who can only be understood along the child-to-adult continuum” (Buckingham 2000 as cited in Bass 2007:141); “as human *becomings* rather than *human beings*” (Qvortrup 1994 as cited in Bass 2007:141). Children are thus seen, on the one hand, as objects of the actions and investments of others, as future adults, future members of the workforce, and future citizens who must be instructed accordingly. On the other hand, a child, through presenting their identity in terms of physical, psychological, or mental weakness, appears to be a vulnerable victim, susceptible to harm from adults (Wihstutz 2012:95-99). This becomes clear when we take a closer look at the most important publications about childhood, which have been published in Poland since the 90s. As pedagogue Wioletta Danilewicz observed, during this time the topic of childhood – captivated, endangered, harmed, isolated, and disturbed (2006:54) – gains a lot of popularity. Within these perspectives, it is hard to see the child as an active agent. It is even more difficult to see the child as a contesting apostate. Only critical sociology and anthropology of the family put forward alternative perspectives which frame children as subjects and experts in the area of their own thoughts and feelings, desires and needs; as possessing moral competences.⁹

⁹ The need for such approaches is related to the growing tendency to emphasize the agentive role children have, e.g., in intersectionist research (e.g., research on children as caretakers of adults) but also the growing emphasis on the need for adolescents’ representation and participation in the public sphere (Wihstutz 2012).

A Dramaturgy of Leaving: Lack of Control over the Conditions of Leaving

Thus, social expectations and ideologies that set the foundations of institutional practice demonstrate the lack of precedent for mothers’ and children’s leaving (in comparison to the possibilities that fathers have). Situating these practices outside the normative boundaries of culture results in apostasy taking place in secret, far from any witnesses, often realized through an escape and renouncement rather than negotiating the conditions and modes of leaving, due to the apostate’s perception of themselves as a taboo-violating traitors. Such intuitions are validated by a few existing scholarly studies and documents that reconstruct the dramaturgy of leaving as fraught with the acts of breaking, disappearing, feelings of guilt, and anticipation of family hostility.¹⁰

Leaving often involves moving to another city or country and therefore, a total change of the social milieu. One sometimes even conceals his or her previous identity for fear of ostracism (Gustafson 2005; Urbańska in press). It is interesting, however, that such acts of leaving are kept secret not only by the *passagee* but also the abandoned family members, as if breaking a taboo would equally stigmatize them (Gustafson 2005; Urbańska in press; see also: Itaka – Center for Missing People¹¹). The act of breaking family relations can also take the form of an escape – committing suicide and/or murdering family members, which can be understood as a spe-

¹⁰ A famous example of a mother’s leaving – a full-time housewife who flees her husband and son – is presented in the movie *The Hours*, on the basis of Michael Cunningham’s prose.

¹¹ See: <http://zaginieni.pl/>.

cific act of apostasy committed in a situation where there is a lack of socially accepted exit options. An example of such an apostasy from the institution of motherhood can be found in Adrienne Rich’s book *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986). It is the story of an American housewife – Joanne Michulski, a mother of eight – who stabbed two of her youngest children on the lawn in front of the house. In popular culture, there are more stories of child and/or husband murderesses who are presented according to the categories of emotional aberration than of women who voluntarily and deliberately left their families.

However, not much is known about the biographical and social dimensions of the leaving process.

Natalia’s Case – Apostasy from an Alcoholic-Abusive Family as a Variant of the Process of (Un)Becoming a Daughter

Natalia’s autobiography is an example of the apostasy of an adolescent girl from a working-class family where the style of caretaking and raising children, according to the typology put forward by Baumrind (Alwin 2007:50 as cited in Szlandak 2010:234), is a combination of authoritarianism (corporal punishments, insensitivity to children’s needs) and rejection connected with neglect (children are left on their own, lack of parental support and control).

Natalia was born in 1975 to a peasant-worker couple who lived in a flat in the countryside. Her father came from the country, but he didn’t own land. Her mother was the daughter of a poor woman worker from Lodz, twice widowed by her alcohol-

ic husbands. Soon after Natalia’s birth, her parents moved to Lodz – the mother’s native town. The mother broke into an abandoned tenement located in the town’s working-class district. The couple and their six children reside permanently (to this day) in a thirty-square-meter room given to them and another tenant as public housing. After their neighbor’s death, Natalia’s parents squatted in his room. We might say that the story of Natalia’s family is representative of some working-class families from Lodz as an example of social advancement – moving from rural to urban areas.

Natalia told the story of her apostasy and the ways of working it into her biography to the researcher in 2011. She volunteered to do the interview. She answered an advertisement sent by Dr. Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas to former residents of children’s homes from Lodz. Natalia is thirty-six years old. She has a high school education, a job, a husband, and a daughter. She lives a “normal” life in a flat that was provided by the town council after she left the orphanage. Her flat is located in the same building in which her parents live. As she explains, former residents of children’s homes usually get housing close to their families in the Lodz poverty ghettos.

Natalia’s account does not have the structure characteristic of an interview according to Fritz Schütze’s methodology (Kaźmierska 1996; Schütze 2012). Intense emotions released during the interview led the researcher to empathize with and emphatically support the narrator by suggesting pauses, changing subjects, and asking questions. Consequently, the structure of Natalia’s account resembles

a narrativized interview consisting of two separate parts. The first one is a type of “apostasy narrative” (Introvigne 1999) about the contexts of leaving with themes that need to be elaborated on, such as childhood and living with the family of origin. The second part, initiated by the researcher, concerns Natalia’s present life and her relationships with her parents and siblings. Transcription of both parts takes around fifty pages. The material is full of long narrative fragments, excellent for biographical analysis. It allows to reconstructing the process of apostatizing from a family before and after Natalia’s departure for the children’s home.

What, then, did make a fourteen-year-old Natalia “decide” to leave her family – first through a suicide attempt, then, after being hospitalized, through a refusal to return home and a move, instead, to a children’s home? I will now analyze the conditions which systematically build the conditional potentials of a suffering trajectory, leading to apostasy as a means of managing the problem of violence and negligent care in the family.

Filth, Stench, and Head Lice – Crossing Boundaries

An important part of the interview with Natalia consisted of an attempt to present and reconstruct the conditions of her family life that pushed her to make the critical biographical decisions. In the first place, she discussed the specificity of her relationship with her parents, tried to evaluate the care they provided, and recalled images of home and the atmosphere there.

The reconstructed images reveal the blurring of the boundary between home, understood as an intimate sphere, and everything else, represented by a poor and dangerous street in a city ghetto. When, after many years of regular drinking, Natalia’s parents turned the flat into a den that became popular in the neighborhood, the street with all its strangeness entered the intimate space of family life. “The guys were indeed not interested if there was a den at home and forever some uhm... men came, older or younger, came for the alcohol (“Transcript of Biographical Interview with Natalia” in this issue of QSR, p. 130, lines 15-16) “at the time when my dad went to prison my mom uhm... went partying hard. She met a company and I remember all sorts of people came, even some man without a leg uhm...” (p. 120, lines 24-26); “we often served the ((laughs)) the client” (p. 130, lines 17-18).

She recalled distortion of the day-night rhythm, chaos, and a sense of danger:

there’s never been any good in this family. There always was some kind of drinking, there have always been such quarrels, fights, brawls... these were not just one- or two-day things, but they lasted several weeks, up to maximum exhaustion of financial resources. (p. 133, lines 20-23)

Such, mm, alcohol binges, carousals, were becoming heavier more and more often, sometimes it used to be so that my parents kept drinking for three weeks uhm... sometimes it used to be that they were drinking for half a year let’s say. (p. 117, line 34 to p. 118, line 1)

Natalia discussed images of disorder, filth and stench: (“house of drunkards,” “urine,” “alcohol,” “cigarette butts”).

We might say that Natalia’s experience of home – portrayed as the neighborhood’s latrine – exemplifies everything that is bad and dangerous. Significant here is the total reversal of expectations, marked by the symbolic opposition of secure-home and dangerous-outside. Home is not a shelter and thus, everything that is normal, moral, and intimate is located outside of it. Particularly interesting is the depiction of the flat and the everyday objects. They are reconstructed through the opposition – the filth of the home versus the cleanliness of the outside world. This symbolism sharpens the critical moral assessment of Natalia’s drinking parents’ negligence in care. The first social contacts outside home, the interactions with peers and the nursing staff in primary school, made Natalia painfully realize the abnormality of her home. The stigma is related to, in the first place, the clothes that she and her siblings wore. She described them as dirty even when they were clean because – as she explained – they were grey and shabby from washing them together in one washing machine:

[m]aybe I will add that... in my family still earlier it was always, I don’t know, it was dirty uhm... somehow my mother didn’t pay attention to look after us so that we had clean neat things. It was all washed but it was washed in such a way that it was thrown into one washing machine, so these things were so, well, uncool. Generally, always, I don’t know, maybe it wasn’t lice but there were always some scabies uhm... (p. 118, lines 17-21)

The public head lice checks,¹² which usually ended up with the discovery of bugs in Natalia’s and her siblings’ hair, presented another humiliating experience.

¹² Until quite recently, lice checks in Poland took place in public, in classrooms. School nurses would check children’s hair, one by one, and then leave with the children who had bugs, which led to stigmatization of these children.

Furthermore, a couple of times she described her flat as infested with vermin. She also identified home with the smell of urine.

So, except that there was dirt in this house, lice, many many times, uhm... one could feel this smell of urine... because it wasn’t like he had this bed linen changed every day, he peed himself, it was turned over to the other side and that’s enough, well that wasn’t too cool... (p. 124, lines 11-14)

A few objects that appear in the descriptions of home are marked with dirt: (“[t]here was no bathroom, just an old dirty sink and uhm... and a pot for children to piss in... at night or in the evening” [p. 152, line 35 to p. 153, line 1]¹³).

Hence, Natalia described her home experience in terms of physiologically and moral abhorrent filth, stench, and chaos which grew gradually over time. It became unbearable when, persuaded by her father, she returned home after two years of living with her grandmother (in the sixth and seventh grade of primary school), where she discovered different standards of normal life. It was soon after the period of time spent away from home that the strength of her psychological boundary broke. The descriptions of filth, stench, and bad habits symbolize the inability of the fourteen-year-old girl to maintain any mental or bodily integrity, or normality at home. They represent the impossibility of an intentional shaping of life and the loss of control. For Natalia, the inability to establish a barrier separating her mentally and physically from her parents’ amoral lifestyle became

¹³ It needs to be noted that in the flat – what was, and still is, typical for council houses – there was no bathroom or toilet. The inhabitants had to use a bathroom located in the courtyard (for more on the subject of poverty in the Lodz ghettos, see: Warzywoda-Kruszyńska and Jankowski 2010).

the source of a deep rebellion which found its apostatic expression in a failed suicide attempt and, afterwards, a deliberate departure for the children's home.

The Space of Death – Home as a Context of Risks to Life and Health

Another important dimension of Natalia's experience is the inability to intentionally shape her life, which became the source of the systematic growth of her suffering. In the narrative fragments, as well as those prepared from the perspective of the present day, the narrator tried to explain her decision to leave her family by referring to the lack of care provided by her parents. However, Natalia's evaluations go further, beyond the simple enumeration of parental negligences, such as the scarcity of food, hygiene, medical care, and love, as well as the violation of the right to bodily integrity (for example, corporal punishments and the instances of Natalia's father beating her brothers with a belt). More important is the fact that this type of "care" is presented as a fixed context of risks to health and life, and a danger to the children's future.

The essence of such "care" and "upbringing" (or, more accurately, lack thereof) led to the systematic loss of control over her life and the inability to live it in a normal way. According to Natalia, living in a place like her home was bound to end in self-annihilation, due to the devastating habits and criminal offences of its inhabitants. Living there was like rolling down an inclined plane, as illustrated by the fate of Natalia's siblings who did not have a chance to, or who did not dare to, escape from home during their childhood.

It is worth noting a few events of symbolic importance to which Natalia referred to in order to legitimize her perspective and thus, to work through the decision to leave her family before the researcher and herself (*identity work*). The most important event, which began her narration, was the death of her youngest sister. Two-year-old Gosia died at home from meningitis. Although Natalia is very cautious, and, at the same time, ambivalent in putting the blame for Gosia's death on her parents, her account suggests that they ignored the symptoms of the child's illness ("[a]nd in the morning she said that she had a headache, in the childish way, cause this child was just very little" [p. 118, lines 33-34]). They went out for the whole day, leaving the sick child with the other children in a locked flat. At that time, Natalia was eight years old and her oldest brother was nine. When the parents came back home, Gosia was already dead. Natalia recalled scenes when she and her siblings had anxiously observed their sister's dying ("[a]nd... and we were at home and observed this girl, in this bed as she uhm... caught breath, like a little fish" [p. 119, lines 3-4]).¹⁴ The pattern of ignoring health problems and avoiding any medical care, let alone preventive treatment, became apparent on other occasions, for example, when Natalia talked about the bed-wetting problems of her youngest brother.

She also recalled a few other events from her childhood that represent a constant sense of danger that permeated the atmosphere at home. The intrinsic motive of these stories is the lack of parents' interest in their children during their alcoholic binges,

¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that in communist Poland, in 1983, a telephone was a luxury that few people had. That is why the locked-in children, even if they had realized their situation, would not have been able to call for help.

such as in the situation when the mother locked all of the children in the flat and left for two or three days without warning. At that time, the father was in prison. If it had not been for the neighbors, who passed food through the window, Natalia and her brothers and sister would have starved. Probably at the same time, though the narration is not clear on this point, the kids, locked in the flat, started a fire so that the fire fighters and police would intervene.

In another scene, Natalia described how she and her siblings tried to *escape* their parents' drinking bouts and seek shelter with their grandmother who lived in a different part of town. However, they got lost. They were not able to return home so a passerby walked them to the police station where their identity and address were ascertained. Natalia recalled that after coming back home, she felt sorry to realize that her drunken parents had not even noticed that the children had gone missing for a whole day. In fact, all scenes reconstructed by the narrator show the lack of parents' interest in the children and portrayed types of risks the children had to manage, as well as their limited possibilities for growth and development. For instance, one of the siblings' favorite pastimes was collecting cigarette butts for their alcoholic housemate.

Also important is the perspective from which Natalia talks about those experiences that characterized her trajectory. Typically for children from alcoholic-abusive families who have to take responsibility for and care for their younger siblings, the relationship with their parents reflects not only their perspective but, to a great extent, the perspective of their brothers and sisters with whom they

feel a strong emotional bond. The analysis reveals that the siblings are the people with whom Natalia created a proper family community. They lived a separate life, isolated from the parents who were presented as engaged in endless binge drinking or who, as in the case of Natalia's father, were in prison. The feelings of loneliness and confusion – premature, since they were caused by the necessity to look after and take responsibility for younger sisters and brothers – were magnified by the empathic identification with the siblings' orphan experiences. One of the most significant scenes representing the sense of communally shared experiences was the story of the siblings taking in five stray dogs, feeding them, and dreaming about opening an animal shelter in the future.

It needs to be emphasized that the neglecting and rejecting style of upbringing, rendered in Natalia's autobiographical account, is congruent with an authoritative model of upbringing which manifested itself in corporal punishments and the father beating up Natalia's brothers for small offences. Such a patriarchal model of exercising control over children's lives is interpreted by Natalia as one of the most important contexts that led to her brothers becoming criminals, through its capacity to generate aggression rooted in the inability to learn how to be emphatic and understanding.

Apostasy as a Turning Point

What series of events made a fourteen-year-old girl decide to commit apostasy from her family – to try to commit suicide; then, to deliberately leave for a children's home? It is worth asking what scope

of agency can be construed in a teenager's struggle with the alcoholic trajectory of her family.

Although Natalia's parents had been drinking for a long time, in fact, since she remembers, the turning point which marked the beginning of the process of the family's degradation was the moment of turning the house into a den, which, in turn, led to Natalia's father's imprisonment for illegally selling alcohol:

[a]nd then it all began, it all began to fall apart, although earlier there were such situations, that if perhaps social care had been more often interested uhm, in depth and probably earlier, everybody would have ended up in children's home and this may have been better for us. (p. 118, lines 10-13)

Natalia presented the father's absence within the context of the mother's total loss of control over her life and the life of the family, due to her immersion in alcohol binges. The father's imprisonment was one of the most difficult moments in the biography of the eleven-year-old Natalia who felt extremely lonely and who had to take care of her siblings:

so my mom completely lost it, uhm... lost probably... a sense that she is a mother, that she has a family, that she has children, and that these kids really have only her at the moment, because dad was in prison and it was for two long years. (p. 120, lines 11-14)

A whole series of events led to Natalia's two-year stay away from home, initiated by outside actors. Since the mother often neglected the children, their grandmothers intervened. One of them (the maternal grandmother) brought food to the children, and the other (the paternal grandmother) reported the

parents' negligence to the appropriate institutions. It was probably at that time that the court limited the mother's parental rights, and the siblings were sent to different children's homes and shelters. However, this theme is unclear in the narration. Natalia was the only child to stay with her paternal grandmother who needed her help on the farm.

And generally my... my grandma once uhm... came, saw, I mean - many times she came and helped us, she brought us different things and and she came once and saw what was going on and she set the things right. As there was no normal contact with my mom... she called... uh... reported this in general I don't know where, to some care, anywhere, to the police, I don't know. Anyway, my brother was taken to the children's home... I mean my siblings went somewhere to children's homes, and I was sent to my other other grandma, my dad's mother. (p. 121, lines 6-11)

The two-year stay at the grandmother's in the countryside, two hundred kilometers from Lodz, was an ambivalent time in Natalia's experiences. On the one hand, she discovered what a normal life looked like (she described it in terms of cleanliness), which helped her to regain agency in everyday life. On the other hand, this was a time of enormous loneliness and suffering related to the loss of contact with her siblings. Natalia did not know how her brothers and sisters were doing. This scene also shows the dubious character of social care institutions, which do not ensure the continuity of contact between separated children.

Longing for her siblings was probably one of the reasons that made it so easy for Natalia's father to persuade her to return home. The father, after having served his two-year sentence, promised Natalia

a significant change in his lifestyle. But, Natalia was back home for just a short while. This event only preceded the key turning point in Natalia's biography – her deliberate and permanent departure from home. Natalia was back home, but the old problems, which returned with magnified force, were there, too. The girl came back with new outlooks and ways of life – she was a different person. It was difficult for her to accept the old habits, which, despite her father's promises, had not changed. Her defiance towards living in an alcoholic-abusive family grew systematically and led to the escalation of her aversion to the filth and amorality of the house. Hostility towards her parents, arguments with the mother, disappointment, alienation, and anomie were also accelerating. A total destabilization and the ultimate loss of life orientations found their expression in a suicide attempt.

A lot of things I didn't like. I didn't like my mom's behavior ever, there were conflicts with her forever. I just had the impression that there were constant clashes. Besides uhm... there was no/ relationships got very/ I hoped that when I get back it would all be well and at last this family of mine/ but I already, uh, I could see I couldn't live like this. I freed/ I/ for two years I was gone and I just stopped to accept things, it was very very difficult for me... and I remember that (((with hesitation in her voice))) no, I don't remember at this point yet, so I don't remember for sure, but it all got one thing on top of another... and... and these quarrels... such fights, it's probably, I mean adolescent age also played a role, I mean once, umm... enough of this all... enough of this life here in this house of drunkards (((strong emotions))). And... well I didn't want, uhm... again these lice, this dirt and and generally such old habits of the family that, uhm... (p. 121, line 31 to p. 122, line 5)

The fourteen-year-old Natalia did not see a solution to her problems other than committing suicide – she tried to poison herself. She overdosed on medications. In the context of a total lack of options or patterns of managing her life situation and a lack of institutional support, Natalia's decision to kill herself can be seen as an agentive solution¹⁵ to escape the family's alcoholic trajectory. On the one hand, Natalia was unable to live with her parents, and any attempt to communicate and initiate change failed. On the other hand, she did not see any alternative to escape from her home and family, which is symptomatic of a number of factors. Apart from the fear of breaking the taboo of unconditional obedience to her parents, typical for an authoritarian upbringing, this sense of lack of an alternative can reveal – at least in reference to that time period and the social group Natalia belonged to – a lack of knowledge and patterns, in the consciousness of children, of how to solve such situations.

This problem is rooted in systemic conditions. The lack of substantial support for children and families in need in the 80s and 90s in Poland¹⁶ undoubtedly contributed to strengthening the taboo of unconditional respect. It is telling that the police interventions at Natalia's home did not proceed with any

¹⁵ Conceptualizing a suicidal attempt as an agentive solution may seem a controversial interpretation. However, it is directly connected to two premises. A suicide may be treated as a means of escaping a total institution, as shown by Erving Goffman, and for a teenager, an alcoholic-abusive family is such an institution. Moreover, proponents of "new childhood studies" suggest viewing the acts of children in terms of their agency: "children are to be viewed as social actors in their own right, with 'competences' that are not restricted by biological age, with worthwhile views and contributions to make, and with rights over consent and confidentiality" (Scott 2006:24).

¹⁶ It is worth adding that introducing complex programs to fight violence against women and children has only just started in Poland.

care for the fate of the children. Only the ultimate drama – Natalia’s failed suicide attempt – made the school teacher interested in her situation. It is possible that the potential to depart for a social care institution, which has managed to become a pattern in the lives of Natalia’s siblings, was associated with power, punishment, and stigma rather than with a place a child can voluntarily go to. For we cannot forget about the criminal background of Natalia’s family, immersed in a social milieu marked by strong ethics which holds that any kind of cooperation with supervisory institutions is, by definition, an act of betrayal and informing. Perhaps this is why Natalia did not initially even consider departing for a children’s home or shelter as a means of escaping her family. Neither did Natalia say why she had not tried the solution that worked before – why she did not return to live with her grandmother in the countryside. However, in other parts of the interview, she seemed to suggest that the relationship with the grandmother, described as a reserved, rigid, and extremely thrifty person, did not work well. Natalia mentioned some quarrels.

The next causal steps in the apostasy process took place during her hospitalization after the suicide attempt. However, the part describing Natalia’s stay in the hospital, during which her formal departure for the children’s home was organized, is faded out in the narration (*Ausblendung* [Schütze 1997]). At this point, the apostasy was no longer taking place in solitude but in public – in the presence of supervisory institutions, the family, and some third parties.

We can only guess what the contexts of Natalia’s decision to leave home were from a few short eval-

uative fragments and from her answer to the question asked by the interviewer. We learn that it was the school teacher who helped her. However, Natalia openly admitted that she did not remember that period of time, what is symptomatic for the experience of anomie and trauma: “I don’t remember. I had then such a tough time in my life, that some things I missed” (p. 137, line 28). We might suspect that the amnesia or obliteration of this period is rooted in the liminal character of the experience of abandoning one’s family and to the related absence of an appropriate language – useful cultural categories which would enable her to describe that turning point easily, as well as to address the question of the apostate’s identity, which becomes central to her biography.

The fourteen-year-old Natalia did break one of the strongest taboos. Essentially, she had to publicly testify against her parents, renounce them, and leave them, which burdened her with a sense of guilt and – in the eyes of her family – the stigma of a betrayer. However, the detailed information concerning her cooperation with supervisory institutions or the court trial are faded out in her narration and thus, we do not know any details of these interactions. We do know, however, that though it was a traumatic moment for Natalia, she was not a passive participant of the process of leaving for the children’s home, as the following narrative and evaluative fragments suggest: “I, uh, was taken to hospital to [street name], and there I had gastric lavage but from this hospital, but I didn’t return home because I didn’t want to” (p. 122, lines 9-11 [emphasis by the author]; “I rebelled” (p. 125, line 11); “I turned away, that I said no and all. That I don’t want to live in,

such a family. Actually it was my decision” (p. 122, lines 21-22).

It thus becomes clear that Natalia had agency in taking the decision to commit apostasy. Through this act she regained control over her life, removing the destructive alcoholic and abusive elements from her everyday existence. Apostasy opened a new chapter in her biography. The apostate’s identity became the potential and central biographical problem of her trajectory.

The Apostate’s Trajectory – A Liminal State of In-Between-Ness

Natalia cannot come to terms with her identity as an apostate, either during five years spent in the children’s home or when – as an adult woman – she is educated and has a job and a family. The analysis shows that though Natalia has managed to establish a happy family, she still suffers from stigmatization by her parents and siblings – she is labeled a betrayer. “Well, but this was very hard for me ((cries)).... because my family absolutely turned away from me...” (p. 122, lines 11-12).

And usually when my parents drank then I always had... I was always reproached that... that... What was I there for, that I’d moved out, that I didn’t want be there and so on and so on. Well, this was very painful for me, I really was very emotional about it... (p. 141, lines 23-25)

She could not manage the feeling of extreme guilt for abandoning her family. Furthermore, despite the “excommunication,” she was unable to leave them once and for all. After a short period of suspend-

ing her relationships with her family, when Natalia is in the children’s home, she tried to re-establish contact with her family members with even greater eagerness. With the passing of time, she felt more and more responsible for their lives. She took care of them and intervened in crisis situations. She ensured that the essential details of their everyday lives were taken care of: shopping was done, bills were paid, and medical care was provided. Why is it, then, that Natalia, until this day and despite her intensive efforts at repair work, is unable to manage the apostate fracture in her biography?

First Trajectory Potential – The Norm of Unconditional Respect

One of the potentials of the continuous revival of Natalia’s suffering is related to the difficulty of working the conflicts of values. Such conflicts were not solved but only magnified by her decision to commit apostasy. All her life Natalia has been torn between the norm of unconditional loyalty towards family members and the moral imperative to rebel against individuals who break elementary social norms. Natalia’s drama might represent a typical dilemma that children from dysfunctional families have to deal with – is it possible to establish a relationship with a violent parent, for example, with one sentenced for mugging or murder? Is the norm to “respect thy parent” legitimate in such a situation?

Natalia has internalized the norm to respect her parents so deeply that she is not able to assess them in an unambiguous manner, though the images reconstructed from her narratives reveal a portrait of people who presented a danger to their children.

And though it might seem that the scale of violence experienced by the children should invalidate the normative pressures to respect one's parents, Natalia's account of her parents is strongly ambivalent. The fragments concerning Natalia's parents and siblings show a series of instances of repair work – rationalizations and justifications of their illegal behavior (e.g., theft, brawls, and alcoholism as the effect of living in a criminal environment, being battered by the father); the denial of non-normative elements of their identity (e.g., when she does not want to find out what her oldest brother was sentenced for); and idealizations (e.g., she believes that the “true” nature of her siblings is good and she idealizes her father). Natalia tries to “save” their identities by gathering scattered memories, and nourishes the belief that, in essence, under a hard shell, they are good people. She remembers that when her mother was sober, she was a good cook, and her father was a highly valued worker. To Natalia, her brother, who is portrayed as someone capable of killing other people, has a good heart since in the past he took care of stray dogs and dreamed of founding an animal shelter. Those memory scraps help her to reconstruct an idealization of an imagined family (Vuorela 2002).

However, the difficulty of subverting the norm of unconditional respect has permanently frozen the potential for suffering in Natalia's biography. Still, however, Natalia does not seem to fully acknowledge that in the past, to save her fourteen-year-old self, she really had no choice but to leave her family. Instead, she attempts to justify her leaving before the researcher (and herself), as if she still doubted her moral stance from that time. She does not stop

to dialogue or to negotiate with herself, as if, at that moment in time, she had any choice. The burdening of traditional norms is too strong, but the failure to redefine them disables the working through of Natalia's leaving her family, which creates the potential for significant identity tension (strain).

Trajectory Potential – Loved Ones as Strangers or Fictitious Relationships

Although Natalia points to the inability of managing the feeling of rejection by her family, it seems that there is one more issue – apart from the conflict of values – that needs to be worked through, which also builds the potential of her suffering. Although, after having committed apostasy, Natalia invests a great deal of effort to establish a relationship with her parents and siblings, their relationships are one-sided, to Natalia's disadvantage. Had Natalia realized the actual impossibility of establishing an authentic relationship with her family, and the inability to communicate with them or to be understood, it would have been easier for her to accept the apostate point in her biography. Perhaps, she would not experience the meetings with her family in such a dramatic way, as instances that always bring to the surface the normative conflict, making her suffer and feel guilty.

However, Natalia does seem to locate the source of her difficult relationship with her parents not in the biographical conditions but in her decision to quit the family, as if she could not realize that, in fact, she “had left” this particular social world a long time ago, before she attempted to commit suicide. To this world she is a total stranger. Her suffering resembles the suffering of people who successful-

ly climbed the social ladder. The price they pay for forsaking their social class is the necessity to scale the high wall dividing them from their relatives left on the other side (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1972; Ross 1995:338-350 as cited in Ferenc 2012:233). But, Natalia wants to be back, no matter what the costs.

In practice, Natalia's strategy to return to her family was to take on the caretaking role. The desire to rebuild the relationships with her family members prompted Natalia to live their lives for them, anticipating the moments when she could help each of them, and trying to re-socialize her brothers and sisters. Those efforts occupy a lot of space in Natalia's biography, however, as the analysis suggests, it is impossible for her to create stable relationships with them. The care she provides is of an interventional character only. The narrative fragments show that her contacts with her siblings and parents only took place in crisis situations when the drinking routine was broken by an illness, an imprisonment, or some other serious situation. Her father let her into his life when he fell ill with cancer. It is Natalia who organized medical care, a surgery, and finally, a funeral for him. The mother, with whom Natalia is unable to communicate to this day, allowed herself to be taken care of only when she was no longer able to live normally because of her advanced alcoholism. Natalia took care of her mother: she did the shopping, she cooked, and she spent weekends with her. She also created a positive image of her for her own daughter, hiding her grudges.

Furthermore, she took care of her siblings. When her alcohol-addicted brother suffered from regular epilepsy attacks, she called for medical help; she

gave shelter to her younger sister who could no longer stand living in the drunkards' home; she visited her brothers in prison; and she tried to take care of her siblings' children. Despite her efforts to establish a strong relationship with her family, the relationship broke easily. The bridge of care she wanted to build in order to return to her family turned out to be a shaky board since the interaction rules, usually taken for granted, had to be construed, from scratch, over and over again. We can observe Natalia's inability to return home and establish a relationship with her family. Natalia is situated in the liminal sphere of in-between-ness. The apostasy was not entirely successful since, in fact, it was not possible to accomplish from the normative point of view, just like it has been impossible for Natalia to establish a relationship with her family.

However, providing care remains the only opportunity for Natalia to do biographical work and manage the feeling of guilt, though it does not remove the potential conditions for her biographical trajectory – the conflict of values, the awareness of mutual strangeness, and, what is related, the impossibility of establishing a relationship. To reconstruct a positive image of herself as a daughter, she construes an identity of a missionary, of a prodigal daughter. In doing so, she refers to gender resources of sacrifice, strongly embedded in Polish culture – the schema of the Polish Mother. This enables her to cope with the feeling of guilt, but only partially, since the family has not forgiven her. The mother does not acknowledge the negative impact she has had on her children's lives. The father did not make a gesture of forgiveness before dying. Her brothers and sisters still see her as an outcast. Perhaps, the impossibility

to remove the interactionist stigma imposed on her by the relatives was what made Natalia answer the researcher's advertisement. She volunteered to present her biographical account because she wanted to explain or justify before the General Other, embodied by the researcher, her moral stance – something that she was not able to do in front of her parents and siblings. She is aware that she has never been, and never will be, understood by them.

Natalia's account consists of two separate stories put together. The first one is the story of the "bad" care provided by her parents and her subsequent leaving. Natalia is strongly ambivalent when it comes to judging her parents and to the moral justification of her decision to apostatize from family. The second story is that of Natalia's adult life and her new identity focused around her care-providing mission. Those two stories are not connected with each other, they are separated (cf. *twofold perspectivities* [Gütelkin 2003 as cited in Gütelkin, Inowlocki and Lutz 2003]). Had the interviewer, Dr. Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, not stopped the narration about apostasy with the question about Natalia's present life situation, she would not have started it by herself. The situation of being stuck in a biographical problem demonstrates that, paradoxically, apostasy only brings the apostate closer to their family. And the process of leaving a family is, in fact, a process of returning to it. Natalia's apostasy is indeed the process of (un)becoming a child, a daughter, a family member.

The metaphor of apostasy has thus far been used in the fields of sociology of the family and sociology

of organization. However, it would be valuable to apply this notion to the study of the processes and phenomena taking place in contemporary families.

The rise of popularity of family models based on partnership, as well as the growth in awareness of how violence manifests itself in family relationships are linked to the phenomenon, increasingly observed in Europe and the U.S., of mothers and – as in the case of Natalia – adolescents quitting their families. What is interesting is that those two categories of actors are identified in the popular consciousness with the exact opposite behavior. The metaphor of apostasy can reveal the agentive element of those instances of leaving which are usually perceived as improbable, unnatural, or victimized. And, at the same time, it can shed new light on the exit processes understood as acts of rebellion and disruption, as well as their biographical consequences.

Moreover, including the perspective of apostasy can prove to be valuable because thus far not much attention has been given to the biographical aspects of the exit processes. The analysis of the case of Natalia allows the theoretical differentiation between the two fundamentally different models of leaving. The first one is the path of an "agentive," though socially unstructured, passage of leaving a family by an adolescent. The second is a "normal" leaving considered a phase in the process of growing up – though it might sometimes take a turbulent course, bristled with acts of disruption, it represents a grounded and culturally desirable status passage into adulthood. The analysis of Natalia's autobiographical account is, therefore, an attempt to make comprehensible an instance of premature quitting of a parent-child re-

lationship. This process has become visible due to the notion of agency that children demonstrate in everyday life. Employing the perspective of apostasy made it possible to capture the essence of this process.

There might be many other possibilities of using the metaphor of apostasy. Whatever they are, however, Natalia's autobiography reminds us that being a child is an identity, which is very difficult to leave. Even an apostate has to work out some kind of defi-

nition of a relationship, a new image of a parent, and, as I have demonstrated, this effort is likely to make him or her bind with the abandoned parent even more.

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