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"We Are the Poles from Former Yugoslavia." Transformation Processes Shifted in Time—The Biographical Perspective

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Abstract This paper is based on the first analysis of the 25 narrative interviews collected from March to November 2018 in small local communities in the Lower Silesia Region. All narrators belong to the families that were transferred from the former Yugoslavia in 1946 to the western lands which were incorporated to Poland. The socio-cultural conditions are significant for local development, so I present some features of localism after 1989 when the state transformation processes started. Next, I discuss the narrators' self-identity dilemmas and make an attempt to conceptualize "migrating biography" as one of the features of living in a postmodern world.

The aim of the whole project, but not described in this article, is to reveal the intergenerational adult learning processes seen from the insider's perspective, as well as to describe such lives in a psycho-social and cultural context.

Keywords Western Borderlands of Poland; "New Localism"; "Return Migration"; "Migrating Biographies"; Self-Identification

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The transformation in Poland after 1989 in different social areas influenced the processes of constituting local communities.¹ The "Western and Northern Lands" (*Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne*) or previous-

¹ In this article, when I use the terms "local community," "localism," "new localism," and "second localism," I refer to the categories described by Kurczewska (2006:88-129) who combines the traditional anthropological and sociological meanings with 20th and 21st centuries tendencies based on modern and postmodern discourses (p. 90) and elicits some hybrids of current pictures of local communities. By "local community" she refers to social ties or/and to the values, symbols, subjective interests that have existed in a "real local society" that is constructed through complicated individual and group communication processes that represent the local residents as a socio-cultural whole.

ly named "New Lands" or "Recovered Lands," in the meaning "taken back" (Strauchold 2012; Sakson 2014:149-150), have become a historical category. The process of constituting local communities and localism² in the Western and Northern Lands due to the accumulation of war and resettlement experiences differs from other regions of the country, and the dynamic within these local communities still differs further. As a result of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945, the region along the current western borderland was incorporated to Poland and then became one of the most ethnically mixed regions in the country (Kosiński 2000). The after-war period still has an impact on the current development of the local/regional image of localism and/or collective memories and identities (Halbwachs 1992; Nora 2009; Connerton 2012) in the west borderland of Poland (Sulima 2001; Theiss 2001; Kurczewska 2006; Słowińska 2017). Due to the post-war regulations, thousands of people were uprooted from their homeland,³ resettled from their places of origin, and then for over fifty years their home culture was suppressed and dominated by the socialist national government that strove for the unification of culture in order to have power over public and private life (Leoński 1998; Mach 1998; Kosiński 2000;

² The hybridization of the types of local communities (see: footnote 1) brings some forms of the "localism" that does not need to have any territorial connection, but takes into consideration the dynamic and the structure of imagined symbols and values shared both either by the individuals or/and groups. A further type of "localism" consists of the mixture of both the concepts of local communities and the localism (real or imagined social ties and symbolic culture), but it differs from the other types because of contrasts in selected comparative features.

³ 1,5 million Poles were relocated to the western borderlands from the eastern parts of Poland which were incorporated into the Soviet Union; over 500 000 Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians were compelled to live in Poland; over 3 million Germans were displaced from the territory that used to be Germany, but had become Polish in 1945 (Derwich 2004).

Niedźwiedzki 2000; 2003; Derwich 2004; Strauchold 1995; 2012; 2016; Strauchold and Nowosielska-Sobel 2007). After three decades of transformation processes in Poland, including the western borderlands, the question, "Where are you from?" is still significant, except that it no longer stigmatizes, but allows for the expression of personal identification. In contrast, shortly after the war and for the next several decades, the question of origin caused social conflicts (Mach 1998; Niedźwiedzki 2000; 2003; Ligus 2009a; Strauchold 2012; Wylegała 2014). Now, the need to answer it may be one of the manifestations of both post-war individual and collective "biographical work"⁴ (Kaźmierska 1999; Schütze 2012a:148-150; Strauss 2012:517-527) done by both the individual residents and the local communities as a whole. Ideas, values, symbols, collective images, collective convictions and opinions gathered over a long period, and commonly shared experience taken from various ideologies of the modern and postmodern world (as Kurczewska [2006:88-129] suggests some can be taken after Bauman and Szacki's concepts) have become sources of the "local ideologies" that in turn construct the social or/and cultural program for the locals and shape their understanding of the localism in a country that has

⁴ For more, see: Anselm Strauss (2012:515-527) and Kaja Kaźmierska (2014a), but, in this article, I follow F. Schütze's (2012a:148-150) explanation of "biographical work" that is quite a hard task to be done by a person / a group of people that covers a few dimensions: work to understand the positive attitudes of the uniqueness of self-identity which has been under permanent construction; work to discover the strongest self-potentials through recalling the own life-history; work to discover the past "dead ends" and false understanding of self; to discover if there have been any other possible modes to act; work to deeper self-understanding of the developing self-identity and the ways to estimate such options. Work to become self-directed and supportive for oneself and in a way that the unique identity deserves (Schütze 2012a:148-149). For more, see: Schütze (2012a:148-150).

been influenced by transformation processes since the 1990s. So, the concept of “new localism”⁵—apart from the symbolic heritage—also carries tangible aspects, space attributes, and consists of different social groups that may also be consolidated or scattered. That is why the notion of “social ties” is taken into consideration again, but differently than it used to be in the traditional approaches. According to Kurczewska (2006:92), from the perspective of current community studies, the old definition of “social ties” that used to relate the individual and group belonging to the surrounding environment or territory has now become the most problematic category to be described. Community ties are strongly influenced by both global and local processes. The “second new localism,” especially after 2004 when Poland entered the European Union, is a parallel one with two overlapping processes: regaining sovereignty by the state, society and culture overlapping with increasing participation in European and global structures (Kurczewska 2006:106). The first after-war revival of localism related to democratic movements started a decade before the state transformation in Malopolska, Podhale, and Kaszuby in the early 80s (Kurczewska 2006:105). In contrast, the small local communities in the incorporated lands were dominated by collectivist centralism and suppressed by the political rules, and this could be a reason why they were not able to start the democratic movements before 1990 (Hałas 2001; Łukowski 2002; Machaj 2005). So, a specific type of new localism that appeared all over the country

⁵ “New localism” in 1990 resembled an old type of regionalism directed to values and symbols, but not promoting democracy. Anyway, it has become the engine for bottom up social activities.

translated as “little homeland”⁶ in Lower Silesia, the North-West Pomeranian Region and Lubusz (Western and Northern Lands) and awakened an “indigenous spirit” for the local communities and the need to come out from the shadow of the former “unification” time. Subsequently, the concept of “little homeland,” on the one hand, became the driving force for locals to take up grassroots activities (Kurczewska 2006) and brought to light both the cultural richness of local communities, as well as their collective trajectory⁷ (Kazmierska 1999; 2008; 2018; Rokuszewska–Pawełek 2002; 2016). On the other hand, however, it has mostly resembled the model of traditional regionalism which was a bit rigid, conservative, and based on nationalism (Kurczewska 2006). The process of revealing the local identities in many communities of the Lower Silesia, Lubusz Land, or Pomeranian Region did not occur simultaneously with the systemic transformation processes, but a number of political changes triggered conditions for the slow revitalization of the social fabric (Ligus 2009b).⁸ In 1990, one of the measurable signs of revitalization of the socio-cultural fabric of the

⁶ The concept of “little homeland” elaborated by C. Robotycki and then R. Sulima has become a special kind of “connector” of various elements of socio-cultural and economy-political reality, of everyday and festive social practices, of humanities and social disciplines, of conceptual strategies and explanatory schemes, of reflection on national culture, and is one of the meanings of localism in a postmodern perspective (Kurczewska 2006:110-120).

⁷ By “collective trajectory” I refer to one of the structural processes according to Schütze’s procedure that represents the state of being overwhelmed by the “outside pressure” that the individual or group experiences as a permanent pain that cannot be avoided, but stops people from taking control of their lives (Schütze 1997; 2012a:180; Rieman and Schütze 2012).

⁸ In 1998, in the North-West communities in Poland there were only 12 NGO associations, while in the districts of South Poland there were 42-48, that is, four times as many. In 2000, in the North-West part there were 11 associations organized by parents to keep the local schools, whereas in the South-West there were around 50 (see: www.fio.org.pl, retrieved November 20, 2018).

incorporated lands⁹ was establishing socio-cultural associations referring to the territory inhabited before World War II, as well as the popularization of related traditions. As research data show, the number of associations in the 1990s was not very big in the peripheral areas of the western lands nor was it a sufficient impulse to launch grassroots civic initiatives, especially where the local population felt a minority in a given community.¹⁰ The heterogeneity of localism began to reconstruct collective identities and started the slow process of “recovering” the symbolic socio-cultural heritage (Strauchold 2007 and Nowosielska-Sobel; Ligus 2013). The change in attitudes towards themselves and towards “Others” can testify to the long and cautious process of transformation of these post-war communities influenced by becoming a member of the European Union (in 2004).

When the process of rebuilding local ties began in 1989, one of the first fears the settlers had to face and overcome was the fear to make their origin public (Ligus 2009a; 2013). The images of contemporary local communities are embedded in individual and collective biographical experiences, and their future image is unpredictable and can be influenced at any time by interactions with the “glocal”¹¹ world. Łukowski (2002), in relation to the

⁹ The biggest movement in 1988 was the establishment of the Society of Lovers of Lviv and Eastern Borderlands with the headquarters in Wrocław. In 1989, at the Congress in Cracow, 57 local sections were registered all over the country. Currently it has 44 sections that give the image of how important the association is for the families of the former re-settlers from the Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*).

¹⁰ A Greek community, the after war minority of Lower Silesia District that “hide” themselves from the public space is described by E. Nowicka 2008; M. Gołębiak 2016; D. Sturis 2017.

¹¹ I refer to Roland Robertson’s concept (1995) as cited in M. Kempny (1998:244).

Western and Northern Lands, describes the phenomena of symbolic closing of the past experiences by local communities and taking up new ideological concepts of localism rooted in the inherited territory, material artifacts, and own self-identity of the inhabitants of the North Lands. In the light of the introduction of the different dynamics of collective identities of local communities along the western borderland, it raises the question of why those groups (i.e., the participants of the project) felt unable to reveal their true identity until the first decade of the 21st century.

Entering the Field

Project’s Participants and Methodology

Despite the fact that over seventy years have passed since 1946 (when the resettlement processes began at the incorporated lands along the western borders of Poland) and Yugoslavia has not existed on the world map for 25 years (since 1995), still in 2018, four generations of the inhabitants of the Bolesławiec district and its surroundings, repeat, “We are Poles from Yugoslavia,” These are the facts that have drawn my attention to the group of people who introduce themselves officially as “Stowarzyszenie Reemigrantów z Bośni, ich Potomków i Przyjaciół” (the Association of Re-Emigrants from Bosnia, Their Descendants, and Friends), but not all people from the families transferred from the former Yugoslavia are members of the Association, so I also met the descendants of the former colonists “privately” to conduct the interviews. The interpretive-constructivist paradigm has been followed by the chosen approach, that is, the autobiographi-

cal narrative interview elaborated by Fritz Schütze (1997; 2012a). It is a theoretically and methodologically coherent conceptual and interpretative grid that can be used in a double way as a method or/and a technique (Kaźmierska 2012:111). The empirical material consists of 25 narrative interviews conducted from March to November 2018 in the local communities located 60 km from Wrocław, in Bolesławiec, and the surrounding area. The narrators (aged 20-82) have been chosen deliberately and all come from the families that were resettled from the former Yugoslavia to the western lands in 1946. The methodological barriers appeared while conducting the interviews and finally only 10 of them can be classified according to the pure methodological approach of Schütze. The other 15 are narrative interviews, but their interpretation can be supported by some of Schütze's theoretical figures and instruments (Prawda 1989; Włodarek and Ziółkowski 1990; Kaźmierska 1996; 1999; 2008; 2012; 2013; 2014b, 2016; Czyżewski 1997; 2016; Schütze 1997; 2012a; 2016; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002; Gałęziowski 2019; Waniek 2019). Among the 25 interviews, there are 5 given by the members of the Association and 20 were collected from "private" people. Because of the specific nature of the narrators' backgrounds, some basic information about their families' history is needed.

History in Brief

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, from 1882-1905, around 15,000 Poles (with families) migrated from Galicia (an Austrian partition of a former Poland) to Bosnia and Herzegovina due to poverty (Lis 2016). Both Galicia and Bosnia at that time were

under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire¹² (Kwaśniak and Orlovac 2008:11-12). In 1946, immediately after World War II, under the mutual Yugoslavian and Polish political agreements, Poles who were living in Bosnia and Herzegovina were in danger of ethnic genocide, so they collectively decided to leave their homes and, under the mutual Yugoslavian and Polish governments agreements, were resettled in the "West Lands" of Poland (Drljača 1997; Strauchold and Nowosielska-Sobel 2007; Strauchold 2016; Lis 2016). Who exactly were those 18,000¹³ people coming to Poland in 1946? They were the third generation Polish colonists, but with Yugoslavian citizenship, who felt Polish and were brought up according to Polish traditions (Lis 2016).

Research Questions

The socio-biographical experience of the narrators raises many questions which I try to answer while interpreting the empirical material: Is the presence in the public space of a previously unnoticed group an attempt to (re)construct identity at the individual and/or collective level? How do the descendants of Bosnian colonists interpret both their own and their grandparents' experiences and what meanings do they give to their biographical identity? How is collective knowledge formed? What ties, social

¹² Based on XXV article of Berliner Contract established in Berlin Congress on 13.06.1878, seven empires, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Italy, agreed that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be ruled by Austro-Hungary (Kwaśniak and Orlovac 2008:11-12). The colonists were offered 10-12 ha of lands (forests) for free, but obliged to grub up the forest themselves, in three years to build a family house, accept Bosnian citizenship (*Landesangehörigkeit*), and pay 1/10 of the collected crops, but after 10 years to pay taxes (Bujak 2017:36-37).

¹³ The number of Poles who came from Yugoslavia is estimated between 15,000 to 18,000 people (Kwaśniak and Orlovac 2008; Lis 2016:40; Strauchold 2016:8).

practices, and cultural practices favor the creation of (postmodern) individual/collective identity in a specific group? What intergenerational learning processes are launched in such a (re)constructed environment? In this article, I discuss the questions the project's participants asked themselves and were asked in each narration: "Who are we? Where are we from? Who are they? Where are they from?" and then discuss the concept of "return migration" and conceptualize the category of "migrating biographies" (Appadurai 2005; Aspitzsch 2012).

"Our Neighbors Who Were Resettled from the Eastern Borderlands Called us 'Serbians'"

The participants' questions can be asked from two different perspectives. One is from the perspective of the subject involved in a reflexive process of constructing/constituting his/her/their own identity, and the second perspective comes from the Other(s), that is, the "observers." Both perspectives bring different interpretations according to the individual/collective experience that had constituted the social knowledge of both groups of the current inhabitants of local communities in the western borderland. Hence, the bundle of the above questions suggests a division between "us" and "them" that is found in the interviews of both the younger and older narrators.

"Our neighbors who were resettled from the Eastern Borderlands called us 'Serbians' and even my wife after so many years calls me Serbian. Why? We were never Serbians, we were from Galicia **and we returned here...**" (An/82).

Naming those people who introduce themselves as "We are Poles from Yugoslavia" depends on various, complicated contexts. In one of the publications, *Z Bośni do Polski* (Lis 2016:5-6), a collection of the "terms" appear as follows: emigrants, Yugoslavian Poles (*jugosłowiańscy Polacy*), Poles from Yugoslavia, former colonists, 3rd generation of the colonists, repatriates, Polonia from Yugoslavia. In the official Polish and Yugoslavian documents of that time, all comers from Yugoslavia are called "repatriates," according to the formal institution that coordinated the resettlement and was the Polish Repatriation Mission in Belgrade (*Polska Misja Repatriacyjna w Belgradzie*). In Polish documents of the State Repatriation Office (*PUR Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny*), the letter "R" ("repatriate") stands only for those who came from Yugoslavia. Two more marks were used: the letter "O" belonged to a settler (*osadnik*), that is, those who came from different regions and countries to settle voluntarily and "P" (*przesiedleńca*) for those resettled by force from the Eastern Borderlands.¹⁴

But, when a voice is given to Poles who returned from Yugoslavia in 1946, they say, "We are the Poles from Yugoslavia" (Lis 2016:5).¹⁵ In 2018, in collected interviews, there are some attempts of self-identification: "I was born as the subject of King Peter II" and "I always came back to **Polish Bosnia**, every year, every summer, every holiday. It was **my own land**...We are the **Sons of Bosnian Lands**. This is **our Bosnia**" (An/82). "We are the human beings of

¹⁴ See: <http://www.archeion.net/atom/index.php/> (AP we Wrocławiu, Sygn. 239, Nr Zesp. 345, Bolesławiec 1945, Listy imienne repatriantów i przesiedleńców). Retrieved October 10, 2019.

¹⁵ A speech in Bolesławiec, of a man from the first transport of Poles from Yugoslavia, April, 1946 (Lis 2016:5).

two hearts, the first one lives in Bosnia and the second is beating in Poland" (Ed/80).¹⁶

The above phrases illustrate the great difficulty of identification that the project's participants experienced when answering the questions "Who are we?" and "Where are we from?" Nowicka (2008) confirms that it is an observed ubiquitous manifestation of relations between groups and their territories of origin, a complex, but infinitely vivid importance of the place of birth, early age as the background of both individual and collective identity of the groups all over the world.

Drljača (1997:20-21) commented that in Poland no "return migration" was recorded or maybe it does not exist, in contrast to internal migration which was registered quite often. He added that this was the opposite situation to what was observed in the former Yugoslavia (Drljača 1997:20-21). The conceptualization of "return migration" is one of the latest discussions that has been growing since 1980 (Babiński 2008:21; Kaźmierska 2008; Nowicka 2008:20). Nowicka (2008:9) stresses that the concept of "return migration" is still neglected as when Kubat described it in 1980. She also underlines that "return migrations" are diversifying along the changes of socio-cultural and economic conditions, as well as along the dynamic changes in migrants' profiles. Nevertheless, she tries to apply the concept of "return migration" to different Polish past and present contexts, times, and spaces. One of the examples she introduces is the transfer of Poles from the contemporary territories of Ukraine, Belarus,

¹⁶ The symbols in brackets as: (An/82), (Ed/80), (Cz/68) represents the interviewees.

and Lithuania to the western and northern parts of Poland in 1947 during the so called "Akcja Wisła"¹⁷ (Nowicka 2008:10). Analogically, the concept of "return migration" could be applied to the return of Poles from former Yugoslavia in 1946, and in that way the name "re-migrants" could be replaced by "return migrants," but the question is if those people who were "coming back" to their ancestors' country felt like "return migrants." As Nowicka (2008) mentions, to understand the process of re-migration, the social, economic, and psychological contexts must be taken into consideration and it is possible that "return migration" can last years or even centuries. It is not, however, clear for the narrators/current descendants of the Polish colonists from Bosnia and Herzegovina if they identify themselves as "returning" because those who moved to Poland as children (now older adults) had never migrated before. Again, following the above author, the personal aspect of "return migration" means that the return may refer to a person, also his/her children, grandchildren, or further descendants, so that maybe for the narrators a familiar name "re-emigrant" is equal with the "return" and that is why "re-emigrant" is in their association name (*Stowarzyszenie Reemigrantów*). The geographic aspect should be considered and it is important if the return is exactly to the same place or the same region or the national state territory. In the case of Poles who were transferred to their home country after 50 years of their family having lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina (till 1990 known as Yugoslavia), who perceived themselves as "re-emigrants from,

¹⁷ In 1947-50, in "Akcja Wisła," people were resettled by force from the Eastern Borderlands to the western incorporated lands. See: footnote 3.

in fact, Yugoslavia" ("We are Poles from Yugoslavia"), but as they have explained, to be politically correct, they resigned from the word "Yugoslavia" and replaced it with "Bosnia" so that it is an "Association of the Re-Emigrants from Bosnia, Their Descendants, and Friends." Therefore, in their case, if one agrees that it is a "return migration," one can discuss the complexity of both the private and ideological homeland as Ossowski (1967)¹⁸ proposed, but in a very complicated double constellation. Those homecomers¹⁹ had to face, in fact, two images of their (private) homelands. The first one is that imagined by their grandparents and parents embedded in their stories that recalled living in Galicia and leaving their (private) homeland at the end of the 19th century. However, in 1946, the homeland of their grandparents was a completely different place. Devastated by two World Wars (1914-18, 1939-45) and subsequently gaining political independence made it impossible to recreate the image of the homeland from their ancestors' memories. There was also the picture of the second (private) homeland that was constructed by their own imagination created by the image based both on their Bosnian and Herzegovina living conditions, landscapes views, smells, tastes, and their own experiences and memories. The group leaders in the years 1945-46 made a great effort while negotiating the contracts between the Yugoslavian and

¹⁸ I refer to the typology of S. Ossowski—the private or/and ideological homeland means that individual or a group is bound to. With private homeland, people are bound through personal, everyday relations, habitual ties. The ideological homeland means imaginary bonds, beliefs, and ideas.

¹⁹ "A home comer" in Schütz's (1964) concept combines the social and psychological state of a person who expects to come to the place he/she used to know and predict to come back to the space that he/she is familiar with, but, in fact, he/she experiences a kind of cultural shock (as cited in Nowicka 2008:17).

Polish government to attain the most similar conditions to the ones in Bosnia. For the "homecomers" from Yugoslavia returning to the homeland meant maintaining group ties, family connections, and to move together to the new land and to have conditions as similar to the Bosnian conditions as possible. In their narrations, they underline that the region in the western lands was chosen deliberately according to the geographical conditions (warm climate, a landscape with hills and mountains, land quality to grow similar crops), and, finally, to "be at home." Returning to Poland was meant to fulfill their ancestors' dream and fulfill a duty, but the dream was to be completely different from the reality. In that sense, their return appeared much more as the coming to the ideological homeland than the private one because they placed great emphasis on reconstructing their great grandparents, grandparents, parents' (and what some of them personally experienced as children) beliefs and ideas, symbols which were the source of their power and motivation to come back, especially after the war time. The reality disappointed them: "We were sitting at those German courtyards...looking around...we had never seen such big buildings, it was the first time we saw such a beautiful city...and we were told all those brick houses and the towns, villages will be ours forever and it is Polish...Nobody believed it. Everything was strange for us" (An/82).²⁰

So, who are they? Poles from former Yugoslavia or Bosnian Sons? Descendants of former Polish colonists who "returned home" or the descendants of re-emigrants?

²⁰ An/82—an interview conducted on November 15, 2018.

In their interviews, there were two strong reference points. The first one focuses on the 19th century migration of their ancestors from the Austrian Partition (Galicia) to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the years 1882–1905. Despite the fact that none of my narrators participated in this 19th century “exodus,” the transmission of the experience from family member(s) seems to be so strong that their children and posterities cannot tell their own stories without including the long passages and episodes from their great-grandparents’ lives. The narrators express the need for reconstructing the experience of their families having lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for fifty years. In particular, the narrators over seventy years old stress the first coming of their grandparents who dug in the forest without any tools and who lived in primitive mud huts for the first year. They speak about their grandparents’ everyday hard work cultivating the offered land from the scratch (just the forest) and to finally achieving prosperous farms with their own small vineyards, bees and honey, self-collected linden flowers for tea, fruit trees especially for plums for “baking rakija,”²¹ farm animals for the milk and meat, fields of corn, and family houses made of wood or bricks. That mediated experience (Giddens 2001:314) is borrowed from the ancestors and included in their own life histories.

The second reference point, which the narrators witnessed as children, that is, experienced personally, was their parents’ decision about the “homecoming” made in 1945 and which then took almost one year’s preparation for this journey. They re-

member all being gathered at the same neighborhood village waiting for the transfer and listening to their parents’ perplexities and dilemmas about sacrificing two generations’ achievement of creating so much from almost nothing and only by the work of their hands, the support they gave to each other, and their community ties. The year 1946 is mentioned in all the interviews, when resettlement of 18,000 Poles from former Yugoslavia to the “West Lands” appears as a “double bind.” They wanted to come (back) to Poland, but they did not want to lose what they had worked for through two generations in Bosnia. Finally, the journey “home” lasted only a few months, from 01/07/1945 to 28/03/1946.²²

The narrators speak about their parents and grandparents who decided to return as if they, the grandchildren, “took the responsibility to return to the country of origin” (Cz/68),²³ even if it was not the same place from where the ancestors had left. This underlines how strong the emotional ties are of belonging to both a nation and territory. As Aspitzsch (2012:609) states, all the migrants’ families members experience the collective trajectory of their family. In the biographical narrative rarely does the narrator include only his own individual life experience, but he/she includes the experiences of a specific group (Aspitzsch 2012:609). In the narratives of the adult children of the former Polish colonists in Bosnia, it is seen as the symbolic duty towards the ancestors with adoring their engagement in protecting the family, cultivating the farms in Bosnia, but

²² More information about the context and conditions of leaving Bosnia from the biographical perspective will be provided in another article.

²³ (Cz/68) an interview conducted on May 07, 2018.

also being torn apart when involved in World War II fights mostly by force, often against themselves, but without any choice.

Conceptualizing “Migrating Biographies” and the Summary

One of the interpretations of the narrators’ action taken individually, but mostly together and with the Association since 2011, is that they wish to save the life histories and the collective experience of their ancestors (specifically from the previous two generations) from the oblivion. This is why the Association has taken up different forms of work and produced the artifacts that, in their opinion, are a guarantee of not being forgotten by their descendants.²⁴ These actions may also be seen as an attempt to gain a better, fuller understanding about “Who they are.” One of the explanations for the process of sentimental, nostalgic return to the lost, idealized world of childhood or family roots is the need to embed your own life history in space, time, and the socio-cultural tradition of ancestors, which is one of the elements constituting personal identity. According to Łukowski (2002), in the postmodern world, the nostalgic movement of commemoration results from the need to satisfy the hunger for rooting, the disappearance of transparency of the structure of the world, the loss of confidence in building to what is distant in opposition to what is close, seeking support points that stabilize identity, mobility without time to recognize the new. “The multilocal effect becomes an

²⁴ The collection of the actions, publications, projects, films, festivals, regular traditions, et cetera that commemorate the history of the locals from Boleslawiec district can be found here: <http://reemigrancizbosni.pl>. Retrieved October 10, 2019.

antidote to the feeling of loneliness in space. Polycentrism in creating the network of ‘our places,’ pluralization of homelands reveal that ‘homeland’ as a tame space is a link between subjective experience of reality and the need to give meaning to life and to form one’s identity in the process of externalization, objectification, and internalization” (Łukowski 2002:73–101). Bauman (2017) has interpreted this phenomenon as retrotopy which strengthens those who are living nowadays towards the unpredictable future as opposed to the tame past. Appadurai (2005) links the power of imagination with the migration of modern man and his repeated return to places distant in the geographical sense, but which are carriers of meanings in the symbolic sense. The complexity of self-identification processes encourages a critical review of the “collective visits” of ancestral places and draws attention to the diversity of interests, quality and type of activity of each person who, although came together to the same place and combines their type of shared experience, but those are individual goals that they all followed after the arrival and the final results differed significantly (Appadurai 2005). This may apply to the birth places of ancestors (known to the narrators personally or not), symbolic rooting in milieu and/or history (Kaźmierska 1999; 2008; Schütze 2012a; Czyżewski 2016; Piotrowski 2016). Apitzsch (2012:613) goes further and says that biographies of migrants are themselves the transnational spaces.

Migrating biographies is a term, a code, and maybe a future theoretical category that describes the lives of people living today, in which the narrators make the point of reference in their own biography to the experience of migration of earlier generations, under-

²¹ Rakija—this is a homemade alcohol popular in the Balkans. When the narrators talk about it, they use the verb “to bake” rakija (in Polish: *piec rakije*).

lying various types of compulsion: economic, political, ethical.

The term "migrating biographies" at this stage of research is the result of preliminary, analytical descriptions and listings of features that I can assign to my narrators based on the collected interviews. In describing "migrating biographies," I combine the anthropological concept of (post)modern "imagined biographies" by Appadurai (2005:89) and Bauman's (2017) description of "retrotopy." I also include the findings of the sociologists from the University of Lodz, who have analyzed the experience of "being cut off from the roots" (Czyżewski 1997; 2016; Kaźmierska 1999; 2012; 2018; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002; 2016; Bokszański 2016; Piotrowski 2016), and I take into consideration the phenomenon of "return migration" (Nowicka 2008). The carriers of "migrating biographies" undertake biographical work and refer to the experiences of earlier generations, whose doubled identity becomes "an obstacle" in constructing their own biographical identity (Goffman 1963; Schütze 2012b; Strauss 2012), and include a "personally un-lived" past, but it gives meaning to their own lives. This is probably why "the Poles from former Yugoslavia" have started feeling ethical coercion, an inner need and taken up the challenge of rebuilding the "missing" continuity in their ancestors' life stories by identifying themselves with them and interweaving their own life history with the life stories of their ancestors. The narrators emphasize that they "feel deep emptiness in themselves" because they are not able to reconstruct precisely the conditions in which their families left the Austrian partition, and it makes them look for pieces of the remains from both the material and symbolic world. Hence, witness memo-

ries from Bosnian neighbors have great significance, as do the remains of the houses owned in the former villages and old cemeteries which they stress need to be protected from the encroaching forests. Thus, "migrating biographies" are closely related to the work of "imagination in action" whose presence in the social world, according to Appadurai (2005:28), is documented, among others, in the prose of the genre of magical realism, which reflects the contemporary experience of collective entities and is embedded in one type of "second localism" that is quite symbolic and mythical (Kurczewska 2006).

The term "migrating biography" seems to be the one that synthesizes the condition of postmodern man's migrations that is part of the biography of those who experienced it personally or through the family trajectory, influences of global forces, symbolic roots of the homeland, a sense of familiarity with history/past compared to the unknown future. It describes the stories of people living today, whose experiences are saturated with family memory, with the stress on the experience of the repeated migration of ancestors, rooted in a milieu and/or history, and using a specific symbolic universe in the process of constituting their identity. People whose experience corresponds to "migrating biographies" experience a multiplication of biographical experiences because when they collect stories about family dynamics, memory, voluntarily or not, but with some regularity return to the places of their "roots," they themselves discover that they become part of the confusing networks of these "migrated biographies" of their own. Appadurai (2005:87-89) calls this process "contemporary imagination in action" that moderates our current life projects.

The "Association of Re-emigrants" from Boleslawiec and the other acts taken up by the locals may illustrate the long-term transformation processes that gradually reveal the hidden collective experience of the narrators who are the posterities and "heirs" of 18,000 Polish colonists from former Yugoslavia, but who only in 2007 finally decided to come out of the shadow and eventually appear in public in 2011 as the Association.²⁵

The processes of state transformation created the conditions for the development of many forms of "new localism" which is accompanied by "modern dignity" and the construction of identity. This is deeply associated with individual biographies that constitute us as human beings. What is underlined by my interviewees is the fact that biographies of local communities along the west borderland in Poland differ greatly from one another and from others in the country. "Native minorities" (such as the post-Greek community or Poles from former Yugoslavia) slowly emerge from the shadows. It is still possible that one day the voice given to the minority communities will become louder and those who have not yet divulged their identity will—in more favorable social conditions.

Among the many theoretical analyses, I wish to highlight the concept of "modern dignity" by Charles Taylor. Dignity and identity have become mutually interpenetrating concepts and are inextricably related. They do not, however, exempt any person from discovering his/her source identity, that is, the "inner self." Reaching to the inner self to articulate its most indigenous authenticity is the condition of "being

²⁵ See: <http://reemigrancizbosni.pl/>. Retrieved November 05, 2018.

true to oneself" (Taylor 1994:43-47; see also Ricoeur 2005). "Being true to myself" means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This can be one of the possibilities of a background understanding to the postmodern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization in which the ideal is usually couched" (Taylor 1994:45). The Poles from former Yugoslavia, as well as the Greek and Lemko communities, may open the way for the possible emergence of other "native but minor" groups in the former western lands of Poland. To support this idea with my personal experience I will share a short story. In 2007, when I was moving from the North-West Pomeranian Region to Lower Silesia, from a small town "A," I was informed that a tiny village in my neighborhood, located 6 km from "A," is fully inhabited by Lemko. For almost 20 years of me having lived there, nobody ever mentioned this, even though the children from that village attended the local school and we had everyday interactions with them. This is only an example of how difficult it is to recover dignity, the "indigenosity" and authenticity and come public with all the features of who we really are and how significant the socio-cultural and historical context is to developing in small local communities.

Now the collected interviews need deep biographical analysis to reveal the individual self-identifications of the narrators of different generations²⁶

²⁶ By "generation" I refer to both, but not simultaneously, the common meaning when we speak about generations in a family; and secondly, the social generations which are the cohorts of people born in the same date range and who share similar cultural experiences (Mannheim 1952).

and ways of constituting their identity along their life course. The family remains, including land and housing, language, social values and aspirations, as well as the strategies of accepting the new

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