

Foreigners of Polish origin studying in Poland.

"Return to the motherland" or a pragmatic choice?

Marcin Gońda

PhD candidate

Institute of Sociology

University of Lodz (Poland)

e-mail: mgonda@o2.pl

PhD research project

Examined group: foreign students and graduates of Polish origin studying in Poland

Why?:

- Poland, for centuries being a sending country, has recently experienced an increased influx of immigrants
- foreginers of Polish descent (including students) have possibly the strongest cultural competences to adapt to Polish society?
- growing popularity of Polish tertiary education institutions (univeristies) among foreigners:
 - 1989 – 4 thousand
 - 2008 – 16 thousand, i.e. 0,8% of all students (Żołędowski 2010)
- students of Polish descent - about 22% of all foreign students (mostly from the former USSR countries)

PhD research project

Research goals (research questions):

- 1) To determine both **motivational and political/institutional conditions of the students' mobility** and to describe their **integration process with the hosting Polish society**:
 - What are the reasons of students' arrivals (ideological, economic, etc.)?
 - Do respondents maintain regular transnational contacts with both hosting and sending communities, and – next – what economic, cultural, social and religious links they sustain?
 - Whether studying in Poland is a kind of “return to the motherland” or, rather, a pragmatic choice dictated by structural opportunities?
 - Whether studying in Poland is an opportunity to confirm their “Polishness” or rather just a next step in their professional career?

PhD research project

Research goals (research questions):

- 2) To determine whether and how studying in Poland **affect students' national identification:**
 - To what extent the respondents identify with the country of current settlement (Poland) or the country of birth?
 - What cultural capital (including the image of Poland) is transmitted to respondents by their families and local communities?
 - How cultural capital is verified after arrival to Poland?

PhD research project

Research method:

- qualitative research
- **autobiographical narrative interviews (Fritz Schütze's method)** -> enables to examine the process of individual's identity change
- circa 30 interviews (2010-2011)
- (desktop research on structural conditions of students' mobility)

Foreign students in Poland

Foreign students in Poland (Żołądowski 2010):

- about 16 000 in total (2008)
- about 40% from the former USRR (growing number)
- about 50% of students from the former USSR have Polish origins (mainly from Ukraine and Belarus)
- in total 22% of foreign students have Polish origins (3000-3500 a year)

Narrators

Narrators:

- 1) Maria (Belarus, 27 y.o)
- 2) Nadia (Ukraine, 27 y.o)
- 3) Tatiana (Moldova, 28 y.o)

similar socio-demographic profile

different reasons of arrival to Poland and their implications on the narrators' national identification:

- > 3 different degrees of adopting Polish culture
- > 3 possible attitudes towards Poland:
 - 1) from seduction to subsequent disappointment of Poland
 - 2) instrumental making use of Polish origin to achieve individual's particular goals
 - 3) rejection of undoubtful national identification and turning towards cosmopolitanism

1) Maria's narration: from seduction to disappointment of Poland

Biographical profile:

- 27 y.o (8 years in Poland)
- Belarus
- MA studies in humanities, currently works in the trade
- binational family (Polish-Belarusian)

Advanced culturalization (Kłoskowska 1996):

- patriotic upbringing in love of Polish country, language and traditions
- tragic experiences of the family during the WWII times
- sustaining Polish language knowledge
- intergenerational transmission of knowledge about Poland by the family, community, school, church
- previous frequent visits to Poland

1) Maria's narration: from seduction to disappointment of Poland

Motive of arrival:

- idealized image of the motherland transmitted by the family and community
- willingness to participate in the Polish culture
- economic expectations

"(...) at the time when I was a child and we were coming here for summer holidays Poland was for me, as I say, the country where everything is available, other sweets, some other stuff yyy/ /it was so amazing .. Soviet Union had already collapsed, Poland was already in a sense//maybe it was due to the fact Poland wasn't a part of the Soviet Union, it was only under its influence /and thus Poland had earlier access to, I do not know, to food, to some other goods like TV-sets or fridges or whatever//for me Poland was strictly an European country .. then in my child's imagination our countries or Eastern Europe may have been.. were perhaps yy ((smiles)) more like backward yy .. uh like I say, for a long time these post-Soviet thinking and way of life dominated, yy and here everything was new for me .. therefore in a sense it resulted in my decision to come here.."

1) Maria's narration: from seduction to disappointment of Poland

Stay in Poland:

- verbal discrimination („*Rusky*“)
- Poland/Poles different from the earlier images (lack of patriotism, ignorance of history and tradition)
 - > unfulfilled expectations
 - > *homecomer* syndrom (Schütz 1990)
- *marginal man* (Stonequist 1961) – split between the *private homeland* (Belarus/diaspora) and the *ideological homeland* (Poland) (Ossowski 1984)

1) Maria's narration: from seduction to disappointment of Poland

*"(...) I came here and realized//I always thought that this was a Pole, right?.. he must be, I do not know, that every person must have some national identity| I'm not talking specifically about the Polish people, I always thought that the Belarusians have the same approach towards their country and nation. and I came here and I noticed that most of it is just about talking words//I do not want to offend anyone because I always try to objectively approach to most issues... I always emphasized that I am a Pole and this rule applies to me .. But I increasingly began to see the difference between the Poles living in the country and... those outside the country.. I'm not talking only about Poles living in Belarus, I am talking in general about the Polish community living outside the country.. This is a completely different image of a Pole and Polishness .. people who live outside the country can only be recognized as 100% true Poles.. those who live in the country, I think, they have always this syndrome of such a resentful man, most of them are people who not only have prejudices towards other nations but they have primarily prejudices towards their own nation.. they are nationalists [**chauvinists**] in most cases (...) and I noticed that these people with so-called sense of their nationality declare a lot, but really in any way, it is not reflected in their daily activities at all"*

1) Maria's narration: from seduction to disappointment of Poland

Attitude towards Poland/Poles:

- disenchantment and negative verification of earlier hopes -> disappointment
- "true Poles" from the Borderlands („Kresy”)/diaspora vs. Poles from interior Poland -> identification with other Borderlands inhabitants
- reluctance to full integration -> rejection of the homeland (eg. refraining from requesting citizenship)
- willingness to escape to another EU country (instrumentalization of Polish origins)

2) Nadia's narration: making use of Polish origin to achieve individual's particular goals

Biographical profile:

- 27 y.o (8 years in Poland)
- Ukraine
- MA in humanities, currently PhD studies
- Polish family

Dim culturalization (Kłoskowska 1996):

- no grounded Polish identity of family members
- no intergenerational transmission of knowledge about Poland
-> initial lack of awareness of Polish origins and lack of knowledge of Polish language
- previous visits to Poland -> image of Poland as "*a land flowing with milk and honey*"

2) Nadia's narration: making use of Polish origin to achieve individual's particular goals

Motive of arrival:

- no explicit plans for the future
- bad relations with parents

escape to new possibilities:

- making use of structural opportunities (Polish origins) to apply for studies in Poland -> deliberate „resurrection” of the family's Polish traditions, learning the Polish language
- economic motive -> instrumentalization of Polishness

„somehow my approach was more rational, without any concrete ideas and expectations when it comes to Poland... as it is a country as every other country.. no no, I did not have any vision of Polish to be verified later”

2) Nadia's narration: making use of Polish origin to achieve individual's particular goals

Stay in Poland:

- verbal discrimination („*Rusky*”, „*Ukrainian*”)
- no cultural expectations
- high economic expectations -> seeking possibilities to self-develop and prepare for labour market
- willingness to depart from Poland in opportune circumstances (instrumentalization)

2) Nadia's narration: making use of Polish origin to achieve individual's particular goals

Attitude towards Poland/Poles:

- low expectations -> low biographical costs, no disappointment
- Poland as an emotionally neutral space which is a source of opportunities
- despite her long stay only a habitual bond (no ideological bond) with Poland (Ossowski 1984)
- national ambivalence -> simultaneous, partial rejection of both the culture of the host country and the sending country (Kłoskowska 1996)

"(...) I never identified with the Poles ... and I think that I would not do, /you know, it is just that I have probably an impaired sense of identity at the moment| .. Because I feel neither a Pole, nor do I feel Ukrainian| .."

3) Tatiana's narration: rejection of undoubtful national identification and turning towards cosmopolitanism

Biographical profile:

- 28 y.o (9 years in Poland)
- Moldova
- Medical studies, currently works as a dentist
- Polish family

Dim culturalization (Kłoskowska 1996):

- no grounded Polish identity of parents
- no intergenerational transmission of knowledge about Poland -> no knowledge of Polish language

3) Tatiana's narration: rejection of undoubtful national identification and turning towards cosmopolitanism

Motive of arrival:

- willingness to study in Moldova
- high costs of medical studies

- escape to new possibilities:
 - > „activating” Polish cultural capital to apply for studies in Poland (instrumentalization of Polishness)
 - > making use of structural opportunity to convert cultural capital (Polish origins) into social and economical captials (Bourdieu 1986)

- pragmatic choise:
 - „Mhmm... I came here to study rather because of my origins .. only beacuse of that”*

3) Tatiana's narration: rejection of undoubtful national identification and turning towards cosmopolitanism

Stay in Poland:

- lack of acceptance by the Poles -> *marginal man* (Stonequist 1961)
- Poland as a part of the West:

"I always thought this way that even if I returned to my country, I have that diploma, right?, European diploma.. So really I am able to work anywhere, right?"

- launching process of individualization -> increasing need for constructing own live, self-development and escape from family constrains:

"(...) I thought I would finish these studies.. I would finish these studies, I would work, I would fun.. I was firmly convinced that, as I drove there, I would be an independent woman that my husband regardless of whether he was rich or poor, I would have my profession and thus I would rely on myself and always make a living, right?"

3) Tatiana's narration: rejection of undoubtful national identification and turning towards cosmopolitanism

Attitude towards Poland/Poles:

- low expectations -> low biographical costs, no disappointment
- fulfilling initial economic expectations
- low culturalization and growing individualization -> rejecting national autocategorization and turning towards cosmopolitanism:

„In Moldova I've never been a Moldovian.. I was there, so to say, a Pole.. but here I've never been and I will never be a Pole and I'm here a foreigner with the Moldovan citizenship.. and who do I feel?.. I feel like myself.. No I'm not able to clearly answer.. I'm not a Pole for sure.. and Moldovian either”

"If I had to choose between Poland and Germany, I would choose Germany, because they are even better in terms of medical science"

Conclusions

- 1) return to the homeland -> **need to redefine their national identification**
- 2) motives of arrival and attitudes towards the motherland (or its members) conditioned by the degree of the earlier culturalization process:
 - **none/dim culturalization:**
 - > **instrumental making use of membership in a national group** to achieve particular goals/benefits
 - > individual do not have high expectations associated with the arrival to the motherland and, consequently, **does not bear high biographical costs**
 - **advanced culturalization:**
 - > creating flattering, mythical image of a homecountry, which after the initial **seduction** ultimately leads to **disappointment and its rejection**
 - > *homecomer* syndrom
- 3) **rejection of Polishness**
- 4) **final willingness to escape from Poland**

Thank You!

mgonda@o2.pl