

Excursus on the Country of Origin: Poland

Poland—when appearing on European maps as a sovereign state—has long been and continues to be a country of emigration. Despite a recent influx of immigrants from East European and Asian countries, most significantly Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam (Iglicka 2001: 21, Kaluza/Mack 2010: 72), it is widely seen as an ethnically homogeneous country and society (Alscher 2008: 5). Because of its geographical location between Eastern and Western Europe, it increasingly serves as a transit country for migrants. Contrary to the assumption that Poland would become a “country of immigration” as a result of its EU membership (Iglicka 2001, Alscher 2008), it remains—in light of its current political atmosphere—a net emigration country, with an excess of people leaving the country as opposed to entering it. In the long history of Poland’s emigration, the most important countries for settlement were Germany, the United States, and Canada (Iglicka 2001: 12, Więckowski 2008: 266, Alscher 2008: 1f) and I gathered the empirical data for this study in two of them: Germany and Canada. Generally, the Polish diaspora (the so-called *Polonia*) is estimated between 15 and 18 million people worldwide (Meister 1992, Alscher 2008).

There was a time in history when Poland disappeared from the European map. After the neighbouring powers of the Russian Kingdom, the Kingdom of Prussia, and Habsburg Austria partitioned the country (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) three times in the eighteenth century, they ended the existence of the state, eliminating the sovereign crown of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania for the next 123 years. Uprisings during the nineteenth century failed and thus Poland as a state was not “reborn” until the end of World War I.¹ Until the late twentieth century, emigration took place in waves, but also in continual yearly movements, and was most often politically motivated. The end of World

1 For a historical account of Polish national movements in Prussia as a response to the policy of Germanisation, see Loew 2014: ch. 2: 31-119.

War II and the subsequent shifting of Poland's borders westwards resulted in mass displacement and forced settlement (Alscher 2008: 1). Communism, especially during the uprisings of 1956 and 1968, as well as the imposition of martial law and the ban on *Solidarność* in December 1981, triggered further waves of mass emigration out of Poland.² Last but not least, Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004 triggered another emigration wave—mainly for economic reasons—most notably into the UK, Ireland as well as Sweden (Kaluza/Mack 2010: 72). EU membership gives Polish nationals the right of free movement within the EU member states, Switzerland and Norway under the *Schengen* agreement. In fact, nearly 2 million people have left the country since then (ibid., Więckowski 2008: 266, Vargas-Silva 2012: 5). This significant recent increase of mobility is also visible in social and economic changes within Poland itself (ibid.: 261).

In the following sections, I will focus on two crucial destinations of Polish immigration: Germany and Canada. In so doing, I mainly refer to historical works; yet, there are surprisingly few works that *comprehensively* examine these two migration histories. There is, in fact, one exception: historian Peter Oliver Loew's history of Polish migration into Germany (2014), within which he expresses surprise that this kind of work has not been done before:

“A history of Poles in Germany has not been written to date. There are individual investigations of Masurians or the Ruhrpoles, Polish princesses and circulating cleaning ladies, but a more sustained investigation is still missing. This is perhaps due to problems with methodology, because both terms ‘Germany’ and ‘Poland’ are blurry and elusive, and one can also have quite heated debates about the term ‘minority.’” (ibid.: 11, my translation)³

Loew sees three reasons for the lack of such crucial work. First, Polish (speaking) people living and having lived in Germany have not always considered themselves to be Polish, but as subjects of the Prussian King or as Germans. There have always been differences between the subjective belonging of Polish-

2 The “Solidarność Movement” was a union founded by Lech Wałęsa in 1980 in Gdansk which triggered the democratisation process in Poland.

3 “Eine Geschichte der Polen in Deutschland ist bis heute nicht geschrieben worden. Es gibt Einzeluntersuchungen zu Masuren oder Ruhrpolen, polnischen Prinzessinnen und pendelnden Putzfrauen, aber eine Gesamtdarstellung fehlt bislang. Vielleicht liegt dies an den methodischen Problemen. Denn sowohl der Begriff ‘Deutschland’ als auch der Begriff ‘Polen’ sind unscharf und schwer zu fassen, und auch über das Wort ‘Minderheit’ kann man sich trefflich streiten.”

speaking persons—that they should be called Poles on the basis of linguistic, historic, or racial criteria. Second, Poles got into Germany in different ways. Some became German citizens through border demarcation as in the 1793 partition. They have also entered Germany through processes of migration such as rural-urban migration, flight, and displacement. In fact, both ways are intrinsically intertwined with the history of Polish migration to Germany:

“In many cases, [Poles] did not need to come ‘to’ Germany when they migrated, because they already lived within Prussia or on the border of the Reich [...]” (Loew 2014: 12, my translation).⁴

Third, the history of Poles in Germany is not only the history of Polish Catholics, but also of Polish Jews (ibid.: 11-14). We should thus be aware that Polish migration history to Germany is a history of wars, which makes the case between Poland and Germany unique and complex. In fact, German-Polish relations contain a difficult history that reaches back a few centuries: in Upper Silesia, for example, German-Polish bilingualism and cultural hybridity has existed there since the nineteenth century (Loew 2014: 64). For a contemporary sociological study, it is crucial to understand these long and multi-faceted historical relations.

The (Im)Migration of Borders and Humans: Polish Immigration to Germany

To start my historical overview, I focus on the migration wave which arose during industrialization, when the demand for labour in Germany grew, particularly in the industrial centers and in agriculture. From 1860 until 1914, 3.5 million people from the eastern provinces of Prussia migrated to the West of the kingdom, including many hundred thousands of Poles, most of whom came to the Prussian provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia. It was there where coal mines and steel mills developed rapidly. Most of the Poles settled around the river Ruhr; well-known as “Ruhrpoles” (*Ruhrpolen*). Estimated at about 460.000 in number, most of them settled in Recklinghausen, Herne, and Gelsenkirchen. Often half of the mines’ workforce were Polish workers and the prevailing unofficial “underground” language (*unter Tage*) was Polish (Loew 2014: 78ff, Kaluza 2002: 399, Pallaske 2001a: 10f). The Ruhrpoles lived in distinct neighbourhoods

4 “Vielfach mussten sie selbst dann, wenn sie migrierten, gar nicht ‘nach’ Deutschland kommen da sie als Polen bereits innerhalb Preußens bzw. der Reichsgrenzen lebten [...]”

where they were mostly among themselves. This eventually led to the formation of Polish associations (worker associations, singing clubs, gymnastics clubs, and so on). In fact, Polish associations experienced a boom at that time, with 875 clubs and 80.000 members and the city of Bochum became the organizational center. After 1899, however, the government reacted with increasing policies of Germanization, which, in turn, triggered nationalist movements on the part of Poles working in the mines (*ibid.*: 83f). Some scholars also point to the significance of Polish migration to Berlin at that time (Loew 2014: 89-94, Pallaske 2001a: 11, Meister 1992). Not only workers, but also noble Polish families were attracted by the dynamic metropolis. It is estimated that 100.000 Poles settled there. That being said, the Polish (internal) mass migration of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was predominantly a proletarian one. In Berlin, they did not live—unlike in the Ruhr valley—in enclosed workers' housing estates, but all over the city, which led to their cultural assimilation. There were significantly less associations than in the Ruhr valley (Loew 2014: 91f).

After the outbreak of World War I, several hundred thousand Poles became Prussian prisoners of war. Until the end of the war, about 500.000 “foreign Poles” were recruited and forced to work in the Prussian kingdom (*ibid.*: 117f). However, after the end of World War I, many Poles returned to the new Polish national territory; and those who did not were long adapted to German society. The Versailles Treaty of June 1919 granted Poland much of the historical province of Greater Poland, and many Germans who had settled there earlier left the area (*ibid.*: 119-123). Yet,

“[...] because of the strong mixing between the German and the Polish population, it was impossible to clearly separate them by a demarcation, so that large minorities continued to live on both sides of the border.” (Loew 2014: 123, my translation)⁵

After the borders of both countries were ultimately drawn in mid-1922, the non-aggression pact between Germany and Poland of 1934 brought about only a temporal relaxation. The outbreak of World War II marked the most tragic chapter in the long history of Poles in Germany, as Loew writes:

5 “[...] Da es aufgrund der starken Vermischung von deutscher und polnischer Bevölkerung aber unmöglich war, sie durch eine Grenzziehung klar voneinander zu trennen, blieben auf beiden Seiten der Grenze größere Minderheiten bestehen.”

“Since the Third Reich annexed large parts of the eastern neighbouring country, millions of Poles became disenfranchised residents of a criminal state—if they were not expelled, deported or murdered beforehand.” (2014: 163, my translation)⁶

While one million Christian Poles from the annexed regions were sent to forced labour, some two or three million of the Jewish population in Poland was largely exterminated during the Holocaust, along with millions of other European Jews. Besides, tens of thousands of (non-Jewish) Polish people were killed by the Nazi Regime. They were mostly members of the intelligentsia: politicians, priests, teachers, members of liberal professions. Other Poles, categorized as “non-Germanizable” (*nicht-eindeutschungsfähig*) were systematically deported; others were “re-Germanized” (*wiedereingedeutscht*) based on the famous German People’s List (*Deutsche Volksliste*) to be recruited for the army while Polish children were taken away from their parents to be Germanized (Loew 2014: 165-173).

The end of the cruel war, however, did not mean the end of Polish presence in Germany: “In the decades to come, people from Poland almost constantly migrated into both German states—displaced persons, ethnic Germans, asylum seekers, workers and intellectuals.” (ibid.: 192)⁷ Immediately after World War II, there were many displaced persons: forced labourers, freed inmates from the concentration camps, prisoners of war, soldiers of the Allied armies, among them were approximately 1.7 million Polish people. Some returned to Poland based on the so-called “repatriation” process while some remained in Germany because they either had no one to return to or Communist Poland did not appear as a good political alternative for them. Others moved on, for instance, to Canada (ibid.: 194-197, Ruchniewicz 2001: 64). After the war, Germans were expelled from Upper Silesia and other former eastern territories. The Polish government considered the Polish-speaking population as “autochthones.” While they all officially became Polish citizens, “[i]n reality, both the Polish authorities

6 “Da das Dritte Reich große Teile des östlichen Nachbarlandes annektierte, wurden Millionen von Polen, bevor sie teilweise vertrieben, verschleppt oder ermordet wurden, zu entrechteten Einwohnern eines verbrecherischen Staates.”

7 “Fast pausenlos wanderten in den Jahrzehnten danach Menschen aus Polen in die beiden Deutschen Staaten—Vertriebene, Aussiedler und Asylbewerber, Arbeiter und Intellektuelle.”

and the Polish population, who settled in these regions, did not regard the ‘autochthones’ as ‘fully-fledged’ Poles.” (Kaluza 2002: 701, my translation)⁸

The re-introduction of citizenship in West Germany based on the principle of *ius sanguinis* (blood descent) and the category of the German “belonging to the people” (*Volkszugehörigkeit*) was a reaction to the post-war situation, aimed at maintaining access to German citizenship for German refugees from Poland and other Eastern European countries. Ethnic Germans were defined as “members of the people” (*Volkszugehörige*) affected by a “fate of expulsion” (*Vertreibungsschicksal*) as a consequence of the Third Reich and the war, so that laws were enacted in 1953 and in 1955 that categorized ethnic Germans as *Volkszugehörige*, even if they lived outside the borders of the territory of the 1937 German state. This way, the government secured access to German citizenship for ethnic Germans (Bommes 2012b: 45f). Mistrust and discrimination against German minorities in Poland triggered the first migration wave of ethnic Germans into Germany in 1956 and 1957, among them were many people with a “double identity” and who were taught both languages. After this wave, immigration from Poland into Germany decreased up until the end of the 1960s.

In the early 1970s, when Poland’s government allowed trips abroad for individuals, immigration to Germany increased again. Furthermore, the Polish-German agreement of 1970 and 1975 about family reunification, the existing practice of recognizing Polish nationals as ethnic Germans and the worsening economic situation in Poland lead to a mass immigration: between the 1980s and the 1990s, approximately one million Polish nationals settled in Germany (Kaluza 2002: 101). In view of these high numbers and a subsequent rise of xenophobia in Germany, the German state promptly reacted by introducing control measures. A newly introduced legal status of “late resettler” (*Spätaussiedler*) restricted access to persons born before 1. January 1993. Persons falling under this category needed to prove that they had either been affected by expulsion themselves or were descendants of such families. Since then, few have managed to obtain *Spätaussiedler* status, thus a large number of Polish people immigrated as “foreigners,” i.e., refugees. However, both streams implied a heavy reduction of their social rights in Germany (Bommes 2012b: 50).

The year 1989 marked an important turning point in the migratory movements not only between Poland and Germany, but also for the East-West migration in general. Most of the migrants of the 1980s from Poland ultimately settled

8 “In Wirklichkeit betrachteten sowohl die polnischen Behörden als auch die polnische Bevölkerung, die sich in diesen Regionen niedergelassen hatte, die ‘Autochthonen’ als nicht ‘vollwertige Polen.’”

in Germany as far as they were (legally) able to (Pallaske 2001b: 124). Since the 1990s, however, legal migration options were limited to internationally agreed upon, temporary work programs, so that migrants to Germany became contract and seasonal workers, continually changing their residence between Poland and Germany. This form of migration is known as so-called “circular migration” (*Pendelmigration*, Morokvasic 1994, Cyrus 1994, Miera 1997, Palenga-Möllennebeck 2014). The German turnaround (*die Wende*) seemed impossible until 1989, so that leaving the country was not associated with the possibility of return. The structural conditions responsible for these motivations changed completely in the 1990s, when the transformation and democratization process of Poland started, the economy took an upward turn and the borders simultaneously opened (Kaluza 2002: 702, Pallaske 2001b: 125).

The last migration wave—up until today—is politically linked to the EU-enlargement. As the opening up of the labour market for Poles and other inhabitants of East-Central Europe loomed large, a heated debate about the (feared) influx of people came about in Germany. It was mainly the underprivileged and their interest groups who feared losing jobs to low-skilled migrant workers. These fears existed particularly in the structurally weak regions in Eastern Germany: there, at the border between two states (a border with one of the largest wealth gaps across Europe) political actors wanted to make capital out of this specific socio-economic situation. Right-wing parties, such as the NPD (*National Democratic Party of Germany*), repeatedly tried—and not without success—to win votes with anti-Polish slogans. This was the background for the German government to negotiate restrictions on establishment (*Niederlassungsbeschränkungen*) for Polish people, valid for seven years from May 2004 until May 2011 (Loew 2014: 234, Kaluza/Mack 2010: 72, Alscher 2008: 2). The restriction had a crucial effect: countries like the UK, Ireland, and Sweden became popular destinations of the migratory movements of Poles. However, the restriction period passed and, as the annual report of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*) of 2014 indicates, Polish people also used the possibility of free movement into Germany: the migration balance indicates 73.060 Polish people, which is the second biggest group (after Romanians) to come to Germany under the regulations of Schengen (Schmidt/Grimmeiß 2015: 11). Poland’s poor economic situation is behind this migration wave. When Poland entered the EU, unemployment was high: 20% of the population was unemployed in 2004. This situation was worse for young adults under 25 years. There the unemployment rate lay at 25%. Still today, when people find jobs, their incomes are low. In some literatures, these young people are referred to as belonging to the so-called “generation nothing”: quite

well-educated young people, who cannot access the labour market or whose material claims do not match the social reality in Poland. In order not to be materially dependent on their parents, young adults widely chose the possibility of migration (Kaluza/Mack 2010: 72).

Many scholars state that people of Polish heritage in Germany are thought to be “invisible,” despite their large numbers (Loew 2014; Kaluza/Mack 2010, Pallaske 2001a, a.o.). Because many of them were granted German citizenship quickly, they were thus able to integrate into the labour market and adopt the language and culture; a means of protection against the majority populations’ negative attitude toward them. Ethnic Germans in particular were faced with a big pressure to assimilate due to their admission of belonging to the German people; the very precondition for their legal status. Therefore, it is not surprising that a “Polish community” is weakly developed in Germany. In fact—as Pallaske writes—there are no Polish organizations that can be considered an effective interest group (2001b: 133). Neither is there a considerable territorial concentration of Poles, nor a considerable number of Polish restaurants, bars, grocery stores, or sport clubs. According to Kaluza, one can find “Poles recognizable as Poles in Germany only in Polish mass, held in many Catholic Churches.” (2002: 708, my translation)⁹ Nevertheless, we can find people, whose language, identity, or heritage is Polish, in each federal state, and certainly, without exception, in all German cities (Loew 2014: 235). The migration waves of the 1980s until the 1990s and beyond significantly frame the historical and political context of this study. These migration waves are, in turn, an outcome of those past historical events that I have delineated in this section.

A Piece of the Multicultural Mosaic: Polish Immigration to Canada

It is widely known that Canada is multicultural. In fact, over 200 ethno-cultural groups settled all over the country, including many people of Polish origin. Polish settlement in Canada has a long history, though data and literatures are rare and often outdated. Historians were able to trace the presence of Poles in Canada back to at least 200 years (Kogler 1968). Dominik Marcz is reputed to be the first Polish immigrant to what is now called Canada. After he travelled to Montreal in 1752 as a fur merchant, he subsequently decided to settle there. However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that Canada experienced a marked influx of immigrants arriving from Poland (Library and Archives Canada 2015).

9 “Erkennbar werden Polen als Polen in Deutschland nur bei polnischen Gottesdiensten, die in vielen katholischen Kirchen gehalten werden.”

Most literatures on Polish immigration to Canada recognize three distinctive immigration waves (Kogler 1968, Avery/Fedorowicz 1982); yet, “newer” editions point to the importance of another wave, namely the Polish immigration to Canada during Communist times (Makowski 1987).

The first wave of Polish immigration to Canada began in the mid-nineteenth century and peaked just before 1914. It largely consisted of impoverished peasants, so-called Kashubes from northern Poland (Zurakowska 1991). Various steamship and railway companies recruited these immigrants and many of them settled in the town of Wilno, Ontario, which is now recognized as the oldest Polish settlement (Kogler 1968, Makowski 1987, Avery/Fedorowicz 1982). World War I interrupted this immigration wave. The second one, however, occurred after World War I, when Poland had to face many challenges, such as political confrontation, a ministerial crisis and an assassination. The government was therefore more disposed toward continuing emigration. It was at that time that the Canadian railway and labour-intensive sectors, including various corporations, demanded cheap European labour. The Canadian government temporarily removed immigration restrictions and consequently many Polish emigrants entered Canada. Again, the Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II interrupted the second immigration wave, but the next one was to follow soon after. Scholars situate the third wave of Polish immigration to Canada during and after World War II. This wave consisted mostly of military men, professionals, and the intelligentsia (Avery/Fedorowicz 1982, Makowski 1987, Zurakowska 1991). While their motives to immigrate into Canada were primarily political, Canada’s military efforts created a manpower shortage in industrial and agricultural sectors, which promoted a more favourable climate for the entry of refugees from Poland. In the aftermath of World War II, Canada admitted entry for family reunifications as well as to a number of displaced persons. As already indicated, the country also recorded an increase in Polish immigration during the economic difficulties and political tensions of Communist Poland (Avery/Fedorowicz 1982: 13). In response to the martial law imposed by the military junta in Poland in 1981, the Canadian government allowed Poles to enter Canada as refugees. Those who entered were rather young and well-educated (Makowski 1987: 271). The third wave of Polish immigration, during and after World War II as well as the increased immigration during Communist Poland frame the context of this study as most of the Canadian-based interviewees or their parents and grandparents entered Canada under these specific historical conditions. Therefore, the present chapter serves as the historical and political background for the biographical narratives of my respondents and their interpretation

We have seen that the relationship between Poland and Canada is fundamentally different from the relationship between Poland and Germany. Although Canada's admission of Polish immigrants has also been politically motivated, policy has primarily been economically driven. While we can say that the immigration of Polish people to Canada is the result of a rather typical market-driven migration policy, immigration into Germany is far more complex as a result of various geo-political, economic and compensational factors. The crucial difference is—and this is the reason why the section on Canada is relatively short—that Canada was and is not geo-politically involved with Poland—unlike Germany, whose history of having Polish people within the territory characterizes its citizenship policies. These different histories still frame the social realities for Polish immigrants in today's world, as we are about to see in the upcoming chapters.

A Note on my Respondents' Life Stories

In this part of the book, I share some of my respondents' life stories by presenting my interpretations of the biographical narratives of Anja, Sandra, Janusz, Oscar, Malinka, and Francis. They are ordered not according to the cities/countries in which they live but toward upward mobilities, depicting the life stories of less mobile respondents first and continuing with the more mobile ones. Such a way of sequencing simultaneously indicates minimal and maximal contrasts both within and across the patterns. Generally, the aim of the analysis is twofold. First, I set out to illustrate the *diversity of geographical movements* of respondents: the young adults commonly referred to as "migrants." I focus on how these movements emerge in their life courses and how they lend meaning to them. Second, I aim to point out the *shifting of mobility patterns* throughout life courses. Since biographical constellations, motivations, and the meanings that the individuals confer on their mobilities may change over time, so can the (im)mobility practices change in the course of individuals' lives. There are always phases of immobility, even for individuals who are highly mobile, thus illustrating the dialectic of immobility and mobility (Urry 2007, Hannam et al. 2006, Adey 2006).

Analyzing my respondents' life stories means interpreting their narratives. How my respondents narrate their lives sheds light on how they confer meaning to their experiences of (im)mobility. Thus, I am looking to detect the discourses they provide me with. What are the discourses that reflect the experience in the type of immobility after migration? What are the discourses that reflect more mobile experiences as the patterns of transmobility and cosmobility suggest? How do respondents give meaning to their own lives, particularly with respect to their mobilities? I will address all these questions in chapters 3, 4, and 5. But before going into an in-depth analysis, I will outline the principle underlying my interpretations. I ordered the analyses according to the flow of life, which I see as the anchor of my reading of these life stories, meaning that my explorations of

them most often follows a life chronology (and not the narration chronology) for the simple reason that we can better understand how (im)mobility experiences develop, how they are maintained, or how they shift over time. I interpret and subsequently present the life stories by examining important biographical constellations in interplay with theoretical (and political) positions in migration studies. I refer to various approaches and I use them as analytical potential by intertwining etic and emic perspectives (Pike 1967, Harris 1976, a.o.) in my readings of the life stories. My interpretations of the life courses are also entangled with elements of my respondents' post hoc reflections, in which significant life phases are organized according to themes. We shall see that there are various themes that run through all the life stories and substantially account for various experiences of post-migration (im)mobility. Then again, there are other themes that stand out only in individual biographies. In each case, it is crucial to contextualize the biographical experiences, which I will work out in form of vignettes. They arise out of the life stories themselves and only make sense within the particular story. Contextualization in form of vignettes constitutes one part of the interpretation as they not only serve to deepen our understanding of the individual story, but they also open up comparative perspectives—within and across the patterns. As such, my study provides less a “traditional country-comparison” than a comparison through contextualization taking into account the life circumstances, practices and experiences, own reflections and interpretations of the individuals, used where they are deemed necessary in the analysis. Scholars in the field of mobility studies call for contextualization because (im)mobility entails different meanings in different contexts. (Im)mobility as a social phenomenon is constructed and needs to be interpreted through the meaning the individuals give to their own movements, but also through meanings that are generated and normalized through and in specific contexts (Adey 2006, Cresswell 2006).