The Social Construction of Emigration as a Moral Issue

by

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Introduction

Both home country and host country nations have differing attitudes toward individuals seeking to change their place of residency. For example, as a host country nation, the United States makes a distinction between political refugees and economic immigrants. Political refugees are given more monetary and social assistance than economic immigrants, mostly because the latter is considered to have chosen his/her exile, whereas the political refugee was forced into it. The United States has also more readily admitted refugees who escaped from repressive communist systems as opposed to repressive capitalist systems, making it easier for Eastern European refugees to enter the United States in the 1980s than Central American refugees. In addition, the home country nation, the country from which the person emigrates, reacts differently to the exodus of its educated versus uneducated citizens, the former being accused of creating a "brain drain." Nations can also construct moral barriers to persuade its citizens to stay home. For example, in Poland in 1980, members and especially leaders in the Solidarity trade union and the democratic opposition movement were encouraged to remain in Poland to fight the communist regime, and those who left were at times labeled deserters. The extent to which the home country nation's attitude...
toward emigration influences the individual's decision to emigrate is the focus of this paper.

Reasons to emigrate or not to emigrate can be divided into "collective good" reasons or "selective incentive" reasons. A collective good refers to a benefit that can be shared by all whether one contributes or not.¹ For example, if an opposition leader stayed in Poland to fight against the communist regime, when the regime toppled every citizen would benefit from this (or at least be affected by it; it could turn out to be a collective bad). If a person decides not to emigrate because s/he wants to help rebuild the nation, or because of duty to the fatherland, then this is a decision based on a collective good—the betterment of the nation as a whole. Reasons to emigrate or not can also be based on selective incentives. A selective incentive is "an incentive that operates, not indiscriminately, like the collective good, upon the group as a whole, but rather selectively toward the individuals in the group."² Selective incentives can be positive (e.g. a person wants to emigrate to make more money) or negative (e.g. a person decides not to emigrate because there is no chance of getting a high prestige job abroad).

Issues of morality are linked to the collective good. The terms "ought" and "should" imply rightness or wrongness, and "national duty" often means favoring the good of the whole over the benefit of the few. This paper argues that collective good reasons are used in two ways. First, the national and religious authorities in Poland subscribed to this philosophy when urging its citizens not to emigrate. Secondly, on a micro level, people were more likely to invoke issues of morality and the collective good when they judged others who emigrate than when they judged themselves. The first section of the paper shows how the events in the nation and the national leaders constructed emigration into a moral issue. The second part of the paper uses data from interviews to examine how individual decisions not to emigrate were reached. The data show that selective benefits such as social status and monetary gain were more important than the collective 'good of the nation' in making the decision of whether or not to emigrate.

The Issue of Morality in Emigration

Estimates are that half a million Poles left Poland in the 1980s. Polish officials estimated that in 1988, 100,000 Poles between the ages of 22-35 left Poland for good each year, 10% of university graduates emigrated, and

²Olson, p. 51.
12% of youths between the ages 15-19 expressed a desire to emigrate.\(^3\) Statistics from the state (PRL) press list that in 1989, 63.5% of the workers, 47.1% of the managers and 20.7% of the city mayors wanted jobs abroad.\(^4\) There were 58,000 emigres from Poland in the United States in 1987, and there were 327,000 Poles who had extended their visas to stay abroad.\(^5\) In 1989, the United States Consulate in Poland issued 80,000 visas to Poles,\(^6\) but they also refused 60% of the visa applications.\(^7\) This means that over 200,000 Poles wanted to go to America in 1989. The numbers indicate the scope of emigration from Poland in the 1980s, but it is not only the large number of people leaving Poland that is of importance, but also the type of people leaving. Most of the emigres were young (20s and 30s) and well-educated (higher education degrees).

Polish leaders were concerned about the growing number of emigrants leaving in the 1980s. Moral authorities in Poland (religious and opposition leaders) conceded that every human had the right to emigrate, but at the same time they admonished emigration because of the negative consequences it had on the nation as a whole. In an article titled "The Advice of the Primate on Social Issues,"\(^8\) the Polish Primate of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland wrote, "The right to choose a place to live belongs to every human being; where someone wants to go or live is a personal decision. But Poland, at this particular time, is in a specific situation and needs all of its human resources to rebuild its social structure." The basic message was, you can go but you should stay. In the article the Primate acknowledged that outside aggression and economic backwardness had driven people away from Poland in the last two centuries. But he focused on the increased number of refugees who had emigrated in the last decade, this half a million people who left from 1980-1987 (1.3% of the population), and many of these were the young, the educated and the skilled workers.

The Primate identified seven specific reasons that Poles left in the 1980s. (1) Because of the economic crisis many people could not survive materially. (2) The collectivist system inherent in socialist ideology was not appealing to young people. (3) There was no role for young people in the social-political system. (4) The necessity of having to operate on a dual

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\(^5\) Ibid.
market system, where one has to buy toilet paper on the black market, affronted people's common sense, and psychologically and socially complicated everyday living. (5) For artists, scientists and specialists it was easier to fulfill their ambitions abroad. (6) There was a pessimism about the future and hopelessness that things would get better. And finally (7) there was weak patriotism or ties to the nation, captured by the Socratic phrase often used by Poles, "I am a citizen of the world."

The Primate then listed six reasons why Poles should not emigrate. He prefaced the list by saying, "The nation as a whole has the right in any case to make a moral judgement on the decision to leave the homeland and also to be aware of its consequences."

The first reason Poles should not emigrate was because of the Christian moral code of love, rights and responsibility to one's nation. He emphasized one's obligations and responsibilities to social, familial and national ties. He states that because the nation educated and socialized its citizens, the citizens were indebted to the nation and should not forget that they were "a borrower from the national group."

The second reason Poles should not emigrate from their homeland was because emigration weakened the nation. In this section he referred to emigration as "escaping from the very difficult Polish challenge. It's escaping from our fraction of responsibility for the nation as a whole." (I had one Polish émigré who was helping me with this translation. At this particular point he stopped and said, "This is me, I escaped. Don't press me to do this [translation]. It's self-annihilation." This is an example of one Polish émigré who had internalized this moral construction of emigration.) This weakening of the nation came from the emigration of well-educated and highly-skilled people. Also, those most against the system left and this broke apart the strength of the opposition. The Primate did not use the word "opposition" but said, "For people fighting to live in Poland it is very depressing and frustrating because they do not have friends with whom they could achieve their goals."

The third and fourth reasons not to emigrate were because the hope of being able to influence events in Poland from abroad was an illusion, and the stories about how great life is in the West were myths. Fifth, emigration led to a loss of national identity. This referred to the children of émigrés who would lose their identification with their Polish heritage. And last, the Primate cautioned that emigration was a naive and hasty decision based on short-term needs without regard to long-term damage. With this statement he implied that selective benefits of a better house and more money were the short term goals, while the collective good of a stronger nation was the long-term goal. The Primate ended with a plea to his countrymen to accept the challenge of staying in Poland and to help rebuild the nation. He wrote, "The Poland which the young yearn for and which all
of society wants for themselves and the successive generations, can not be built without a struggle. It can not be built in a different part of the world either."

Pope John Paul II also urged Poles to stay in Poland because of national duty. At several meetings with Poles (Westerplatte, 1987, Częstochowa, 1983) he mentioned that emigration was an "escape" and that Poles had a "duty" to the nation to stay in Poland. In 1987 the Pope "appealed to Polish youth that they not surrender to hopelessness and that they not leave the country." In an address on December 23, 1986 to the Polish community in Rome at the Vatican the Pope described emigration as "an inevitable evil" and urged Poles abroad to return home. He said, "we cannot forget that emigration entails a loss" and that those who leave are best equipped to improve life in Poland because they are well-skilled.

Even President Bush spoke in favor of Poles staying in Poland. In his speech at the Gdansk shipyard on July 7, 1989, Bush said, "I was asked by a correspondent just before I left, if I was young and lived in Poland would I come to America, and I told him I would want to stay in Poland and help rebuild the nation." And when Tadeusz Mazowiecki introduced his new cabinet in early September, 1989, included with his proposals for change was an appeal to the youth in Poland not to emigrate, but to stay in Poland to help rebuild society with "patience, energy, and persistence in action."

Polish opposition leaders touring America (e.g. Marian Jurczyk and Janusz Onyszczkiewicz) also touched upon the subject of emigration, never accusing any Pole of being bad for leaving, but urging them to return and help their country. Numerous articles in the Polish press in Poland and abroad in 1988-89 also stressed the concern of state and oppositional leaders about the scope of emigration. As one writer, Józef Sieradzki noted, it is recognized that the right to chose one's place of residence is a human right, but the public discussion of emigration by Polish authorities "indicates that the decision to leave their country is a moral problem for them, specifically under the aspect of faith to country, society and family." Sieradzki listed the negative consequences of emigration as weakening the nation by first a brain drain but also because it "lessen[s] the social pressure to reform the system."

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Opposition leaders specifically condemned Solidarity activists who left Poland during martial law. Adam Michnik wrote that in 1982 the choice for internees was "leave or stay in jail." He chose to stay because the decision to leave was not given to all citizens but only the internees, and he said the interned Solidarity activists who choose emigration "are committing an act that is both a capitulation and a desertion." Because Poland was undergoing a non-violent revolution in the 1980s, members of the opposition were considered to have betrayed the revolution when they emigrated. Conversations with Solidarity activists who stayed in Poland revealed that, in their opinion, the decision to emigrate for Solidarity activists was not a personal decision. As activists in the opposition, these Poles had more of an obligation to the nation, the collective good, than non-activists.

One concrete example will show how emigration weakened the opposition in Poland. In 1987, opposition activity was centered in the underground publishing houses. During this period the opposition was at a low point. The general amnesty of political prisoners in 1984 had removed international pressure on the Polish regime. The economy was on a steep decline and people were more concerned with buying basic foodstuffs than underground literature. In Poland, material and mental support for the opposition were diminishing, but in Chicago, Solidarity refugees were actively collecting money to send to Poland to support this underground activity. One recipient of this money in Poland said, "Of course, I appreciate the money they are giving us, but we need more than money...some of the best young minds have left the country, and they are needed here. America doesn't need them." This man gave one example of how the refugee "defection" had contributed to the demise of the underground publishing houses. Underground literature, because it was illegal, circulated in small closed circles. The distribution pattern was that one man would pick up 20 copies, bring them to his house and distribute them to his friends when, for example, they came over for dinner. In order to attract new readers, the man had to attract new friends. The distributor did not go out and create new companion circles, he sold to his acquaintances. When people emigrated, these networks of subscribers were broken.

In general, emigration broke apart the opposition networks. In this case, emigration among revolutionaries highlights the "weakness of strong ties." Mark Granovetter explains that "the strength of a tie is a ... combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual

14 Ibid., p. 23.
confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize that tie."

In Poland, relations among people involved in oppositional activity was characterized by long hours, strong feelings of emotional intensity surrounding the ideological good of their activity, and the reciprocity of trust and confidentiality needed to insure the continuance of their anti-state activities. Covert activity was established on a system of strong trust and minimal networks. When the circle was broken, as when a participant emigrated, the ties between covert activists were broken. Thus, emigration of opposition activists led to the weakening of opposition networks. Those involved in the opposition could only see emigration as something destructive to the chances for a better nation. Emigration tore apart the collective good.

The moral authorities in Poland defined emigration as a collective act. The decision to emigrate, though acknowledged to be one of individual choice, was embedded in national issues and framed in the context of a moral decision. Religious and oppositional leaders especially have instructed Poles to place the collective good—i.e. the good of the nation—over the individual gains one may receive from emigrating. Conversations with some Polish refugees revealed that they have internalized these messages. Some Solidarity refugees admitted that perhaps all the money-collecting and banner-waving they were doing in America to help Poland was a way to assuage their feelings of guilt for having left their homeland. As one refugee said, "we came to America with the idea of what to do with ourselves, how to be helpful, or maybe, how to erase this shame we brought with us when we left Poland at a time when our friends were fighting." A press release sent out by the Polish American Congress about a conference between old and new Poles stated that "The Solidarity emigres have been burdened with a sense of guilt.... The emigrés have often felt that they were abandoning the cause they worked so hard for, and their colleagues in Poland have felt as if they were abandoned" (December, 1987). (I do not know who wrote this, Polish-Americans or Solidarity refugees.) A play written by a new Polish emigre, Hunting Cockroaches, touches on the issue of feeling guilt for having "left the revolution." One woman who emigrated chided these Poles who are active in America to help Poland. In 1989 she said, "If they are so concerned about Poland why did they leave.... Even for me, even though I am not politically involved, still I feel that maybe I should be in Poland. I am a Pole and the place for a Pole is in Poland."

Though many Solidarity refugees left Poland because they could no longer find a place for themselves and their families—occupationally, socially, or psychologically—the emigres felt that there was some wrongness to their leaving. Words like "abandoned," "desertion," "guilt," "shame" and

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"betrayal" reflect this feeling of wrongness. But this feeling of wrongness had not prevented them from leaving.

**Those Who Did Not Emigrate**

The first section of this paper looked at the social construction of emigration as a moral issue. Constructed in this way, emigration was no longer just a private decision involving a weighing of the negative and positive incentives attached to emigration, but emigration was an act that could potentially harm the nation. Poles were advised to consider the collective good before they emigrated. The second part of this paper explores the extent to which Poles thought about collective goods versus selective benefits in their decisions of whether to emigrate or not.

In order to understand how Poles thought about emigration in their private lives, I interviewed Poles in Poland who had thought about emigrating but had decided to remain in Poland. From conversations and interviews I had had with Poles who did emigrate, it was clear that the decision to emigrate was based on selective incentives. But what about Poles who did not emigrate? While selective incentives prompted Poles to emigrate, did the collective good keep Poles from emigrating? In brief, the answer is no.

In the summer of 1990 I interviewed 24 men and 5 women who were all members of a summer business seminar in Kraków, Poland. The respondents were well-educated (90% had received or were pursuing master's degrees). They ranged in age from 22 to 47 years old, with 48% of them in the 30s. Most of the respondents were married (76%) and had children (70%).

The respondents were asked if at any time in their life they thought about leaving Poland. The majority (76%) had at some point thought of leaving, but 24% said they never thought about it, and only 48% said they had seriously thought about it (for the others it was a passing thought or they intended to go abroad for a few years and then return.)

The three life incidents that surrounded their thoughts about emigrating were (1) life cycle transitions (e.g. finishing their education, in between jobs), (2) being abroad, and (3) historical situations (e.g. the imposition of martial law). Life cycles had more influence than historical situations in thinking about emigrating. Of those who thought about going, 40% were in a transitional period of their life, 28% were traveling or working in the West at the time they thought about emigrating, and 25% said they thought about it during the period of martial law in Poland (roughly 1982-1984). The most important transitional periods were finishing high school, or finishing the university. After graduating, many Poles looked around and did not see a place for themselves in Poland. As one man said, "It seemed to be like a horror living here. [There was] no future. I couldn't realize what I
was to do when I grow up. What am I to do?" One may be more likely to think about emigrating during life cycle transitional periods because of the absence of the negative incentive of career disruption. The less disruptive emigration would be to their personal and occupational lives, the more likely they were to think about emigrating. Those who thought about leaving during martial law (a period, we may assume, when the feelings of moral obligation to the nation were diminished), had decided not to emigrate because they were involved in careers or studies. There were only two people for whom a life cycle transitional period coincided with a historical transitional period, which would seem to afford the greatest potential for leaving. One of them had never been in the West before, he had no family members in the West and he could not obtain a visa to get abroad. The other one said that her personality was psychologically incompatible with emigration, calling herself "very domestic" and relating the tragedy of having to move from Warsaw to Kraków and how she returned every weekend for the first two months because she was homesick.

The reasons given for wanting to emigrate were related mostly to economic and occupational advantages. Economic reasons refer to lifestyle comforts: the ability to get an apartment, the ability to buy goods in a store, the absence of long queues, and the (perceived) efficiency of stores, transportation and communication systems and restaurants in the West. Some responses were:

* Living with parents, it was the reason to emigrate.

* In Poland you spend all your time to get some food, to rent a house, and for people its not a normal life, like abroad. I saw in Canada and Switzerland, they live a different way. They can go to the cinema. Here you have to count everything. I think the main problem is the job and the place to live.

* Just every time [in America], when you go to the bus, when you use metro, or in stores, you don't have to stand in line. I can not buy brown rice here [in Poland]. And I love brown rice. I can't go to a decent restaurant here, I must prepare food myself.

Occupational benefits to emigrating included the idea that they could advance and learn more in their professional fields, that occupational advances were based on merit, and that better work ethics in the West would make one's job more enjoyable. In general it was an attitude that there was some return on hard work, either in the way of better wages or improved knowledge, and that it would be easier (because of proper equipment and advanced technology) to do their jobs and advance in their fields. This feeling
was especially prevalent for people in academics, computers and business professionals.

Only three of the respondents said they wanted to emigrate because of political repression. The majority pointed to the positive selective incentives of improving the conditions of their life rather than abstract ideals of liberty and justice and a sense that the communist system was "wrong" or "unfair." Most expressed their opinion that the communist system was a failure, but this translated for them into an economic failure which affected their personal lives in that they could not get apartments, they could not easily buy goods, and they did not have the proper equipment to do their jobs. This concentration on economic and occupational rewards from emigrating was also evidenced in their answers to what they had perceived to be the benefits of emigrating. Only two people mentioned "increased freedom" and when asked to explain they said this meant they would be able to get visas more easily and that they could travel more freely around the globe. The majority saw the benefits as being a greater return on skills, and a better chance to compete their talents on a free market.

The ideal positive selective incentives made them want to emigrate, but the real negative incentives made them stay in Poland. In deciding whether to act upon their idea to emigrate, these Poles weighed the potential economic and occupational gains in the country they would immigrate to, against their occupational and social statuses as well as familial and social attachments that they had in Poland. In most cases, they thought that though their material conditions would be better in the West, they did not see themselves as being able to take full advantage of the economic and social systems. Those who had some contacts with Poles living abroad knew that emigres often had to take menial labor positions, that without a visa to work legally it was impossible to work in your field of expertise, and that though emigres had better houses and cars, Poles abroad were still immigrants and, in their words, "second class citizens." Many respondents (34%) mentioned something akin to the phrase in Polish "emigracja to deklasacja" that "emigration is de-classation," or status degradation. These people said they saw no future for themselves in the West, that their skills would not be convertible (e.g. a lawyer's legal skills), and that most likely they would have to take a low social and occupational position. Though economically they would have higher living standards relative to Poles in Poland, they would have lower social and occupational statuses relative to the native born citizens of the host country. Many mentioned this was especially true for European countries and that Poles chose to go to Australia, America and South Africa because they would have a better chance at attaining a higher status position. This is how they expressed it:
Last time I was thinking about emigrating I thought I would emigrate if I could work in my job, not going to Chicago and cleaning windows. I like my job very much and I would like to use it. If I go to Chicago after only one year of cleaning windows I could forget many things [I learned in my profession].

[Emigration means you] change your social position. When you go abroad you have to quickly take money, and you don't know anybody and it is difficult, and you have to work with your hands.

I met Poles in Greece waiting for permission to go to other countries, and they were in bad conditions, bad material conditions and psychological too. They worked any job.

In West Germany they work mainly in construction. For me it's not good. The money is very good, a lot of money, but that job for me is not interesting and I think it is difficult to get an interesting job because of language.

The first, it is impossible to do it legally. I can go if I will have work in my job and that it will be possible to come back to Poland if I want. Running away didn't interest us ever. Money is important but it's not all. If I have a job in my profession then I will learn something. I'm not interested in washing dishes. If I am running away I probably must wash dishes and nothing more. I don't want to do this.

In an ideal case, they would emigrate and work as engineers, architects and computer scientists, but considering a more realistic scenario they concluded that the only jobs available to them would be dish washing, window cleaning and construction work.

Poles are very status conscious and in weighing their decisions of whether or not to emigrate they thought of whether emigration would raise or lower their social status. The respondents were all highly educated people, and the majority (80%) also had parents who had professional or white-collar jobs. They belonged to a 'middle class' in Poland. Concluding that emigration would lower their status, they decided not to emigrate.

Another important factor in their decision not to emigrate was their attachments—cultural, social, familial and psychological. A majority of re-

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spondents (64%) said that they were unwilling or unable to break these attachments and this prevented them from emigrating. Included here are such things as: they were more familiar with the Polish language and culture, they had close ties to friends and family which emigration would sever; and they had psychological roots in Poland and did not think they were adaptable to a new culture.

* The reason that I didn't leave is because of my character: I like my friends, I like this place, I like Kraków. I don't want to leave my parents.

* When you decide to live abroad, to emigrate, you have no relatives or no family. I like my family, I'm family-oriented. This is the loss.

* You are cutting all your relations with your friends and family. This is the most important thing.

* My heart and my psychological structure is that I have to see some roots. The question of children is very strong for me, how can they be Swedish if I am not Swedish. And how can they be Polish if they are not living in Poland. That was important. Also, for religious reasons I stay here. The side of my faith, some level of it, is to be here.

* In Poland, now and for the next year we live very difficult lives and if we have the occasion to go to the land that has a high industry and gives us for our jobs 10 times more money than here, that is an interesting proposition. But when we are talking about it I told my wife, I from here, from Silesia. I know that it is more polluted. But I'm from here.

* It's not so easy to leave the country. Besides, there is your own language, own tradition, own history, books, everything. Everything you know. If you decide to leave your own country you have to learn from the beginning.

In addition, 28% said that they were involved in something they had already invested some time in. School, families, and the hope of getting an apartment kept some of them in Poland. People going to school wanted to finish their education, and people recently married or with young children said these relational involvements prevented them from emigrating. One person said that soon after he received his visa that allowed him to leave he
was notified that he would be getting an apartment soon. He said he had been waiting over ten years for an apartment and he decided to stay in Poland till he got that apartment and then decide if he wanted to leave or not.

Another 34% said that they did not leave because they could not get a visa or they had no familial or financial connections abroad which would help them. This is tied to the issue of not wanting to leave if they perceived emigration as a lowering of status. Having a visa which stated they could work, or family members that would help them assimilate and adjust in the new country would increase their chances of avoiding status degradation.

In discussing why they did not emigrate, or did not think about emigrating, 6 (20%) of the people interviewed listed something in the category that I call "national loyalty." (Three of them had thought about emigrating and the other three were people who had never considered emigrating.) These people made statements like "I am a Pole, I should stay in Poland" or used words like "morality," "patriotism," "altruism" or attachment to "historical Poland." Some said:

* I think it is better to stay here for me and for my country and for my children also. I always think that when I work good, when I am clever, it's good for my country. It's very little, but it's the most that I can give my country. My work is important for my country, not for another country.

* Now the attitude toward emigration is changed. Here in Poland we have such a big opportunity to do business, to live in a Western way, and to make really big money. I didn't believe that there could be such a big political change. It's a miracle for me. My parents didn't have this opportunity. So for me I have to do something here.

* Most important is that I grew up in this country so I feel that I have to serve it. My family is very strictly connected with Polish history. My family fought against the Russians and Germans. One of them was killed in Auschwitz. Also I have a debt to my parents, I have to help them, look after them.

* I have always been sure that it is my duty to spend my whole life in Poland. First, my father fought against the Germans. He was in the underground army fighting during the Second World War. Maybe my father's duty was to fight and my duty is to stay in Poland. Second, all my family lives very together in contact. Third, I remember in '83, in Częstochowa the Pope
said that it's our duty to stay here and keep our national values and our Catholic values.

In sum, though 20% of the people thought about issues of loyalty and duty, the majority of the responses (and they could list several reasons) revolved around issues of whether their lives really would be improved by emigrating. No person listed "national loyalty" as the only reason for not emigrating. The most general feeling was that the chance of status degradation, coupled with the severance of social and psychological attachments, made emigration an undesirable alternative. The issue of the collective good did not arise for 80% of the respondents when they discussed their personal decisions of whether to stay in Poland or to emigrate.

In contrast, though, when asked to express their feelings about their fellow countrymen who had emigrated, 38% mentioned collective good issues, saying that emigration hurt the nation. How emigration hurts the nation can take several forms. In reference to the Solidarity refugees, one person said that it was wrong for them to emigrate because they had made a commitment to Solidarity. This man referred to the emigration of these people as "desertion." Another said that by emigrating these people "played into the hands of the communist leaders," and the emigration drained leaders from the opposition, thereby weakening the opposition and inadvertently making the communist Party stronger. Others said that the emigration of educated people represented a brain drain which hurt the nation. They placed special emphasis on young people who emigrate soon after getting their degree. Several people said that because emigres take low social and occupational positions they present a negative image about Poland to the larger world and that they were "ashamed" of these Poles. Some of their responses were:

* Some persons can go abroad and emigrate but a lot of persons should stay here. Why must Poland be for the communists or other people from Russia, and we should go to another land . . . You know, I was educated by my parents and by my scout leaders which were very good persons, quite non-communists . . . We were educated in the meaning of patriotism, altruism, and doing something for other people.

* R: I think two kinds of people [emigrate]. One are the doctors and intelligentsia and the other are the very low [class]. So OK, the [lower class] go to buy something, [and do a] little work.
I: What do you think about doctors who emigrate?
R: I think its very bad because [doctors are] very good people for us and if they emigrate we don't have these people. The country needs intelligentsia.

I: And these lower people, if they emigrate?
R: [laughing] It's a problem for the country they go to.

Still, the majority (52%) felt that emigrating was a matter of individual choice, (even 30% of those who disparaged the emigres talked about emigration as a private choice.) They said:

* If someone wants to leave because he has better opportunity to do what he wants to do then he should leave.

* It's individual choice. For science workers, they haven't the possibility to look for a good job in Poland because we don't have a very good system or equipment. I understand that to be a good scientific worker would be impossible in Poland. I understand. But I am not a scientific worker, I am a businessman. It's possible to be in Poland for me. Every decision is individual.

* It's a very individual decision, it depends on the person. If they can't find a place here they will emigrate. But now, as I said before, as the situation in Poland becomes better, we can say we are free, so we can do things differently. But of course I said this is a private matter, if you want to go this is your business.

In summary, though most of the respondents felt emigration was a private matter, they also recognized the negative consequences that emigration posed to the nation as a whole. Emigration, for the most part, was talked about by these Poles as a personal decision, not a collective act. The most striking impression from these interviews was that for the people making the decision to emigrate, there was seldom any thought given to the morality of emigration. Instead the decision was based on whether or not emigration would improve their social standing, whether it would advance them in their occupation, and whether they could psychologically sever their attachments. The majority of the respondents used selective incentives to explain why they thought about leaving and why they eventually decided not to emigrate. In addition the benefits did not normally rest on abstract ideals like greater freedom and less repression, but more on the occupational and economical advantages of living in a free market system. It is interesting though that issues of duty to the nation came up more often when they discussed the emigration of others than when they discussed their own reasons.
for not emigrating. Morality was more often used as a basis for judging others than as a basis for decision-making.

In general, the construction of emigration as a moral issue concerning the collective good of national duty had not been internalized by the majority of the respondents in this sample. The fact that emigration had been turned into a moral issue even annoyed several of the respondents. One woman to whom I had mentioned this issue of morality angrily said:

[Emigration] is very serious problem, but I think many people in other countries, for example, in England, if they want to go to South Africa nobody asks them about morality. If you want to live in Spain or some other country nobody asks you about your morality because you live in the United States. I think everyone has their own decision about what country they want to live in. And it’s not about morality, because I could love my country, OK, but, for example, I don’t like the climate and I want to stay in another country.

Conclusion

If the decision to emigrate is based on selective incentives, then what explains the differences between those who did emigrate and those who stayed behind? How does this group of Poles that did not emigrate differ from the Poles that did emigrate? I would suggest that three important factors influence the decision to emigrate: information about the West, material conditions and social status.

(1) A rational actor model is dependent on the idea that people have sufficient information to make an accurate cost/benefit analysis. Those people who lack adequate or accurate information are more likely to make a bad decision, meaning they may misjudge costs and benefits. Immigrants have often been accused of making an inflated assessment of the benefits of immigrating to the West. One cliche used to describe this in the America is to say that immigrants think in America “the streets are paved with gold.” A less exaggerated idea is that in the West everyone has the same opportunities, and that given hard work and a good mind, one could do anything and become anyone. Those with more accurate information about the immigrant's opportunities in the West are more likely to know that the occupational opportunities for immigrants whose skills are not transferable and who do not speak the host country language are minimal. In this sample, most respondents had knowledge about and contact with the Western world, especially Europe: 86% of the respondents had vacationed and/or worked in the West (legally or illegally) at some time in their live; and 75% had some
member of their extended or immediate family member living abroad. And they used this knowledge to explain why they did not act upon their desire to emigrate. As some of the above quotes demonstrate, they told stories about immigrants who were window washers and dish washers, to demonstrate that they knew the occupational opportunities were limited for immigrants.

(2) Many immigrants I talked to in Chicago said that one reason they emigrated was because the material conditions were unbearable in Poland (e.g. they could not get an apartment or they could not buy toilet paper.) On a macro level the economy in Poland was in shambles. But there were individual variations in people's material living conditions. We can assume that the worse their material conditions were the more likely they were to emigrate. One of the biggest problems in Poland in the late 1970s and 1980s was the extreme housing shortage. Estimates were that families had to wait 15-20 years to get their own apartment. This meant that young adults and married couples often had to live with their parents in small 2-3 room apartments. In this sample, though, at least 50% of the respondents owned their own houses or apartments, and only 17% were still living with their parents, and of those living with their parents only one was married.

(3) Most of the Poles in this study conceded that if they moved to the West they would have more material benefits—cars, brown rice, stereos, clothes, etc. The second factor above argues that those with worst material conditions were likely to be motivated by this positive incentive. But they also argued that they knew that these material items would come at a cost to them, and that cost was a lower occupational status. Thus, having a low status position in Poland reduced the costs of emigrating. Even if a woman could not buy a car and had to live with three generations of relatives crammed into a two bedroom apartment, she may still have her status as a university professor or physician. To emigrate would mean she could exchange her elite status for a bungalow and a Ford. It seems sensible then to assume that those with lower statuses in Poland were more likely to emigrate. As mentioned, the sample represented Poles with higher educations from middle class backgrounds and they were aware the emigration would lead to a lowering of their social status, even if it did raise their economic status.

Social status may also explain why many Solidarity activists emigrated. In Poland the communist nomenklatura occupied most leadership positions, especially in the political, industrial and market spheres. If one did not become a member of the Party they could not make use of this status system. An alternative status system existed in the remnants of the
old Szlachta, or intelligentsia or petty nobility. Familial ties to aristocracy are still maintained in Poland. A taxi driver once proudly introduced himself to me as a Duke, (his title was confirmed by my friends). Although this family heritage status was not marketable in the economic or political spheres it did bring a sort of parochial prestige. The Solidarity trade union provided a third status structure. The managerial positions in Solidarity, that is people who became elected union officials in factories or at the local and regional level, were occupied mostly by young men in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, with master's degrees, who found legitimate positions of prestige for themselves within the trade union. Their positions provided them with social and occupational status. When martial law was imposed and the trade union de-legalized, this system collapsed and they were stripped of their status and blacklisted from jobs. At this point many chose to emigrate. An activist who stayed in Poland described the refugees’ decisions to emigrate in this way:

They rose very quickly to prominent places within Solidarity, they had titles, prestige and respect and when they spoke many people listened.... They rose too quickly and then couldn't adjust when they lost their jobs, they couldn't wait, they couldn't struggle through the bad parts. For them, since they became active, everything was on the up, everything was good and exciting, even in prison there was this energy, this invigorating atmosphere, but once they got out and there was no active union and they couldn't get jobs, they just abandoned their countrymen, their workers that trusted them.

I recognize that political refugees emigrate for different reasons than non-refugees emigrate or choose not to emigrate. The Poles in this sample were in general not opposition activists, although 80% had some involvement with Solidarity and the opposition, and one man's opposition activities resulted in spending some time in jail.

These three factors—information, material conditions, and status—do not exhaust all the factors which affect one's decision to emigrate. Many emigres had realistic knowledge about the immigrant's life in the West, their material conditions were not so awful, and they had high status positions in Poland, yet still they chose to emigrate. They may have believed that the immigrants' occupational restrictions and status degradation were caused by the failings of individuals and not the structure of a capitalist system. And there are success stories of emigres who have mastered the language and found high status occupations for themselves in the West. These stories may have encouraged others to think that they could break the stereotype of the window-washing immigrant.
In addition, it is wrong to assume that all people view the cost/benefit analysis of emigration as a tradeoff between economic benefits and status costs. Besides economic benefits, Poles have emigrated to the West for the benefits of the increased freedom of expression in a democratic society and for the, as they defined it, rationality of a free market system. Poles have told me that the psychological costs of living in a repressive communist system drove them into exile. Others left because they had a spouse or parent living abroad with whom they wanted to live. And others, many others, have stayed in Poland because they could not obtain a visa that would allow them to live and work legally in a Western country.

Finally, there are a large number of people, especially among those who come on tourist visas, who do not so much make the decision to leave their homeland as the decision not to return to their homeland. In this case, a whole different set of variables influences their decisions, among them, how well they have assimilated in the new country and whether they have been successful occupationally and economically in the new country. Some people never force the decision and live each day wondering if they are going back or staying. In one survey I conducted of 464 Polish emigres living in Chicago, only 4% said they planned, for sure, to stay in America. The other 96%, half of whom had temporary visas and the other half of whom had permanent residency (nine of them had become United State's citizens), said they were uncertain of whether they would return to Poland or stay in America. The decision of whether to return home is very different than the decision one makes, while sitting in Poland, to leave the home country and begin life over again in a new land.