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## The Role of the State in Contemporary Polish Political Migration and Return Migration

**Abstract:** The state regulates the movement of people across international borders and manufactures motivations for political migration and return migration. A focus on the state helps explicate the macro-level political context within which micro-level biographic choices are made. Understanding the architecture and ideology of state policies can help explain why, where, and when people decide to migrate. In this paper, I first analyze the state policies in the latter half of the twentieth century that shaped the political migration stream from Poland to the United States. Then, drawing from oral histories with political migrants from the Solidarity era who returned to Poland after 1989, I illustrate how the state shaped their migration decisions – both the decision to leave Poland and the decision to return.

**Keywords:** migration, state policies, political migration, return migration, migration decisions

### Introduction

The state regulates the movement of people across international borders and manufactures motivations for political migration and return migration. A focus on the state helps explicate the macro-level political context within which micro-level biographic choices are made. State policies operate as barriers and filters determining who leaves, who arrives, and who returns. Moreover, the state owns the means of repression that create the push factors of political migration. Political migration is the general term for people fleeing their country of origin because of fear of persecution. In this paper, I first analyze U.S. and Polish policies in the latter half of the twentieth century and then draw on preliminary data collected from oral histories with political migrants from the Solidarity era who returned to Poland after 1989, to understand how the state shaped their migration – both the leaving and the returning.

Between May 2014 and June 2016, I collected the oral histories of ten political migrants: eight men and two women who were born between 1939 and 1960.<sup>1</sup> The interview sessions ranged from 75 minutes to over five hours (in multiple

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<sup>1</sup> This study was approved by the Internal Review Board at Case Western Reserve University, IRB-2014-811. I originally met three of the narrators in Chicago in the 1980s while working on my dissertation, *Emigrés and Ethnics: Patterns of Cooperation between New and*

sessions). Six respondents were officially members of the Solidarity trade union (*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy "Solidarność"*) and the others supported Solidarity but were not members of the union because their occupation or work site was not unionized. For example, Wiktor could not be a member of the union because he was management, yet he was labeled by the Polish communist government as an "extremist" and interned for four months. Similarly, Maciej was a prominent journalist who left his job, he said, on "December '81, when Martial Law was imposed. I started to drive a cab because I didn't want to be part of the system." While never interned, state officials harassed him, he said, because he was "well known, and driving a cab was sort of symbolic. I was really visible, and they [government officials] didn't like it." He said that several times "people jumped into my cab and tried to persuade me to quit this job." They gave him "warnings," told him what he was doing was "stupid," and one state agent said: "We can make your life miserable." And they did, so he and his family left Poland in 1984.

The state definition of a political migrant was determined by the receiving country. Six of them applied for refugee status at foreign embassies in Poland. Those interned or listed as "extremists" by the communist government had their refugee applications processed easily. The four others were outside of Poland when they applied for refugee or asylee status. Nine of the political migrants returned to Poland after the political-economic transformation that began in 1989. To return means they did not think of themselves as visitors but as living permanently in Poland.

### Political Migrants and U.S. Policies

Political migrants were first admitted into the U.S. in 1946. Between 1946 and 1990, a total of 2,471,628 refugees and asylees were granted lawful permanent resident status in the United States, and eight percent (202,820) came from Poland.<sup>2</sup> People displaced from their homelands because of political oppression are legally allowed to enter or stay in the U.S. in one of three ways: 1) as refugees, granted to those residing outside of their country of origin (with some exceptions); 2) as asylees, granted to those already living in the U.S.; and 3) as parolees, a temporary status that can later be revoked if conditions in their home country improve. While these policies for resettling people who have been displaced because of political oppression in the countries of origin are often constructed as humanitarian endeavors, scholars

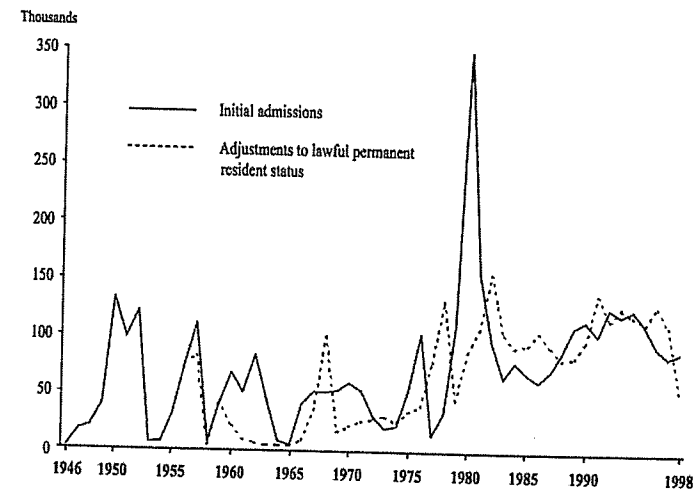
*Established Organizations in Chicago's Polish Community* (Northwestern University, 1992). Unless otherwise specified, all quotes come from the oral history interviews.

2 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1990. U.S. GPO: Washington, D.C. 1991, 109.

generally agree that the process of deciding who is a political migrant "has been driven by foreign policy as opposed to humanitarian concerns."<sup>3</sup>

From post-WWII to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, U.S. refugee policy heavily favored those fleeing persecution from communist countries, illustrated by spikes in admissions following conflicts in Hungary, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Soviet Union, Poland, and Afghanistan (see Table 1). The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allowed in over 400,000 Europeans fleeing fascist or communist regimes; the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 admitted another 205,000 refugees from communist-dominated regions; 15,000 Hungarians were paroled in 1956 after the uprising; almost a half a million Cubans were paroled over a thirty-year period after the 1959 revolution; and roughly 130,000 Vietnamese were paroled after the fall of Saigon in 1975.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1: Refugee and Asylee Initial Admissions and Adjustments to Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1946–98



Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1998, U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 2000, Chart F.

- 3 Laura Murray-Tjan, "Conditional Admission and Other Mysteries: Setting the Record Straight on the 'Admission' Status of Refugees and Asylees," *N.Y.U. Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2014), 44.
- 4 Ibid., 45, 48; *Statistical Yearbook*, 1990, 108. Until 2000, over half of all political migrants allowed into the U.S. came from three countries: Vietnam (19%), Cuba (18%), and the Soviet Union (16%). Ruth Ellen Wasem, "U.S. Immigration Policy on Asylum Seekers," CRS Report for Congress, 2005, 3. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32621.pdf>.

The 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 created a special category for refugees. This seventh (and last) preference was allotted six percent of the quota slots.<sup>5</sup> The Refugee Act of 1980 eliminated the seventh preference and created the first systematic process for admitting and resettling people fleeing political persecution. The 1980 Act adopted the definition of "refugee" set forth in the 1967 United Nations Protocol on Refugees. This protocol established a geographically and politically neutral definition of a refugee as a person outside their country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution. While this definition is seemingly neutral, there is wide room for interpreting what is considered a "well-founded fear" and what is considered "persecution."<sup>6</sup>

The 1980 Act also made a clear distinction between refugee and asylum status. The asylee could apply for political status while in the U.S., and this status could be terminated if the conditions in the country of origin changed and the fear of persecution no longer was present. This act also allowed for certain refugees to have their applications processed in the country of origin. Refugees were not given legal permanent resident (LPR) status until they were in the U.S. for a year; and asylees could have their status adjusted one year after their asylum was granted. Under the 1980 Act, provisions were also made to process a growing backlog of asylees. Up to 5,000 of the slots for refugees were to be used to give LPR status to asylees (and their families) who had been in the U.S. for the mandatory one year after receiving asylum. These additional slots, however, were insufficient and the number of asylees waiting for LPR grew. By 1986, there was also a fear that many asylees from Eastern Europe might not receive LPR status because improving political and human rights in their native countries would make them ineligible to qualify as refugees.<sup>7</sup> The backlog was eventually resolved by changes implemented in the Immigration Act of 1990 that raised the ceiling to 10,000, exempted asylees who applied for LPR before June 1, 1990 from numerical limits, and gave status to those who had qualified as of November 29, 1990 but were "unable to obtain it because of the prior numerical limits and improved country conditions."<sup>8</sup>

Through this policy we see the U.S. circumventing its own laws to allow in Eastern Europeans; and Poles benefitted from this circumvention. According to the spirit of the law, after 1989, these asylees should have been returned to Poland

5 The seventh preference was reserved for refugees from the Eastern Hemisphere until amendments to the act in 1976 extended it to the Western Hemisphere.

6 Wasem, *U.S. Immigration Policy*..., 7.

7 Ibid., 3.

8 Ibid., 4.

or remained on temporary status as conditions looked to be improving in Poland. Ironically, as the U.S. was still admitting asylees to LPR status (and admitting Polish refugees), some of the refugees were already returning to Poland to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the new economic and social freedoms.

In sum, the U.S. refugee policy created during the Cold War favored people fleeing communist countries. To accommodate these political migrants, the definition of "persecuted" included not only threats to life, imprisonment, and loss of homes and livelihood, but also the general loss of freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of movement. For example, Ryszard was never officially involved with Solidarity but when Martial Law was imposed he left Poland. When he applied for refugee status, he said:

I had to tell them what was the reasons why I do not want to go back. Lack of freedom. General lack of freedom, 'cause at this time I was writing songs and they would not let me to write what I wanted to say. They would tell me: "Change this, change this." There was a communist party clerk, and he was saying, "This is not right. This is not. Change this." So. Censorship.

His application was accepted and he was admitted as a refugee into the U.S.

During the 1980s when tens of thousands of Poles were given refugee and asylee status, many people fleeing bloody turmoil and oppressive dictators in Central America were denied.<sup>9</sup> Because the U.S. was supporting the governments in El Salvador and Guatemala, the state did not characterize those seeking admission into the U.S. as political migrants. As Susan Gzesh writes:

Characterizing the Salvadorans and Guatemalans as "economic migrants," the Reagan administration denied that the Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments had violated human rights. As a result, approval rates for Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum cases were under three percent in 1984. In the same year, the approval rate for Iranians was 60 percent, 40 percent for Afghans fleeing the Soviet invasion, and 32 percent for Poles.<sup>10</sup>

This disparity in approval rates lends support to the argument that U.S. state policy was based more on political than humanitarian considerations. This helps to explain how Poles could receive refugee status on such grounds as artistic censorship, as Ryszard claims. The U.S. more tightly controls its Southern borders, leaving those fleeing persecution from Latin American countries at a disadvantage while favoring political migrants from the Soviet bloc and Soviet aggression.

9 Susan Gzesh, *Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era*, Migration Policy Institute, April 1, 2006. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-americans-and-asylum-policy-reagan-era>.

10 Ibid.

Maciej, the journalist/cab driver, came to the U.S. on a professional exchange program in 1984. He was invited to Stanford University, but, Maciej laughs, "it was funny because I was legally a cab driver, so there was no exchange between cab drivers." That fact was overlooked by the state. He and his wife and two children were in the U.S. three years on this professional exchange visa before they applied for asylum, and got it easily. Maciej said:

I went to the Immigration Office in Chicago and I stood in the line of hundreds of Latino people. [At that time] it was not very easy to get asylum but I had good credentials. They called me immediately for interview, and I brought all this [documentation] because you need to show that you are in conflict with the political system. So I showed them all these pieces [articles published in U.S. newspapers and periodicals] and they gave us asylum immediately.

While he did not fear physical violence, his livelihood was threatened because of his outspoken criticism of the system. Yet, the salient factor was that he was in conflict with a political system that the U.S. did not support.

While cases like Ryszard and Maciej may not represent the majority of refugees, they were also not isolated cases. While doing fieldwork on politically active migrants in Chicago during the 1980s, I heard similar stories.<sup>11</sup> One man said the only proof he needed to convert his student visa into asylee status was a picture of himself at a demonstration holding a sign in support of Solidarity. In contrast, a large number of the Polish refugees who arrived in the U.S. between 1982 and 1989 had been imprisoned or harassed by the Polish communist state.

### Martial Law and "Pro-Exit" State Policy

Martial Law, imposed December 13, 1981, was a state-level turning point that reverberated as a life course turning point for these political migrants. Amnesty International reported that by December 1982, over 10,000 individuals had spent some time in internment; and by 1983, already 3,500 activists and their families had emigrated: over 1,000 to the U.S., 900 to France, 900 to West Germany, 370 to Canada, 350 to Sweden, and 60 to Australia.<sup>12</sup> The state oppression of Solidarity created the circumstances that opened the doors to the Western receiving states.

- 11 Mary Patrice Erdmans, *Émigrés and Ethnicity: Patterns of Cooperation Between New and Established Organizations in Chicago's Polish Community*, PhD Dissertation. Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University, 1992.
- 12 *Amnesty International Reports*. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1983.

Since 1960, the vast majority of Polish refugees arrived in the U.S. after Martial Law (see Table 2). Given that U.S. policy favored people fleeing communist countries, what explains the fact that fewer than 10,000 Poles were admitted as political migrants in the 1960s and 1970s? This is in part explained by the restrictive exit policies of the Polish state. As Dariusz Stola notes, during communist times Poland was a "kraj bez wyjścia" or a "a country with no exit."<sup>13</sup> While the "obsessive control of and systematic restrictions on international mobility" eased up somewhat in the 1970s as compared to the Stalinist years, the Polish government still controlled passports, and any trip outside the Soviet bloc required Poles to apply for a passport from the state.<sup>14</sup> Obtaining a passport for travel to countries like West Germany or the U.S. were the most difficult.

Table 2: Polish Refugees and Asylees Granted Permanent Resident Status, 1961–1992

Years	Number	Percent
1961–70	3,197	6.6%
1971–80	5,882	12.1%
1981–90	33,889	69.6%
1991–92	5,717	11.7%
TOTAL	48,685	100.0%

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1990, Table 34, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1991; *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1993, Table 33. U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1994.

In the early months of Martial Law, the Polish government returned to its extreme "no-exit" policy,<sup>15</sup> but in the spring of 1982 the state opened its borders in an effort to empty their jails and push out dissidents by making passports readily available to members of the opposition. Between 1982 and 1989, over 33,000 Polish refugees arrived in the U.S. (see Table 3). The largest year for admissions was 1982, when over 6,000 refugees arrived. The numbers leveled out to under 4,000 a year in the later half of the decade, and dropped significantly after 1989.

- 13 Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polska 1949–1989*. Warszawa: IPN, ISP PAN 2010.
- 14 Dariusz Stola, "Opening a Non-exit State: The Passport Policy of Communist Poland, 1949–1980," *East European Politics & Societies* 29, no. 1, 2015, 96.
- 15 Ibid.

Between 1991 and 1997, only 565 Poles arrived as refugees (most in 1991–1992, with only six arrivals in 1997).<sup>16</sup>

Table 3: Polish Political Migrants to the U.S., 1982–1990

	Refugee Arrivals into the U.S.
1982	6,312
1983	5,520
1984	3,794
1985	2,806
1986	3,617
1987	3,734
1988	3,670
1989	3,792
1990	1,883
TOTAL	35,128

Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, U.S. GPO: Washington, D.C. Refugee arrivals into the U.S., 1988 (Table 26), 1990 (Table 27).

The prior “no-exit” restrictive state policy helps to explain why many opposition activists took advantage of the chance to migrate provided to them not only by the Western states that offered them refuge, but also by the Polish state that gave them their passports to exit. While the prior “no-exit” policy was a form of social control that tightly regulated the border, the “pro-exit” policy implemented in 1982 was also a form of social control, one that attempted to control the opposition in Poland by pushing them out of the country. For the roughly 10,000 activists interned in those first days of Martial Law, most of those who left did so months or even years after they were released from prison, though some had been offered a ‘get out of jail free card’ if they agreed to leave Poland. By early 1982, the internees reported that they knew General Jaruzelski had announced that anyone interned who wanted to emigrate would have the chance. Andrzej Paczkowski writes:

16 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1997. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998, 83.

In March 1982, the SB began trying on quite a large scale to convince Solidarity and opposition activists to emigrate, and they publicized it in the press. The aim was, above all, to rid the country of individuals who were a threat to the system ... Permission to leave the country constituted a very serious temptation, even just granted a passport was the dream of millions of Poles.... Information spread quickly throughout Poland that most Western countries would grant new immigrants from Poland political asylum or permanent residency with few problems, and would even provide them with financial assistance and help in finding a job.<sup>17</sup>

Narrators in my study confirm this coercive state-assisted migration policy. Jarek, an internee who later emigrated, described the atmosphere in prison when they heard that they were being allowed to emigrate, and that Western countries would assist them.

There started to be a tremendous discussion in jail. Some people had a really hard time in jail. And for them, this notion they could change their position, they are now in jail but it depends on only their simple decision, and they can go to somewhere like California. Nobody knew how long we would be in jail. Some people were very pessimistic and making statements that we will probably be jailed for ten years.<sup>18</sup>

This political migration stream was supported by both the sending and receiving states. It is one of the most explicit example of the states’ role in political migration – and it involved multiple states as the Polish state gave them permission to leave and the Western states gave them permission to arrive.

Once released from prison, the incentives to emigrate were amplified. Many internees were blacklisted and could not get a job. Moreover, they could no longer continue their oppositional activities because Solidarity had been banned and the general public during the state of war was in fear mode.<sup>19</sup> Jarek said that he left one year after being released from internment because he and his wife were blacklisted and he could not engage in any oppositional activities. They were living on the largesse of the family and friends, which was humiliating for him: “I was asking my Uncle to hire me and he said, ‘Listen. I can give you every month equivalent your monthly salary. Just don’t ask me to employ you.’ That was the

17 Andrzej Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980–1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe*. Translated by C. Manetti. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015, 101.

18 Mary Patrice Erdmans, *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnicities in Polish Chicago, 1976–1990*. University Park: Penn State Press, 1998, 66.

19 Ibid., 65–71; Paczkowski, *Revolution and ...*, 102.

quite typical answer, and he was on my side, of course."<sup>20</sup> Jarek also talked about his inability to continue his political activities: "Opole was a very small town and people are scared to death... [they] would not meet my eyes on the street." The inability to find work, the continued harassment by the police, the limitations on oppositional activities, and the constant state of fear were integral to the oral histories of the internees who had been active members in Solidarity.

Roughly one-fifth of the 10,000 Solidarity activists interned after Martial Law emigrated.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 1982, the Polish state had granted permission to leave to 4,385 people (1,247 were internees), and the state issued passports to 921 internees and 165 people charged with "conducting hostile political activities."<sup>22</sup> The state was also issuing passports to family members of these activists – a change in the routines of the communist state that in the past often restricted passports to one member of the family, forcing the remaining members to stay in Poland as an incentive for the migrant to return.<sup>23</sup> The state policy after Martial Law was one that encouraged migration and it targeted the leaders of Solidarity: one-third of the members of the National Commission of Solidarity were given permission to leave as were hundreds of members of regional boards.<sup>24</sup>

It was not only the internees who wanted to leave. For many, the introduction of Martial Law was a watershed event that led to an alteration of their life course. In their oral histories, December 13 was a day seared in their memories, the day they decided they could no longer live in Poland. Wiktor described that day:

On Sunday the 13th, I took my car, a little Fiat, and I rode around city. I saw those times and all those armaments and I came back [home]. A friend of mine came. We drank a half of liter or vodka and we decided, "That's it. Enough. ENOUGH." I could [depart legally] because I could always call on my being Jewish. Any time I could, but it never came to me [before]. The Martial Law made it. I would never depart from Poland, if not for Martial Law.

As early as 1950, the Polish state had established the "Israeli Option" for Jews, supported by assistance from Israel.<sup>25</sup> It was not until Martial Law, however, that Wiktor chose to exit Poland.

20 See also Paczkowski, *Revolution and ...*, 102. He writes: "The fact that so many people agreed to emigrate may attest to a lower motivation to engage in trade union (or political activities) after the imposition of Martial Law, when the degree of risk was higher."

21 Ibid., 102. For data on Solidarity emigration, A. Paczkowski cites Stola, *Kraj bez ...*, 315–322.

22 Paczkowski, *Revolution and ...*, 102.

23 Stola, *Opening a Non-exit...*

24 Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, 102.

25 Stola, *Opening a Non-exit...*

Ryszard expressed a similar breaking point on that Sunday in December when tanks swarmed the streets of his Silesian city, curfews were imposed, Solidarity was declared illegal, and the state imposed a state of war.

I turned on TV and I'd seen General Jaruzelski saying, "This is the end of the Solidarity," and I said "No." I was 21. I do not want to live in a country where generals are telling us what we should do. So this was the first moment I decided to leave Poland, and after two months I was not in Poland anymore.

He said that until that day, he had not thought about trying to emigrate.

While the Polish state created the reason for migration and opened the border for the oppositional activists to exit, for people like Ryszard the ability to migrate permanently depended on Western states opening their borders to admit them. And many countries were willing to accept Polish refugees – so many that the narrators talked about the choices they had about where to resettle. Ryszard said: "At one moment I had three countries that wanted me as a refugee – Australia, Canada and the United States. I decided, because of music, United States." Wiktor said: "I could go anywhere. I could go to Switzerland. In that wave of immigrants, we could go anywhere. All countries were accepting. Even to Germany."

By 1984, however, they had concerns that the Western doors would be closing, especially the door to the U.S. As Jarek described:

One of my friends with whom I was in prison had a mother who worked for American Embassy and she said, "You know guys, you have to be fast in action." It was the first moment I started to think maybe, Okay, because now I have a choice still. You know foreign embassies are still asking but maybe there will be a moment when maybe Americans will stop admitting people.

Shortly thereafter, Jarek took advantage of the U.S. invitation and left.

In sum, the role of the state in political migration is multifaceted. First, the Polish state created the reason for the desire to emigrate. Second, the Polish state created the possibility to emigrate by relaxing their no-exit policy and encouraging the departure of dissidents. Finally, Western states such as the United States, West Germany, France, Canada, and Australia created the possibility for migration by offering a place for resettlement on a permanent basis. These states provided not only admission but also material assistance in the resettlement process. In the United States, for example, refugees received educational and employment assistance as well as housing, health care, and food assistance.<sup>26</sup>

26 Donald Cichon, Elzbieta Godziak, and Jane Grover, *The Economic and Social Development of Non-Southeast Asian Refugees*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1986.

## The Role of the State in Return Migration

The state facilitated their return by providing both money and opportunities for international exchanges and employment after the collapse of the communist state in 1989. Opportunities for new ventures were abundant during the period of economic restructuring.<sup>27</sup> The educated urban population was best positioned to take advantage of new business initiatives, to get jobs in new technology arenas (e.g., computers and telecommunications), to apply for grants and seed money provided by the United States, Sweden and Germany, and to secure managerial, skilled and unskilled positions in private corporations and international and U.S. state organizations and NGOs. This was especially true for Poles who had international experience, were multi-lingual, had connections with foreign governments and private industries – that is, the population of Solidarity refugees.

Polish leaders also tried to persuade its citizens to come home. When Lech Walesa visited the U.S. in November 1989, he specifically invited Poles who had emigrated to return to Poland and help rebuild the economy. At a rally in Chicago he said, "Remember, the door is open to you all to return."<sup>28</sup> During that visit Walesa also met with a newly formed organization of mostly political migrants called the Polish American Economic Forum. This organization was designed to promote investment in Poland's new economy; and Walesa and other new political leaders in Poland, who appeared at Forum's inaugural convention, encouraged them to invest and become a part of the new Poland.<sup>29</sup>

Polish and American state officials and organizations operated on the assumption that repatriating Polish migrants would provide Poland with much-needed skills and experience. One of the problems Poland faced in developing its economic infrastructure was a shortage of expertise related to free-market commercial enterprises. Efforts were made to transfer this knowledge to Poland. In 1989, the U.S. Congress

27 Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, "An Economic System and Group Interests," in Władysław W. Adamski, ed., *Societal Conflict and Systemic Change: The Case of Poland, 1980–1992*. Warszawa: IFIS Publishers, 1993, 108.

28 N. A. Lewis, "Chicago's Polish Americans Hail Walesa with a Rally," *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1989, 16.

29 Mary Patrice Erdmans, "Recent Political Action on Behalf of Poland: The Interrelationships among Polonia's Cohorts 1978–1990," Chapter 8 in Helena Znaniecka Lopata's *Polish Americans, Second, Revised Edition*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994, 236–237.

approved a \$852 million aid package to Poland.<sup>30</sup> The Support for Eastern European Democracy (SEED) Act of 1989 outlined America's international aid program for Poland and allocated more than \$10 million to be spent on teaching Poles commercial, entrepreneurial, financial, scientific, and technical skills needed to compete in a free-market system. Organizations like the U.S. Agency for International Development implemented programs in Poland designed to teach these skills. The United Nations promoted the Umbrella Project to send expatriates back to Poland to train managers and bankers. Paul Zeiber president of the Institute for the Analysis of Eastern Markets in Hamburg said in April 1989: "The sole chance I see for Poland is the opening these changes provide for large amount of private investment, including private investment from émigré Poles."<sup>31</sup>

One Polish asylee in Chicago drafted a proposal called the "Reverse Immigration Project" to train Polish migrants and help them find jobs in Poland. They proposed developing a program to train migrants "who have a clear intention of returning to Poland to start a small business or those who want to work as a manager in existing Polish or foreign firms" (underline in original).<sup>32</sup> While the program never materialized, the grant proposal encapsulates the belief that the migrants were ideal candidates to return to Poland to help rebuild the nation, and this participation in the economic restructuring of Poland was seen as a national duty and not simply an economic opportunity.<sup>33</sup>

## Return Solidarity Refugees

In a preliminary analysis of the oral histories, three themes emerged regarding their return to Poland. The first is that the return to Poland was a process – one that took place in stages as they negotiated work, family needs, and the psychological decision of returning. Second, a push-pull dynamic was evident for some – the push was that they had not found success in the U.S. and the pull was the new opportunities in Poland. Third, "return" was an ambiguous term as many wanted to live in both Poland and abroad in a "50–50" lifestyle.

30 The bill provided funding to assist Poland's private sector economy, stabilize its currency, encourage academic and cultural exchanges, train Polish managers in Western business techniques, and help to reduce air pollution among other problems.

31 Serge Schmemmann, "Polish agreement is seen as putting the economic ball in the West's Court," *New York Times*, April 9, 1989, 3.

32 Personal files.

33 On this point of economic activity as a form of political activity see Erdmans, *Opposite Poles...*, 173–174.



## Remigration as a Process

Even before they returned permanently in the mid-1990s and later, the political migrants had begun visiting Poland in early 1989. Ryszard said, about returning:

It was a process. It took me about five years. I decide after ten years of not being in Poland, I came here [to Poland] to look to see it from the inside. I stayed for two months and I was, "Yes, I'm coming back," but there was nobody waiting there to give me a job, so I had to create a situation that I would call a job here. Living in Chicago, I started to promote a music band globally, this took me two, three years, and then all of a sudden we are having a hit. So I decided: "Time to move. I'm ready. I have a job." Not only as music promoter, I started a music company here, producing CDs, tapes.

Today he has his own label with copyrights to over 5,000 songs. He also has investments in several businesses in Warsaw where he lives with his family.

Maciej first returned to Poland in 1989 but did not return permanently until 2005, when his family responsibilities and work opportunities coalesced. As he describes: "In the fall of '89, I got an offer from Radio Free Europe (RFE) to work in Warsaw. So I decided to get this job, and I came to Poland. I had no American citizenship and no Poland passport, so I came to Poland with this white travel document. It was late '89, and after several months in Munich, we opened the Bureau [in Warsaw]." Unfortunately, neither his wife nor his children (nor his mother-in-law) wanted to return to Poland at that time. He negotiated with RFE to get a transfer to the U.S., and in 1992, he secured a position in Washington, D.C. In 1994, he received U.S. citizenship and took a job at Voice of America, where he worked for six years. In 2000, he took over as editor-in-chief of *Nowy Dziennik* (the largest Polish-language newspaper in the U.S.), where he stayed for five years. During this time, he said, "on a regular basis I was getting some offers here in Poland." At one point, he was offered a position that he rejected in what he called the "publically owned or politicians-owned commercial television."

It was in the news that they offered me the job and few days later, the boss of this television called me in New York and said, "I learned that you are considering your return to Poland." I said, "Yes. Now maybe." And he wanted me to decide quickly, and it was a good offer in the right moment since we were not exactly sure what to do next – return to Poland or maybe go to Florida.

From his first job in Poland in 1989, it took him more than 15 years before he returned to Poland permanently. In his narrative, he returned not because he was unsuccessful in the U.S., but because he could be more successful in Poland. Also, at that point his children were out of college and his wife, who had started working on several projects in Poland, was ready to return.

What is important in Ryszard and Maciej's stories is that they were both successful in the U.S. Ryszard was a successful music promoter and Maciej was a successful journalist. For them, remigration was not as much about being "pushed" out of the U.S. because of low status attainment but being "pulled" back to Poland because of the promise of higher status attainment.

## Push-Pull Factors of Remigration

In contrast to the previous two stories, in the next two, the pull of opportunities in Poland was coupled with stalled careers in the U.S. The pull came from the private sector as well as U.S. and international organizations (e.g., USAID and the World Bank). Jarek's story illustrates these push and pull factors. He had been the host of a radio program in Chicago since 1987, but by the early 1990s he was having problems because of conflicts with the new owner of the station, who was also one of his biggest advertising sponsors. At the same time that his career in Chicago was spiraling downward, he was getting offers from Poland.

Many attempts in Chicago with a group of my collaborating business people collapsed, and I started to think about Poland then. One of my friends called me saying "Jarek, I had a call from my friend from Poland who says that there is a radio station in Szczecin, and they want an investor, and would you be interested" and I started to think about it. I visited Szczecin in '96 and realized that it's not bad. And since '97, I'm in Poland.

He did not initially intend to stay in Poland, but he was pulled into the new political scene, and he was attracted to staying in Poland because his expertise was recognized.

There was a time of Solidarity raising prestige, moving from the position of the trade union to the political party as *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność* was created, like a political movement based on Solidarity, and my expertise was really needed and I felt that my new friends from Szczecin were really after my advice, my help in the not only radio, but also other fields.

He later moved to Warsaw because a Polish political migrant, whom he had met in Chicago and was then working in Warsaw, called him and said: "I'm looking for a replacement because I'm working now for USAID and I have to return to the United States, and I need someone like you."

I asked Jarek: "When did it occur to you that you were not going to return to Chicago?" He replied:

I can't tell you exactly when, but probably when I moved to Warsaw, when I started this work for USAID, Local Government Partnership Program, and maybe some satisfaction,

because for a long time I didn't feel, especially this last moment in Chicago, I didn't feel that what I'm doing makes a lot of sense, and here there was an official gesture from my counterparts from the Embassy. I ran the last conference, and I remember the high notes for what I did. So probably this lured me.

In his narrative he clearly states that his inability to find a successful place for himself in Chicago coupled with the call from Poland where he felt his expertise was needed were integral to his return to Poland. His expertise came from both his connections that he had formed in Poland during his time as a leader in Solidarity as well as the skills he had acquired in the U.S. while working for a radio station. It was his transnational biography that shaped his skill set and made it possible for him to become a successful businessman in Poland. It was also opportunities offered by U.S. state agencies that locked him into returning.

Wiktor had a similar push-pull story. He was an organizational psychologist in Poland (he had an M.A. in Psychology). In the U.S., he continued his studies, received a Ph.D. in Psychology, and was hired in a tenure-track position at a state university in Mississippi. Problems developed, however, and by his fifth year it was clear to him that he would not get tenure. He moved from Mississippi to New Jersey and tried unsuccessfully to find a job in the private sector as an organizational psychologist.

Okay, so a year passes by. I cannot find a job. I am on the edge of really getting depressed, right? "What I'm doing next?" At that time, the owner of the house I was staying went to Poland. He came back and says, "Wiktor, what are you doing? Why you're not going back? Why you struggling here? What is the point?" Then I start to get in contact via email with my professor and he says, "Wiktor, come to Poland. We're putting together a private university. You will teach," and so on. And one day I said, "Enough." At that moment, I removed the barrier in my head and I said, "Whoa! Why I'm sitting here? Why I'm begging for work? The tanks are not on the street anymore." And the whole stress went down, out. So wow! That's it! I said, "The only place I know I can get a job is Poland," and I packed all my things. Money. You have to make money, and that's how I ended up back in Poland. It took me one or two hours to rethink the whole thing. ... I think I made the most important decision in my life, because I said, "Look, I just cannot take it anymore. I have to depart. I've had enough" ... and here I came to Poland and I have done so many different things.

For Wiktor, like Jarek, it was the stalled career in the U.S. coupled with the chance for new opportunities in Poland that led to his return. In Poland he worked for both a private university and USAID and he became wealthy and occupationally successful in the 20 years since his return.

## The 50-50 Arrangement

The 50-50 arrangement is a concept several returnees used that refers to the desire to live 50 percent of their time in Poland and 50 percent abroad. It was a concept that emerged without prompting in their narratives when they described initially going back to Poland. Over time, they said, this changed as they found themselves firmly ensconced in Poland and their travels to the West dwindled to short visits. The reasons for wanting to split their time between two locations was because their work was in Poland but family members and friends lived abroad. They also, initially, did not want to give up on life in the U.S., hoping to be able to live as bi-nationals, which is how they saw themselves when they first returned.

Jarek said, when he first returned he had "this very naïve idea that maybe half of the time will be Poland, half of the time I will be in the States, but it didn't work since the beginning." While he spends most of his time in Poland, he returns to the U.S. and Canada several times every year to visit his wife and children who have no intention of returning to Poland permanently. His mother and sister, however, live in Poland.

Ryszard also travelled back to the U.S. more frequently at the beginning, but then settled into life in Poland.

I used to go [to the U.S.] every six months. I was missing the United States – 20 years ago when I moved to Poland, I thought I would be able to live six months in the United States and six months in Poland. This was my idea. Did not work. Once I got involved with things here I could only go back occasionally.

And Maciej, who has a successful career in Poland, is still considering that he might move back to the U.S. for health reasons: "Now when I'm getting older I'm a little bit scared with the health care here. In the U.S. it's much better, since we have a good insurance because as a former government employee, but it works only in the U.S."

## Conclusion

The state is a gatekeeper that regulates the flow of people across national borders. Understanding the architecture and ideology of state policies helps to understand why and where people decide to migrate. A restrictive exit policy not only acts as a way for a state to keep its citizens inside its borders, but can also create a pent up demand – a psychological urge that develops as a result of denial – that can explain why people, like water, flow out when the floodgates are open.

In addition, the political basis of migration policies – even when cast with humanitarian underpinnings – helps to explain why states let in people from one country or region of the world rather than another. States are rational actors, and their policies regarding who to let inside their borders (and who to keep out) are determined by not only economic factors (e.g. labor needs), but also political concerns. This is painfully evident today as nation states rancorously debate policies toward Middle Eastern refugees. The common push-pull mechanisms often used to explain international migrant streams cannot be understood outside the context of the political state that regulates these streams. This fact is particularly relevant when looking at political migration. Whether or not a state considers a person to have a well-founded fear of persecution depends in part on whether that state supports or opposes those who own the weapons of persecution.

The decision to return to the country of origin after oppressive conditions have abated is influenced by both personal and political factors. Once a migrant has legal permanent resident status in a second country, the ability to move back and forth across borders is influenced by such things as family relations and occupational careers. Often political migrants are stuck with a “no return” policy (or at minimum, they can expect a lengthy period in exile), however, once the situation in the home country changes, the political migrant who has gained legal status in a second country has more freedom to consider moving back to the country of origin. And if things do not work out as planned (e.g., job opportunities are not available, family members do not want to follow), they can move back to the resettlement country. Unlike many refugees who do not have the luxury of returning home, after 1989, the Polish political migrants had the freedom to decide what nation state(s) they wanted to call home.

## Contributors

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