

Paradoxes of Liaison Work in Bottom-Up Perspective

Katarzyna Waniek; University of Lodz, Department of Sociology of Culture

k.m.waniek@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper will explore paradoxes, pitfalls and mistakes in liaison work from the perspective of individual experiences as recapitulated in an autobiographical narrative interview. Liaison work is considered here as crucial activity in intercultural communication that relies on translating differences in cultural codes and on defining and explaining the viewpoints of interaction partners which may take three basic forms: hegemonic, symmetrical, asymmetrical. The case of Magda – a young Polish woman, who tried and failed in her attempt to integrate Pakistani women with the local environment in Italy during her work within the scope of the European Voluntary Service represents a contribution to the discussion on (*quasi*)professional work and liaison work in its hegemonic form. It explicates why under certain socio-biographical conditions even “goodwill in action” is doomed to fiasco. The reconstruction of the narrator’s efforts, her system of orientation as well as her understanding of the social frames in which her experiences were embedded is an attempt to account for the causes of her failure, which brought about significant consequences: her clients returned to their homeland and Magda ‘suspended’ her faith in intercultural dialog

Key words: professional work, liaison work, European educational mobility, intercultural communication, autobiographical narrative interview.

Introduction

The autobiographical narrative interview with Magda was carried out within a large research project “EuroIdentities” founded by the European Commission in the FP7 program. It was aimed at examining and understanding experiences of people “exposed” to Europe (i.e., immigrants, international students, CSO’s activists, cultural contacts or farmers) in their everyday lives and from their own perspective as presented in extempore life histories. The

case was selected for the analysis because it gives us an in-depth insight into neglected phenomena of ‘work at the grass roots’ level which is seen here from the bottom-up perspective.

Recapitulated in an autobiographical narrative interview, the experiences of 24-year-old Magda constitute the basis for this article on a certain type of liaison work and its biographical consequences. It is set within the framework of (quasi)professional work and in an intercultural context. This makes it necessary to refer to considerably different cultural patterns manifesting itself in a lifestyle of Pakistani immigrant women in Italy. The empirical data reveal however that for reasons which will be discussed below even dedicated volunteers helping immigrants continue to have “missionary” attitude, relying on attempts to impose or make available specific cultural patterns to those who are in their care, or, put differently, attempts to “mould” them for a specific European “image and likeness”. This is the result of deeply rooted rules of thumb and stereotypical views of an individual who is receiving help and of the motives for their conduct, which quite frequently direct the actions of social work practitioners, including even experienced professionals. This includes a presupposition – not always fully realized – regarding a definite hierarchy of actions, value systems, lifestyles, i.e. the preferred European versions versus those strange ones which originating in the Orient and in Islam. Such a simplified understanding of intercultural differences seems to offer schematic diagnoses of the problems of the young Pakistani women, whereas their origin could be elsewhere. The fact that Magda notices their suffering might suggest a need to introduce asymmetrical work – which is not so much focused on bringing together viewpoints and hierarchies of significance, but rather identifies and accepts cultural differences and tunes in to the overwhelming experiences of a marginal person (Stonequist 1961) that are seen, but unnoticed (Garfinkel 2002) by the narrator. It is therefore even more important to inquire what was her definition of the situation which translated into a paternalistic attitude to an individual afflicted with a problem and triggered hegemonic work.

Consequently, the study discusses the tensions, ambivalences and paradoxes which appear in micro-situations, including conversations and professional activities, frequently framed by the neoliberal ideology promoted by the educational programs of the European Commission. It seems that they are rarely a subject of critical analysis which takes into consideration the biographical consequences experienced by both sides of the interaction and their social implications, particularly in the area of multiculturalism or intercultural dialogue.

The Conceptual Framework: Professional Work and Liaison Work

Before discussing the case, two major analytical concepts referred to in the study need to be outlined. These are: “modest” professions and liaison work. In both cases the starting points are concepts introduced by Everett C. Hughes (1972, 2009) – an outstanding Chicago sociologist.

Professional work is understood here as a series of actions performed by an individual who has esoteric knowledge, a social mandate and licence (usually resulting from theoretical expertise and long-lasting practical experience) towards a person (client) in need of advice, help or support. Professional work can take the form of manual expertise, e.g. during an operation carried out by a surgeon, or it could be symbolic, e.g. when a priest absolves a sinner from his sins. On many occasions these forms occur together, blending with each other in various proportions. However, the classic professions such as doctors, lawyers or clergymen are not discussed here, but rather the focus is on the more “modest” profession (cf. Schütze 1992: 133) of a social worker (Magda).

At the same time, Magda’s work is defined here as *quasi*-professional for two reasons: firstly, because she has no appropriate educational background, expert knowledge, training or experience; and secondly due to the fact that there was no accountability for the results of her work to specific institutions or superiors. Furthermore, mistakes at work in Magda’s case could not be discussed with senior or more experienced colleagues or supervisors, who might have provided reflections and guidance on her failures in the context of her identity and life history (cf. Granosik 2013: 241–242). All the factors above do not eliminate dilemmas and predicaments typical for this type of work; actually, quite the opposite, they can augment them.

One paradox of social work resulting from knowledge gained and applied by professional assistants should be stressed here, as it is meaningful for our considerations. Mariusz Granosik defines it as follows: “The decidedly unequal division of power and knowledge between a worker and a client naturally introduces a hierarchy to the situation of a professional action. The client’s expectations are quite different though – the client counts on full understanding, cooperation, and some preservation of equal footing. This conflict implies the need for special professional tasks aimed at minimizing the sense of subordination of the client – controlling the trajectory of suffering. Such intentional efforts facilitate a high

efficiency of work, which is the foundation of its meaningfulness.” (Granosik 2013: 116–117).

The second significant concept for this study is **liaison work**. Its origin is in the *liaison communication* introduced into sociology by Everett Hughes (Hughes 1972: 303 at al.). He was observing the work of a bilingual secretary in Quebec, who relied not only on translating from English to French and vice versa, but also took into account the respective cultures (including the communication styles characteristic for both of them). This concept was further developed by Fritz Schütze to include the notion of *liaison work*, i.e. the work essential in intercultural communication which relies on converting differences in cultural codes (understood as resources of interpretation which facilitate defining and giving meaning to reality), and on defining and explaining the viewpoints of interaction partners (see: Czyżewski 2005: 348).

Next, Marek Czyżewski – an outstanding Polish sociologist – characterised three types of liaison work with reference to the public discourse (Czyżewski 2005: 356–385; 2006: 130–132). They will be discussed below and then applied in the analysis of face-to-face contact with the Other.

1) Hegemonic liaison work is based on a schematic way of thinking about the Other, it does not include the rule of reciprocity of perspectives, and therefore it is associated with attempts to dominate the interaction. It can take two forms, by either: a) ignoring the points of view of the partner in a communication process, or b) **paternalistically treating** the partner’s outlook on the world, which is pre-defined as incorrect or distorted. More importantly, the persons who perform this work are typically well-intentioned and truly believe they are acting for the good of the Other.

2) Symmetrical liaison work assumes equal terms for both sides of the argument and both viewpoints, wherein asymmetrical conditions stemming from a sense of injustice or humiliation do not occur. It has a modern-rational variant (a), relying on reciprocity of perspectives, i.e. considering and recognizing the standpoint of the interaction partner and assigning basically equal significance to his or her schemes of interpretation and values (Czyżewski 2014: 398–399, cf. also Schütz 1976b). It is also related to an assumption that in wishing to settle some controversy “one should use primary and unvarying criteria of rationality of arguments and aim for a valid synthesis of an opinion” (Czyżewski 2006: 131).

It also has a post-modern-relativistic variant (b), which rejects the assumption above and recognizes the validity of all opinions in efforts to reach consensus. Juggling various, frequently dispersed and inconsistent discourses, becomes an objective as such and a cultural value (cf. Czyżewski 2014: 399).

3) **Asymmetrical liaison work** is related to thoroughly problematic and primarily asymmetrical experiences of violence, suffering, and humiliation. It requires – as Czyżewski points out with reference to Levinas’s ethics – to learn ‘instructions’, subordination to the Other, giving voice to them (without negotiations or attempts to reach common ground), listening to their story, and respecting their (harmed) dignity in a face-to-face situation (Czyżewski 2005: 364). Put differently, this type of work is aimed mainly at persons experiencing a trajectory of suffering (Riemann, Schütze 1991), i.e. those who are disoriented and feel increasing chaos in their lives, have lost trust in the world and themselves, suffer from disorders, and are convinced of an inevitable, terrifying fate. It must be stressed that yielding to the dynamics of the trajectory makes one essentially unpredictable both for oneself, one’s significant others, as well as professional assistants. It happens that a person afflicted with suffering seems unbalanced, brusque, argumentative or arrogant, which deepens the interaction anomy and discourages people who bring help, exactly when their help is desperately needed. It requires extreme patience and understanding from their interaction partners, but also entrance into their biographical experiences, which could bring about a “discovery” of enormous significance for their own life and outlook on the world (cf. Czyżewski 2012: 491).

Method

In order to grasp the mutual influence between individual experiences, collective phenomena and social opportunity structures the autobiographical narrative interview method was employed. The interview technique is designed to encourage an interviewee to spontaneously recollect sequences of events the course of life and accompanying inner states. Thus, interviews begin with a **single eliciting question** designed to encourage informants to tell the story of his or her life without prompts. The stimulus question is formulated in an open way and may be articulated in the following form: **Could you please tell me the story of your life starting with you earliest memories up to today.** Once the narration finishes with a ‘coda’

(“That was it” or “This is my life so far”), additional narration-eliciting questions are asked (i.e. questions that may explain ambiguities and vagueness, clarify incomprehension or complete unfinished threads). Finally, in the third stage the researcher asks explicit questions on issues relating to inner and outer perspectives on the research topic. The recorded interview is meticulously transcribed and only then subjected to the analysis. The **research procedure** starts with the single case analysis consisting of: **(1) text sort analysis that aims at description** of the features of on-going interaction in the interview situation and the communicative schemes of narration, description and argumentation. It also focuses on identifying background constructions which deal with chaotic pieces of biographical experience and argumentative commentaries (Schütze 1983); **(2) structural analysis**, i.e., a formal sequential analysis enabling identification of specific modes of experiencing one’s life: (a) different kinds of biographical action schemes, (b) institutional patterns of the life course (phenomena of life and family cycles, career patterns, etc.), (c) metamorphoses (unexpected and surprising development of creativity), and (d) biographical trajectories (extended processes of suffering and losing control over one’s life); **(3) analytical abstraction** that allows to find out what is essentially unique in one’s biography in the sense of its “self-historical gestalt” and what is theoretically remarkable. In the autobiographical narrative interview method the researcher rely on the informant’s accounts, his or her own presentation of the flux of events and their interpretation; nonetheless, very restricted ways of data collection and narrative constrains (naturally occurring obligations to condense, to go into detail, to close the narrative form) , as well as carefully worked out rules and stages of data analysis enable the “quality” control (Schütze 2008: 16, Kallmeyer & Schütze 1977, Kaźmierska 2004) .

After a couple of single cases are analysed, **comparative analysis** proceeds according to the principle of minimal and maximal contrast. The elaborated hypotheses and theories are open to modifications and supplementing up to the point when any new single case does not change the architecture and decisive content of the theoretical model anymore, i.e. the theoretical saturation is reached. After collecting and scrutinising a sufficient number of cases with their diverse variables the building up of a theoretical model can be carried out.

It is important to note that the Schütze’s method finds its roots in the research strategy of **grounded theory** as developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Corbin & Strauss 1990 and 1997) in which hypotheses emerge from the collected empirical data. The authors highlight that grounded theory, unlike theories generated by

means of logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Glaser, Strauss 1997: 3), is not based on a preconceived theoretical framework to test or verify already established categories, concepts and hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 45). The emphasis is placed upon the theoretical structuring to be followed by a constant **comparative analysis** of the collected data that then shapes further investigation and leads to the generation of initial categories and hypotheses. The final move in the sequence of research steps is the building of a theoretical model. This mode of methodological conduct is based on the **abductive logic of research** introduced and elaborated by Charles Peirce (1965). This type of reasoning consists in continual moving between inductive and deductive thinking and constant verification of the emerging theory with new data. Schütze explains that the researcher adhering to the abductive logic of reasoning must freely step back and forth among different stages of the analytical process. (see: Apitzsch & Inowlocky, 2000: 66, footnote 14).

Discussion of the Case:

In the text below – based on the experiences of Magda – an attempt is made to show the socio-biographical determinants for the choice of a particular type of liaison work, to indicate some crucial points (overlooked or ignored) in its course, and to discuss the consequences of introducing hegemonic liaison work. Asymmetrical liaison work, although it is not considered here as a biographical experience, is presented as an alternative and, in Magda's case, a recommended way to proceed in the situation of rising tension between diverse cultural patterns.

The interview with Magda was conducted in 2008 two years after her stay in Bergamo, Italy. She was then 24 and was studying at the university in a big Polish academic centre, where she moved from a middle-size town. Having been prodded by the interviewer and narrative constraints, she started her story with memories of her family, which were still very difficult for her due to her parents' recent divorce. At the same time they were of major significance in Magda's reasoning about the role of women and in her feminist orientation. She underlined that she had always enjoyed gaining knowledge and had been continually engaged in social matters. This scheme of action produced specific results: at the young age of 13 Magda won an English language competition and as a result received a journey to Italy. As she claims, she was delighted by this 'fortuitously' visited country and it became an object

of her great affection. Another trip the next year and subsequent travels to many other European towns – due to her engagement in numerous intercultural cooperation programs for children and youth and within the European Voluntary Service – were her conscious choices and are presented in the narration as a biographical action scheme, i.e. one of four (besides institutional expectation patterns, trajectory of suffering, and metamorphosis) biographical structural processes that refer to one's own autonomic plans and the intentional mode of relating to one's life (see: Schütze 1981).

Before proceeding to analyze the history of interaction processes related to Magda's cooperation with Pakistani women immigrants, it is worthwhile to look at her mental space (cf. Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen 2012), which influenced her definitions of situations. It should be recalled that the horizon of mental space of an individual is determined by his or her biographical experiences, which profile a unique stock of knowledge at hand (Schütz 1976c: 281), systems of significance shaped in the process of education, public debates concerning issues important to the individual, or tested methods of coping with external expectations (e.g. requirements of the European Union expressed in the rules of youth programs). Put differently, in trying to answer the question why narrator applied a certain type of liaison work, we should take into consideration what could determine her understanding of the situation in which she found herself back then. In Magda's biographical account we can indicate two main viewpoints which organize her reasoning and system of relevance and, thus, configure her mental space and life attitude. They are: feminism and neoliberalism. It should be pointed out that while the narrator consciously refers to the former 'ideology', the latter is taken for granted as a model of organizing everyday reality and is not subject to her critical reflection.

At this point it's worthwhile to ponder the experiences which Magda associates with her feminist attitude. Paradoxically she traces the origins of her young fascination with *gender* issues back to her days in a senior boy-scout crew, which she joined so she could face specific challenges on equal terms with the other members. Unfortunately, she quickly realized that even there the division of tasks was strictly related to gender – it was assumed that as a girl she would take care of cooking while the male members of the crew would willingly carry her rucksack. The narrator recognizes this form of external expectations of the role of the woman as a pressure which she refuses to accept. It is unclear to what extent this definition of her world is impacted by the relations between the narrator's parents – nonetheless, it ought to be

taken into account in further considerations. At the beginning of the interview we learned that her parents were recently divorced. In Magda's opinion, this event was of an emancipatory character for her mother – only after escaping her husband's dominance could she continue her professional career. Moreover, when reconstructing Magda's descriptions, we can trace the beginnings of her attitudes, values, desires and orientations invoked and promoted by youth programs (e.g. the European Voluntary Service). Let's look closely at two excerpts where she relates what young people can learn there (e.g. in the course of trips or camps) and what lessons she herself learnt from these meetings:

Then the camp in Denmark... [...] school in Copenhagen [...] ¹ (2) The camp was for young people aged 18 years old and I went too early of course ((laughing)), I was 16 years old and I didn't fit in well there because of my age, but I found my feet soon. And it was a camp for ... for people from all over the world, there were Asians and people from South America there, the whole world really. Hmm. The camp was organized in such a way that the participants had to work on its programme, the structure of the whole camp err everyday agenda, organized cooking, cleaning and all that. We were supposed to govern the school for three weeks and well... it was our good will if we did something or not... The camp was fantastic, actually full of... stories, getting to know people, sort of voluntary things, so this was// this was the best idea for a camp, just let us act... hmm wonderful thing. [...] it was just a nice camp, good camp, hmm, with interesting people, from whom I learned a lot, that's it! Not in the sense of competences, but I learned from them, hmm, some ideas for life... As a teenager I needed such... sparks. (for transcription notation system see: Appendix).

Next, in response to the interviewer's query how she actually finds out about the possibilities to go to European camps or youth meetings, Magda explains what their participants can learn:

Well, apart from a set of social and other competencies which one [...] acquires there, I think that they also get convinced that they can do something, that if they want they can do something for others... and I... probably thanks to these experiences **I became convinced that, generally I believe in it, that we are the**

masters of our own destiny and hmm// and maybe I am, I don't know, so much contaminated or marked with this sort of thinking, but I believe... hmm that we think about our life in terms of some sort of plans short and long-term [plans], and I just schedule every next year, I've got...// It's very embarrassing, but well, I've got a plan for every single year to be carried out, one-year plans...

It should be noted that the informant describes a way of 'formatting' a model of a 'useful' citizen, needed for Europe – an individual who has specific features and competences. She talks about self-organization, self-discipline, facing challenges, reaching for her personal potential, rational and creative time management, adaptation to various situations, responsibility for oneself and others, and skilful management of cultural differences. All this should ultimately contribute to a harmonic coexistence and optimal cooperation in the spirit of personal freedom and independence. However, the narrator does not realize that her way of presenting experiences is essentially the characterization of a person who is an 'entrepreneur of himself' (cf. Foucault 2008: 226, Stachowiak 2013: 141-161), which is aptly captured by her own words: *I became convinced that generally I believe that we are the masters of our own destiny*. At the same time Magda was not aware that her autonomy was merely superficial and that she was overcome with mediated and disguised – characteristic for 'governmentality' – methods of wielding power (cf. Czyżewski 2009: 87). This 'neoliberal variant of the art of government' – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains following Nicolas Rose – "aims at (...) 'governing through freedom' – managing actions of subjects convinced of their own autonomy, independence, and self-determination" (Stachowiak 2013: 144). Analyzing the informant's excerpts above, it can be assumed that while working with Pakistani women immigrants she was driven by a particular image of what qualities an individual should have to 'fit in' with the Italian society and become a legitimate citizen of Europe. In other words, features such as independence, agency, openness, individuality or equality seemed vital to her, and these were all traits which – according to a common stereotypical view – a traditional Muslim community does not have and which those young women (oppressed by a patriarchal family, in her view) needed to be shown. That's why her support relied mostly on encouraging them to defy their own religion and culture, which – paradoxically – she hardly knows.

Let's now proceed to the part of the interview in which Magda talks about her one-year stay in Bergamo, Italy, under the European Voluntary Service. We will closely examine

the sequences of her interactions with young Pakistani women and pay attention to the way both parties to this process defined each other, bearing in mind that negotiating and maintaining own identities (establishing who is who in a given situation) is a fundamental issue for this process and also defines the further direction of the actions of both sides (cf. Czyżewski 1985: 36).

That was the whole year of my life. Very intense, beautiful, well, well, amazing, I think, it has changed me a lot, because... hmm of course, right, one thing is that I got to know Italy and the Italian culture, this is actually obvious, but hmm, I met **my beloved immigrants** errr . . . from from Pakistan there, too. Because...the cheapest house to rent, mhm, in the surroundings was in the heart of the immigrants' district [...] and Italians have a very strange policy, at least these Ital// at least Northern Italy has a policy of hmm, facilitating immigrants' life. I mean they secure flats for them, hmm, ration out life necessities, but in my opinion it results in segregation, because these people are clustered round one area and they have their Gypsy houses, Pakistanis too, Lebanese and this looks totally like, I don't know, maybe a ghetto, at least for me it looked like this. And that was the place where the centre in which I worked with children was situated, so I could see my **beautiful Pakistani women** every day bri// just bringing their children, and then taking them home, well, and their role... was over in fact, they could not go farther, they were very restricted in terms of physical [surroundings], they couldn't get out of this park which separated their houses and our centre, so they crossed the park, took their children and returned// came back home [I :uhm] well, hmmm, it was a difficult experience for me, because I actually discovered that one may, hmm. such hmm, so strong// that women can have their hands tied tightly and can be so strongly tied to their homes. It's, hmm. because [...] I am talking about girls who were born in Italy and until then//girls, women, hmm, who until then were going to school with Italian children and then because of an arbitrary decision of their families: actually their uncles, fathers, elder brothers at some moment these girls are withdrawn from the schools and well... placed at home. They are supposed to marry quickly, which means that this husband is a find for them, and they are supposed to deliver children and they should bring these children to our centre, that's all... But it is, well, something terrible, because for some time they are under the illusion that they also can learn. Mmm, can study,

they can be like other girls. For a moment they are allowed to put on these// western style [clothes] go out in the same fashion as, for instance// as Italian children and then they have to wear these...robes. So we became close, because I was// I was smuggling my mobile and they could call their friends, mmm, luckily, mmm, no men found about this, none of these families, because I would be in trouble, I guess. So for instance, they could not talk to their childhood friends with men because at a certain age, mmm, talking to men is unworthy of a woman. Even though he was their friend in childhood. I know for instance, that these are things one can read about and so on, but... to see it, to see suffering in this woman's eyes it'ssss, it's a different matter... and I with my compassion, with this sensitivity to feminism it was// I felt sorry for them, especially because they couldn't be honest, they could// and it took us a long time to reach them and have some sort of opening up and building trust. Eventually they started to talk about their suffering, that they do not feel well// in spite of the fact that// that they were born in Italy and for some time they could live like other children and then... their hands are tied, so well... it's a strange thing. And, of course, I didn't solve this puzzle, I don't know how it was, I didn't know what kinds of processes take place in these families, but hmm, well, I really felt sorry for these girls and, hmm, they actually disappear from that place. This means that when I came back to Trento, after some time, I came to this place in order to visit them after half a year... yes it was some half a year after my Voluntary Service there, it turned out that they don't live there anymore, so they were sent to// to Pakistan...so I don't know what happened... I'll never solve this puzzle.

Magda describes her interaction partners/clients as: *my beloved immigrants from Pakistan*, or later *my beautiful Pakistani women*. Their ethnic identity takes the forefront – therefore we are dealing with ethnicization (Czyżewski 2009: 8-9; Nowicka 2014: 249-253), while their characterization is reduced to physical appearance. This collective description of women, as well as the narrator's analysis of their behaviour, tends to significantly generalize – there are no references to individual, separate cases or mentions of singular life stories. Moreover, in speaking about Pakistani women Magda says: *my* or *my beloved*, which indicates a paternalistic relation, sanctioning their subordination. All these ways of linguistic description are markers of a stereotypical (and extremely simplified) image of the Other.

It is important, however, that her interaction partners came from another ethnic group and another civilization zone, which created distinct communicative problems resulting from differences in cultures, incomparably greater than those which can be encountered between people coming from various European countries. This is related to the substantial limitation on possibilities of applying a basic rule of commonsense thinking, namely reciprocity of perspectives, which is highlighted by Marek Czyżewski (2014: 402) in his considerations on symmetrical liaison work.

This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of historical, cultural and social frameworks determining the attitude of Europe to the Orient, which was thoroughly described by Edward Said, among others. He claims that it still creates the deepest and most recurring images of the Other in the European culture (see: Said 1979: xxvi). The perception of this region is frequently based on the dogma repeated by orientalists, who presume that there “is an absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior.” (Said 1979: 291).

Taking into consideration Magda’s individual experiences and the general socio-cultural framework, it can be presumed that in the case of dealing with Pakistani women we face a higher risk of interaction misunderstandings and a failure in professional work. The problem is that nobody had prepared the (young and voluntary) narrator for her task, and nobody made her realize that contrary to what the European programs required in terms of accomplishing specific objectives – her actions do not have to produce substantial results. In consequence, she was left alone to deal with the nagging mystery that ‘something went awry’. This situation is undoubtedly more complex than presented here. It seems intriguing, however, that the work aimed at creating a social order relying on multiculturalism is delegated to young people who are not indigenous members of the culture to which immigrants are to be ‘included’.

In this context, it is interesting to speculate on how Magda might have been perceived by the Pakistani women. This task is difficult as long as the only source of information about this topic are utterances from the informer herself who, while interpreting action processes of her interaction partners, makes inferences about the role that was imputed to her, and on this basis she positively evaluates both the communication process and the joint actions (cf. McCall and Simmons 1966: 143). Nevertheless, we are interested here in her subjective impressions and definitions of situations. The narrator emphasizes that she succeeded in building trust and felt

she became someone significant for her clients. It could also be inferred from Magda's utterances that she was primarily (if not exclusively) defined as a 'European', and the fact of her being Polish did not carry substantial weight. This is important because, firstly, she could have been perceived (and it apparently happened) as a representative of the West, which forces its civilizational superiority on others, and secondly – at least hypothetically – the emphasis could have been shifted to a shared fate, resulting from the fact of her also being a guest in another culture. In this context it seems interesting that Magda's actions fit into the role of a European patronizing instructor. She not only proposes some (European) lifestyles to her clients and promotes a specific cultural pattern that is supposed to liberate young Asian women from the ties to their own culture and religion, but also forces a specific model of intercultural communication, i.e. she determines what rules it should be based on and what objectives it should aspire to. This conduct clearly shows the narrator's disapproval of their cultural otherness.

Now we turn to reviewing how Magda attempted to solve the 'puzzle' of her Pakistani clients' disappearance from Bergamo. She thinks that they had been sent back to their homeland and returned to their (oppressive) families. In her understanding this was caused by the force of culture and religion on Pakistani women, which 'sucked them back' after they had been enabled to get a taste of another life and had given an illusory and short-term sense of freedom. This event is a source of the narrator's chagrin – she was hoping that with her help her women immigrant clients would emancipate themselves, and become self-determined, self-sufficient, independent, and responsible. We may reckon it was at this point that her feminism and neoliberal ideology (acquired in European programs for youths) started to impact her interpretation of her surrounding everyday reality, and her role as a European volunteer in particular. However, for Magda this failed attempt to 'Europeanize' Pakistani women immigrants (which could obviously be interpreted as an attempt to 'civilize' them) is a significant and fateful biographical experience, which damages her defined preconceptions of the world and 'suspends' her faith in grass-roots work.

It is thought-provoking that the narrator's vision of the world and the common rules of its functioning managed to overshadow other interpretations of the existing situation and triggered a hegemonic-paternalistic modality of liaison work. Undoubtedly Magda recognized the suffering of her clients (she says, e.g.: *to see [...] suffering in the eyes of that woman, this, it is another thing obviously*, or later: *Finally, they started to tell me they were suffering*) and

she is most sympathetic to them, and this should rather initiate an asymmetrical liaison work. It does not happen though. We can point to several reasons for this state of affairs. First of all, in her theoretical commentary Magda explains the causes of the suffering of the young women immigrants exclusively by the rigidity of the Islamic culture, noting however, that they *suffer, because they were born in Italy and for some time they were able to live like other children and then... their hands are tied*. Yet she does not recognize the real impact of the gap between these two cultures on their lives. However, as might be inferred from the quote above and the following excerpt: *for some time they live under the illusion that they can also learn, err, can study, can be like other girls. For a while they can even dress (...) in a western style (...), and then they have to wear those (...) robes* – the source of their painful experience (unnoticed by Magda) could be their marginal position in the dominant society, that is, experiencing a conflict between groups as their own fault, a sense of inferiority (cf. Stonequist 1961: 122–125), and discovering a stigma related to their race and ethnicity (Goffman 1990).

The informant ignores the tensions which are usually evoked in marginal people by attempts to reconcile competing cultural paradigms, which those people could experience in their lives – raising their sense of dissonance and harmony, repelling and attracting them at the same time. (cf. Stonequist 1961: 9). She does not notice the thing described by Georg Simmel in his considerations on ‘the stranger’, that is, a person who arrives today and stays tomorrow and does not leave, does not completely resign from their freedom of coming and going (Simmel 1950: 204). It is interesting that although she criticizes the Italian policy towards immigrants, she fails to recognize that young Pakistani women as well as their parents aspire to the group (Italian society) continually manifesting their lack of interest, keeping them at bay and preventing them from building trust. Analyzing the situation of Pakistani women described by Magda, two additional things ought to be taken into account: the fact that they are the second generation of immigrants (they were born in Italy) and are most likely entering an early phase of adulthood, which could trigger or exacerbate a conflict between their own biographical plans, expectations of the family, and the requirements of Italian society, creating a special biographical configuration at that point. It can be said that they are highly likely to experience a trajectory of suffering (Riemann, Schütze 1991), which – stressing it ones more – does not have to result exclusively (nor even primarily) from their native country culture, but from their particular position as a ‘marginal man’.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Magda's relationship with Pakistani women was inevitably headed for a failure because it seems that her sentimental work and most of all on trust was not sufficient (Strauss et al.1985: 135–136). Most probably this was leading to a sense of disappointment on both sides of the interaction and to a cessation of efforts to work out an agreement between diverse cultures, based on a conviction that reaching such a joint standpoint is impossible. Moreover, it might be presumed that their mutual perception of each other could result in strengthening or even creating negative stereotypes (e.g. attributing to immigrants a reluctance to integrate or assimilate) and prejudices (e.g. due to a conviction of barbarian acts or terrorist tendencies on the part of Muslims). These are very serious social consequences, which could be physically and symbolically strengthened and create entrenched borders between an immigrant *ghetto* and an immigrant-receiving society (as it happened, e.g., in Brussels in its Molenbeek district).

Conclusions:

One needs to realize that the kind of intercultural work done by Magda is not an easy task, although it is seldom recognized and typically underappreciated. Nowadays, understanding the culturally different Other is usually based on a quick, schematic explanation, a superficial interpretation of gestures and symbols and a sketchy recognition of their values and rituals. However his or her cultural patterns, resulting from “vivid historical traditions” (Schütz 1976a), hardly ever lend themselves to such quick and casual transpositions. Their comprehension requires intense work (including examining one's own interpretation schemes, reference systems, and mistakes in interaction) and does not always lead to overcoming the tensions which arise when juxtaposing one's own cultural patterns on somebody else's, even when it is brought to our attention or interest.

It may be posited that the problems discussed in this article are outdated or invalid, particularly in the light of the European immigration crisis, whose origins date back to 2011 (the breakout of the civil war in Syria). However, an analytical reflection on the failure of Magda's work can be a contribution to considerations on systematic mistakes committed in professional work related to the provision of help to immigrants and refugees arriving in Europe from Africa and Asia, and particularly from countries defined as Muslim ones. It seems that this problem is especially relevant today and is related, on one hand, to the enormous wave of people seeking asylum in Europe (applicable for the most part to Syrians) and, on the other hand, to the threat associated with the Islamic State.

It seems that there is little regard for the bottom-up perspective and that work at the grass roots is ignored, while thinking of Europe exclusively in macro-structural and economic terms does not allow for reaching the heart of the matter. In fact, it contributes to thorough misunderstandings and diagnostic absurdities (e.g. in mistakenly attributed motives and the strengthening of stereotypes). At the same time, it is obvious that resorting to the level of microanalysis does not provide the quick, straightforward and effective solutions sought for shaping European policies. But it may potentially enable the identification of and critical reflection on the paradoxes, pitfalls and mistakes in professional work (even when it is of kind of ‘amateur’ character).

In closing, it should be stressed that communication failures in multicultural interactions, particularly when we are dealing with suffering and humiliation, result from dynamic interactions between differences in the knowledge at hand and systems of significance (especially when very ‘remote’ cultures are at play), as well as the type of liaison work applied. In addition, we should bear in mind that multicultural misunderstandings are seldom shortcomings which can be easily and seamlessly amended. Volunteer workers in the European programs are usually unaware of that fact, and for them an inability to reach successful communication can result in a serious biographical disappointment and, in consequence, build a reserve to the challenges of multiculturalism, thus depriving the society of the needed professionals who do liaison work on its behalf.

Appendix:

Transcription notation system used here is adopted from Gail Jefferson [see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, ix-xvi].

I: Interviewer;

N: narrator; ... short pause;

(2) longer pause, lasting 2 minutes;

// cut off of prior word or utterance, difficult stressed word or utterance;

((laughing)) nonverbal or preverbal behaviours;

[] additional explanations of the researcher or transcriber,

[...] avoided parts.

References

- Apitzsch, U., and Inowlocki, L. (2000). Biographical Analysis: A “German” school? In: P. Chamberlane, J. Bornat and T. Wengraf (eds). *The Turn to Biographical in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*, Routlage, London, pp. 53-70.
- Corbin J., Strauss A.L. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications: London.
- Corbin J., Strauss A.L. (ed.) (1997) *Grounded Theory in Practice*. Sage Publications: London.
- Czyżewski, M. (2005). *Öffentliche Kommunikation und Rechtsextremismus*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Czyżewski, M. (2006). Dyskursy pro- i antyeuropejskie. Polaryzacja i ‘praca pośrednicząca’. Zarys problematyki badawczej. In: *Europa w polskich dyskursach*, A. Horolets (ed.), 117–135. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Czyżewski, M. (2009). “Między panoptyzmem a ‘rządnomysłnością’ – uwagi o kulturze naszych czasów”. *Kultura Współczesna* 2: 83–95.
- Czyżewski, M. (2012). Praca pośrednicząca w relacjach polsko-żydowskich. Doświadczenia biograficzne i dyskurs publiczny. In: *Zagłada Żydów na polskiej prowincji*, A. Sitarek, M. Trębacz, E. Wiatr (eds.), 478–496. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Czyżewski, M. (2014). Praca pośrednicząca w debatach publicznych. In: *Dyskurs elit symbolicznych. Próba diagnozy*, M. Czyżewski, K. Franczak, M. Nowicka, J. Stachowiak (eds.), 380–409. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sedno.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Garfinkel, H. (2002). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glaser, B.G., Strauss, A.L. (1967). *Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine: Chicago.
- Goffman, E. (1990). *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin Books.

- Granosik, M. (2013). *Praca socjalna – analiza instytucjonalna z perspektywy konwersacyjnej*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Hughes, E.C. (1972). The Linguistic Division of Labor in Industrial and Urban Societies. In: *Advances in the Sociology of Language*. Vol. 2. J. A. Fishman (ed.), 296–309. The Hague: Mouton.
- Hughes, E.C. (2009). Mistakes at Work. In: *The sociological eye. selected papers*, E.C. Hughes (ed.), 316–326. London: Transaction Books.
- Kallmeyer, W., Schütze, F. (1977). Zur Konstitution Kommunikationsschemata der Sachverhaltsdarstellung. In: Wegner D. (ed.), *Gesprächsanalysen*, Hamburg: Buske.
- Kaźmierska, K. (2004). Narrative Interview as a Method of Biographical Analysis. In: *Qualitative research. different perspectives – emerging trends*, J. J. Fikfak, F. Adam, D. Garz (eds.), 153–172. Ljubljana: ZRC Publishing, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU.
- McCall G.J., J.L. Simmons. (1966). *Identities and Interactions*. New York: Free Press.
- Nowicka, M. (2014). „Dynamika pamięci publicznej debata wokół książek Jana Tomasza Grossa a wybrane spory o pamięć zbiorową”. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 3: 237–258.
- Riemann, G., Schütze, F. (1991). ‘Trajectory’ as a Basic Concept for Analysing Suffering and Disorderly Social Processes. In: *Social Organization and Social structure. Essays in Honour of Anselm Strauss*, D.R. Maines (ed.), 333–357. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Schütz, A. (1976a). The Stranger. In: *Collected papers. Vol. II. Studies in Social Theory*, A. Brodersen (ed.), 91–105. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Schütz, A. (1976b). The Well-informed Citizen. In: *Collected papers. Vol. II. Studies in Social Theory*, A. Brodersen (ed.), 120–134. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Schütz A (1976c). Tiresias. In: *Collected papers. Vol. II. Studies in Social Theory*, A. Brodersen (ed.), 277– 293. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

- Schütze, F. (1981). Prozessstrukturen des Lebensablaufs. In: J. Matthes, A. Pfeifenberger, M. Stosberg (eds.) *Biographie in handlungswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*, Nürnberg: Verlag der Nürnberger Forschungsvereinigung,.
- Schütze, F. (1983). "Biographieforschung und narratives Interview". *Neue Praxis. Kritische Zeitschrift für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik* 13(3): 283–293.
- Schütze, F. (1992). Sozialarbeit als 'bescheidene Profession'. In: *Erziehen als Profession. Zur Logik professionellen Handelns in pädagogischen Feldern*, B. Dewe, W. Ferchhoff, F-O. Radtke (eds.), 132–170. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Schütze, F. (2008) "Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews". *European Studies on Inequalities and Social Cohesion* 1/2 (part I): 153-242 and 3/4 (part II): 5–77.
- Schütze F., Schröder-Wildhagen, A. (2012) European Mental Space and its Biographical Relevance. In: *The Evolution of European Identities. Biographical Approaches*, R. Miller and G. Gray (eds.), 255–278. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Simmel G. (1950). The Stranger. In: *The sociology of Georg Simmel*, K. Wolff (ed.), 402–408. New York: Free Press.
- Stachowiak, J. (2013). "Pedagogizacja medialna i wzór 'przedsiębiorcy samego siebie'". *Societas/Communitas* 2: 141–161.
- Stonequist, E.V. (1961). *The Marginal Man. A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*. New York: Russell & Russlell.
- Strauss, A.L., Fagerhaugh S., Suczek, B., Wiener, C. (1985). *Social Organization of Medical Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.