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The Refugee Crisis in Contemporary Polish Nonfiction

The now infamous words of Jarosław Kaczyński, spoken at a political rally in 2015, that migrants carry dangerous diseases “long absent from Europe” as well as “all sorts of parasites and protozoa”¹, caused a stir among Polish opinion-makers. The rising Islamophobia, hate speech in social media, and the lack of support for refugees from politicians and policy-makers pushed intellectuals, in particular writers and reporters to take action. A collection of stories, *NieObcy: 21 opowieści, żeby się nie bać. Polscy pisarze dla uchodźców* [NotForeign: 21 Stories against Fear. Polish Writers for Refugees] (2015) was published by the Polish Humanitarian Action, featuring the most famous names of the Polish contemporary literature.

Why this book? Because one must help. Must, but moral imperative cannot be learned. Because one needs to listen and be compassionate. . . Because one needs to discern individual faces in a crowd? Yes, but neither short stories, nor reportages, will not convince those who are convinced that above all, one needs to fear. Or to loath, which usually means the same. And this is why this book was created. As a negation of fear and hate.(7)²

The short stories featured in the collection do not depict the current situation of Syrian refugees, their goal is to show, through fictional accounts, various ways in which Otherness is perceived, the consequences of displacement, the ethical dilemmas of fictional characters. It is, however, an inspiration to engage words in order to challenge the collective indifference and misperception of refugees. Several reporters undertook a similar task: to portray refugees and their suffering, to make readers aware of their plight, to move the consciousness of people who watch world news, yet feel untouched by conflicts and human suffering. Among the texts analysed in this paper are: Wojciech Tochman and Katarzyna

¹ Translation of quotations into English after Jan Cienski from Politico.eu, <http://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-asylum-poland-kaczynski-election/>

² “Po co ta książka? Bo trzeba pomagać.

Trzeba, ale moralnego imperatywu nie da się wyuczyć.

Bo trzeba słuchać i współczuć. . . Bo trzeba widzieć w tłumie pojedyncze twarze?

Tak, ale ani opowiadania, ani reportaże nie przekonają przekonanych, że przede wszystkim trzeba się bać. Albo nienawidzić, co zwykle znaczy to samo. I właśnie dlatego powstała ta książka. Z niezgody na strach i na nienawiść. ”

Excerpt From: Publikacja zbiorowa; “NieObcy.” iBooks, SPPAH, Warszawa, 2015.

Boni's *Kontener* [The Container] (2014), Jarosław Mikołajewski's *Wielki przyptyw* [High Tide] (2015), and Artur Domosławski's *Wykluczeni* [The Excluded] (2016). The three texts have been selected according to their thematic focus – the situation of contemporary refugees, to their genre – works of reportage, and their form – they are all book reportages.

All four authors are well-known journalists: Wojciech Tochman is a famous reporter and co-founder of the Institute of Reportage, Katarzyna Boni a travel journalist, and Artur Domosławski's fame is linked with his reportages on Latin America and with a controversial biography of Ryszard Kapuściński. Jarosław Mikołajewski is a poet, writer and translator, but also a journalist, author of non-fiction accounts and essays. What these authors have in common is a wide, global perspective, and the understanding of the complexities of social phenomena, whether they occur in Africa, Asia or South America. Except for Katarzyna Boni, born in 1982, Tochman, Domosławski and Mikołajewski are born in 1960s, which means that all three were at the beginning of their careers in the years of Polish transformation from communism to democracy. In particular, Tochman and Domosławski's formation was marked by the important figures of Polish reportage: among their mentors were Ryszard Kapuściński and Hanna Krall. Perhaps this is what shaped their sensitivity to the stories of the excluded and the dispossessed, and their international outlook. It is not surprising that the war in Syria, which begun in 2011, and the ensuing refugee crisis caught the reporters' attention.

Refugees in Jordan

Tochman and Boni are among the first Polish reporters to publish a full book reportage on Syrians fleeing their war-thorn country. It is published in 2014, following the reporters' journey to refugee camps in Jordan taking place almost three years after the beginning of the war in Syria.

How many [people] have died in the course of these three years? Hundred thousand? Hundred twenty? They are dying every day. Nine million people had to leave their homes. Let us repeat that: over two and a half million people moved to the neighbouring countries. They were citizens, and they turned into refugees.³

³ „Ilu zginęło w ciągu ostatnich trzech lat? Sto tysięcy? Sto dwadzieścia? Codziennie giną. Dziewięć milionów ludzi musiało opuścić swój dom. Powtórzmy: ponad dwa i pół miliona ruszyło do sąsiednich krajów. Z obywateli stali się uchodźcami.” (Loc 70, Boni and Tochman)

According to current estimates, the number of the dead in the Syrian war is nearing half a million (the numbers vary: the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the number of victims in the period between 15 March 2011- 15 July 2017 as up to 475,000⁴, while the United Nations special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, believes the death toll to be 420,000⁵). According to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, around 6.3 million Syrian people are internally displaced, and 5.1 million have fled the country. Many of them have initially fled to the neighbouring countries – primarily Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey – however in summer 2015, there was a sharp increase in the number of migrants seeking refugee status in Europe⁶. Boni and Tochman’s reportage, published before this “refugee crisis” of 2015, highlights the difficult conditions that the refugees face in neighbouring countries. These conditions, together with the lack of perspectives and the desperation of many exiled Syrians, are what makes them undertake the perilous journey to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea.

The two reporters visit the largest refugee camp in Jordan, Zaatari, which today hosts about 80,000 people⁷. They also interview Syrians living in the suburbs of the Jordanian city of Ramtha, just a few kilometres away from the Syrian border. The reporters’ journey leads them to the refugee camp with a sophisticated name, Cyber City, but very unsophisticated conditions. They meet a 55-year old Palestinian-Syrian, Fadi, who stays in the camp with his wife and teenage son. His elder son, until recently, student of French philology in Damascus, is now living with relatives near Amman and continuing his education (Loc. 248). The father talks about the fate of his eldest son, which was the most difficult:

The third son is gone, he was arrested in Syria, it is worse than death, you know about this, we know, we know, they broke his jaw, after forty days we managed to get him out of there, it cost us a lot, he weighed less than fifty kilograms, he managed to leave through Turkey, Greece, you know how these trails go, we know, we know, illegally through all the borders, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Austria, it cost us a lot, all the way to Norway, that’s where he got his permit, he studies there and calls

⁴ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=70012>.

⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/staffan-de-mistura-400000-killed-syria-civil-war-16042305735629.html>

⁶ According to data provided by BBC, over a million people arrived in Europe in 2015 seeking asylum, many of them following a perilous journey across the Mediterranean, and/or through the Balkan trail. Syrians were the biggest group among the asylum-seekers. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>

⁷ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=176>

us sometimes. And we are rotting here, says Fadi and pours us some more coffee. (Loc. 248)⁸

In their account of the conversation with Fadi, the reporters use long, sentences, not interrupting them with full stops, to imitate their interlocutor's way of speaking, his repetitions and his emotions. Fadi often addresses the reporters, referring to well-known facts: tortures at Syrian governmental prisons, ways to smuggle migrants to Europe through the Balkans. The reporters' acknowledgment of these facts – "we know, we know" – not only suggests that there are two sides participating in the dialogue, but also it gives the impression that Fadi seeks understanding and legitimacy for his story.

The story of refugees in Jordan is often told by world media after a short visit to the Zaatari camp. Boni and Tochman comment, in a somewhat ironic way, on how Zaatari provides a perfect material to journalists:

All the refugees are in one place, almost everyone eager to talk. It is not difficult here to see emotions, mournful wailing and tears of hopelessness. Even the camp manager, a German, does not refuse interviews. He is friendly, speaks in an animated way, gives numbers – this is enough to stitch together a good story. . . Why? To show that the big world has a problem? To prevent someone from saying that there will be no more money for refugees? There must be. The Zaatari camp costs daily five hundred thousand dollars. (Loc 382)⁹

Indeed, the interest of the global media is superficial and short-lived, and does not provide understanding of the individual stories of refugees, their frustrations, hopes and expectations. How do they perceive the world, and Europe more specifically? The reporters join a group of male inhabitants of the camp, leading a heated political discussion.

Europe can do whatever they want. But they don't want. No point talking about it. But why do you need entire Europe? If Paris doesn't accept something, it can send a few planes at once. And it's done. Or London. They have nothing against it. They accept the killing of

⁸ „Trzeciego syna nie ma, aresztowali go w Syrii, to gorsze niż śmierć, wiecie o tym, wiemy wiemy, złamali mu szczękę, po czterdziestu dniach udało się go stamtąd wydostać, drogo nas to kosztowało, ważył mniej niż pięćdziesiąt kilo, udało mu się wyjechać przez Turcję, Grecję, wiecie, którędy idą szlaki, wiemy, wiemy, nielegalnie przez wszystkie granice, przez Bułgarię, Czarnogórę, Austrię, drogo nas to kosztowało, aż do Norwegii, tam dostał pobyt, studiuje i czasem do nas dzwoni. A my tu gnijemy, mówi Fadi i dolewa nam kawę.” (Loc. 248, Boni i Tochman)

⁹ „Uchodźcy są w jednym miejscu, prawie każdy chętny do rozmowy. Nietrudno tu o emocje, żałobny lament, łzy bezsilności. A i komendant obozu, Niemiec, nie broni się przed wywiadami. Jest sympatyczny, mówi barwnie, sypie liczbami – to wystarczy, by uszyć zgrabne story. . . Po co? Aby pokazać, że wielki świat ma problem? Aby komuś nie przyszło do głowy powiedzieć, że na uchodźców więcej pieniędzy nie będzie? Muszą być. Obóz w Zaatari kosztuje dziennie pięćset tysięcy dolarów.” (Loc 382, Boni i Tochman)

Syrians. They could be done with it in a couple of days. Each country of Europe could be done with it. Our regime is strong, but only against our own people. In Europe, they respect animals, dogs, cats, I read about it, they fight for their [animal] rights. Maybe the world will help us one day, maybe it will come to its senses, and the Syrian man will at least be like a dog, not like cattle for slaughter. (Loc 660)¹⁰

This paragraph is structured like a conversation of several people, in which many voices overlap, interrupt and contradict one another. The discussants are not identified by name, but they represent different opinions. Some believe that Europe – probably understood here as the EU - is powerful and it should act, and they are disappointed by its inability, or rather its unwillingness to act. Others feel that the EU does not need to act as a whole – some nation-states are strong enough to act on their own, for instance France and United Kingdom. They are convinced that it would be easy for politicians in Paris or London to stop the killing by sending military force against the regime (and presumably, ISIS as well). The lack of such decisive actions is perceived as the acceptance of the mass killings of Syrians. Thus, European member states are at fault for not stopping the massacres, and in that way, are guilty of the deaths, casualties and displacement of Syrian citizens. One man points out the Europeans' hypocrisy, in highlighting the respect given to animals and advocacy for animal rights, but lack of action in the face of human suffering. By evoking all these opinions, the reporters illustrate the bitterness and disappointment in the European Union among the Syrian refugees. One of the men concludes the discussion with the words: "Europe and the United States think equally badly of the Arabs, so they abandoned us" (Loc 673). The accusatory finger is pointed towards all Europeans, also the Polish readers of their reportage.

Refugees in Lampedusa

Giusy Nicolini, the mayor of the Italian island of Lampedusa, also blames the EU: even though Europe has just received the Peace Nobel Prize, it is silent about the carnage in Syria (10). Jarosław Mikołajewski met her during his first visit to the island. He arrives to Lampedusa a second time when writing his book *Wielki Przyptyw* [High Tide] in 2015. He

¹⁰ Europa może zrobić, co zechce. Ale nie chce. Szkoda gadać. Po co ci aż cała Europa? Jak Paryż czegoś nie akceptuje, to raz dwa wyśle kilka samolotów i po sprawie. Albo Londyn. Oni nie mają nic przeciw temu. Akceptują zabijanie Syryjczyków. Uwinęliby się z tym w dwa dni. Każdy jeden kraj Europy by się uwinął. U nas reżim jest silny, ale tylko przeciw swoim. W Europie szanują zwierzęta, psy, koty, czytałem, walczą o ich prawa. Może świat nam kiedyś pomoże, może się opamięta i człowiek syryjski będzie chociaż jak pies, a nie jak bydlę rzeźne. (Loc 660)

tries to meet the mayor again, but feels ashamed to push for a meeting again – the argument he gave her previously turned out to be untrue:

I was making a point about the necessity of making the issue heard. I was saying that Europe reacts inadequately, because it is not informed well enough. Not certain enough. Not moved enough. I was assuring [her] that when Poland finds out about the one thousand and five hundred refugees cramped into three hundred spots at the Centre for Identification and Extradition on Lampedusa, it will react. If it hears that the island is too small to bury a thousand corpses – it will help . . . What am I supposed to tell Giusy Nicolini now? (10-11)¹¹

He is ashamed of his countrymen and women, of the Polish politicians, of the people who remained indifferent even after the huge tragedy on 3 October 2013, when hundreds of people sank near the coast of Lampedusa. The writer feels almost betrayed by the lack of response among Poles who so eagerly claimed their links with the Mediterranean culture, especially in the communist times (11). Now, when “the modern-day Jasons and Odysseus” boarded inflatable rafts, is this link gone? (11).

Lampedusa, part of the Pelagie Islands archipelago south of Sicily, is only about 20 square kilometres in size. It became one of the main points of entry for migrants from Africa, as it is the southernmost point within Italian borders. Mikołajewski interviews medical doctor Pietro Bartolo who is responsible for the ambulatory on the island. Each boat or ship that brings asylum seekers to Lampedusa requires doctor Bartolo’s presence: he has to make an initial health assessment and give a *nihil obstat* certificate, which allows them to enter the Italian territory. After further examination, he provides them with immediate medical help, and issues a Straniero Temporaneamente Presente document (Temporarily Present Foreigner), giving access to free Italian healthcare for twelve months. His words stand in exact opposition with the words of Jarosław Kaczyński, mentioned at the beginning of this article: “- The people arriving from the sea are healthier than us, and what they could infect us with is still nothing in comparison to what they have experienced

¹¹ „Przekonywałem o konieczności nagłośnienia problemu. Mówiłem, że Europa słabo reaguje, bo jest niedoinformowana. Nie dość pewna. Niedostatecznie poruszona. Zapewniałem, że jeśli Polska dowie się o tysiącu pięciuset uchodźcach stłoczonych na trzystu miejscach w Centrum Identyfikacji i Ekstradycji na Lampedusie, to zareaguje. Jeśli usłyszy, że wyspa jest za mała, żeby pochować tysiące trupów – pomoże. . . Co teraz miałbym powiedzieć Giusy Nicolini?”(10-11)

themselves. Women, in particular, who are almost all raped, especially in Libia.” (27)¹² Bartolo underlines that despite good physical health, many asylum-seekers break down emotionally and psychologically upon their arrival. They have undergone such torture, humiliation, rape, and much suffering, risking death on the sea to reach a safe place (23). Once they are in Lampedusa, they are disappointed: “this is an island, and behind that island, there is another island, and behind that are the contours of the continent, but that land is not Scandinavia, Germany, England or the Netherlands” (23). Their journey is not over – their physical presence on the territory of Italy does not mean that they will be able to immediately proceed further, that their asylum claims will be processed fast, that they will be able to begin a new life. Instead, many face long months, if not years, in refugee centres, eventual relocation, or an illegal passage to the desired country. Doctor Bartolo admits: “we are excellent at rescuing, but cannot deal well with integrating” (23). He is outraged at the fact that nothing has been done to stop the illegal trafficking of migrants over the Mediterranean Sea. He thinks that asylum seekers could be brought by planes or decent boats, their health checks could be done before boarding. Rescue actions are costly; it would be much more reasonable to use this money to organise a better way for migrants to reach the shores of Europe. He estimates that one transport earns the traffickers from 1-1.5 million euro. “At present, these criminals increase their wealth, we keep spending on the rescue, and these poor people still die in the sea” (35), states Bartolo, with resignation.

Another interlocutor of Mikołajewski, Giacomo, local poet and artist, shares the same frustration:

“It is maddening that people, the majority of whom ask for political asylum, are allowed to die in such circumstances. Wouldn’t it be better to open a humanitarian corridor between Libya and Europe? We could then avoid such tragedies and waste of money – the few thousand euros, that each of these poor souls pays to criminal organisations.”(54)¹³

¹² „Przybywający z morza są zdrowsi od nas, a to czym oni mogą nas zarazić, jest niczym wobec tego, czego sami doświadczyli. Zwłaszcza kobiety, które są gwałcone prawie wszystkie, zwłaszcza w Libii.”(27)

¹³ „To doprowadza do szału, że ludziom, którzy w większości proszą o azyl polityczny, przez tyle lat pozwala się umierać w takich warunkach. Nie byłoby lepiej otworzyć korytarz humanitarny pomiędzy Libią a Europą? Można by wtedy uniknąć takich tragedii i trwonienia pieniędzy – kilku tysięcy euro, jakie każdy z tych nieszczęśników wypłaca organizacjom przestępczym.”(54)

Giacomo is well aware that migration is a much larger and more complex phenomenon than what can be perceived in Lampedusa. He finds that the exodus from Africa is caused by Europe's actions: the selling of arms and the long-term exploitation of African resources (55). Even the help that Lampedusans provide to the migrants is, according to Giacomo, a way to soothe one's own conscience rather than to save people's lives – in the end, all Europeans are responsible for the crisis (55-56). Indeed, migration to Europe cannot be simply reduced to the search of peaceful or better conditions of living, but it has to be linked with such large-scale phenomena as global economic inequalities, conflicts and climate change (Werz and Hoffman, 2016).

One of Giacomo's artistic projects is to display the everyday items left behind by the migrants: bags, clothes, toys, books, shoes... Giacomo says: "Everything is alive. Each object is alive. It has an energy, a temperature. It makes a connection between itself and those who look at it." (78) The ultimate goal of this project is to initiate political discussion and to commemorate this great migration. Giacomo does not want it to be forgotten, just as "we forgot about when we were leaving", or how "we forgot the eight million victims in Congo and everything that we dared to do" (78). Again, the objects that the asylum-seekers leave behind tell a story, it is a story with deep roots, inscribed in the colonial era, which still marks the relations between the global north and the global south. The image of heaps of shoes left by migrants is particularly powerful, since it suggests a journey, but also reminds of the gruesome display of shoes in Auschwitz Museum. Objects with which we surround ourselves are extensions of our bodies, actors in the everyday routines, recipients of emotions and memories. They can even outlive a person.

Each of Mikołajewski's interlocutors is compassionate towards migrants, but critical towards the government(s) and the European Union. This human dimension is what is missing in the Polish debates, and many blame the Catholic church for failing to address the refugee crisis in an adequate manner. Indeed, the Polish Catholic Church, largely supportive of the right-wing government of Law and Justice, has not taken any initiative to counterbalance the anti-refugee stance of the politicians (Mazepus and Berardi). Even though the Episcopate has issued in 2015 a statement calling for providing help to

refugees¹⁴, it was rather lukewarm and pointed at the need to help potential refugees in their countries of origin, and expecting the government to take a leading role in such aid. In this context, the words of the Lampedusan priest, Don Mimmo, stand out as brave and compassionate:

... I tell my parishioners that the most serious cause of stagnation in life is waiting for a good occasion for truth and courage. Repeating to oneself that “we need to await the Other”. Each moment is this occasion, perhaps there will be no other. This moment is a unique occasion: millions of refugees see Europe, including Lampedusa, as a land of wellbeing, peace and freedom. And in this moment, you need to face the image that they have of you. This moment, as I tell my churchgoers, is also an exercise in memory. It would be good for Italians to remind themselves that they are also a nation of emigrants. (. . .) I will tell them, and I do tell them, that this is a great occasion to ponder on Europe. Because for refugees, we are Europeans, even though we think of ourselves as Italians or Poles. We have not thought it through with enough seriousness, what does a common European identity mean. It is high time to think it through.” (99-100)¹⁵.

Unfortunately, in Poland the refugee crisis has had an opposite effect – it did not lead to the feeling of being united with Europe, it gave the opponents of the EU a new weapon. While “solidarity” is a term that the public agencies like to promote as a Polish value, there is hardly any solidarity when it comes to the issue of refugees – the quota system of redistribution of refugee applicants in different Member States, to support Mediterranean countries like Greece and Italy, has been publicly criticised by countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Slovakia and Hungary¹⁶ even took the EU quota mechanism to the

¹⁴ Komunikat Prezydium Konferencji Episkopatu Polski w sprawie uchodźców. <http://episkopat.pl/komunikat-prezydium-konferencji-episkopatu-polski-ws-uchodzcow-2/>

¹⁵ „- ... mówię wiernym, że najpoważniejszą przyczyną życiowej stagnacji jest czekanie na tę właściwą, dobrą okazję do prawdy i odwagi. Powtarzanie sobie, że „mamy oczekiwać innego”. Każda chwila jest tą okazją, innej może nie będzie. Ta chwila jest okazją jedyną: to, że miliony uchodźców widzą Europę, w tym Lampedusę, jako krainę dobrobytu, pokoju i wolności. I to w tej chwili musisz zmierzyć się z tym wyobrażeniem, jakie mają o tobie. Ta chwila, powiem moim wiernym, to też ćwiczenie z pamięci. Dobrze, żeby Włosi przypomnieli sobie, że oni również są narodem emigrantów. . . Powiem, i mówię, że to wielka okazja, aby się zastanowić nad Europą. Bo dla uchodźców jesteśmy Europejczykami, choć my myślimy sobie jako o Włochach albo Polakach. Nie przemyśleliśmy dotychczas ze stosowną powagą, co to znaczy wspólna europejska tożsamość. A więc najwyższy czas ją przemyśleć.” (99-100)

¹⁶ Deutsche Welle, „Hungary and Slovakia take EU refugee quota scheme to court”, 10.05.2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/hungary-and-slovakia-take-eu-refugee-quota-scheme-to-court/a-38781422>

European Court of Justice, while the Polish Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, publicly declared that Poland will not accept any refugee quotas¹⁷. Europe could be perceived as a place of welcome and peace, of refuge from conflicts, dictatorships, and oppression – instead, it appears as divided and, at least in part, hypocritical. This is not only the perception of the asylum-seekers, but it is a feeling shared among some of its citizens, like the inhabitants of Lampedusa. For them, migrants arriving on boats are people, not numbers. They see their tears, their fear, their attachment to family members, and they do not dehumanise them as the Polish or Hungarian politicians do. They realise that basic values of compassion, sharing, providing help to those in need, are not sufficiently present in the political decisions taken at the EU and national levels. The EU proved to be inefficient or unwilling to put these ideas in practice, missing a chance to reassert its commitment to the values that it claims to uphold. Values are indeed tested particularly in times of crisis.

Refugees on Kos

Artur Domosławski visits Kos, one of the Greek islands closest to Turkey (the distance is just about four kilometres), in 2015. Upon his arrival, he hears of the death at sea of eleven Syrians, trying to cross over to Greece on two rickety boats. Four others were saved by Turkish coastguards and two swam to the island in lifejackets. Domosławski observes that the people who arrive to Kos on their own emanate a newly gained sense of self-confidence (318). “They march with a wide smile, a bright look. Not like castaways or wrecks who have been battered by fate. Look, we won. We are alive. Some look like they are floating above the ground” (318)¹⁸. During his time at Kos, the reporter is able to discern many differences between asylum-seekers: Syrians tend to be better dressed and better off – some have enough cash to pay for a long stay in a hotel, or at least to buy a decent tent for forty euro (319). The local hotel owner, Paris Koutsouradis, confesses to the reporter that he has never had in his hands a five-hundred-euro banknote (320). The poorest migrants, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh or from Africa squat in an abandoned hotel in the suburbs (319). Financial status also defines means of transport – bigger, safer motorboats,

¹⁷ Rzeczpospolita, „Beata Szydło: Polska nie przyjmie uchodźców”, 16.05.2017, <http://www.rp.pl/Rzad-PiS/170519184-Beata-Szydlo-Polska-nie-przyjmie-uchodzcow.html>

¹⁸ „Maszerują z szerokim uśmiechem, z jasnym spojrzeniem. Nie jak poturbowani przez los straceńcy czy rozbitkowie. Patrzcie, zwyciężyliśmy. Żyjemy. Niektórzy sprawiają wrażenie, jakby unosili się nad ziemią.” (318).

or rickety inflatable pontoons. The reporter lists all the links in the chain of human traffickers – smugglers, illegal insurance sellers, middlemen, but sometimes even corrupt coast guards (320). This big business is a response to the demand – what Domosławski calls “the great migration of peoples” (321). This migration is not only the result of the war in Syria, but of various global tensions generating millions of the dispossessed. Domosławski’s book *Wykluczeni [The Excluded]* is in fact a collection of stories on exclusion, exile, dispossession, marginalisation – from Brazil to Myanmar. The reporter notices many levels of exclusion, which sometimes overlap, as in the case of women from Ciudad Juarez in Mexico who suffer violence both as women and as people who are economically deprived. What all these cases of exclusion have in common is the fact that the public opinion in Western countries is largely indifferent to the suffering of the most underprivileged in the countries of the Global South. Domosławski, in opposition to those voices in Poland who prefer to see migrants as people who seek social benefits in Europe, demonstrates that those who are called “economic migrants” have just as shockingly painful personal stories as those of Syrian refugees (324). Sangin and Ahmed from Afghanistan explain that they left their country out of fear of kidnapping for ransom – it is a way to extract money from victim’s families. If the family cannot pay, the victim is killed with cold blood. Ibrahim from Guinea escapes from poverty – although he was never hungry – and wants a good job and a share in the Western wealth, which is built on the exploitation of resources of his country. Abdul from Bangladesh ran away from semi-slavery in a textile factory (325). These various facets of exclusion illustrate the many reasons for global inequality. A growing number of people around the world can be inscribed in the category, which Domosławski labels after Zygmunt Bauman “human waste”. As Bauman explains:

The production of ‘human waste’, or more correctly, wasted humans (the ‘excessive’ and ‘redundant’, that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. It is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* . . . and of *economic progress*. (4)

The world’s division into global centres of modernization and peripheries which are deemed to be “backward” and “underdeveloped” creates a highly unequal relationship of power. One of its outcomes is the invisibility of the peripheries (real or imagined). The peripheries’ inhabitants are not considered in the same way as the inhabitants of the developed world.

Domosławski talks to Muhammad Berni, a sixty-one year Syrian “whose world fell apart” (324). The man, recently saved from drowning by the Greek coast guard, is angry: “ - The world is moved by one photo of a Syrian boy who drowned on the way to Kos, but it is silent when in Syrian a hundred of such boys die every day. How can Europe allow it? Why does America not do anything?” (324). This is a feeling shared by many migrants. Their faith in the power of the United States and the European Union is shaken – the countries that claim to be global players, are in fact helpless or disinterested in solving the crisis.

The other outcome of the global inequalities is that when the dispossessed try to break the barrier and enter the world of the wealthy, they are considered to be a threat to stability and security. Even though the wealthy world needs cheap labour, it fears those who are different and supposedly less modern. Domosławski concludes:

The satiated Westerner does not want to know at all why do the migrants migrate and refugees escape, nor why do they try to break into our fortresses – the European and the American ones. It is not only about the money . . . The migrating people are “messengers of bad news”. They remind us of the fragility of our existence, the impermanence of our comfort and security. They make us realise that our life can fall apart in just a moment because of forces that we cannot control: climate change, wars or global financial markets shocks. (334-335).¹⁹

Thus, the refugees represent our own fears, they speak to the more or less conscious anxieties of the Westerners not wanting to lose what they have. A common reaction is simply to turn one’s head around, to pretend the crises do not concern us, to assume that the global problems are far away. But these problems have a way to manifest themselves anyway: vacationers sunbathing on the beaches of Greece find corpses of asylum-seekers washed on the shore.

The Polish reporters realise that the topic of refugees, dominated by media and internet discussions full of prejudices and hate speech, needs a deeper understanding. They

¹⁹ „Syty człowiek Zachodu wcale nie chce wiedzieć, dlaczego migranci migrują, a uchodźcy uciekają, ani dlaczego próbują sforsować nasze twierdze – europejską i amerykańską. Nie chodzi tu tylko o pieniądze . . . Ludzie migrujący są “postańcami złych wiadomości”. Przypominają o kruchości naszej egzystencji, nietrwałości wygod i bezpieczeństwa. Uświadamiają, że nasze życie może w jednej chwili się rozpaść z powodu działania sił, na które nie mamy wpływu: zmian klimatycznych, wojen czy wstrząsów na globalnych rynkach finansowych.” (334-335)

write about the uncomfortable reality of our time, the desperate great escape from the regions with a history of colonisation, Western exploitation of resources, or those who serve as a playground for competing global powers. On the one hand, the reporters write about the world to change the perception of the excluded, to break the silence, to put into focus, but on the other hand, they realise their helplessness. Indeed, Domostawski finds that the feeling of helplessness is a dominating one in his profession – while the written word has some potential for change, more often than not, the reporter's work has no impact on the fate of the story protagonists (35). This work is linked to the danger of becoming addicted to the adrenaline, to seeking the most intense, vivid emotions; reporters become like those who indulge in dark tourism (also called grief tourism), but have the safety of a return ticket in their pocket, says Domostawski (107). Mikołajewski, although lamenting on the insensitivity of Polish society to the suffering of refugees, believes in the power of the dialogue, of a conversation: "it is one of the most important rules of reportage: do not ask, just wait. Build an atmosphere, a substitute of friendship. A planned one, but an authentic one" (22). Listening is more important than asking questions, giving time and space for the person to share their thoughts, feelings and words. Thus, what the reporter can do is to give the refugee, the excluded, the dispossessed a voice and a presence. The three reportages in this paper do exactly that: they do not discuss EU and national policies on migration, the potential for integration, the consequences of accepting or rejecting migrants. They focus on the migrants themselves, their stories, their hopes and fears. This way, the migrant acquires a face and a humanity – often lost in mainstream discourses in times of the refugee crisis.

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