



A book about the fate of Ukrainian immigrant women (based on research in Poland). Aleksandra Boroń, Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik. *Ukrainian war refugees: identity, trauma, hope*. Kraków 2022: Impuls Publishing House

The authors begin their reflections with a poem by Stanisław Barańczak Only this porcelain if any. Stanisław Barańczak (1946–2014) was a Polish emigrant poet, dissident, and lecturer at Harvard University. The poem's message about the transience and fragility of human existence harmonises with the content of the book, especially the stories of Ukrainian women. It is in their experiences that one can see the spectrum of tragedy caused by the merciless war unleashed by Russia. Individual statements of refugee women create a multi-voiced story about forced escape to Poland, showing the drama of making decisions in conditions of stress, fear and uncertainty. These stories concern both saving lives in dangerous conditions, as well as longing for what once was, rebuilding everyday life in a new, strange place without the support of family, friends, not speaking the language, with limitations related to financial resources, as well as awareness of one's own strength in overcoming difficulties. The entire course of the interlocutors' reflections focuses on the journey, which they understand as an exodus and migration. Women set off alone or with children, abandoning everything that was dear to them. They have suitcases with the most necessary things, which, after unpacking, turn out to be insufficient. They leave with regret, fear and sadness, often with tears and despair. It is unknown whether they will return. Sometimes they know exactly where they are going, sometimes they make decisions only during journey, often accidental. In any case, it is a new beginning, which for some is associated with relief and hope, for others with anxiety and helplessness. Forced immigrants who are emotionally attached to their homeland cannot return to it and thus they try to find their place in the new country. They are constantly looking for: a job, an apartment, a sense of security, and the opportunity to acquire new qualifications and competences. Always on the move. However, they do not abandon hope, they are constantly fighting with reality and themselves—for the integrity of their identity, for the future of their children. They are not passive. Despite everything, they want to maintain control over their lives, to have a sense of control, but not fragmentary. They are sad but brave. These women do not want to remain victims of the events that are taking place, they do not want the vision of an abandoned (sometimes destroyed) house and memories of the atrocities of Russian aggressors to destroy their psyche. They fight for survival, dignified existence and mental health—for themselves and their children. Although the heroines described in the

book are spatially and psychologically detached from their homeland, they are not integrated into the new environment. They are “neither here nor there”, “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial”, as William Turner, a British anthropologist and researcher of rituals in the context of social change, put it. These women are passengers, their characteristics are “ambiguous; they pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.” The metaphor of the journey refers to the research method that the authors chose: a narrative interview, thanks to which they could learn, at least partially, about the women’s experiences and the meaning they attributed to the events related to forced emigration. Personal stories allow us to discover fragments of biography, distant from the generalised portrait of a refugee presented in quantitative research and reports. The relationship between what a person has experienced and their story is multi-layered, and at the same time it is a journey: from the event to its interpretation. An individual’s experience is elements of real life that become experience in the process of perception and attribution of meaning, in the context of previous experience and sociocultural context. The next phase is a story that puts these experiences into a specific framework when meeting a listener, depending on the relationship between them, but also interprets them in the context of the past and future.

The final layer is life as text, transformed by the researcher’s interpretations, experiences, guesses and knowledge. The research part of the book is preceded by a theoretical one, consisting of seven chapters. They contain a methodology, an attempt to recreate the concept of a refugee in the context of mainly sociological theories, examples of waves of refugees in history and a description of actions towards them, including those of Poland towards Ukrainians in 2022; description of the political, economic, socio-cultural effects of migration from a macro-perspective; description of the psychosocial effects of being a refugee on the individual from the perspective of trauma, existential shock and identity destabilisation. Here, the Russian aggression against Ukraine since February 24, 2022 is also reconstructed against the background of historical and national conflicts, and the reaction of the international community is described. There is also an attempt to characterise Ukrainianness in a historical and contemporary perspective (talking about women’s emancipation and feminist ideas as they are perceived by refugees). Finally, the intercultural intervention project “Great power in small words” was presented, which is implemented by the Department of Multicultural Education and Research on Social Inequalities of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and aimed at children from Ukraine.

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