

# Homecoming

An Anthropology  
of Return Migrations

Ewa Nowicka  
Homa Firouzbakhch (eds.)

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## PREFACE

We live in a world that migration and remigration, in the life of individuals, families and groups increase the opportunity of contacts between different cultures, and at the same time create new migratory patterns. This territorial mobility, in turn, redefines the very concept of identity, being local, regional, cultural, national or transnational. And yet, if migration received some scholarly attentions, the phenomena of return migrations and international return migrations have been rather neglected. Most notably, research on return migrations mainly concentrated on its economic and political aspects and consequences. Surprisingly, the social and cultural differences of receiving and sending societies as well as the socio-psychological profiles of the return migrants received little or no scholarly interests. Some authors suggested and predicted (Appadurai) the diminishing importance of territorial factor in the identity formation of the contemporary people. Contrary to those views, we can observe ubiquitous sources of manifestation of relations between groups and their territories of origin. These relations range from emotional, social to practical ties and connections. We witness a complex but infinitely vivid importance of the place of birth, the place of origin and the place of the early age as backgrounds of the individual and the collective identity of groups all over the world. The deterritorialization of the individual or the group identity is certainly not a simple and all encompassing process in our times. Why do migrants – voluntarily and permanently – return to their native lands? Is the return influenced by changes in their country of origin? Is it due to changes inside the receiving country, as the result of for instance a growing hostility towards foreigners, nationalistic tendencies and/or intolerance and xenophobia? Or is it due to the „ideology of return” cultivated by migrants in the host country?

These questions and reflections were discussed during a conference held in Warsaw, at the Warsaw University (March 31st-April 1st, 2006) ; the majority of articles included in this volume, were presented during the conference. Some of the papers included here, were presented in Bristol (September 18–25), during the 2006 Biannual conference of the European

Association of Social Anthropologists. We also incorporated Petra Andits's article which is a particularly pertinent one to the subject of this book. Andits using Australian-Hungarian travel diaries examines a particular aspect of the return migration. More specifically, she focuses on strategies that returnees employ to reintegrate into their native land, in order to avoid marginalization. Papers included in the present volume, analyze various cases of literal and physical return migrations. Some of them, develop the subject of cultural elaboration of attitudes towards the home-country, with an emphasis on imaginary rather than real returns. We have also decided to include in our volume a personal and intimate account of a return home of an exiled, written by one of the co-editors, Homa Firouzbakhch. We are aware that the text is written in an entirely different style than other articles. In her paper, problems raised by all other authors are presented subjectively. The author narrates her personal experiences of exile and her subsequent return after twenty years to find out she is a stranger in her own home country. The article has also a methodological peculiarity being doubly subjective. The author uses her diary written during her journey back to home, re-elaborating on her own earlier autobiographical materials from the point of view of her present situation.

The title of our book requires a comment: it is inspired by the famous essay of Alfred Schuetz «The HomeComer» published almost half a century ago, a classical study of return migration providing an illuminating sociological and anthropological insights into the phenomenon of return to home-country. We still find the Schuetzian essay inspiring in the study of contemporary social and territorial mobility.

As the editors of this book, we would like to express our acknowledgments to all contributors of the volume. It was a great pleasure to cooperate with you all. We would also like to extend our gratitude to all doctoral students, assistants and the staff of the Social Anthropology section of the department of Sociology at the Warsaw University, who were active and helpful discussants. We wish to express a special gratitude to Wojciech Połec for his invaluable help in organizing the conference on return migration held at the University of Warsaw.

Ewa Nowicka and Homa Firouzbakhch

Warsaw, Gdańsk, November 2007