

How does it feel to be a foreign-born university professor? And how does it feel to be a Polish-born professor in the USA or the UK? The answer to these questions, undoubtedly, is associated with one's individual ability and personality as well as the discipline this person represents. But it depends very much on how the country we are coming from is perceived in the receiving society.

The main goal of the project is to gather variegated biographical accounts of the members of the Polish diaspora, i.e., Polish-born academics working abroad, in order to analyze the “geographical imaginaries”, i.e., ways that people perceive places, ideas about the world, or mental images, we hold of different places and of the people living there.

As other determinants of migration are well-researched (e.g., career opportunities in traditional countries of migration or various push factors in the peripheral countries), the role played by geographical imaginaries remains relatively unknown in international migration studies, not to mention studies on Polish intellectual diaspora.

High expectations towards newcomers stem from Poland's low symbolic position in the global system of knowledge production and the discourse of hypermobility that governs Western academia – built on the descriptions of hyper-productive and hypermobile 'hegemonic academics'. These hegemonic imaginaries can be challenged by the biographical experience of internationally mobile scholars. The main motivation behind this project is, thus, the desire to present to an academic audience and the wider public (e.g., journalists, students) the complex story of individuals who have experienced academic migration 'to the West'.

The project uses variegated sources to investigate the biographical experience of being a long-term academic migrant abroad (2 years+), or – more precisely – a Polish-born migrant in the center of global knowledge production (United Kingdom, United States plus Canada, and Australia – two other major English-speaking academic systems). The study is built on a multi-stage research design. The analysis will embrace: (1) written memoirs/diaries of Polish academic migrants, (2) autobiographical interviews with Polish academic migrants, and (3) new memoirs of the present-day migrants – acquired during a writing competition. In order to take into account the historical specificity of the academic field in Poland (and its significant transformations), the study focuses on the biographical experiences of academics who left Poland across five decades: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, or the period after March 1968 and before COVID-19 pandemic, excluding political migrants whose decision was shaped by completely different circumstances.

The results of the project will be disseminated in the form of academic papers and press releases. The raw material and interpretative papers will be available at no cost on our website.