

# 'Americans' in Pruszków and in Grodzisk, Poland

## The ethos of returned migrants in local and family memory

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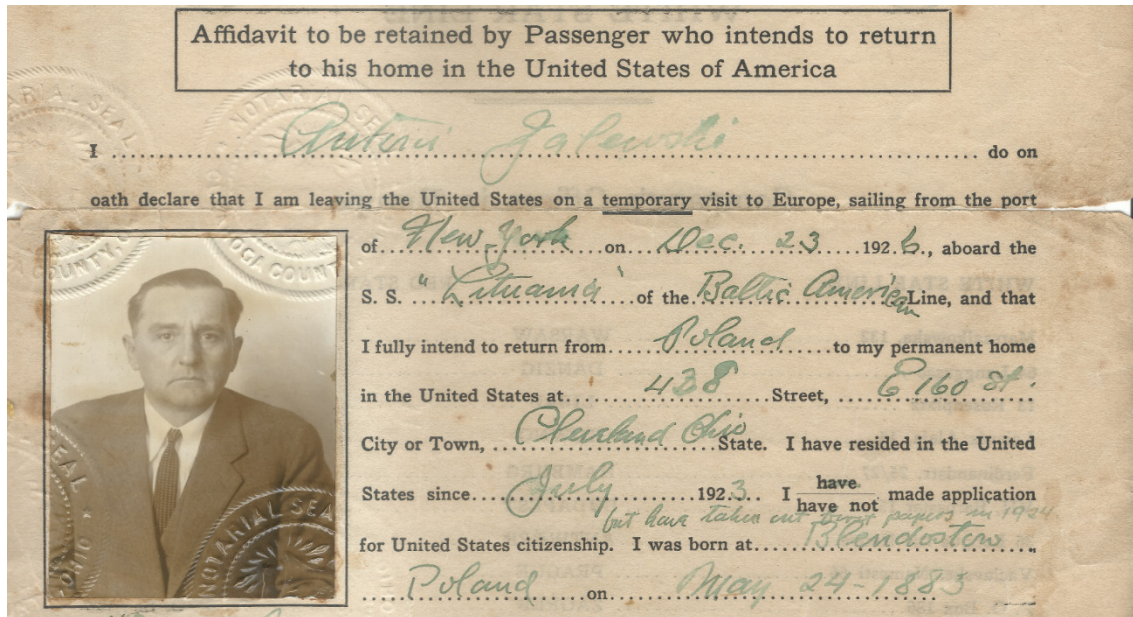


Figure 1: An affidavit of Antoni Zalewski [detail]. The family intended to move permanently to Poland, but at the same time to leave an open door for their return to the United States © Agnieszka Szurek [Agnieszka Szurek family archive]

This paper explores local and family memory of the re-emigrants from the United States who came to live in Pruszków and Grodzisk, small towns near Warsaw. Stories by and about the 'Americans' took many different forms and were conveyed in different ways: in memoirs, newspapers articles, oral tradition, through lifestyle practices or preserving memorabilia. Drawing on the notion of 'rhetorical ecologies' and on Kenneth Burke's concept of identification, this paper describes various contexts, negotiations and reinterpretations which influenced the forming of a local version of the 'American ethos'.

**Keywords:** re-emigrants, family history, local history, rhetorical ecologies.

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## Rhetorical ecologies

An ‘ecological turn’ in rhetoric has provided researchers in the fields of memory and place with a new theoretical framework, as the well-established notion of rhetorical situation was developed into the concept of rhetorical ecologies. In his famous essay Lloyd F. Bitzer argued that rhetorical situation is “the context in which speakers or writers create discourse” (Bitzer 1968: 1). Rhetors identify exigences in their environment and react to them, attuning their response to constraints such as beliefs, attitudes, interests, traditions and other. This model has been criticised by Richard Vatz (1973) and other scholars, who made the point that rhetorical situations are in fact interlacements of various exigences, interests, relations and influences and that they are created, not identified or discovered by rhetors. The model of ‘rhetorical ecologies’, introduced by Jenny Edbauer and described more fully in subsequent passages of this paper, was intended not to replace, but to broaden this classical, Bitzerian notion of rhetorical situation (Edbauer, 2005 : 9).

While the topic of rhetorical ecologies is too broad to discuss here, several points are important for the study presented in this paper. The ecological approach advocates methods which include immersion, ‘immanent participation’ and close contact between critics and researched ecologies (Wells, McGreavy, Senda-Cook, 2018: 20) – including physical contact with places and objects. Narratives are told not only through texts, but also through things – in the case of the re-emigrants’ stories it may be a mincer brought from the United States in the 1930s and still used in the family or a memorial tablet from the former factory, now displayed in a shopping centre.

The ecological approach encourages rhetoricians to think ‘outside of fixed identities and environments’ (Wells, McGreavy, Senda-Cook, 2018 : 9). Hence, this paper addresses the question of how re-emigrants identities were changing, what means they used to express themselves, and also how their practices were taken over, continued, reinterpreted or modified. According to one of the most important assumptions of the ecological model, it is not an ideal end product which is being analyzed here, but “an everyday process – a lived, bodily experience” (Wells, McGreavy, Senda-Cook, 2018: 9).

## Return migration from the United States to Poland after World War I: two local stories

Soon after Poland regained its independence in 1918, a lot of Polish migrants started heading back to their homeland. Their decisions to take a round-trip back home were not exceptional. They were part of a large ‘backward’ movement: in the years 1880–1930 from one-quarter to one-third of all European immigrants to the United States permanently returned home (Wyman, 1993: 6). However, the return migration of American Poles after World War I had specific reasons: patriotic propaganda pictured Poland as ‘a mother in need’ – a country laid waste by war, impoverished and underdeveloped, looking with hope towards

resourceful and wealthy compatriots from beyond the ocean. The emigrants viewed return to the homeland as a patriotic duty, but also as a pioneer crusade (Walaszek, 2000: 252).

Among the group of over 318 thousand American Poles who re-emigrated from the United States (Wyman, 1993: 11) there were about 100 families of the members of the Polish Mechanics Association who came to settle in Pruszków with a plan of organizing the machine tools industry. The Company bought the remains of Józef Troetzer's factory, badly damaged during World War I, and in 1920 managed to start the production of lathes and millers in the new buildings equipped with machines brought from the United States. Some of these 'Americans' definitely decided to leave Pruszków and found jobs elsewhere in Poland or abroad. However, in the years 1934–35 about 35 emigrants from the United States were still employed in the Machine Tools Factory (Piłatowicz, 1983: 19).

Except of these cooperative returns there were obviously numerous examples of individual initiatives. In 1921 the Zalewski family returned to Poland after over ten years long stay in the United States (Zalewski: 3–8). Antoni Zalewski found himself in America after he had escaped from a life sentence in Siberia. With the help of the comrades from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) he managed to get back to Warsaw and then to Hamburg. On May 10th 1908 he disembarked on Ellis Island. Soon he was joined by his wife with a new-born baby. The family increased from three to six with the arrival of Antoni's brother and the birth of two more children. They settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where Antoni found job as a carpenter in a railway company. In 1920 the Zalewski family decided to return to Poland, without any clear notion where to find a new home. Their choice finally fell on Grodzisk, a town about 30 km from Warsaw and 15 km from Pruszków. Antoni had tried several businesses before he successfully set up a lemonade and mineral water bottling plant, later enlarged by new branches: vinegar bottling and beer bottling for the Warsaw-based brewery Haberbusch & Schiele. Two of his three children were born in the United States and held American citizenship.

### **Material explored: Memoirs, mementos and memorabilia**

While the issue of return migration has been explored by historians and sociologists (e.g. Walaszek, 1983; Wyman, 1993; Walaszek, 2000), this article focuses on stories 'from below': how the emigrants from America pictured themselves and how they were described by their neighbours and friends. The main aim of this paper is to investigate how the 'Americanishness' was used in various kinds of life stories to construct the ethos. Another goal is to try the methods of rhetorical criticism on a very specific material: memoirs and family memorabilia.

The paper explores two main threads: the narratives about the Polish Mechanics Association and the family history of Antoni Zalewski. Although these two groups of emigrants from the United States lived not far from one another, their stories never crossed.

There are numerous sources concerning the Polish Mechanics Association (e.g. Piłatowicz, 1982; Piłatowicz, 1983; Piłatowicz, 1984a; Piłatowicz, 1984b; Walaszek, 1986; Kępkowska, 2019). However, a grassroots look on the ‘Americans’ in Pruszków I found mainly in the memoirs of Henryk Krzyczkowski (2009) and in local press from the time (“Echo Pruszkowskie”, “Tygodnik Pruszkowski”, “Głos Pruszkowa”). The Polish Mechanics vision of themselves is explicated in the journal issued by their association (“Mechanik. Miesięcznik poświęcony sprawom techniki: organ Stowarzyszenia Mechaników Polskich w Ameryce”), in the programme brochure (Sierosławski, 1921) and on the first pages of Alexander Gwiazdowski’s memoir (Gwiazdowski, 2017).

The family history of the Zalewskis is told in an unpublished manuscript by Witold Zalewski, my maternal grandfather. The sense of ‘American’ identity was also transferred in oral tradition and constructed by family memorabilia: photos, shipping cards and other travel documents, and also carefully preserved small items brought from beyond the ocean.

## Methods

Persuasive stories are told not only through words, spoken or written, but also by storing family collections, putting memory plaques on buildings, cultivating – or ceasing to cultivate – traditions, by choosing clothes to wear or sports to play. To put it in Burkean terms, people react symbolically to their environment and use words or other symbols “to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (Burke, 1950: 41). Stories are constantly re-told, reinterpreted, modulated and adapted to changing circumstances, audiences and exigences.

In her description of “Austin’s weird rhetoric” Jenny Edbauer pointed out that the Bitzerian model of audience/rhetor/exigence, although useful for the analysis of public rhetoric surrounding the issues of urban life, does not cover the whole spectrum of situations, interactions and distributions: the “lived, in-process operations of this rhetoric” (Edbauer, 2005: 17). Instead of thinking of rhetorical situation as of a collection of discrete elements, Edbauer suggests shifting the focus “from *rhetorical situations* to *rhetorical ecologies*” (2005: 9; emphasis in original). The “rhetorical ecologies” model takes into account “amalgamations and transformations – the viral spread – of this rhetoric within its wider ecology” (Edbauer, 2005: 19).

Much the same point is made, although from a different perspective, by Liz Stanley (2013: 210–211) in her book about the documents of life: “Stories are multiple and multitudinous, arriving in many shapes and forms, speaking of many different things, appearing across all forms of media. They weave and interconnect with each other creating a vast inter-textual panorama in which we dwell”. The first aim of this paper is therefore to present the ‘panorama’ or the ‘ecologies’ in which the tales of

the ‘Americans’ operate and to account not only for the ‘speakers’, ‘audiences’ and ‘exigences’ but also for their complex, fluid, and intricate relations.

These relations also take place between the researcher and the analysed text, especially in the case when the object in question is my grandfather’s memoir. I was deeply emotionally attached to my grandfather and I have read his memoir many times through various lenses: as a granddaughter, as his heiress living in the house built by him, as a person interested in local history, and also as a scholar. From earliest childhood I spent hours talking with him and many stories I knew first from the oral version; I also know about things which he did not put into his memoir, either because he had forgotten to do so, or because they were too painful or too intimate. The ‘American myth’ was a tale of my childhood: my great-grandfather coming to Poland with bags full of dollars was for me a kind of fairy-tale figure; there were shelves full of English books, belonging to my grandfather’s elder sister, and traditions kept in the family, such as roast turkey in oranges as a must-have for Christmas.

I am conscious that my discussion of the rhetorical strategies used to construct the local ‘American myth’ may say more about me, my ethos, my interests and biases than about the actual emigrants who returned from the United States to Grodzisk and Pruszków. Similar problems were faced by Daphne Desser (2001), researching rhetorically her great-grandfather’s letters. I understand, like Desser did, that analysing my grandfather’s ethos constructions “I am rewriting him, reconstructing him, creating another fiction, more for my own purposes than his” (Desser, 2001: 316). This kind of reflexive research may however be insightful for understanding a continuous process of identity formation. Desser (2001: 317–318) recalls here Burke’s concept of identification as especially apt for describing the complex relations between the reader and the text. It may be also a fitting approach to describe the ongoing process of negotiations between the ‘Polish’ and the ‘American’ identity inside individuals as well as communities.

### **Millionaires, termites or leaders? Negotiating the re-emigrants ethos**

For children in Pruszków in the years 1919–1920 ‘America’ meant food aid. People displaced by the war, the unemployed and the impoverished received flour, condensed milk, tinned meat and lard. “Even little children knew that from this far America, the rich country beyond the big water, we get clothes, food and cod-liver oil and now people will be coming from there to built a factory” (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 32, own translation). Poles returning from the United States were aware of this stereotype. In the first issues of their journal the Polish Mechanics presented themselves as ‘indebted’ to their fellow countrymen in the home country for their war effort: “It was not our part to shed blood for our country, so we have to pay off our debt of gratitude with our pennies and toil” (Do członków naszych..., 1920: 97, own translation). They were also conscious that by the local people they were expected to be generous and showy, and commented on it ironically: “The arrival of the Americans made quite an impression on Pruszków residents. The gossip went that four millionaires arrived and that they are going to make Warsaw out of

Pruszków. Of course, for the welcome of the newcomers the prices went up by 400 per cent. The millionaires however soon rolled up their sleeves and, to everyone's outrage, get themselves to wheelbarrows and shovels" (*Działalność Stowarzyszenia...*, 1920: 1, own translation).

In 1920 the 'Americans' generally viewed their relations to the countrymen in Poland in the simple terms of givers and receivers, but the most important thing they wanted to give were not dollars, but experience and professional skills. The issues of the "Mechanik" are full of grandeur declarations: the comers from America are going to "rebuild Poland from scratch" (*Mechanicy polscy...*, 1920: 34, own translation). The effort of restoring Poland's wealth and prosperity seemed to be laid fully on the shoulders of the comers from America. The postcard, edited by The Association of Polish Mechanics in 1921 (*Muzeum Dulag 121*) shows a Superman-like figure of a young re-emigrant, stretching a helping hand to a sitting, depressed old worker. In the background there are burning ruins of houses, with women and children crying, but in front of the black smoke from these fires there is a rising sun in form of a radiant coin. In much the same way Polish workers and farmers returning from America were presented by Stanisław Sierosławski (1921: 6). However, not only the wounded, women and children needed help and guidance. Polish workers were described by one of the re-emigrants as inefficient and poorly trained, and factories as badly organized (*Spostrzeżenia...*, 1920: 93–94, own translation). The 'Americans' were careful to explain that 'native' workers are not lazy – they just need proper training. "From beyond the ocean there come hundreds of brave workers, skilled in their professions. Here, in their home country, they stand by their workshops, using the most advanced tools and machines. Everyone of them becomes a teacher, showing by his very example how very efficient this new method is" (Sierosławski, 1921: 10, own translation). Walaszek (2000: 257) using Francesco Cerase's term, classifies such migrants' returns as "returns of innovation". Poland was described as a backward, devastated country, lacking everything, as a periphery, a frontier waiting for settlers. The 'Americans' in Pruszków saw themselves as pioneers of new work culture, almost as the ones whose mission is to civilise and enlighten the natives. When the local factory started hiring local people, it paid big wages but demanded absolute discipline: punctuality, no smoking, no talks during work; church holidays were cancelled. The Polish Mechanics were very proud that in this way they were educating the locals (*Działalność...*, 1920: 1).

The contrast between hardworking 'Americans' and indolent 'natives' is also present in family memory. According to his both written and oral memories, while my grandfather's peers from Grodzisk thought only about having fun, he and his sisters were working in the family business lugging crates full of lemonade bottles. My grandfather pictured his father's factory as more innovative than similar businesses in the neighbourhood. He elaborates on the story how his father decided to buy a car – a third one in the town. The round trip to deliver lemonade and mineral water to his customers, which previously took 5 to 6 hours with a horse cart, shortened to 1,5 hour. Cars were generally perceived as a part of the 'American ethos'. In July 1921 the Mechanics from Pruszków organised in Warsaw a car parade. Twelve cars, decorated with flowers and with Polish and American emblems set off from the Association's

headquarters and headed to the Theatre Square, where there were speeches and music played by the police band. Twenty three young girls agitated among the public. The cavalcade next progressed through the streets of Warsaw, with more speeches and applause from the spectators (Sierosławski, 1921: 12–13). The car stood almost as the symbol of innovation and modernity, but also of an ability to learn, an openness for novelty. These values were often praised in my family oral tradition and are a very important part of my grandfather's ethos. In his memoir he presents himself as a person who was able to learn everything – from making zippers to opera singing. It may be worth mentioning that he wrote his memoirs on the computer. It was the year 1988 and he was 72, but he learned how to use a text editor (Chi-writer).

Alexander Gwiazdowski, the initiator and the first president of the Polish Mechanics Association in America, constructs his ethos in much the same way. He landed in New York with “twenty cents in his pockets, two English words in his mouth and no friends” (Gwiazdowski, 2017: 9). Five year later he graduated from the Columbia University with M.E. degree and in 1914 became an associate professor at the Toledo University. Both Zalewski and Gwiazdowski present themselves as resourceful and self-reliant, but also able to take care of others and to commit themselves for common good. The American episode is in both cases presented as a forming experience, as something which shaped not only the social (or financial) fates of the authors, but also their character. It is worth noting that both memoirs were written in the times of political and social changes (1954 in the case of Gwiazdowski and 1986–1989 in the case of Zalewski), and also in the time when the children or grandchildren of the authors were on the threshold of adulthood. The memoirs were written not only to tell the younger generations about the past, but also to empower them to make their own way in the changing world. The authors stress the contrasts between the past and the now, but also seek to reconcile both the past and the present and their Polish and American identities.

The ‘Americans’ therefore presented themselves as leaders and innovators. Their friends and neighbours however often portrayed as instructors not so much in new technologies, as in the new lifestyle.

“There worked more and more »Americans« in the rebuilt factory. You could spot them on the street from afar. They dressed in a different way. Women wore short dresses and when going outside put on overcoats, men wore hats with wide brims or colourful checked flat caps, which seemed very funny to us, and narrow pointed shoes. They talked loudly, interfering foreign words, which we couldn't understand. They used to read books and newspapers, which was very rare in our homes. Their clothes were neat and tidy. When at home or on a walk they put off their jackets, they impressed us with their colourful suspenders, nice shirts and oversleeves. They often smoked cigars, spreading around strange smells” (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 78–79, own translation).

Krzyczkowski gives many examples of lifestyle changes introduced by the re-emigrants: knickerbockers and flatcaps were first quite a sensation in Pruszków, but soon become common, as well as a Superman-like haircut with a side part and a playful curl (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 119). Sports became popular, especially football, although there were also some attempts at introducing American football or rugby (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 136). One of Krzyczkowski's friends brought from New York roller skates, but he couldn't use them in Pruszków, because there were no pavements nor tarmac roads. He therefore put them on at home, and standing still on a rug (not to scratch the polished floor) imitated the movements of a roller-skater to a delight and wonder of his friends (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 136).

Krzyczkowski's perception of the 'Americans' was unequivocally positive. "These hundred families, these 'Americans' played an important and constructive role in the life of Pruszków. They brought with them not only dollars, but also the vision of another, better world, about which they often told us. Through their own example they taught the people to live better and to work better, they taught us to respect public property and to respect work" (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 79).

Not all voices from the locals were so uncritical. A local newspaper printed for example a letter to the editor in which a resident from Pruszków complains that his 'American' neighbour knocked down from the house roof the antenna for his radio, because she was convinced that it brings rain and thunderstorms. "As a person who spent several years in the United States, so much more civilised and developed than Europe, she should have known that radio antennas do not bring thunderstorms" (Kowalski, 1928: 12–13). In another article from "Echo Pruszkowskie" America was portrayed in an ambivalent way, as both alluring and dangerous.

"America! – One word, but with what power and force. It has something which draws us like a magnet. It is like a precipice – when you stand on its edge, something draws you down, to the dark, bottomless abyss... It's like a sea into which you want to throw yourself, not minding that its arms are the most treacherous.

America! The land of work and money. Of rich and poor men. Of abominable crimes and of great hearts." (Kleks, 1928: 3)

The author praises the industriousness and austerity of the 'Polish Mechanics', but does not see them as leaders nor audacious businessmen. He calls them 'laborious termites' who toil and scrimp every penny to build a factory (Kleks, 1928a: 4). The relations between the locals and the newcomers are not unproblematic. The author sees mistakes and misunderstandings on both sides: the locals not always accepted the new way of life, and the newcomers "sometimes thought that Poland is America" (Kleks, 1928: 4). Yet, in spite of this discord, the 'Americans' and the 'natives' can agree on essentials and work together. The common ground was to be found, in the author's opinion, in patriotic feelings, in the "Polish



hearts” which always stay the same no matter where you live. The persuasive strategy chosen by the local journalist is very close to Burke’s identification:

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there 'would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric. Here is a major reason why rhetoric, according to Aristotle, “proves opposites.” (Burke, 1969: 25)

American influences contributed to the introduction of prohibition: in 1929 Pruszków, as the only town in Poland, banned alcoholic beverages. In “Echo Pruszkowskie” this initiative was presented as learning from good American example: after praising the beneficial results of the prohibition in the United States, the author concluded with an appeal: “It is fashionable today to americanize everything. So let’s americanize our greatest illness and set an example of prohibition to all our countrymen” (W.M., 1928: 4, own translation). The resolution banning the sale of alcoholic beverages was passed in 1927 by the town council with only one voice against. In 1928 there was a public voting and the new law was passed (although the turnout was only 25%) with 1867 voices for the prohibition and 981 against (Skwara, 2006: 136). The prohibition in Pruszków lasted from 1929 to 1931, and although some local journalists remained its supporters to the last, other criticized the idea and mindless mimicking of the United States (A.S., 1929: 3–4).

The discourse about the ‘Americans’ in Pruszków may be read in terms of colonialism. Walaszek (2000: 252–257) pointed to the elements of colonialist attitude in the writings of the re-emigrants from the United States. It is also possible to see examples of colonial mentality in the local press of the time and in Krzyczkowski’s memoir. He mentions for example that at school ‘American’ children did not want to sit at the same desk with “dirty and lousy” locals. His heart was all the same fully on the side of the ‘Americans’, and he reproached the ‘ungrateful’ Pruskovians who criticized them (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 82). For the re-emigrants who came to Pruszków with the Polish Mechanics Association pretty houses with red roof tiles were built (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 79). It is natural for the author that the ‘Americans’ had to live in better conditions than the locals.

### **Polish or American? Difficult choices of the re-emigrants**

In the 1920s the idea of dual citizenship seemed strange and even dangerous. Holding two citizenships was considered illogical, absurd, and was compared to bigamy (Pudzianowska, 2017: 17). American citizenship was prestigious and practical for people who often made numerous round trips between the

Old and the New World. Holding Polish citizenship was however a condition to be admitted in the ranks of the Polish Mechanics Association in America. It was also the condition of military conscription service. For these reasons, as well as from emotional motives, the re-emigrants most often declared themselves as Poles.

My grandfather named the desire to enter the military service and his parents' wishes as two main motives for his decision of declining American citizenship and applying for a Polish one. He wrote that his parents never pressed him about this, but were very glad when they saw him in the Polish army uniform (Zalewski: 14–15).

Although officially Polish citizens and declaring themselves as Poles, the re-emigrants sometimes assumed – or were given – the mask of Americans. Krzyczkowski recalls that one hot summer he and his friends wanted to go swimming in a pond – unfortunately, it was a private property of the manor in Pełce. However, when the manor owner heard his friend's foreign accent, and had with him a long talk in English, he granted him and his companions a permission to swim in the ponds all summer long (Krzyczkowski, 2009: 292). Clearly, such a permission would not had been given to a common Pruskovian. My grandfather's family also benefitted from their foreign connections. One of the local memory writers enumerates in her book the people she, a child, was expected to curtsy to. My great-grandparents are on this list, although they were just small traders. However, they had returned from the United States, so “we were expected to bow to them – girls with a curtsy, boys with a bow and a scrape” (Poraj, 2000: 20, own translation).

This mask of an American citizen became especially useful after the outbreak of World War 2. In the end of 1939 my grandfather and his sister went to the United States consulate in Warsaw and applied for American passports. In his memoirs my grandfather recalls his talk with the consul:

The first question was: ‘Have you served in the Polish armed forces?’. The next one was ‘Did you take the military oath?’ I answered ‘Yes’ to both. Mr Zawadzki [the consul] was however inquisitive and asked ‘Have you opposed joining the army and taking the oath?’ ‘No.’ ‘Perhaps you opposed in your mind?’ ‘No’. I noticed that the consul was clearly disappointed with my answers. ‘Well. I’ll send your papers to Washington, but I don’t think the State Department grants you the passport.’ Indeed, I never received any answer to my application, but it apparently was registered somewhere, because ten years later I received a letter summoning me to the Embassy to complete the procedures regarding my and my family moving to the United States. (Zalewski: 43).

For a time the certificate issued by the consulate was enough, and my grandfather passed as an American citizen, walking with stars and stripes pin badge in his lapel. When arrested on the street in Warsaw in August 1940, he informed the guard (in German) in a very confident voice, that he is an American citizen. He was let free, while all others arrested with him were sent to concentration camps (Zalewski: 44). Similar

situations are recalled by Gwiazdowski. In 1943 he was arrested and sent to Wartenburg (present Barczewo) prison. When threatened with a death sentence, he stated that he is an American citizen, and that his passport was issued in April 1941 by the American Embassy in Berlin (Gwiazdowski, 2017: 123–124).

One cannot answer with certainty whether they considered their American citizenship as a mask, a way to fool the oppressor, or whether they really wanted, at least to some extent, be both: American and Polish. Gwiazdowski after the war decided to stay in the United States, but on the last pages of his memoir he gives voice to that hopes that his son will see free Poland (Gwiazdowski, 2017: 197). My grandfather ever boasted about his decision of staying in Poland – he declined American citizenship which so many seek – but in the family archive he carefully preserved all documents regarding his and his parents American roots: among this his father’s affidavit stating that his return to Poland is only temporary and he intends to apply for United States citizenship. He kept also the instructions sent by the American consulate, regarding evacuation plans via Geneva and Lisbon to New York, and even the envelopes in which the correspondence from the Foreign Service was delivered. To the end of his days he continued to make lemon pie as a special treat for his friends and family. In the house there are still some small items brought from the United States – for example the front door latchkey with an engraved inscription “New York Keil”.

International Mercantile Marine Company  
AMERICAN LINE - RED STAR LINE - WHITE STAR LINE

Affidavit to be retained by Passenger who intends to return to his home in the United States of America

I, Antoni Zalewski do on  
oath declare that I am leaving the United States on a temporary visit to Europe, sailing from the port  
of New York on Dec. 23 1922, aboard the  
S. S. Siam of the Red Star Line, and that  
I fully intend to return from Poland to my permanent home  
in the United States at 238 Street, Puchow  
City or Town, Poland State. I have resided in the United  
States since July 1922. I have made application  
for United States citizenship. I was born at Poland  
on May 27 1883.

Age 39 Eyes Blue  
Height 5'8" Hair Black

STATE OF Pa.  
COUNTY OF Philadelphia No. 1481 Antoni Zalewski  
Signature of Passenger.

Sworn and subscribed to before me this  
..... day of December 1922  
J. Gwiazdowski Witness  
8026 Spruce St. Philadelphia, Pa. Address  
Notary Public.

See over page for addresses of the European Offices of the American Line, Red Star Line and White Star Line, where return passage to the United States may be engaged, in exchange for your Westbound Prepaid Ticket.

Figure 2: An affidavit of Antoni Zalewski. The family intended to move permanently to Poland, but at the same time to leave an open door for their return to the United States © Agnieszka Szurek [Agnieszka Szurek family archive]

In Pruszków there are not many memorabilia of the Polish Mechanics Association. The factory was blown up by the Germans in 1945, rebuilt after the war, and finally destroyed in 2014 to make place for a shopping centre. A recovered plaque honouring the founding of the factory is now exhibited at the entrance to the shopping centre, and its copy decorates a nearby square. One of the points on Pruszków's memorial map is devoted to the "Polish Mechanics from America". The text on the maps credits the Mechanics for bringing to Pruszków "westerns, jazz, first refrigerators and American fashion" (Pruszkowska Niepodległa, M).

## Conclusions

The re-emigrants from the United States who came to live in Grodzisk and Pruszków shaped their ethos through a lot of symbolical practices: wearing characteristic clothes, using cars, keeping family memorabilia from their American life, introducing American sports, eating American food. In their publications they took pains to construct their character as leaders, competent businessmen and true patriots. However, their neighbours and the local press framed them rather as millionaires and trendsetters, sometimes detached from Polish reality. The re-emigrants presented themselves as Poles, but with characters formed by living in America. Contrary to the notions of the time, they didn't see this in terms of conflicting loyalties, but tried to prove that their American experience makes them better Polish patriots.

In their own eyes as well as in the eyes of their neighbours the re-emigrants were therefore both native and alien, and in various moments of their lives they identified more with their Polish or with their American legacy. To recall Burke's concepts (1969: 25), you cannot know for certain just where identification ends and division begins.

In local rhetorical ecologies ethos constructions are interactive and subject to continuous re-negotiations and reinterpretations. The history of the Polish Mechanics can be read as a success story (like in Krzyzkowski's memoir), as a story of true patriots defeated by enemies both from the outside and from inside (Gwiazdowski's version), or as an example of a noble but not wholly practical initiative (Piłatowicz, 1982). The past is continuously brought to the present, "is open to change regarding the interpretations made, accounts given and claims advanced" (Stanley, 2013: 6). The American ethos continues to influence local and family life in various ways.

The analysis presented above was an attempt to encompass both sources from the past and everyday rhetorical experience. It shows in my opinion the need to develop and refine methodologies for such investigations, which can be useful also outside the academia.

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