

MAGDALENA GRABOWSKA¹

**„Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”. Mat 11, 28.
Identity Narration of a Non-heteronormative
Catholic. A Case Study.**

**„Przyjdźcie do Mnie wszyscy, którzy utrudzeni i obciążeni jesteście, a Ja was pokrzepię.” Mt 11,28
Narracja tożsamościowa nieheteronormatywnej katoliczki.
Studium przypadku.**

Key words: conscience, Church, homosexual, identity, lesbian, non-heteronormative

Słowa kluczowe: homoseksualny, Kościół, lesbijka, nieheteronormatywny, sumienie, tożsamość

Abstract

Conscience is the light of truth, says a Catholic lesbian, Polish human rights activist. To her, it should be the key signpost in life. Obvious, though it may seem, being a non-heteronormative person in a democratic country may prove challenging. In addition, to reconcile one's psychosexual orientation with religion requires breaking the ground and pushing the boundaries. Eventually, only a handful of people manage to further their own agenda.

The present paper focuses on a personal narrative of a Polish lesbian who has managed to find the way to God. It is a case study which offers insights into how one manages to reconcile seemingly opposing identities. It is meant to reveal the stages of the process of coming to terms with one's complicated social situation.

¹ Dr Magdalena Grabowska jest adiunktem w Instytucie Lingwistyki Stosowanej i Translatoryki Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

Streszczenie

Sumienie jest światłem prawdy, mówi wierząca lesbijka, Polka oraz aktywistka broniąca praw człowieka. Jej zdaniem sumienie powinno być jedynym drogowskazem w życiu. Choć wydaje się to niemożliwe, jednakże bycie osobą nieheteronormatywną w kraju demokratycznym może okazać się wyzwaniem. Ponadto, pogodzenie sfery seksualności z przekonaniami religijnymi oznacza przełamywanie granic oraz wychodzenie poza przyjęte normy. Jedynie niektórym udaje się zrealizować ten plan.

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie narracji tożsamościowej polskiej lesbijki, której udało się odnaleźć własną drogę do Boga. Jest to studium przypadku ukazujące proces godzenia nieheteronormatywnej tożsamości z wyznawanymi przekonaniami o podłożu religijnym.

Introduction

„There is a principle of reflection in men by which they distinguish between approval and disapproval of their own actions...this principle in man...is conscience.“ ([Butler 1726, 21] as quoted in Bowie 2004, 147).

The quoted fragment comes from an Anglican priest and theologian Joseph Butler for whom conscience was a matter of intuition. It was influenced and shaped by two principles, namely, self-love and benevolence. He believed that conscience directs humans towards decisions that value the happiness or interest of others (Bowie 2004).

In the light of a highly normative debate in which such a complex issue as non-heteronormative psychosexual orientation generates different responses, the notion of one's individual conscience is often considered a touchstone of the right attitude and approach. In general, societies have been divided when it comes to the legitimacy of a non-heteronormative orientation. Some are likely to frown assuming a judgmental stance. To them, nonstandard equals unhealthy hence the only solution to the problem of homosexual preferences is psychological treatment. Others, however, are in favour of a more tolerant approach, in which everyone deserves understanding and due respect. By the same token, representatives of Christian religious groups worldwide seem to be

divided on the question of how to approach psychosexual orientations other than straight. On the surface, the stance of Roman Catholicism appears to be clear. Such people must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity, however, the acts are considered grave depravity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

In the current paper we would like to take a closer look at the struggle which nonheteronormative people undertake in order to find their own way to God and by doing so endeavour to reconcile their psychosexual identity with the so-called standard values and norms. In particular, we will study a personal story of a Polish lesbian and at the same time a human rights activist who decided not to abandon her Catholic identity despite strong criticism from the Church representatives. Deeply aware of her own homosexual inclinations, but also convinced that this is her way, the person claims she has finally managed to reconcile her orientation and religious affiliation. The person, after years of struggle, eventually found an organization whose purpose is to gather and support LGBTQ people in their efforts to cultivate Christian life. They pluck up enough courage and perseverance not to renounce their Christian identity. Despite numerous acts of rejection, their attachment to the Church and faith in Jesus Christ seem unflinching.

Theoretical part

Roman Catholic Church and the issue of homosexuality

Specialists are of the opinion that the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality is far from straightforward. The Church officials have made efforts to address this issue on a number of occasions, for instance, in the documents *Persona Humana* from 1975 or *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* from 1986. The authors admit that the homosexual acts are deemed anomalous and sinful, however, they recognize the potential for being biologically conditioned in this respect. The former document has generated negative connotations due to the language it uses. The latter, however, aimed to address the

clergy who did not know how to deal with gay and lesbian people but also to influence gay-accepting groups especially in the United States (Siker 2007; Allen 2005; Gramick & Nuget 1988). It clearly stated that homosexual orientation by itself is not a sin, however, the activity should be seen as disorderly.

According to Siker (Siker 2007), one of the most problematic questions that need to be addressed is the fact that the Church seems to send mixed signals when it comes to the problem of discrimination. In other words, the institution does not perceive homosexual orientation as equal to gender or race differentiation, and, as a result, it defends any acts of extending the civil rights legislation to LGBTQ people.

Hall (Hall 2013) notes that the Church does not offer any serious solution on how to conceptualize one's homosexual tendencies in ways that would go beyond medical treatment.

Identity

Unfailing discriminatory practices only aggravate a fairly complicated position in which non-heteronormative people are. The process of recognizing one's identity whose component is the sexual self-concept in the case of homosexual individuals often concurs with inner conflict. Social Organization of Sexuality, by common consent, admits that the development of self-identification as homosexual is achieved over time, often with personal struggle and self-doubt (Laumann 1994). This process becomes more intense if we understand the social context in which people discover their identities. Most LGBTQ people are raised in communities of different others, unlike minorities such as ethnic or racial groups who grow in societies consisting of people like them (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter and Braun, 2006).

According to Vivienne Cass (Cass Identity Model), homosexual identity takes six discrete stages to develop, namely: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and identity synthesis (Cass 1979). Noteworthy, in more contemporary

approaches to the question of sexual identity formation, it is claimed that this is a universal process that occurs not only among sexual minorities but also among those who represent the heterosexual population (Dillon, Worthington & Moradi 2011).

Narrating about identity

Understanding social phenomena is crucial if we want to make sense not only of how we perceive certain phenomena but also what image of self we have. Each person's life is full of experiences which can be told. Thus, by studying a personal narrative, an account of someone's life experience we can understand his or her opinions, decisions or intentions. The pivotal point that deserves attention here seems to be the so-called *narrative identity*, which is defined as internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self (McAdams 2008). In McAdams' *life-story model of identity* people living in modern societies, in order to give life the sense of unity and purpose, perceive it as an evolving story that combines the reconstructed past and the anticipated future (McAdams 1985).

Much like playwrights or novelists, people work on their stories in an effort to construct an integrative and meaningful product. As psycho-literary achievements, life stories function to make lives make sense by helping to organize the many different roles and features of the individual life into a synthetic whole and by offering causal explanations for how people believe they have come to be who they are. (McAdams 2008, 243)

Making sense of one's life is a key component of identity formation. However, the image of ourselves we carry in our minds is evolving in relation to norms that are supplied by culture. Thus Bruner (Bruner 1990) claims that humans make sense of their autobiographies in relation to culture. What is more, he puts forward a proposal that it is culture, not biology that shapes human life and the human mind more than anything else. Culture's symbolic systems such as language, discourse, narrative explication and patterns of communal life offer meaning to action by positioning its intentions in a broader interpretive system.

Narratives are versions of reality and reflections of common culturally transmitted models. In contrast to constructions based on logical and scientific procedures which undergo objective methods of verification, narratives can only make the impression of being true (Bruner 1991). Like McAdams (McAdams 2008), Bruner (Bruner 1990) sees narratives as a means of conveying meaning, solving problems or dilemmas and reducing tensions. Narratives enable us to explain mismatches between the exceptional and the ordinary and to rearrange chaotic experiences into orderly stories guided by cause and effect. Eventually, the constructed narratives seem safe to us.

Narratives may also be seen as *situated performances* (Thorne 2006). In Gergen's opinion, people tell and enact as many different stories as there are situations in which they can present and perform them (Gergen 1991). „Personal narratives reveal multiple and conflicting self-expressions (...)” (McAdams 2008, 243).

It transpires that the life narrative can be approached from two perspectives, namely, as an autobiographical project or a situated performance. Nonetheless, we could point at a number of common principles that characterise the narrative study of life. First of all, stories have always been the best vehicle for showing how people enact their desires and aim to realise their goals. Secondly, stories help to integrate lives because they bring together ideas, characters, events that used to exist in isolation in our consciousness. Thirdly, stories are told by people to other people in relation to a specific social context. Fourthly, they change because autobiographical memory is unstable. We tend to retain the essence, however, we forget the details. To go further, stories are also cultural texts in the sense that they mirror the culture in which they are born. Eventually, stories undergo evaluation of a different kind and after some time we see that some of them were better and some worse. The methods of evaluations vary. We can, for instance, judge a story based on the criterion of morality or psychological effect (McAdams 2008).

Trzebiński (1992) advanced the conception called autobiographical narrative which illustrates a natural mode of self-reflection and decision making. The framework of its structure resembles a plot or scenario meant to provide a comprehensible explanation of the events that take place in the surrounding reality. There is a hero who has specific aims to fulfill, however, s/he comes across an obstacle which s/he tries to overcome to be able to realize one's goals. One of the characteristic features of an autobiographical narrative is the necessity to maintain the sense of identity and purpose.

Narrative accounts in an interview, according to de Fina (de Fina 2009), appear as a response to an explicit or implied question „why” or „how”. They are given the moment an evaluation by an interlocutor is presupposed, so their aim is to provide an explanation. However, what matters the most is how the narrator shapes the narrative and how s/he perceives the question. Narratives in interviews are told in response to open-ended questions that should not limit the scope of the story. On the other hand, the role of the interlocutor should not be downplayed because s/he is responsible for the process of elicitation and evaluation (de Fina 2009).

Narrating about the intimate

Retelling one's intimate stories becomes a source of power for the teller, remarks Ken Plummer (Plummer 1994). Stories of sexual suffering, survival and surpassing constitute a peculiar feature of the twentieth-century sociological thought that has been revolutionised by feminism.

They have grown from being insignificant to being widespread; they have prefigured major social changes as a result of being told; and – like all good stories – they have been replayed, copied and borrowed over and over again. (Plummer 1994, 49).

These stories reflect a need for action which must be taken in order to lessen the pain. One can observe a move from suffering, secrecy, and a sense of being a victim towards a moment of experiencing a major change. Studying the narrative plot it becomes apparent that the story

is imbued, on one hand, with suffering, on the other with the necessity to break the silence and come to terms with the situation.

One major category of narratives concerning intimate suffering is the so called “coming out” story. In this account a person strives to regain self-confidence by airing the conviction that everyone deserves respect and being a gay or lesbian does not make one a citizen of lower category (Plummer 1994).

Nonheteronormative Christianity – identity conflict

In a thorough research of religion and nonheteronormativity, Dorota Hall (Hall 2013; Hall 2016) has brought to light a number of factors that are responsible for the marginalization of nonheterosexual people in Poland. The study has demonstrated that due to lack of abilities to articulate their past desires they sought explanation in the sphere of religious conceptualization which provided instructions on self-image formation. The research material shows that in search for a deeper understanding of one’s homoerotic tendencies, LGBT people resort to theological sources. By way of deduction based on interpretations given they assess their desires only to conclude they are sinful.

What is more, scholars have noted that there are different ways of dealing with one’s sexual identity. Some people decide to reject religious background to be able to affirm homosexuality (Mahaffy 1996; Schnoor 2006; Ganzenvoort et al. 2011). On the other hand, there are those who would eagerly denounce their sexual tendencies to retain religious belonging. Others try to detach themselves from both, Christian and homosexual identities. Still, others make effort to integrate them somehow (Hall 2013). It has been noted that participation in affirmative religious communities leads to fewer conflicts with reconciling these identities (Rodriguez, Ouellette 2000).

Melissa Wilcox (Wilcox 2009) in her attention-worthy research shows that lesbian women who become actively engaged in affirmative religious organizations still seek spirituality in a more individualized way.

The researcher also notes that women are generally under-represented in Christian communities.

On the other hand, Andrew Yip (2002), a sociologist studying religious experiences of LGBT people in Britain has concluded that the primacy of self, coupled with the rejection of religious authorities, enables these people to obtain the experience of faith. Through the individualization of choices, one discovers an opportunity to apply own interpretation to life and read the biblical texts anew.

However, Hall notices certain shortcomings of this approach. She has seen that for some this highly free and individualized approach is difficult to bear because it creates an image of isolation. What LGBT people would wish is understanding and affirmation, an approach in which their needs and expectations are taken into account (Hall 2013).

Empirical Part

Conscience - my Guide

The data I would like to address here is an account given during an over 40-minute interview with a lesbian, equal rights activist and a member of the organization *Wiara i Tęcza* [Faith and Rainbow] in response to my invitation to participate in a project in which I study religious discourse of representatives of different Christian backgrounds and denominations. Recently I have extended the scope of research to encompass the criterion of sexual orientation to examine to what extent and in what way non-heteronormative Polish people, who openly acknowledge their sexual identity, yet at the same time admit attachment to Christianity, manage to reconcile both aspects of their lives. Listening to the narrator in the interview I was astonished by the strength of her attachment to Catholicism, the depth of her love and faith, but also by the extent of her social involvement in the field of human rights.

In the present paper, I have decided to analyse only one interview, because I consider it unique for a number of reasons. I realise that taking into account only one narrative is not sufficient to illustrate all

the nuances of the problem in question. In addition, its conclusions do not exhaust the potential dynamics of a narrative experience.

However, the narrative analysis lets us experience a real struggle that the person undertook to come to terms with identities that proved difficult to reconcile. Secondly, we learn about her difficult road to become a mother of a child whom she raises together with her wife and with an active engagement of the child's father. From the narrative we also learn that she has managed to free herself from the burden of religious fear which used to keep her in the past. Moreover, the narration reveals the person's ability to articulate needs, pursue aims and look to the future with hope.

At this point, let me introduce certain contextual facts concerning this interview. At first I decided to contact a Polish LGBTQ ecumenical organization called *Wiara i tęcza* [Faith and Rainbow] which gathers non-heteronormative people together with their families. The main thrust of it is to reform the Church from the inside to help increase the level of social tolerance and awareness when it comes to homosexual relations. *Wiara i Tęcza*, thanks to the support of more tolerant and understanding priests, offers its members spiritual counselling and the chance to participate in community life all across the country. The interview took place soon after contacting the person for the first time, in the interviewee's university office, after duty hours.

In the analysis in question I would like to focus on the aspects of a narrative in which the person retells the story of her inner evolution from struggle to victory, from self-deprecation to unconditional self-acceptance.

The narrative under scrutiny makes the impression of being prearranged and reconsidered. One of the reasons why the telling seems so orderly is my interlocutor's interview experience. She has retold the story of her life to the public a number of times. Moreover, the person works as a teacher and coach, which only adds to the ease of articulation and control over the interactive situation.

A characteristic feature of this narrative is its length and order with the role of the interviewer limited to the minimum. To my question²:

1. (mało znaczący wstęp) Chciałabym (lekko wzdycham, mówię przyciszonym głosem)
2. zacząć od pytania o Wiarę i Tęczę,
3. o to co sprawiło, że zgodziła się Pani współtworzyć, przystąpić jako członek?

Translation

1. (insignificant introduction) I would like (sighing, speaking with low voice)
2. to start from a question concerning *Wiara i Tęcza* [Faith and Rainbow],
3. what made you co-found it, join as a member?

which eventually transpires to be just a starting point and apparently an expected stimulus, the narrator slowly however steadily begins developing her life story. The text contains lengthy passages in which the person delineates with attention to detail her personal development as a lesbian woman and how she has become able to reconcile and acknowledge it. In reality, the text is difficult to quote in full due to its extensive character. The received text is a well thought out narrative of a conscious individual who seems accustomed to giving interviews like this. Furthermore, the account has all the features of a testimony of inner transformation.

In the passages to follow the narrator gives an account of her early life drawing attention to the moment in which she discovered her

² Transcription conventions (partly based on de Fina, 2009)

Line - independent clause or idea

((uśmiecha się/smiling)) - non linguistic actions

(.) - noticeable pause

Underlining - to mark important information

[niewyraźnie/unclear] - when the utterance is incomprehensible

(...) - quoting incomplete utterance

orientation. The underlining serves to emphasize the essential moments in the story.

1. Pochodzę z bardzo wierzącej rodziny, katolickiej rodziny, z dziada, pradziada, baby, prababy,
2. stąd moje zaangażowanie w *życie Kościoła było bardzo szerokie.*
3. Grałam na puzonie, saksofonie.
4. Brałam udział we wszystkich uroczystościach religijnych.
5. Chodziłam na pielgrzymki.
6. No i jestem z krwi i kości katoliczką.
7. Mm i pewnym momencie kiedy zaczęłam odkrywać swoją orientację psychoseksualną, pojawił się, bardzo szybko się pojawił konflikt,
8. ponieważ ksiądz, który mnie prowadził, był moim przewodnikiem, mówił o tym, że powinnam ofiarować to Bogu,
9. *że (mm), Bóg (mm), umarł za mnie na krzyżu,*
10. w związku z tym czymże jest wobec tego moja orientacja.
11. No i ja przez ileś tam lat jakoś próbowałam sej dać radę z tym.
12. Raz odchodząc od Kościoła, będąc bliżej swej orientacji, a dwa wracając do swojej orientacji,
13. bo byłam wtedy w okresie dojrzewania więc byłam śmiertelnie zakochana w Ewie z Tarnowa ((śmieje się)),
14. Przez 6 lat byłam zakochana ((uśmiecha się)).
15. No i, mm, mając cały czas poczucie winy, poczucie grzechu, poczucie wykluczenia z tego Kościoła.
16. Mm, pamiętam taką spowiedź, w której ksiądz, mój przewodnik, mm, powiedział takie, no cytaty z Biblii,
17. *że jeśli twoja ręka, twoje oko pcha cię do grzechu, to lepiej wydłub oko, odetnij rękę.*
18. No i rzeczywiście ja to potraktowałam wtedy bardzo poważnie.
19. Miałam nawet serię samookaleczeń na tym tle, na tle religijnym.
20. Mm, i, mm, na tle tego, że nie mogłam pogodzić tego w sobie, mojej orientacji

21. i wydawało mi się, że to jest już koniec mojego życia,
22. że już sej nie poukładałam i e,
23. no wiedziałam, że mój Kościół chce żebym była z mężczyzną,
24. więc, e, związałam się z mężczyzną na 8 lat
25. bo też tak widziałam możliwość do posiadania dzieci (...).

Translation

1. I come from a very religious, Catholic family since time immemorial,
2. hence I was deeply engaged in the Church life.
3. I played trombone, saxophone.
4. I participated in all religious events.
5. I used to go on pilgrimages.
6. So I am a true-born Catholic.
7. Mm and at one point when I started discovering my psychosexual orientation, I experienced a conflict,
8. because the priest, who was at the same time my spiritual leader, said that I should sacrifice it to God,
9. that (mm), God (mm), died for me on the cross,
10. after all, what is my orientation in comparison to that.
11. So I tried to cope with it for a number of years.
12. Sometimes I would leave the Church to be closer to my orientation, at other times I would return to my orientation [not entirely clear],
13. because I was at puberty so I was madly in love with Monika³ from Tarnów ((smiling)),
14. I was in love for 6 years ((smiling)).
15. And all the time I felt guilty, sinful, excluded from this Church.
16. Mm, I remember one confession when the priest, my spiritual leader, mm, said, gave a quote from the Bible,
17. if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and if your eye

³ All personal names have been changed.

- pushes you to sin, gouge it out.
18. And I treated it seriously then.
 19. I even had a series of religious self-harm.
 20. Mm, and, mm, also because I could not cope with it, my orientation
 21. and I thought that was the end of my life,
 22. that I will not get my life together,
 23. I knew that my Church wants me to be in a relationship with a man,
 24. so, e, I got involved in a relationship with a man for 8 years,
 25. because in this way I knew I could have children (...).

She begins her story by setting the context to illustrate the scale of the problem. Her family background, as she claims, is very religious. She was raised in a traditional heterosexual family and received an orthodox Catholic upbringing. However, early on in her youth, she started to discover her homosexuality. By making a point about her long-lasting love to Monika, she seems to prove the validity of her orientation (verses 1-14).

Verses 15 to 23 contain a description of the original breakdown and the hopelessness that accompanied her at the beginning. The narrator did not see any solution for herself because she already knew how hard it is to deny one's natural inclinations. In verse 24 we learn that she eventually decided to push herself to act against her inner voice. At this point, she concludes that the heterosexual relationship was to some extent beneficial for her because it gave her hope to have children.

Later on she states:

1. I w pewnym momencie swojego życia też miłość spotkana i związek już kobietą,
2. Po rozstaniu z moim jedynym, fantastycznym mężczyzną ((śmieje się))
3. spowodował, że zaczęłam znowuż odchodzić od tego Kościoła,
4. ale też zastanawiać się jak mogłabym to godzić,

5. czy jest to w ogóle możliwe
6. i wtedy spotkałam Wiarę i Tęczę.
7. Spotkałam osoby, które myślały już wtedy podobnie do mnie,
8. że, mm, jeśli Jezus Chrystus mówi:
9. „Przyjdźcie do mnie wszyscy” to nie mówi „Przyjdźcie do mnie wszyscy tylko nie ci z orientacją”,
10. A jeśli orientacja, to czułam od samego początku, dana i zadana jest częścią mojej osobowości,
11. no to tez nie czułam, że powinnam być z tego Kościoła wykluczona.

Translation

1. And at one point in my life the love I met and relationship with a woman,
2. after splitting with my only, fantastic man ((laughing)),
3. again made me stop attending the Church,
4. yet at the same time, I was thinking how to reconcile it,
5. is it possible at all
6. and then I met *Wiara i Tęcza* [Faith and Rainbow].
7. I met people who thought like me
8. that, when, mm, Jesu says:
9. “Come to me all” He does not mean “Come to me all except those with the orientation”,
10. and if the orientation, than, I felt it right from the very beginning, given and set as a task, is part of my personality,
11. so I did not feel I should be excluded from the Church.

This fragment illustrates a breakthrough, a turning point. Having experienced a heterosexual relationship, she knew it was not good for her. Interestingly enough, mentioning the fact she communicates one crucial thing, namely, it was the moment of test meant to reveal her true nature.

Moreover, this passage brings us closer to the breakthrough, that is, falling happily in love with a woman and meeting the group *Wiara*

i Tęcza. These are turning points which have permanently changed her situation. Since then she has learnt one important truth that God loves her irrespective of her orientation. This, I think, is the pivotal moment in the whole interview because it demonstrates how she has managed to overcome the inner conflict.

The recounting becomes more emotional the moment she formulates a series of parallel statements like this:

1. Moja orientacja nie jest grzechem.
2. Moja rodzina nie jest grzechem.
3. Moja miłość do syna, do Kasi nie jest grzechem.

Translation

1. My orientation is not a sin.
2. My family is not a sin.
3. My love to son, to Kasia is not a sin.

They reveal the gravity of emotional attachment to the issue and by this serve to strengthen her conviction.

What is more, the feeling of certainty of the righteousness of one's choice becomes intensified as the interview progresses. Throughout the interaction, the interlocutor easily assumes the responsibility and marks it by taking control of the situation. This can be seen in a series of independent decisions she makes during our meeting. To exemplify, although I did not directly inquire about transformation, she decided to tell me about it in great detail. What is more, making a direct reference to the text of the Bible, the narrator demonstrates how serious her attitude toward spirituality is. In many respects, the whole account has explanatory nature in that it gives a detailed portrayal of the original reasons that eventually led to the moment of reconciliation. It is convincing to hear about the causes of her decision. Without a spur, the narrator starts to present the depth of her reflections and by doing so also highlights how serious and emotion-laden her attitude to this matter is.

In more than one place the narrator highlights the causes of her decision to reconcile her religious beliefs with homosexuality. I must

admit the narrative account went beyond my original expectations as a recipient.

In the second half of the interview, stimulated by the following question, the person makes references to morality:

Question

1. Może Pani opisać (.) na tyle, na ile Pani może, moment przejściowy,
2. ten moment, kiedy doświadczyła Pani samoakceptacji.
3. Kiedy to się działo?
4. Jak to się działo, w jakich okolicznościach?
5. Co wpłynęło bezpośrednio?

Translation

1. Could you describe (.) as much as you can the transition,
2. the moment when you experienced self-acceptance.
3. How did it happen?
4. In what circumstances?
5. What factors had a direct influence?

Answer

1. To ja odpowiadam przed Bogiem za swoje życie i teraz,
2. y, nawet, y, jeśli ktoś, Kościół, jakiś autorytet, mówi mi, namawia mnie do czegoś,
3. co mo, po rozeznaniu, w moim sumieniu,
4. to rozeznanie musi być głębokie,
5. musi być faktyczne,
6. musi być oparte na Piśmie,
7. musi być też skonsultowane z przewodnikami duchowymi,
8. a też ze społecznością.
9. To nie jest tak, że ja sej dokonuję takiego rozeznania,
10. mm, od tak, ale jeśli twoje sumienie mówi ci inaczej, to idź za blaskiem twojego sumienia,
11. bo jest to blask prawdy, który jest w tobie. I, mm, w naszym katolicyzmie jest ten prymat sumienia (...).

12. Nie czuję żebym, e, moją miłością, byciem, y, tworzeniem mojej rodziny wykraczała, y, poza ramy mojego sumienia i czyniła grzech.

Translation

1. It is I who am responsible for my life before God and now,
2. y, even, y, if someone, Church, some authority, tells me, persuades me to do something
3. that having discerned the problem in conscience,
4. this discerning must be profound,
5. must be true,
6. must be based on the Scripture,
7. must be consulted with a spiritual leader,
8. and also with the community.
9. It is not that I discern,
10. mm, just like that, but if your conscience tells you otherwise than follow the light of conscience
11. because this is the light of truth which is in you. And, mm, in our Catholicism we believe in the primacy of conscience (...)
12. I do not feel that e, in my love, in my being, y, creating my family I would go beyond, y, my conscience and sin.

Question

1. Mmm, z tego co Pani mówi, mogę wnioskować, że ze spokojem Pani przeżywa swoją religijność, czy mam rację? [niewyraźnie]

Translation

1. Mmm, from what you say I can conclude that you can now experience your religiousness with peace, am I right? [unclear]

Answer

1. ((kaszle)) mmm, rzeczywiście, mm, teraz z całkowitym spokojem przeżywam swoją religijność.
2. Ja jako osoba nieheteronormatywna (mówi głośniej niż poprzednio, większa pewność w głosie) i
3. myślę, że jest to jedyna droga dla takich osób.
4. Mm, czyli ja nie uwierzyłam, że Bóg mnie odrzuca.

5. Cały czas czułam, że Kościół mnie odrzuca.

Translation

1. ((coughing)) That's right, mm, now I can experience my religiousness with peace.

2. I as a non-heteronormative person (speaks louder than before, more self-confident)

3. I think that this is the only way for such people.

4. Mm, so I did not believe that God has rejected me.

5. All the time I felt that the Church has rejected me.

She admits that at one point she eventually managed to reconcile one important truth, namely reliance on conscience is more important than following the opinions or formal regulations.

In our morality, she believes, we should give priority to the responsibility before God and not other people. In verse 12 the narrator defends universal rights to love, existence, and family. By doing so she refuses to sound apologetic for her convictions. In this way, her activist nature becomes visible because she acts as a defender of human rights. Refusing to feel guilty for her orientation she shows her care to safeguard the access of everyone to essentially human rights.

What is more, by making reference to the significance of conscience she makes a remark of what the Catholic faith truly proclaims (verses 3-8). Outlining her understanding of the primacy of conscience she sounds very much in line with the official stand of the Catholic Church, i.e., conscience should act in accordance with the objective moral norm (cf. Latkovic, 2015).

Apparently, letting the conscience discern between the good and evil enabled the person to strike a balance in life. She claims she has learned to accept her homosexual nature in accordance with her beliefs. She openly expresses her conviction that God does not reject her however the Church does (verses 13-17).

Text and Discourse-Related Aspects

As remarked earlier, the interactional dynamics of the account was defined by the narrator's independence. She appeared prepared for the interview and also eager to recount. Hence, the balance between the interviewer and the interviewee was difficult to keep.

Furthermore, the extent of the story, a profusion of details, profundity of remarks but also the organization of the text and order of arguments reflect maturity and readiness to share one's experience. The text in many respects betrays the features of a manifesto against the homophobic attitude of the representatives the Catholic Church in Poland. Due to its emotional and reflective character, it has the potential to make a persuasive impact on the recipient. In addition, developing the account she tends to detach herself from own, particular experience to form more general opinions concerning the global situation of LGBTQ people. As an activist, she is well accustomed to this type of experience. Hence, she seems entitled to illustrate her story with examples taken from the lives of others. What is more, knowing what it means to be a homosexual person in a deeply traditional, conservative family she feels she has the right to act as a spokesperson for all LGBTQ people who share the same fate.

The internal composition of the text is subject to a division into small stories that could be named as:

1. struggling with homosexual identity as a teenager in an orthodox Catholic family;
2. first love;
3. being in an unfulfilled relationship with a man;
4. learning what it means to be in a relationship with a woman;
5. meeting *Wiara i Tęcza*;
6. discovering God's unconditional love;
7. uncompromising decision to remain a Catholic;
8. father-daughter broken relationship;
9. the son;

10. discovering the primacy of conscience and making a decision to trust it.

Interestingly enough, the whole utterance reveals traits of canonical Catholic discourse. She perceives her sexual orientation as given and set (Pope John Paul II during one of his pilgrimages to Poland once said that the country is given and set). There are frequent references to the text of the Bible. Certain ideas are expressed through metaphors, e.g. Church is our home and family. She uses such terms as a spiritual leader, sin, Catechism, discerning, confession, conscience or community.

On the other hand, in many places her talk resembles the style of a human rights activist. As an LGBTQ person, she is willing to sympathize with those who share the same lot.

1. (.) znam przypadki, wiele przypadków takich, że rodzice reagują, mm, bardzo, mm, bardzo niechętnie,
2. homofobicznie,
3. agresywnie, mm,
4. w stosunku do syna czy córki.
5. (...) ksiądz stwierdził, że po co w ogóle przyszedłem,
6. po co w ogóle rozmawiam,
7. co ja se j myślę,
8. proszę się wynosić.
9. Mm, no my jako osoby nieheteroseksualne jesteśmy dosyć przyzwyczajeni do tego rodzaju zachowań w Polsce,
10. homofobicznych,
11. poniżających nas
12. i jednocześnie w konfesjonale od księdza jest to dotkliwie,
13. więc osoby nieheteroseksualne najczęściej albo wychodzą z Kościoła trzaskając drzwiami, y,
14. albo zostają w tym Kościele,
15. rezygnując z siebie zawierając na przykład związki małżeńskie,
16. który jest pustym związkiem, nieszczęśliwym związkiem,
17. co często kończy się rozwodem.

Translation

1. (.) I know cases, many cases when parents' reaction is very negative,
2. homophobic,
3. aggressive, mm,
4. towards their son or daughter.
5. (...) the priest asked me why I had come,
6. why I was talking with him,
7. what do I think,
8. please get out.
9. Mm, well we as non-heteronormative people are used to this in Poland,
10. homophobic,
11. humiliating reactions
12. and at the same time to hear such a thing from the priest in the confession booth is very painful,
13. so non-heteronormative people most of the time leave the Church slamming the door, y,
14. or stay,
15. sacrifice themselves and get involved in marriage relationships
16. that are empty, unhappy,
17. and often end up with a divorce.

The quoted passage repletes with negative images of what it is like to be a homosexual Catholic in Poland. The problems that arise are the following: difficult family situation, hatred, homophobia, rejection, leaving the Church, unwanted marriages or divorce. In addition, the narrator illustrates the scale of the problem by reference to an incident that occurred. When she went to confession, she was faced with a very strong, immediate reaction from the priest who told her to leave the church.

Conclusions

The analysis puts a spotlight on the peculiarities that emerge at the crossroads of Catholic and homosexual identities. The scale and

range of experiences not available at first sight can only be uncovered in an interview whose purpose is to ease understanding of social processes and mechanisms. Through one on one interaction, there is a chance to observe the evolution of a narrative in which a person gradually uncovers his or her life before the interlocutor.

Following an account of one's life, we are given a chance to see the world through the eyes of another person. Interaction with a lesbian, eager to make the world know that it is possible to be both, an LGBTQ person and a believer in Poland, teaches us that judgment should be deferred.

Now the question arises, namely, is the gap between homosexual and Christian identities possible to bridge? Is there room for one's own way? From what I have learned it transpires that stereotypically and superficially thinking there is no link because the two sides stand at the opposite ends in terms of worldview. On the other hand, at the micro-level, i.e., at a level of an individual, his or her life experience, the chances are that we will be able to spot a point where the identities converge.

In the account under scrutiny homosexual identity can be reconciled with Catholicism. The person eventually manages to discover her own way to God on which she makes a commitment to trust only her conscience. Moreover, she also learns the true meaning of love. Her strong bonds with the Church, firm beliefs but also her love to the woman she is with are possible to maintain because love can be evaluated in just one way.

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Wykaz autorów

Dec-Michalska Agnieszka, agnieszkadecmichalska@gmail.com, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna w Warszawie, ul. Broniewskiego 48, 01-771 Warszawa

Grabowska Magdalena, magdalena.grabowska@ug.edu.pl, Uniwersytet Gdański, ul. Chabrowa 63b/7, 81-079 Gdynia

Grzybowski Jerzy, jgrzybowski@uw.edu.pl, Katedra Studiów Interkulturowych Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Wydział Lingwistyki Stosowanej, Uniwersytet Warszawski, ul. Szturmowa 4, 02-678 Warszawa

Ostapczuk Jerzy, jostap@wp.pl, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna w Warszawie, ul. Broniewskiego 48, 01-771 Warszawa

Puczko Andrzej, a.puczko@post.pl, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna w Warszawie, ul. Broniewskiego 48, 01-771 Warszawa

Żak Jan, janzak@poczta.onet.pl, Papieski Wydział Teologiczny we Wrocławiu, ul. Katedralna 9, 50-328 Wrocław.