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The Poles in Vienna in the literary works of Radek Knapp

Introduction

The issue of migrants and refugees is frequently raised in contemporary academic and political discourse. These groups are generally associated with people coming to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. In fact, it is a more complex phenomenon, involving more national groups, including Poles. Some of them may be seen as belonging to the 'old' émigré communities, as they constitute a group that has been marked by emigration for over two centuries, searching for a better life and political freedom. Radek Knapp from Warsaw belongs to the younger generation of Polish immigrants. As a consequence of his mother's decision, he has moved to Vienna, where he lives to this day. In his works, he presents Vienna and Austria through the eyes of an immigrant from Poland, whom he willingly presents as a representative of Eastern Europe and the Slavic world. Knapp writes about his new homeland in a humorous manner and does not hesitate to raise sensitive issues. He has gained a group of loyal readers in German-speaking countries, as well as in Poland. He is unknown to English-speaking public. None of his books have been translated into English. There is also no biographical information about him in English online resources such as Wikipedia. This article aims to present his extremely interesting oeuvre from the perspective of his compatriots living in Vienna.

Radek Knapp – person and work

Data on the life of Radek Knapp is available in the biographical notes published in his works and on the Internet. There are also interviews and articles in which he himself recalls events from his personal life. The same facts are evoked in all the sources, which means that his biography can be presented comprehensively without much effort. Knapp's longest statement on life, writing, philosophy, political views, including the phenomenon of migration, can be found in the volume of interviews with writers from outside of Austria published in 2014 (Knapp, 2014a: 87-126).

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Radek (Radosław) Knapp was born on August 3, 1964 in Warsaw (Palej, 2007: 178). He grew up with his grandparents but was brought to Vienna by his mother in 1976. Since he did not speak German, he was assigned to a class for not very gifted students. He felt good in it, because teachers and students treated him kindly. Later, for two years, he attended a commercial high school, which he did not graduate (Knapp, 2014a: 96-97). He eventually got his diploma at the age of twenty-three (Mikos, 2003b: 2). For some time, he studied philosophy at the University of Vienna. It was then that he met Stanisław Lem (1921-2006), a world-famous science fiction writer, who lived in Vienna in 1983-1988. He became Knapp's mentor, influencing his writing future (Knapp, 2006: 16; Sobolewski, 2008: 20). Referring to childhood, Knapp evokes the trauma of uprooting and inept attempts by his mother to help him settle in Vienna, where everything, not only language, was strange to him (Knapp, 2014a: 96-97; Knapp, 2003b). Currently, Knapp lives in Vienna and Warsaw (*Radek Knapp. Biographie*, 2021). His everyday life, as he emphasizes, is marked by modesty (Rudle, 2015). He earns a living by taking up various jobs, often involving manual labour – most recently as a seller at a fruit stand on Kutschkermarkt, a market in Währing, Vienna's 18th-century district (*Radek Knapps neues Buch*, 2015). Knapp points out that physical work for him is a springboard from the madness associated with the life of a writer – it happens that he works for free. Meetings with people add a positive aspect to the situation, and provide an inspiration for literary creativity (Knapp, 2014a: 94-95; 116-117). The text with which Knapp debuted is the short story *Ein Bericht*, published in 1989, the title of which can be translated into English as *A Report* (Knapp, 1989). Already in this work there are elements of Knapp's original humour, described by researchers of his work as sly or rogue, or also Czech. This humour enables him to transform what is dramatic into a funny story or anecdote (Wiedemann, 2001: 7; Mikos, 2003a: 12; Hurnikowa, 2014: 290-292; Soborczyk, 2016). In this work, there are references to religious life, which also appear in later works by Knapp. They reflect the Roman Catholic perspective, which Knapp uses without much resistance, and at the same time is distanced from it (cf. Knapp, 2020: 146).

During the substitute service in 1993, Knapp wrote a collection of short stories *Franio* (Knapp, 1994), for which a year later he received the literary award of the German ZDF Cultural Magazine (*aspekte-Literaturpreis*). It was positively reviewed by the Pope of Literature, Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920-2013), thanks to whom literary salons were opened for Knapp (Mikos, 2003a: 12). In 2001, Knapp received the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, awarded by the Robert Schuman Foundation to authors writing in German who are not of German origin or whose mother tongue is not German (Ljubic, 2003: 261). The inconvenience that came with the prize was the necessity to travel around Germany with lectures (Knapp, 2014a: 116; Knapp, 2003b). This motif appears in the novel entitled *Papiertiger* (*A Paper Tiger*) (Knapp, 2003a), the protagonist of which is a literary debutant Walerian Gugania. The grotesque name and surname are not accidental – this feature is also visible in other works of Knapp. However, in order to notice this peculiarity,

it is necessary to know both German and Polish¹. Autobiographical motifs are present in Knapp's later books (Kaindlstorfer, 2022). On the one hand, this gives the readers the opportunity to get to know the author better, on the other – it is not known where the boundary between fiction and reality is.

One of Knapp's greatest literary achievements is his novel *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* (*Mr. Kuka's Recommendations*) from 1999 (Knapp, 1999)². It has been published many times in German (most recently in 2019), and has also become the basis for a feature film, which was released in 2007. The book was translated into Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Italian, Polish and Russian. Its hero is Waldemar, a young Pole who decides to go abroad. Kuka, his neighbour, persuades him to go to Vienna. There, on the one hand, he experiences that the 'paradise' West really exists, and on the other, that its abundance is not meant for everyone. Over time, thanks to a happy coincidence, and above all to friendly people, he finds his place – he stabilizes financially and falls in love.

In 2005, another book was published entitled *Gebrauchsanweisung für Polen* (*Instruction Manual for Poland*) (Knapp, 2005b). It is a kind of a cheerful tourist guide in which Knapp refers to Polish history, culture, customs (including culinary ones), and the political situation in the country. He emphasizes that it was a difficult book to write because he was aware of his compatriots' sensitivity to criticism (Knapp, 2014a: 118). The study was positively received by readers (including those from Poland), which was confirmed by its subsequent editions.

A work that slightly differs from those previously written by Knapp is a crime novel from 2012 entitled *Reise nach Kalino* (*Journey to Kalino*) (Knapp, 2012). The main character is invited to a town whose inhabitants live in luxury and have access to the latest technical developments to solve a murder there. Knapp perceives the novel as a criticism of the Western consumer society, pointing out that despite its deficiencies, he enjoys this lifestyle. He adds that the town of Kalino is located near Łódź (a city in central Poland), which he did not know during his writing work (*Reise nach Kalino*, 2017). He is displeased when the novel is categorized as a work of science fiction (Knapp, 2014a: 104; 120).

The last three books by Knapp are thematically similar (Knapp, 2015a; Knapp, 2017; Knapp, 2020). They present the everyday life of Polish immigrants in Vienna. The protagonist of the first one is Ludwik Wiewurka, who works in the heat plant as a collector. Since he has acquired Austrian citizenship, he has to do military service. It is changed into a civil service in a retirement home. In the second novel, there are references to Walerian's childhood and youth. After his birth, his mother leaves him with her par-

¹ For example, in the last novel by Knapp *Von Zeitlupensymphonien* (2020) set in Viennese scenery, animal lovers appear. This is Mr. Oberbillig and Mrs. Milchpeter. One will not find such names in Vienna. The most bizarre name appears in Knapp's penultimate novel entitled *Der Mann, der Luft zum Frühstück aß* (2017). Its protagonist is a doctor named Noznik, which in Polish (taking into account the German pronunciation) means chamber pot.

² The book was published in abbreviated form as an e-book (Knapp, 2005a).

ents, to return after 11 years and take him to Vienna. There, Walerian, not without difficulties, enters the local community. As an adult, he works in various professions. Like Wiewurka, he is a collector. Knapp's latest novel was written in the convention of *Gebruuchsanweisung für Polen*. It is a kind of 'instruction manual for Vienna', presented by an unknown immigrant from Poland, whose professional career also includes the position of a Viennese collector³.

Knapp is described as a Polish-German-Austrian writer (Kazecki, 2009: 451). He considers himself an author whose homeland is Poland – Polish remains the language of emotions, and German is the 'professional' language that is used to write books and opens access to a larger book market. He emphasizes that writing in German offers the advantage of a healthy distance to the presented issues and the ability to talk about them in a comprehensive way (Gschweilt, 2013). On the other hand, he feels disadvantaged due to the inability to fully identify, primarily in the emotional sphere, with the topic presented. Knapp points out that Polish language is still important in his intimate space. It is the mother tongue that serves him to conduct, among other things, mathematical calculations (Müller, 2015). He adds that one should not run away from difficult topics. However, they need to be approached lightly, so that the reader does not fall asleep (*'Z pisania umiera się z głodu...' – Radek Knapp o sobie i nie tylko*, 2014).

Knapp has the ambition to play the role of an intermediary between the East (Poland) and the West (Austria/Vienna). He does so not only as an author of novels and short stories, but also in journalistic programmes, in which he appears as a keen observer of Polish and Austrian political scenes. Knapp looks at Austria, particularly Vienna, from the perspective of a long-term immigrant who has a good understanding of both the country of residence and the country of origin. When presenting Poland and Poles, Knapp willingly uses stereotypes popular in the West, towards which he keeps distance, pointing to counterexamples confirming that the audience is dealing with phenomena of a universal nature (Kazecki, 2009: 450; 452).

Knapp draws attention to the 'affliction' of Poles (and other Slavs) in the form of hospitality, as well as a specific inferiority complex towards the Western world, manifested, among others, by the thoughtless imitation of what is Western, and in the mutilation of the mother tongue (Sobolewski, 2008: 20). Vienna rises to the rank of 'paradise on earth' – the city of beauty, prosperity and better life, where people live without rush and enjoy every moment. In *Mr. Kuka's Recommendations*, Lothar, the German protagonist of the novel, states on the subject of Eastern view of the West: "This is what I like about you people of the East. Even in the garbage dump, you'd find jewels" (Knapp, 1999: 155)⁴.

The newcomer from Poland, however, is capable of reflection – over time he or she matures in their outlook on Western world – notices its positives and negatives, and at

³ It was a job that Knapp did for some time. Thanks to this, he had the opportunity to get to know the realities of Vienna well (cf. Grupa Wydawnicza SONIA DRAGA, 2017).

⁴ All translations from German are mine.

the same time slowly begins to identify with it (the motif of a 'suitable' immigrant). He or she belongs to this world, and it becomes their property. The opportunity to participate in what is Viennese, among other things, by slowly sipping melange, that is milk coffee in local cafes, as well as resignation from vodka in favour of wine acquires symbolic meaning. Perhaps this world is different from that characterized by Slavic chaos, because it is orderly and boring at the same time, but it is a world to which one already belongs.

Referring to the West, in which Poles seek personal fulfilment, Knapp allows himself to use humour bordering on political profanation. In *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen*, one of the main characters turns out to be the aforementioned Lothar, a German who is passionate about stealing luxury goods in Viennese shops. *Papiertiger* refers to the case of beautiful nurses from Poland working in a Viennese nursing home, who invigorate the everyday existence of local residents. They are intelligent – they know very well how to encourage apathetic patients to eat. They draw swastikas on their napkins, which enlivens 'old comrades'. The theme of the involvement of Austrians in the Nazi activities is also reflected in Knapp's latest book. In it, he recalls a sketch in which an Englishman tells an Austrian he meets that he does not look like an Austrian. He replies that it is because he is half Persian and half Viennese. This means he looks like a terrorist, but is actually a Nazi (Knapp, 2020: 121; cf. Knapp, 2017: 25).

Vienna through the eyes of Radek Knapp

The work in which Knapp takes up the subject of Vienna for the first time is the short story *Franio*, included in the collection of the same title. Its protagonist is a globetrotter who returns to his homeland, to Anin near Warsaw, after 20 years. He is perceived as an unconventional figure. Despite being over fifty, he wears short pants. He is illiterate, and at the same time, he is able to tell stories very suggestively, thanks to which he gains popularity in the Aninian community. Handing his brother a postcard that he found on a sidewalk in Vienna, he talks about the charms of the city, including the cathedral, which stands in the centre. Vienna is prettier than Warsaw and Cracow. Nobody is in a rush there and everyone greets everyone with some title: professor, doctor, engineer, counsellor. In Poland, everything is so common – everyone is called either Nowak or Kilinski. Banks are the most beautiful in Vienna – the oldest ones look like museums (Knapp, 1994: 55).

The protagonist of the last story in *Franio*, entitled *Schwager Wilhelm (Brother-in-law Wilhelm)*, is a Polish dentist who was successful in Vienna – "He made it to a house and two cars. Before he died, he even went to Portugal on vacation. Every year!" (Knapp, 1994: 140). The inhabitants of Anin see him as a lucky person. His brother-in-law, who was in Vienna for his funeral, talks about the city in delight: "You can say what you want, but Vienna is a cosmopolitan city! [...] The department stores there are as big as the Warsaw Military Museum. The sarcophagus of Empress Maria Theresa is taller than

Maniek's new delivery van. [...] But what I liked best was the cathedral in the city centre" (Knapp, 1994: 138).

The eponymous character of *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* makes himself an expert on Vienna. He tells Waldemar to go to the Austrian capital. He states:

In Vienna they speak their own language, but if you can speak German, it's a start. The question is, aren't you a little too young for a huge museum like Vienna? Two million museum guards live there in a confined space and talk about death all the time. And they are not like us, the Slavs, who just talk in vain. They do something too. Just when I was there, they found a pensioner who shot his head off. He had been lying in the apartment for three years, and although he had no head to read, he was still regularly sent department store catalogues (Knapp, 1999: 12-13).

In addition to being a city of museums, Vienna is also the world's music capital. Austrians are a musical nation. The most popular instruments are the piano, violin and transverse flute. Harp enjoys little recognition. The confirmation of musical education is a large number of concerts to which tickets are always purchased miraculously. Apart from making music and listening to music, it is also important to move around in its company, that is to dance. This is confirmed by the numerous organized balls, accompanied by a 'battle call': "Alles Walzer!" ("to the waltz!"). Thanks to TV broadcasts, Austrians as a nation – not counting teenagers surfing on the net and foreigners labouring on the factory line – unite not only with those who dance, but also with the Austrian and international crème de la crème of the society, whose representatives watch the dances live, occupying expensive boxes (Knapp, 2020: 84-90).

When Waldemar comes to Vienna, he is delighted with it. He especially likes the Viennese people: "They looked relaxed and harmless. You just couldn't tell them apart properly. We distinguish a worker from a bank director at first glance. But the Viennese all looked astonishingly alike. They wore almost identical fashionable clothes. There was a peculiar slowness about everything" (Knapp, 1999: 38). Waldemar is most impressed by the first department store he sees, especially its ten-meter-high marble facade. One Polish woman chills his admiration – she explains that people who seem to him to be from the upper classes are ordinary office workers or teachers (Knapp, 1999: 39-42).

Kuka recommends Waldemar the Viennese hotel, Four Seasons. It turns out to be a park bench next to the Belvedere Palace. After the first night he spends there, he notices that even the Viennese benches differ from those in Poland: "Our benches wobble and squeak just from looking at them. The park bench in the Belvedere was as solid as a metal bed" (Knapp, 1999: 63). Also, the water in the fountain turns out to be of better quality than that flowing in Polish taps (Knapp, 1999: 64).

The admiration for Vienna, experienced by people coming there from the East for the first time, can be seen in other works by Knapp. In a text that was published (in German and Polish) on the occasion of the centenary of the Vienna Ring in a collection of short stories by immigrant authors, Knapp recalls the impressions that accompanied him on a tour on a Vienna tram:

As a resident of the Eastern Bloc, the first thing I was amazed at was not the beautiful, large apartment houses and magnificent buildings, but the intact neon signs that hung everywhere. Back home under communism, the letters were always half out, which made us slightly neurotic, but also made us first-class crossword puzzle solvers. Furthermore, the cleanliness caught my eye. Wherever you looked, nothing lay about, not even a handkerchief. It was as if a monstrous vacuum cleaner had just swept over and sucked up everything that wasn't nailed down (Knapp, 2014b: 81-91).

Waldemar draws attention to the unfortunate ability of the Viennese to spot a man from the East among the mass of tourists. It turns out, however, that this issue can be solved. The Viennese have a certain weakness – they like to be greeted “grüß Gott” (“God bless you”). It is enough to address them this way to win their favour. It is due to the fact that on the one hand they are polite people, even towards the beggars who approach them in the streets, and on the other they value order (cf. Knapp, 1999: 68). There, everything and everyone is in place. Waldemar notes: “As soon as you step out onto the street in Vienna, you keep bumping into things that are forbidden. Entering the lawn, standing to the right, walking on the left side, crossing the yellow line, stepping onto the red line – none of this is allowed in Vienna. Even the children have their own prohibitory signs” (Knapp, 1999: 69).

Vienna also has its dark side. It is an immigration world that operates on the verge of legality, especially when it comes to employment. These features are reflected best in the place on the outskirts of the city called the Arbeiterstrich, in a practice known as ‘worker prostitution’, where immigrants looking for work and Austrians who need cheap labour meet (Kazecki, 2009: 461).

People from different nations live in Vienna, each of them with a nickname. One of the protagonists of *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* explains to Waldemar: “Yugols are Yugoslavs. We are Polacks. The Turks are Kanacks and the Germans – Krauts” (Knapp, 1999: 44). It is not always possible to experience Austrian politeness. Waldemar has an unpleasant adventure with Viennese skinheads who do not like his sneakers. Bolek, a young Pole who defends him, explains to him not to worry about failures. It is the same everywhere, even in Germany and France (Knapp, 1999: 135).

Stereotypical view of foreigners is also employed in Knapp's work. As an example, it is worth mentioning Mrs. Simacek, who rents an apartment to Bolek and Lothar. Allowing Waldemar to join them, she delivers a manifesto in the spirit of the populist Freedom Party of Austria:

I have nothing against foreigners. On the contrary, I think the Viennese should be really happy that the foreigners come to us and relieve us from the strain of hard labour. Cleaning the loo, sweeping the streets and selling newspapers is not for us because we are such fine people. And yet we don't particularly like foreigners. The reason is that many rascals come to us and spoil your reputation, the good foreigners you are. They work for a bit here, over in Romania they nurse their brats up with our allowances so that they can grow up quickly and clear out our Julius Meinl (Knapp, 1999: 165).

Vienna has attractive facades, but also a reality hidden behind them, often full of surprises. Thanks to the work as a collector at the heat plant, Ludwik Wiewurka, the main character of the book *Der Gipfeldieb (A Summit Thief)*, has an opportunity to get to know the true face of Vienna. He presents the structure of the capital city in a concise form:

The plush city, as we, the collectors, called Vienna, was built up like a raisin cake. In the middle was the tasty and fragrant centre that rich people and tourists shared among themselves. The heterogeneous layer of student flats, shared flats, and shady clubs stretched out further. At the very edge was a dried-up cake rim with thousands of council houses where the working class went to bed day after day. There, millions of meters waited to be read and resealed (Knapp, 2015a: 6).

Elsewhere, Ludwik allows himself to reflect on the city:

I had been in the plush city for so long and still didn't know what to think of it. The newspaper said it was one of the most liveable cities in the world. And that was true if you were a tourist or an oligarch. The whole world believed that the streets of Vienna were full of people who only sat in coffee houses during the day, drank their Veltliner and talked about the weather. And the more they sat around talking about the weather, the better they looked and the more money they had. But these are merely deceptive appearances (Knapp, 2015a: 25-26).

Ludwik is surprised by the fact that many animals, including exotic ones, live in Viennese apartments. Once he even meets a donkey whose owners did not want to leave it alone in a cottage in the countryside. Its hooves are wrapped in rags so that it would not be heard (Knapp, 2015a: 11-13). Basically, Vienna is a city of animals. Dogs seem to dominate, but in fact there are four times more cats than dogs (Knapp, 2020: 70).

People from the East believe that the West is diligent and free from (Slavic) wangling. Reading the meters in the Großfeldsiedlung, the block housing estate in the 21st district of Floridsdorf, Ludwik has become an opportunity to revise this opinion: “[...] the Großfeldsiedlung was known for two things: for middle-aged people who had the gift of converting unemployment benefits into a disability pension, which at some point gradually became an actual pension; and for lively teenagers who vent their sexual drive everywhere, just not in the bedroom” (Knapp, 2015a: 9-10).

Ludwik draws attention to a certain curiosity. When the Viennese finds out that he is from Poland, they suddenly express a desire to bribe him and, thus, secure lower costs for the supplied heat. As a result, he comes home laden with cheese, sausage and bottles of vodka. It happens because – as he notes – bribing with goods in the late 20th century plays the same role as in the Middle Ages (Knapp, 2017: 50).

Contrary to what may seem, readiness to bribe others is not a problem for average Viennese. Even the clerks in the city hall are ready to turn a blind eye to the formalities, if it brings them personal benefit. The main character of the novel *Von Zeitlupensymphonien und Marzipantragödien. Notizen eines Mächtigen-Österreichers (From Slow Motion Symphonies and Marzipan Tragedies. Notes from a would-be Austrian)* obtains a residence permit extension in exchange for providing a certain clerk with gossip from the celebrity world to which he has access as an employee of an exclusive sauna. Later,

in return for the preparation of a report on the opinion of foreigners about Austrians, he receives a promise of help in obtaining citizenship. The clerical conscience is reproachful, because – as she claims – integration is rubbish, but from time to time one has to open the door to let someone in, because the country needs blood transfusions. Otherwise, only ninety-year-olds would stay there (Knapp, 2020: 116-118).

Communicating in dialect is something that distinguishes the inhabitants of Vienna from the rest of Austria. The Viennese dialect, apart from communication purposes, is an opportunity to distinguish the Viennese from non-Viennese. It also allows identification with individual districts of the capital (cf. Knapp, 2015b: 27-31; Knapp, 2017: 10-12; Knapp, 2020: 17). A closer look at this issue justifies the statement that we are dealing with a more complicated problem. There are no clear criteria by which to judge whether someone is Viennese or not. Merely using a dialect does not mean that someone has ancestors living in Vienna for generations. One can meet Viennese-speaking people from distant regions, for example from Tyrol. There are also those whose surname is Böhm or Nagy, which indicates Czech or Hungarian roots. A strong mimicry that manifests itself in the lives of those settling in Vienna is interesting. They desperately want to become part of the capital's environment through observing local customs and using the dialect, and at the same time do not admit to their actual origin (Knapp, 2020: 22-24).

As Vienna is under the influence of 'globalized' customs, including the culinary and literary German, the real Viennese are being pushed out of the centre to the periphery. Currently, if one wants to meet a Viennese, they should go to the outskirts of the city and look at *heurigers*, that is restaurants where young wine produced in a given year is served. There, one bottle after another is emptied to the murmur of talks about politics, the economy and private life (Knapp, 2020: 25-26). Consuming an excessive amount of wine is not dangerous, because the resulting hangover is less annoying than the Polish one – after vodka. Nobody vomits, and if anything, it is done so discreetly that those who do, do not seem to even notice it themselves. The acts of vandalism accompanying the intoxication are rare (Knapp, 2020: 96-97).

The local cuisine is an opportunity to get to know Vienna, or broader, Austria. For a Pole, it does not present anything exotic, apart from the way the schnitzel is served – it is thin as a host (Knapp, 2020: 32). Viennese confectioners deserve praise. Their products always taste good, even when they are not fresh. The different types of sausages served with sweet or hot mustard in street kennels also deserve a mention. Many Viennese value them more than the most expensive dishes in exclusive restaurants (Knapp, 2020: 34-41).

Poles in Vienna

Vienna is a city that has attracted many foreigners in the past and is doing so today. It affects their lives, and they repay in a similar way. Among them are Poles, including Knapp, who from this perspective – Polish and Slavic – presents the Austrian capital.

Knapp's novel which is usually seen as the one about Poles in Vienna is *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen*. One of the motifs that move the reader, vividly reflected in the novel, is financial abuse by one's own countrymen. The issue corresponds to the belief that it is best to stay away from other Poles in a foreign country. At the same time, there are those in the novel who are ready to lend a helping hand. This 'Polish ambivalence' is visible in other works by Knapp as well.

An important landmark for Poles in Vienna is the church that belongs to the Polish congregation of the Resurrectionists. It is located near the Belvedere Palace at Rennweg 5A and is, therefore, referred to as the church on the Rennweg. In the past, its neighbourhood functioned as a marketplace for the exchange of useful information – Polish coaches would arrive there and set off on their way back to their homeland. For a considerable group of people, the church at Rennweg served and still serves as a place where religious needs can be satisfied.

In *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* it is presented as follows: "On the other hand, the Polish church did not look exactly the way one would expect from churches. It was surrounded by stalls with cigarettes, can openers and a host of other things that were obviously needed for life in Vienna. The buyers, almost all of them compatriots, did the rounds and stopped now and then. The atmosphere was like at the fair" (Knapp, 1999: 49). Waldemar explains his new friend: "Our churches are not just for marriage. Sometimes they also function as bus stops" (Knapp, 1999: 243).

Poles entering Viennese space try to live without wasting significant material resources. For this reason, they choose the cheapest and, therefore, the least comfortable apartments. Their common feature is a small size, proximity to communication routes, which results in 24-hour noise, and a toilet used by several families. Already in *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen*, Viennese 'luxuries' available to local Poles are bluntly presented:

There was a black and white TV and four bunk beds in the living room. A chandelier hung from the ceiling, consuming as much electricity as a sea lantern. If you turned it on, you could see the microbes walking on the floor. The special thing about the apartment was the toilet. Because there was none. [...] It took me a while to understand that the small toilet in the corridor, to which two other people had a key, was our toilet (Knapp, 1999: 147-48).

The issue of a shared toilet appears in Knapp's latest novel. Its protagonist, however, does not feel discriminated due to the inconvenience because, as he emphasizes, this problem affects up to 20% of Viennese today (Knapp, 2020: 55).

Sometimes it is possible to get a place that is free from the typical disadvantages of low-income housing. Ludwik, the hero of *Der Gipfeldieb*, recalls the moment when his mother who took him from his grandparents to Vienna. The beginnings were not easy: "At that time we lived in a small apartment where practically all the cars that were in Vienna at the time passed by" (Knapp, 2015a: 15). As an adult, Ludwik managed to improve his living conditions: "For the first time in my life, I rented a small apartment, the windows of which did not overlook a highway, but a children's playground, on which

a giant wooden ladybird was enthroned and exuded a pleasant sense of confidence. My neighbours didn't play any classical instruments, which was equivalent to winning the lottery in Vienna [...]” (Knapp, 2015a: 5).

The living conditions are difficult especially for Polish workers who are just starting their professional career in Vienna. Most often they share small flats, which serve them primarily as a place to sleep. This type of accommodation is called a *Quartiere* ('lodging'). They return there after ten hours of labour at the construction site, drink a few beers in order to fall into a coma typical of builders, without taking off their overalls. The lack of a woman's hand makes the accommodation far from hygienic (Knapp, 2020: 54).

The problem of Poles in Vienna is finding a job. You can do it on your own, which is not easy. This was an experience of Waldemar from *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen*, who, although he followed the example of his neighbour and did not admit to being Polish, could not find a job anyway (cf. Knapp, 1999: 85-129). It is only thanks to the help of an accidentally met compatriot that Waldemar takes the position of a salesman in a doll store. This event reflects the functioning of the social network popular among Poles living abroad. Thanks to compatriots already operating abroad, it is easier to find a flat and employment (Knapp, 1999: 137-146).

Poles in Vienna often undertake jobs that do not require qualifications, and which, at the same time, are not a source of high income. In *Papiertiger*, Walerian who clung to various activities in Vienna, decides to make his dream come true and, just before Christmas, starts working in delivering gifts to children. Since the position of Santa Claus has already been taken, he becomes an angel. The job is simple – handle a gift, shake the wings and make sure too many feathers are not accidentally lost. Among his colleagues are Filipinos, Yugoslavs, Lithuanians and Russians (Knapp, 2003a: 23-29).

The hard position of Poles on Vienna's job market means that many of them cannot afford to participate in the luxuries of the capital. Knapp recalls the impressions of a tram ride on the Vienna Ring: “Like every stranger from the Eastern Bloc, who was actually a camouflaged homeless person at the time, I immediately noticed a hotel. It was the ‘Imperial’. Of course, it wasn't for my pocket (and still isn't), because an ‘Imperial’ roll costs about as much as a diamond, and an overnight stay as much as a real Van Gogh” (Knapp, 2014b: 82).

A positive feature of Poles living in Vienna is that they integrate with the inhabitants of the capital city. This is confirmed by the fact that they use not only literary German, but also its dialect version (cf. Knapp, 2020: 156-159). The attitude of the Viennese towards them is also changing – they are no longer treated as potential criminals, especially car thieves. Ludwik, the hero of *Der Gipfeldieb*, recalls: “Furthermore, after twenty-two years, I finally integrated into Viennese society as I had always wanted. Nobody took their computer to a safe place as soon as they heard my Polish accent, I was never asked why Poles react so lively to a Mercedes as the depressed react to a mood-enhancer” (Knapp, 2017: 7).

Poles who come to Vienna are convinced of their own backwardness in civilization, which is reflected in a specific shame – looking at themselves through the eyes of Westerners, they feel strong disapproval and even contempt. This feeling paralyzes even the bravest. It is not about their appearance, but what the newspapers say about them – that they steal and rape (Knapp, 2003a: 33). Many remember the difficult entry into the Viennese community, and therefore, look with concern at the newest arrivals from the Vistula River, whose behaviour threatens the hard-won positive image of the Viennese Poles. Ludwik's mother admonishes him:

[...] you have to admit that it is precisely us who have to pay for what the rabble from Radom and other holes is doing here. I have to whisper in the subway when I speak Polish. You do not understand this. Because you ride your bike everywhere you go. [...] Have you heard what these knuckleheads did the other day? They wanted to crack a jeweller's window with an electric circular saw. In the middle of it all they ran out of electricity and asked the jeweller they were about to rob if they could recharge their batteries. Not only are we criminals, we are stupid as well. Even the Serbs are smarter. At least they drive a car full throttle into the display! (Knapp, 2017: 18-19).

According to Ludwik's mother, it is possible to escape from a negative opinion – it is enough to adopt Austrian citizenship. This will mean that you will no longer be seen as a citizen of a country that is only mentioned in the newspapers as a country full of car thieves and criminals, and thanks to the Austrian passport, you will experience real social ennoblement. She adds emphatically: "In addition, an Austrian passport is really not to be despised. For example, from now on you no longer need a work permit and you can travel wherever you want" (Knapp, 2017: 23).

While Polish men often work on Viennese construction sites, women find employment in caring for elderly people. Ludwik, who was drafted into the army thanks to obtaining citizenship, which he managed to convert to civil service in one of the nursing homes, meets his compatriots there. Among them is Sylwia, a woman who turns out to be a recipe for a happy future (cf. Knapp, 2017: 198-205).

On the one hand, emigration is an opportunity, and on the other hand, it is a moral burden that cannot be shed, and which makes one adopt a different view of everyday life than those who have no experience of emigration. Stanisław Lem draws attention to this fact to the hero of the novel *Von Zeitlupensymphonien*. He meets Lem when, as a collector, he shows up in his apartment to read the meters on the radiators. Lem explains that people without a homeland have a particularly strong immune system. And this is needed because great changes are approaching (Knapp, 2020: 147).

Conclusions

When presenting various social phenomena, it is not uncommon to refer to what is extreme – in a positive sense outstanding, in a negative sense pathological. A similar approach can be found in studies relating to Poles living abroad. The works of Knapp elude

these tendencies. Their heroes are mainly Polish immigrants, who are average people united by the desire to find a better life in the West, which is represented by the capital of Austria – Vienna. Knapp points to their disadvantages and, at the same time, their strong sides. First of all, they are hardworking people who do not burden the Austrian social system. Even though the new homeland differs from the one they have left, they identify with it, confirming that they are ‘good’ immigrants. Knapp criticizes his countrymen for a naive view of the West, which they believe can only be good, and the East – only bad. Writing about them, he indicates problems of a universal nature. One of such common issues is mimicry in the lives of individuals and groups, which consists in an intense effort to become similar to the people among whom they have settled. This issue is revealed not only among immigrants from Poland and other Eastern European countries – it can also be seen among those who come from the Austrian provinces and decide, most often because of work, to come to Vienna.

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Abstract: Migration is a phenomenon accompanying humanity from its beginnings. The issue of migration is dealt with not only by scholars, but also by writers and novelists. Among them is Radek Knapp (1964-) from Warsaw, who came to Vienna at the age of twelve, and where he lives to this day. In his novels and short stories, Knapp presents the reality of Vienna and its inhabitants from the perspective of ordinary people. Among them are people from Poland who settled in Austria looking for a better life there. They quickly experience that you have to work hard in the Western Paradise. Failures are not uncommon life experiences. Knapp, writing about Vienna and its inhabitants, those from many generations and the newest ones, does so with a specific sense of humour. One of his most popular works is the novel *Mr. Kuka's Recommendations* (1999). It has been translated from the original German into the following languages: Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Italian, Polish and Russian. It became the basis for the script of a feature film with the same title (2007). It is worth emphasizing that no works by Knapp were published in English.

Keywords: Radek Knapp, novel, Poles, Vienna