

INTRODUCTION

One of the questions frequently raised in migration studies is that of the relevance of past immigrant experiences for understanding contemporary ones. We can formulate it even more precisely and ask whether the immigration of Europeans to the United States is helpful in the current analysis. As Leo Lucassen points out there is a constant debate between a “continuity school” and “uniqueness school”. Both of them offer a long list of arguments in favor or against a particular approach. Seeking a third option may lead to the conclusion that the past is not “a strange and highly irrelevant country that has little in common with the present” (Lucassen 2005) but rather that there is “more that makes [immigrants’] histories similar than makes them different” (Gerber, Kraut, 2005:9). Close examination of past and present migrations usually reveals what Ewa Morawska has called a picture of “similarity with notable differences” or a picture of “difference with notable similarities” (Morawska 2011: 20).

It is so obvious that it seems almost trivial to say that the American ethnic landscape is constantly changing. A quick look at the statistics clearly shows how profound these changes have been. At the turn of the twentieth century Europeans constituted the largest bloc of immigrants arriving in the United States. Today Latin Americans and Asians predominate. Yet many of the contemporary issues, concerns and debates echoes those expressed a century ago. The motives of migration, adaptation process, social, political and economic participation, inter-ethnic relations and the identity-building process remain the key issues in scholarly debates. Therefore, detailed examination of the characteristics of the “old” waves of immigration may prove instructive for comparative analysis.

The papers that comprise the current issue of *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny* were originally presented at the 5th edition of the workshop “American Ethnicity: Rethinking Old Issues, Asking New Questions”, which was held on 28-29th May 2012 in Krakow, at the Institute of American Studies and Polish

Diaspora of the Jagiellonian University¹. As Dorota Praszalowicz, the initiator and main organizer of the meetings emphasized, it is important to use old sources and ask new questions as well as implementing new methods of interpretation (2005: 5).

The articles encompass a variety of topics, including sport, social mobility, ethnic legends, collective memory, interethnic relations, identity and marriage patterns. Although at first glance the themes may seem rather widely explored, all of the authors uncover lesser known chapters of immigration history and thus add to our understanding of migration.

Immigrant letters are the best sources to investigate the everyday life of immigrants that help to capture their thoughts, ideals and beliefs. They allow for uncovering personal viewpoints and the subjective dimensions of individual experiences. In her articles, Ursula Lehmkuhl draws extensively from the letters written by immigrants to their relatives living in the Old World. In the first paper she presents a methodological approach, arguing that in order to fully understand immigrant letters scholars must not use them as mere illustrative material, but have to approach them as “texts”. Next, the author reconstructs the life course process as depicted in the letters of a German immigrant couple – Ernst and Marie Kuchenbecker. What seems particularly interesting is a gradual change in the role of the main communicator. At the beginning it was Ernst who wrote the letters. With time, however, Marie, described by Lehmkuhl as “eloquent and versatile” and “a very sophisticated observer” of social and political reality, became the main author. Since in most collections the male-authored letters predominate (Gerber 2005: 23), this analysis broadens the scope. Moreover, in her article Lehmkuhl emphasizes the artificiality of the micro-macro division and calls for the recognition of the interdependence between ‘the individual/subject’ and ‘the social/objective’.

The second article by Lehmkuhl is a continuation of the journey through immigrants’ narratives. This time, however, apart from the letters written by German immigrant Johann Heinrich Carl Bohn, Lehmkuhl also uses the childhood memories of his youngest sons, historical accounts on the family and short summaries of the letters added to the original collection by its contemporary owner, Roland Wehrmann. Such sources have made it possible to reconstruct the memory of a transatlantic family and to show how the past is dealt with in everyday life.

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The articles by Hartmut Keil and Wolfgang Helbich bring into light the political aspects of the German presence in the United States in the second half of the 19th century. Keil's essay considers the motives of German radicals' involvement in antebellum politics and in the antislavery cause. Wolfgang Helbich points out the competition between different ethnic/immigrant communities for social recognition and respect. Some immigrant stories and accounts have almost gained into mythic status. In the essay, the author critically examines five legends connected with German immigrants' participation in the Civil War. By using these legends Helbich demonstrates one of the possible means to "boost ethnic ego and prestige".

For many immigrants religion is an important element of their life as it represents a sense of identification, helps to maintain connections to their place of origin and facilitates the integration process. Different ethnic and religious groups bring with them particular notions of gender roles and accepted behavior. Suzanne M. Sinke adds more elements to the picture, exploring practices surrounding the marriage patterns among three religious groups in the USA: United Brethren (Moravians), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and Unification Church (Moonies).

It goes without saying that immigrants have played a remarkable role in sports and that American sport is "ethnic based". For a number of second-generation immigrants sports created a particular opportunity to succeed and receive acclaim from the host society. As Neal Pease points out in his essay, these athletes were perceived as "ethnic heroes", examples of a success story and the American dream. The story of Stanley Ketchel (Stanisław Kiecal), the first Polish-American to claim a major sports championship in the US and the best middleweight boxer in the world seems to fit the pattern. His fame, adventurous life and immigrant roots should have helped Ketchel to become one of *Polonia's* heroes. Contrary to our expectations Pease demonstrates that Ketchel never won a genuine acceptance of the Polish ethnic community.

The article by James Pula on the process of identity building is a polemic with Mary Cygan's work. Pula argues that Polish American identity cannot be associated only with a working class identity. Also, he claims that Cygan is more concerned with the image of *Polish* history than of Polish *American* history. Drawing from Halbwachs' distinction between collective memory and historical memory, the author suggests that by remembering Poland, but not *Polonia*, the immigrants have failed to create a distinctly *Polonian* identity that is independent of the country of origin.

Joanna Kulpińska offers an analysis of the migration flows from Babica, a Subcarpathian village, to the United States in the context of the social topography of the village. Babica gained the status of an iconic example of

chain migration patterns that evolved in Galicia. Even until today migration has remained one of the often considered life option among Babica inhabitants. In her article, Kulpińska traces the continuities and discontinuities, similarities and differences in patterns between old and new streams of migration. Similarly to Duda-Dziewierz' conclusions, Kulpińska puts emphasis on the role of social networks which allow for the formation of multi-generational migration chains.

To what extent are interethnic relations transferred into a migration diaspora? The article by Anna Fiń is an attempt to answer this question. The author points out not only the old relations, inherited and transformed from the Old World, but also the appearance of the new forms developed in the American context. Fiń offers a careful examination of the ethnic relations are build both in the institutional sphere and in daily, routine contacts.

Finally, Stefano Agnoletto considers the theoretical framework on economic ethnic niches and explores examples of such niches among the Italian diasporas in U.S. and Canadian cities at the turn of the 20th century. Taking into consideration immigrants' strategies in terms of employment choices and preferences, the author argues that immigrants managed to develop multiple and alternative patterns of economic specialization.

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