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1. Author information

Anna Dolińska

Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland

2. Author e-mail address

Anna Dolińska

E-mail: anna.dolinska@wp.pl

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Maintaining Close and Intimate Relationships by Migrant Peasant Families at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Anna Dolińska*

Corresponding author:
Anna Dolińska
E-mail: anna.dolinska@wp.pl

Abstract

In the proposed article and its presentist approach, I raise the question about the nature of close, intimate relationships in Polish peasant families from the early twentieth century, which were separated by migration and maintained contact with their family members through letters, with reference to three chosen series of letters (the Stelmach family, the Topolski family and the Makowski family) from *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki. Referring to the paradigm of transnationalism, modern phenomena and research categories associated with migration of families, I try to show how the chosen peasant families tried to experience togetherness and feelings across borders in the pre-technology era.

Keywords: Polish peasants, migration to America, family, close relationships, letters.

1. Introduction

Mass migrations have been taking place continuously for over 150 years (Castles, Miller, 2011: 19), and are experienced by both families and individuals who, in the place of direct face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 2008) with non-migrant relatives, produce other alternative forms of communication. Ewa Morawska (2013) notes that at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, there was a consensus among researchers that migrations from before the Great War differed from the migrations of contemporary people in the degree of their involvement in maintaining relationships with non-migrating family members in their homelands. However, Morawska argues that within the transfer of

* Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland.

economic goods, in the civil-political sphere, or socio-cultural sphere, there are more similarities between the 'old' and 'new' migration waves than are commonly believed to be.

Since the late 1980s, with the increase in the popularity of the transnational paradigm, it was believed that the rapid development of communication technologies (first the landline telephone, then the Internet) and relatively cheap and available means of transport makes the relations of modern migrants with relatives in the countries of origin more intense and richer in content. This article is a proposal to analyse migrations from the beginning of the 20th century and a source text from more than 100 years ago from a different theoretical perspective, and to treat the correspondence of peasants as an example of the antecedent of certain social phenomena considered to be common and characteristic of the migrations of the second half of the 20th century.

The subject of my interest are three selected series of letters¹ written between 1908-1914 by family members in Poland to a daughter, son or brother who immigrated to America, and the research goal is an attempt at their presentist analysis, which I understand as a critical look at text from more than 100 years ago from the point of view of phenomena and concepts specific to modern times. In the proposed essay, I pose a question about the nature of close, intimate relationships in selected peasant families from the early 20th century, which were separated by migration and maintain contact at a distance through letters.

Due to the scarcity of the source material analysed, the following analysis and conclusions are not intended to serve as a basis for formulating generalisations regarding the strategies of close relations of the broadly understood peasant class, but they are a proposal to look at the peasant family (through correspondence analysis) in opposition to the functional-structural role which it is often attributed with (Markowska, 1976, Ignar, 1986, Knapik, 2013), and may be a contribution to further exploration.

2. Historical context and theoretical inspirations

'Children are the wealth of a peasant,' yet, the demographic and economic factors forced over a million Galician people to leave their villages in 1870-1910 (Chalasiński in Thomas, Znaniecki, 1976: 11) and travel 'for bread', usually to America. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, almost 85% of all overseas emigration from Poland was received by the United States, and in 1914 the number of Polish migrants in the USA was already 3 million (Markowska, 1976:

¹ I have chosen those series of letters which were rich in the empirical content which is the focus of this paper.

25). Equally many people emigrated from the other two Partitions² - from Prussian - 1.2 million, from Russian - 1.4 million). America was also more often the target of settlement migration (Bukraba-Rylska, 2008), Although some chose the circular migration model. Despite the high costs, the record holders went overseas 10 times (Guściora, 1929: 73, cited in Bukraba-Rylska, 2008). The decision about which family member would emigrate was not an individual decision of the migrant, but it was determined by their position in the family. It was most often young men who went abroad, those who had no prospects of inheriting patrimony. Physical labour in exile was to help in obtaining the economic capital needed to invest back in the home country (if the migrant decided to return), and did not affect the growth of social aspirations of individuals – migrants returned to their villages, invested in land and livestock, resumed their duties, without questioning the existing social hierarchy. At the same time, travelling overseas influenced the broadening of the peasants' horizons, and the capital gained plus the investments made as a result of migration increased the social position of the individual and their family in the local community (Bukraba-Rylska, 2008. Additionally, long stays away from the local community disturbed the egalitarianism of the common fate – experience, opinions, lifestyle, environment, ideology, were influenced by foreign cultures, and then they were to some extent transferred and implemented to the native land, creating the foundations for future changes. Paid work outside the family farm and household impacted the independence and agency of the individual, which at the same time resulted in the weakening of the family as a primary group, and created the opportunity for it to be penetrated by new values. (Markowska, 1976, Morawska, 2013).

In the studies on Polish peasants, the family was usually on the margins of researchers' interests (Inglot, 1992), and if attention was given to it, then it was predominantly portrayed within the functional-structural paradigm (Markowska, 1976, Ignar, 1986), describing the family and its members from a deterministic perspective – paternalistic communities with strictly and clearly defined roles, functioning within fairly hermetic rural communities with a well-developed internal system of social control and sanctions. Closeness and intimacy in family relationships, which are the focus of this article, are concepts usually attributed to modern family relations which gradually evolved in modern industrial societies when land ceased to be the main source of livelihood for the

² In 1772, 1793 and 1795 the of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had been divided (partitioned) by the Habsburg Austria, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Russian Empire, which resulted in the dissolution of the sovereign state of Poland (and Lithuania) which lasted until the end of the First World War. Therefore, in the period when Thomas and Znaniecki were conducting their research on Polish peasants, Poland as such did not exist, and its territory was encompassed within Galicia (the Austrian Partition), the Prussian Partition and the Russian Partition.

less privileged social groups. Previously, *relations between spouses, parents and children are subordinated to (...) the logic of long duration, which dominates over the logic of feelings* (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 204), and *there seems to be a certain economic basis of familial continuity in the idea of ancestral land* (Thomas, Znaniecki, 1974: 87). The peasant family was (not always rightly) treated as an ideal type of a traditional family, whose identity focused primarily on the economic functions and the farmland, and was characterised, among others, by the *inseparability of marriage, concluded as a result of a group-family decision, and treated as a sacred institution, appointed to conceive offspring and jointly achieve economic goals* (Markowska, 1976: 19). The peasant family and relations prevailing within it were therefore characterised by hierarchy and large pragmatism – social roles were clearly defined, actions undertaken in order to bring economic benefits to the community, and love or closeness were possibly (but not necessarily) a derivative, secondary consequence of practical calculations and decisions that could but did not have to develop during the course of marriage. As Thomas and Znaniecki (1974: 94) note: 'In all relations between parents and children, the familial organization leaves no place for merely personal affection. Certainly, this affection exists, but it cannot express itself in socially sanctioned acts.' On the other hand, Ignar indicates that *not only sociology but also popular opinion see the countryside as something passive, something that only survives and chews, and does not create nor aspire* (Ignar, 1986: 133), which would suggest that within a peasant family, one could find not only the features that preserve the status quo but also *the dynamic elements* (Ignar, 1986: 133), which are the antecedent of future changes.

Relations of emotional nature began to partially 'replace' the functional ties, and patriarchal models of relationships evolved towards partner relationships as a result of progressive industrialization and urbanization (Bukraba-Rylska, 2008), the increase in the importance of values and individual aspirations, and migration. Overpopulation of the countryside and the shortage of land allowing to make a living from hand labour, were two factors pushing people in the prime out of the villages, resulting in economic migration – be it short-term to Prussia, or permanent to larger cities or overseas. Even if the original purpose of the trip was to be only to improve the financial situation to make investments after returning to their homeland, the experience of living and working outside the hermetic boundaries of the family, farm and rural community resulted in cultural transfer and accelerated the process of social change.

As the subject of my interest are close, intimate relations between family members separated by migration, it should be clarified how I define this term. The concept of intimacy is difficult to operationalise – although most people will intuitively understand what it means, on the other hand, in the context of relationships, it can take many different meanings. The word intimacy comes from the Latin word 'intimus', meaning 'inner, deepest,' and can refer to both

the verbal aspect of the relationship as well as interaction and communication, as well as to non-verbal meaning touch, gesture, body language, sex. Speaking of the intimate sphere in historical terms, it will more often refer to corporeality, while today intimacy is a phenomenon referring to relationality – all the ways in which people maintain their relationships and relationships in various moments and circumstances, together with memories, feelings and a sense of bond with others (Giddens, 2012). In this article, I will understand closeness and intimacy processually as maintaining close relationships, commitment to a relationship based on a community of experiences, memories, experiences and feelings.

3. Methodology and research aims

The purpose of this article is a presentist approach to the issue of close relations in migrant peasant families from the beginning of the 20th century (which in the introduction to this article I define as a critical analysis of documents from a century ago, from the perspective of phenomena and concepts specific to modern times) based on the analysis of three selected series of letters:

- the Stelmach family (Thomas, Znaniński, 1974: 379-393): Jan and Ewa Stelmach, peasant-farmers from Galicia, between 1909-1914 write ten letters (no. 58-67) to their son Józef and daughter-in-law Julka,
- the Topolski family (Thomas, Znaniński, 1974: 579-586): they come from the village but work in a factory in the city and between 1912-1914 write eight letters (no. 273-280) from the whole family or parents to Stanisława (daughter and sister) in America,
- the Makowski family (Thomas, Znaniński, 1974: 606-614): the series consists of 9 letters (no. 297-305), written 1908-1911, seven of which were written by the father Antoni (a shoemaker) to his son Stanisław, and two by Waclaw, another son (himself being away from home in Siberia, due to his military appointment) to his brother Stanisław.

Referring, on the one hand, to the functional and structural paradigm, within which the ‘traditional’ peasant family was used, and on the other, to the transnational paradigm, and to modern phenomena and research categories accompanying family migrations, I will analyse how selected peasant families tried to experience together space and feelings across borders, and answer research questions:

1. In the selected correspondence of the peasants from 1908-1914 to absent family members in America long before the technological revolution, when letters were the only medium of contact, can we observe any germs

- of communication strategies regarding intimate, intimate relations, and what intimacy is in the peasant creation?
2. Can we treat the selected families as an example of precursors of the 'world family' (living across borders)? (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2014).

4. Empirical analysis

Census from 1921 showed that 38.1% of the total rural population in all of Poland was illiterate (Landy-Tolwińska, 1961). Illiteracy was definitely smaller in the Prussian partition, i.e. in the northern and western territories (4.2%), in central and southern Poland it was about 32% of the population, while in the east of the country, in the areas of the former Russian partition, the illiterate accounted for almost 65% total population (Landy-Tolwińska, 1961). In Galicia, in 1880 almost 82% of people could not read and write (Inglot, 1992) and 20 years later, despite the increase in the number of folk schools offering basic knowledge, still 41.3% of children and 55.2% of youth did not attend school (Inglot, 1992).

The peasant class, working mainly in agriculture striving to meet their own living needs, did not perceive education as a priority investment – peasants' capital was made up of land, children (as insurance for old age) and livestock. Therefore, writing letters was a task that was rather difficult for the rural population, associated with intellectual effort and above all requiring time, which in the realities of rural life and the multitude of daily work on the farm and field was rather extravagant. However, as Thomas and Znaniecki note with surprise, the Polish peasant 'writes many and long letters (...) writing letters is for the peasant a social duty of ceremonial character' (Thomas, Znaniecki, 1974: 303). In their monumental work, the researchers make a typology of peasant letters according to their form and function, but pointing out that all letters written by peasants can be included in the fundamental category, which they call 'bowing letters'. They define it as a letter to a temporarily absent relative whose purpose is 'to manifest the persistence of familial solidarity in spite of the separation' (Thomas, Znaniecki 1974: 303). The authors conclude that this new need to verbalize solidarity appeared along with the increase in mobility among peasants and migration outside their home towns and was a substitute for personal, direct relations – previously 'no single member in particular was obliged to manifest his own familial feelings more than others members, unless on some extraordinary occasions' (Thomas, Znaniecki 1974: 303). Within the 'bowing letter,' Thomas and Znaniecki identified five subcategories because of their secondary function. They were:

1. Ceremonial letters (describing important family events, holidays; often replacing speeches whose purpose is *the revival of the familial feeling*)
2. Informing letters (describing the details of everyday life – maintaining *a community of interests*)
3. Sentimental letters (aiming to revive the feelings of the individual – written even in the absence of *a ceremonial occasion*)
4. Literary letters (written as poems – a kind of play aimed at fulfilling one's aesthetic and artistic needs)
5. Business letters (type of transactional letters).

Based on the analysis of the above classification, it can already be seen that, in addition to the overriding function of manifesting family solidarity, the letters also have a fatic function and serve to maintain bonds, and are a form of expression of feelings. Even if the primary goal is the transfer of information, it is motivated by the inability to transfer it personally and the desire to keep the migrating family member 'up to date'.

One of the interesting forms which show the degree of emotions are the openings and endings of some letters. In the series included in the monograph, one can distinguish ceremonial greetings with a reference to God, or greetings indicating a role in the family as: *Dear Children* or *Dear Son*, but there is also an evolution towards more personal formulations using diminutive forms of names, which often manifest fondness and feelings. Endings can be neutral, i.e. greetings and names of people or the name of the person writing or the collective signature *Everyone at home* (the Topolski series), but there are also examples of such with a more emotional nature.

In the Stelmach series, two letters (no. 58, 61) begin ceremoniously with a speech, but most of the letters are opened by neutral addressative forms: *Dear Children* (no. 60, 62, 63, 64 65, 66) or *Dear Son* (no. 59). The Topolski also collectively write letters, *Dear Children* (no. 273, 275, 276), but the other letters use different diminutive forms of their daughter's name like *Dear Stasia* (no. 274, 278-280) or *Dear Stachna* (no. 277) when the letter is written by an aunt. In the Makowski series, all letters contain diminutive addresses like *Dear Staś / Dear Stach*. In this series, the endings are more tender *Dear Staś, we embrace you innumerable times* (no. 297) or *Now, we greet you, I, your father, kiss you heartily* (no. 302).

Thomas and Znaniecki in the last footnote to the fragment of Stelmach series indicate a change in the nature of relations in the context of migration, evolving from group to individual: *The old man ceases to be an active member of the real family-group, and becomes an individual whose only relations with the family are sentimental and blood relations. The obligations toward the rest of the family, cease to be social, and become only moral* (Thomas, Znaniecki, 1974: 393). In the following chosen

fragments of the letters, I will present how these individual feelings manifest themselves.

In the analysed series of letters, parents and siblings express emotions like care or longing, wishing, sorrow, empathy.

In the Stelmach series, for example, parents' concern for the health and well-being of their son and daughter-in-law across the ocean:

We pity you very much that you have no health there now, and I wrote you already to move away from that Pittsburgh (...) And you, Julka, don't grieve, for you are sick from grief, you will get a nervous illness, when you are so you are neither healthy nor sick, and no doctor can help against a nervous illness (no. 63).

Of course, it can be argued that concern for health is a manifestation of peasant pragmatism – health is a necessary condition for fulfilling one's farm duties, which the old father may, adopting his perspective, consider as a prerequisite for the success of his son and daughter-in-law abroad. Also, the fact that as a father he gives his son advice, is in line with the ethos of the family patriarch. However, the way he expresses this concern (*We pity you very much*) indicates a more emotional approach to the matter, because pity is an emotion that expresses compassion. In another passage of the same letter the father writes: *The most healthy life is on farms, but if you have no intention of going on a farm, then at least move where the air is better* (Stelmach no. 63), which means he assumes the possibility of subjective agency of the children, that they will choose a different way of life from the traditional one. The father hereby sanctions the free will of the son and expresses acceptance of his choices – he is happy when the son reports that he is breeding poultry and pigs, but does not try to impact the children's lifestyle, he only makes plans that maybe as the grandchildren grow up, the family overseas will return to the roots and resettle on a farm.

In the Topolski series, the parents also show quite a modern approach to their relationships with children abroad. In letter no. 274 they ask: *Did you get acquainted with somebody from Ostrowiec? If not, try to do it*, which is an expression of the parents' wishes to uphold the tradition of marriage within the community, but in letter no. 280, although the candidate for the son-in-law is far from the parents' expectations, they prefer good relations with their daughter and her satisfaction over their wishes and write:

You write us nothing about him; we don't know whence he is and what is his name, whether he is some skilled workman, whether he has some money. For when two poor people come together, it is not very good. And he is probably old, for indeed everybody says he looks [on the photograph] as if he were more than forty and as if he had gray hair (...) But if he is an honest and good

man, don't mind anything. For us it matters only that we might see you some day...

Free matrimonial choice was an evident violation of tradition, and in other cases, even as late as in the 1960s it could end in severe sanctions including exclusion from the community (Wieruszewska, 1971, cited in: Bukraba-Rylska, 2008). Although men enjoyed a bit more freedom when it came to lifestyle, and were not subject to such a strict moral assessment as women (Markowska, 1976: 57-58), *the choice of a spouse could not be and was not a private matter of two young people* (Markowska, 1976: 60), because the future of the farm, treated as an intergenerational value, depended on the status of the spouse, so efforts were made to pair couples of similar economic status. Moreover, getting married did not mean automatically 'freeing' yourself from parental guardianship. Markowska writes that often after marriage, parents allowed the children to cultivate land with a promise to inherit it in the future, and this was to keep the young ones obedient to their father and mother, which could last up to 10-20 years (Markowska, 1976: 49-51). Stefan Ignar points out, however, that migration was sometimes an opportunity to *fulfil desires and allowed the forming of many marriages of love* (Ignar, 1986: 73). The quotes from the letters above point to the fact that parents were ready to give up active control over the choices of children and accept their free choice of spouse or lifestyle, which was an emanation of individualistic attitudes and signs of family progress.

Topolski's concern and care for the children resounds through a keen interest in what is happening to them abroad:

Write to us exactly about everything, how you like it in America. How does the food taste to you, for we hear that cooking is different there? (...) Perhaps you feel better now than in the beginning. Did you dance during the last days of carnival? (no. 275)

And the bond is maintained by declaring feelings: *You may know that there is not an hour during the day without my thinking of you* (no. 279), and projecting them on the children: *We imagine you must look very bad, because you grieve [are homesick]* (no. 275).

Parents also mention their feelings like fear: *When you did not write for so long a time, we thought different things about you* (Stelmach no. 63), or regret: *I asked you to advise me (...) You did not even answer me.* (Stelmach no. 61). The father, although higher in the hierarchy, is no longer the only source of life wisdom – he asks his son for advice and is offended by the lack of response. The search for emotional support in children is also manifested in Makowski's letters when the father

reporting his other son's illness and funerals of his son and wife in a short time. He does not try to hide being at a loss:

We send you sad news, for we have already buried your mother. A great sorrow reigns over us after the loss of our dearest [wife and] mother and the dear Zygmunt [another son – AD]. (...) Now I don't know what to do. If I knew that in America I should be able to educate these three orphans I would go to America. So I beg you, answer me and advise me how to manage all this. (Makowski no. 302)

A common feeling that families mention when writing letters is sadness or longing. The Topolski reassure their daughter: *You know that you worry me now in writing that we have forgotten about you (...) You may know that there is not an hour during the day without my thinking of you* (Topolski no. 279). The letters written by Makowski family might even be considered somewhat soppy:

We are very much pained that it is already the second Christmas eve that we divide the wafer and you are not here. We said 'With whom does our Stach divide the wafer??' And we looked upon your photograph. I shed tears that you are not here. (Makowski no. 297)

Regret and sadness are compensated, however, by the letters from children abroad:

Your father has wept a long time for you, but there remains the hope that at least we receive sometimes a letter from you; this is our whole joy. (298) I thank you heartily for your letters, for only your letters rejoice me. I should like to have a letter from you every day, but it is impossible. (Makowski no. 304).

As Thomas and Znaniecki notice in foreword to the Makowski series: *it is a father's love without any assumption of authority or any patronizing*. (1974: 606). The Stelmach call for regular contact: *don't forget us, but speak to us as long as we are alive* (no. 67) and so do the Topolski: *Write us regularly, a letter every two weeks*. (no. 274).

The letters also show pride and joy that, however, that this mutual contact is maintained despite the separation, which is not the rule at all: *they [talking about*

³ In Poland, sharing the Christmas wafer is a tradition dating back to the middle ages and is considered an important and symbolic Christmas ritual. Individual family members approach each other and break off a small piece of the other person's wafer while making wishes. Since the 19th century, it has also become customary to send the holy wafer to the family members who are abroad. More about this tradition: <http://www.ppld.co.uk/en/polish-traditions/christmas-wafer-oplatek>

another family – ed. the authors] have two sons in America and they don't know whether they are even alive, they never write to them (Stelmach no. 67).

In another letter by Stelmach (no. 64) there is a tender, empathetic confession:

This has pained us also, because dear children, if anything pains you, it pains us also, because we love you all as ourselves. If you write that you are getting on well and your little wife, our daughter in law also, then we are glad, even if misery oppresses ourselves, because we see that although we have misery, yet at least our children have good success

Here the parents' use of diminutive phrases such as 'little wife' is a warm phrase, positively characterized by emotion. Given that in several other passages, the father appeals to his son not to send money so that they do not fall prey to thieves, this confession is not only pragmatic, but also emotive, bond-forming. In the above passage you can see that already in the correspondence from the beginning of the twentieth century you can notice the antecedents of parental attitudes focusing not only on the obligations arising from tradition but also on feelings that in the future will evolve towards relationships based mainly on relationships and feelings.

Thus in place of stubborn adherence to tradition, there is greater understanding, flexibility, and, to some extent, negotiation within the relationships. Instead of persuading his son to return to the patrimony, which would be a manifestation of the father's expectation towards his son (children) to provide for their parents in old age, the fathers (Stelmach, Makowski) consider sending other children overseas, which may mean that they prefer the good of the children (even if in a purely pragmatic and economic dimension) over their own poverty.

Another example of the advice that the father gives his son and at the same time reveals his progressive thinking is the passage from Stelmach letter no. 66:

Dear children, work and economize as much as you can, that you may have some help for the black hour [for any misfortune], because man is imperfect in this world and always lacks something.

Despite the binding force of tradition and family, the father knows and wants his son to know that it is wiser to count on himself in life, because a bad economic situation may prevent him from cultivating the habit of family solidarity. From the tone of letters I conclude that the father does not assume the return of his son as he himself writes that this is unrealistic:

Dear son, your mother would be glad to see you before she dies, but it is difficult, because here in our country it gets worse and worse (...) because misery creeps into the houses and drives people away into the world (Stelmach no. 66)

Therefore, their relationship becomes more partner than hierarchical, and what the father and mother can give children overseas is greeting, wishes, Christmas wafer, care and assurance of their love, as the individual interests of children are slowly beginning to prevail over the collective interest whole family.

5. Summary and conclusions

The abundant correspondence of the non-migrant family members in the country of origin to their kin overseas, collected by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki and published in 5 volumes in the years 1918-1920 gives us insight into the interactive realities of these migrations and might be used as a reference for analysing contemporary migrations. In the 21st century, the diversity of family arrangements, e.g. world families, multi-local families⁴, whose growth seems to be something characteristic of post-modern societies, is, in fact, the discovery of once functioning family models (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). In the countryside, it was not uncommon that childless marriages relieved relatives having large families (also unrelated families as long as from the same parish) by raising their child/children (Markowska, 1976). Urbańska notes that transnational motherhood is not a new phenomenon because it was practised as early as the 17th century by various social states and classes who would *place a child under temporary or long-term care of relatives, in service or apprenticeship in a craft workshop (...) preparing the child for the profession or enabling its social advancement* (Urbańska, 2015: 20-21).

In the presentist analysis of the Stelmach, Topolski, and Makowski letter series (as well as many other labour migrants from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries) it may be claimed that they became part of the 'world families' in the hope of avoiding poverty and unemployment in their homeland, maintaining regular (as at that time) letter contact with their parents/spouses/children living in another country, on a different continent. As Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk point out, the family is not, contrary to popular belief, a passive recipient of

⁴ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) define world families as those who live together beyond borders (national, religious, cultural, ethnic, etc.). There are two basic types of such arrangements: the multi-local world families comprising couples/families who live in different countries or continents but who share the same cultural background (such as language, passport, religion), and families/couples who live in one place but whose members come from different countries or continents.

wider social changes, but an active participant and creator of these changes (2004: 189), and referring to the work of the English family history researcher David Levin, they cite that:

The plebeian family was not simply the subject, but quite the opposite: its demographic behaviour, undertaken in response to the impact of various economic pressures, created new conditions that profoundly changed history.

Morawska (2013) also points to many other analogies between the ‘old’ 19th-century migration wave and the ‘new’ one from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Economic factors are still the main driving force “pushing” the masses from their countries of origin, in search of better living conditions or the possibility of gathering capital for investment in the home country. Both waves are also similar in terms of a high sense of duty and commitment towards the families left in their country of origin, which are financially supported from abroad. Additionally, within the symbolic-cultural transfer, it can be seen that what may intuitively seem to be synonymous with modern times has already had its manifestations in the times described by Thomas and Znaniecki. Migration as a social norm and cultural expectation is already manifested in letters through discussions on migration chains within the federation of families in the village, or organizations in migration centres in exile. Jan Stelmach says goodbye to his son with the phonetically transcribed English greeting: ‘Gud Baj’ imitating his son, who contributes to expanding the social world of his parents in the Galician village. In the understanding above, we can conclude that the emigration of peasants and mass migrations overseas were a contribution to the emergence of multi-local world families several decades later. Although the peasants of Thomas and Znaniecki are certainly not aware of being the precursors of later trends, their example shows that the dividing distance and technological communication barriers do not affect the disintegration of their family relationship but only change its character – which becomes based on emotional bonds and verbal engagement manifested overtly in letters.

In terms of family relations, given the limitations caused by available means of communication and transport, we cannot talk about developing advanced strategies for maintaining contact. However, despite the difficulties, peasant families actively use those available to them – they write letters quite regularly (in published correspondence the letters are dated at different intervals – the shortest every week, the longest every 11 months), in which they demonstrate a rich range of meanings: they give example of peasant pragmatism (they inform what happens on the farm and in the area), they show solidarity and family ties (they attach, for example, greetings from other relatives or the Christmas wafer), but they also show very ‘modern’ feelings like empathy, e.g. through

compassion caused by the poor health of children, a command to take care of themselves, concern for ensuring better living for children (appeals: work and save, respect money, giving advice at a distance), but also love and emotional attachment by addressing children directly, tenderly, using diminutive forms of their names, making declarations and requests to keep in touch. Closeness and intimacy in the peasant creation is largely rooted in solidarity, and while, unlike in the contemporary relations, their repertoire of possibilities to maintain a close relationship is limited, one can already see in the letters of Stelmach, Topolski and Makowski families some precursors of involvement in the relationships with children, based to a lesser extent on common everyday experiences, but referring to memories, shared worlds of meanings and feelings.

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