

Danuta M o s t w i n. *Emigranci polscy w USA* [Polish Immigrants in the USA]. Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL. Lublin 1991 ss. 184.

The Polish American community, also known as American Polonia, is remarkable for its diversity. Originating in the five decades between 1870 and 1920 when the Great Peasant Economic Emigration departed the lands of partitioned Poland, the 1930 US Census counted over 3000000 first and second generation immigrants and their children. Polish immigrants created among the most complete institutional complexes of any immigrant community, with an extensive system of nearly 1000 Roman Catholic and Polish National Catholic parishes, schools, fraternal, newspapers, sports and cultural organizations, and an expanding network of Democratic and Republican clubs in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, by the eve of World War II it was evident that Americanization and acculturation were making serious inroads, and that it was reasonable to expect American Polonia to continue to merge into the host society. However, some the 8228000 individuals identified themselves as Americans of Polish origin in the 1980 US Census. Contrary to the predictions of Thomas and Znaniecki, the Polish American community did not disintegrate, although it underwent significant changes.

World War II and its political consequences in East Central Europe helped to extend the community's survival as a distinct ethnic group. The threatened establishment of a Soviet-backed communist regime sparked the organization of a national lobby, the Polish American Congress, renewing the community's involvement in homeland politics. Likewise, a new generation of political emigres and self/exiled soldiers who refused to return to a Poland ruled by Stalin's Polish communists left Europe. Some 140000 Poles settled in the United States between 1945 and 1959, reinvigorating the community's ethnic profile. This generation was followed by a consumer emigration numbering 95000 between 1960 and 1979 and driven by a desire for produced goods unavailable in Poland. Most recently, the more than 60000 new arrivals in the past

decade constitute what is broadly called the Solidarity emigration, whose core is the approximately 2000 Solidarity activists interned by the Jaruzelski regime during martial law.

The history and complexity of postwar American Polonia and its changing profile caused by the new emigrant generations are examined by only a few scholars¹. The major study is the work of Danuta Mostwin, who studied the postwar generation of political emigres and soldiers², and whose latest work examines the Polish emigrant in the United States between 1974 and 1984, updating, in effect, her previous study and offering the reader the first serious analysis of the consumer and Solidarity generations.

Mostwin brings unique qualifications to her work. She belongs to the soldier-emigre generation of postwar political exiles, and is the author of an excellent and insightful series of sensitive novels in Polish examining the progress of her generation from the status of emigres and emigrants into Polish Americans³. Educated in medicine in Polish underground university during World War II, and in Poland and Endinburg after the war, she immigrated to the United States in 1951 and became a social case worker and therapist. From 1969 to 1980 she lectured at Catholic University, and since 1980 has been a member of the department of Psychology at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland, specializing in family mental health. She wrote the dissertation on *The Transplanted Family* under Margaret Mead, and in 1984, in consultation with Polish American scholars (Thaddeus Radzilowski, Eugene Obidinski, John Kromkowski) and community activists (Władysław Zahariasiewicz and Antoni Czarnecki), compiled and distributed the survey that constitutes the basis for the present study.

This new study is divided into two broad parts: the problems of emigrant adaptation and the crisis of the family in emigration. There were 540 replies, over 1 % of the 46200 Polish emigrants to the United States between 1974 and 1984. In contrast to the study on *The Transplanted Family*, which focused on a generation born and educated in the patriotic environment of independent Poland, these latest generations were reared in the now/defunct communist Polish Peoples Republic, arriving in America with attitudes and values reflecting the difference. Accustomed by the "socialist" economy to

¹ Two unpublished dissertations are: S. T. S y p e k. *The Displaced Polish Person in the Greater Boston Community*. Fordham University 1955, and A. I w a n s k a. *Values in Crisis Situations*. Columbia University 1957. See also S. A. B l e j w a s. *Old and New Polonias: Tensions Within an Ethnic Community*. "Polish American Studies" 38:1981 nr 2 p. 55-83. The only scholarly historical survey is J. J. B u k o w c z y k. *And My Children Did Not Know Me, A History of the Polish-Americans*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1987.

² D. M o s t w i n. *The Transplanted Family*. Arno Press New York 1980.

³ *Dom Starej Lady* [*The Home of the Old Lady*]. Veritas. London 1958; *Ameryko! Ameryko!* [*America! America!*]. Instytut Literacki. Paryż 1961; *Asteoridy* [*Asteroids*]. Polska Fundacja Kulturalna. Londyn 1965; *Oliva* [*Oliva*]. Instytut Literacki. Paryż 1965; *Ja za wodą, Ty za wodą...* [*I Am Across the Ocean, You Are Across the Ocean...*]. Instytut Literacki. Paryż 1972 and *Odchodzą moi synowie* [*My Sons Are Leaving*]. Polska Fundacja Kulturalna. Londyn 1977.

free medical care, education, and constitutionally guaranteed a job, they found the transition to a capitalist economy, where everything must be paid for, frustrating. Consequently many came to feel lost and abandoned. Serious family and personal crises developed, including broken marriages, alcoholism, depression, and suicide. And unlike the earlier peasant or soldier-emigreemigrations, this new generation is more willing to “go on welfare”, indicating a decided shift in shared community values.

This is an economic emigration, as 50,5% of the emigrants identified themselves as such, although it retains a political profile because of the Solidarity emigration. As distinct from the Great Peasant Emigration, the consumer and Solidarity emigrations possess a strong Polish national identity (87,3%). Unlike the Great Peasant Emigration, the majority (65%) come from large cities and only 10% from rural areas. They bear some similarity to the peasant emigration, however, being the children of the first generation of workers and peasants educated in Peoples Poland. This is an emigration of workers and artisans possessing professional training. Nearly all have completed secondary education, while 40% possess some higher education. Unlike the postwar emigre and soldier emigration, in which 52,3% possess adequate or better knowledge of English and 45,3% a weak knowledge, over 90% of the emigration between 1974 and 1984 arrived with no knowledge of the language, a serious impediment to adaptation. It is also a young (46,4% are between the ages of 29-39), family emigration (83,5% are married), nearly 90% of whom were employed, but only 20,3% in their professions.

While the soldier-emigre and the consumer-Solidarity emigrations total approximately 300, 000 individuals, or nearly 4% of those 8, 228, 000 Polish Americans counted in the 1980 Census, they are important to an understanding the changing Polish American community. After World War II the Polish urban villages began eroding under the impact of urban redevelopment, the flight to the suburbs, and greater educational and socio-economic mobility. The third, fourth, and fifth generations continued to amalgamate into the host culture, and in recent years the politically correct deny them their remaining ethnic uniqueness by dismissing them as “White europeans”. Therefore, it is the recent arrivals who will reshape the Polish American ethnic and community profile, a point indirectly confirmed by the fact that they are more willing than the postwar soldiers and emigres to identify with the Polish American community (p. 71-73).

As researchers from Thomas and Znanięcki onward noted, the Polish parish, with its satellite societies, was the institution around which the communities organized⁴. Some 50,72% of the Polish emigrants arriving between 1974 and 1984 joined Polish parishes, expecting advice and assistance in trying to address their many personal (job, English language instruction, apartment, counselling, friendship, legal advice, money

⁴ W. I. T h o m a s and F. Z n a n i e c k i. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Dover Publications edition. New York 1958 (Originally published in 1918-1920), II, 1523 ff.

to get started), family (medical care and advice about psychological counselling), and ethnic ("Polish" church with a "Polish" priest performing a Polish-language liturgy) needs.

Among the most important revelations of Mostwin study is the consumer and Solidarity emigrations' dissatisfaction with "Polish priests" and "Polish parishes". The new arrivals, somewhat like their predecessors in the Great Peasant Emigration, expect the priest and parish to provide for more than just their spiritual needs, and are harshly critical of both for, from their perspective, failing to do so. In the extreme, the new arrivals expect the Polish American parish to be as "Polish" as a parish in Poland, Mostwin, therefore, posits a new model of the ideal priest for service to Polish immigrants.

Mostwin's priest is schooled in psychology and sociology (especially of social groups), familiar with the techniques of marriage and family counselling, possessing missionary traits and an ability to go directly to people, an organizer capable of creating organization reflecting the Catholic Church's social mission, bi-lingual in Polish and English, aware of Poles deep attachment to Roman Catholicism and capable of extending his activities to Poles outside of the parish, and sensitive to the difficulties to the problems of emigration and adaption, especially for the family. (p. 66-67)

Given the decline in Roman Catholic priestly vocations in the United States, finding sufficient ideal priests for immigrant parishes will be difficult. It may require importing missionaries from Poland or seminarians who would complete their studies in the United States and be ordained for American dioceses, solutions being tried already on a very limited scale.

Mostwin's model in some respects reminds the reader of the Polish-born priest giants of the early Great Peasant Emigration, like Chicago's Wincenty Barzynski, Buffalo's Jan Pitass, or New Britain, Connecticut's Lucjan Bojnowski. However, the criticism and frustration that Mostwin documents indites the current Polish American clergy and Polish American parish. And while this work was completed earlier, it offers insight into the serious parish rebellions that erupted in 1987 in St. Michael's and Sacred Heart parishes in Bridgeport and New Britain, Connecticut, and St. Louis Parish in Portland, Maine. In each case, the Solidarity emigration, together with members of the soldier/emigre and consumer emigrations united to demand that these long-established Polish American parishes be "Polish", taking out their generations' emigrant frustrations on American-born Polish American pastors, and in the process badly dividing their parishes.

Mostwin's study, completed before these disputes, provides important insight into the tensions that have arisen in the Polish American community in recent years. Polish ethnic parishes are now populated by third and fourth generation of Polish and other Americans, who cannot conceive of recreating the Polish immigrant parish of their grandparents' era. On the other hand, a younger and more assertive wave of new emigrants educated in Peoples Poland expects and assumes that the "Polish" parish is a fortress of "Polishness", with a Polish liturgy and with Polish language instruction

available for their children. The frustration of emigration and adaptation to life in America intensifies their assertiveness. On the other hand, their aggressiveness in making these demands, and their unwillingness to behave according to Polish American expectations, leads to charges that they are “trouble makers” and “communists”⁵.

Mostwin’s research has its limitations. It does not survey (nor was it her intention) the Polish Americans and the reasons behind their reception of the new arrivals and their stereotype of “Solidarity” emigres as aggressive trouble makers. Polish American pastors complain about the unwillingness of the consumer emigration to join their parishes or Polish American organization and consider the Solidarity emigration ungrateful for the help extended. And they charge, very tellingly, both emigrations with failing to support the parish financially, although Mostwin maintains that they are not indifferent to the Church. This, of course, raises questions about the ability of a parish and pastor to underwrite the various services social services needed to tend the new arrivals’ needs.

Misconceptions and tensions exist on the part of both Polish Americans and the new arrivals. Mostwin does not think that initially they can be avoided. However, they can be modified if both sides had clearer expectations of their roles, a problem with which the Polish parish and the Polish priest ought to occupy themselves (p. 91-100).

Despite the tensions, Mostwin notes a greater willingness of the 1974-1984 emigrants to identify themselves as Polish Americans. This is startling in view of the extreme reluctance of the soldier-emigre generation to associate with American Polonia, which they immediately recognized as living on the wrong side of the tracks. Mostwin suggests that this change of attitude among the recent arrivals may be due to the greater positive visibility of Polish Americans after the election of John Paul II and Solidarity. Furthermore, it could “create a new potential not only for American Polonia but also for world Polonia, with which the descendants of today’s emigrants and tomorrow’s Polish emigrants will identify” (p. 77)⁶. Mostwin’s assertion of the emergence of a world Polonia may strike some as ethnic exaggeration⁷, but the author is

⁵ Mostwin questions stereotyping “new Polish immigrants” who have been described the American Polish language press as deplorable and disgraceful. In a pilot survey between November, 1987 and March, 1988 based on a sample of 142 respondents between the ages of 28 and 42 and with at least one Polish parent, Mostwin found the educational level very high (80% have higher education). Similarly, important inherited values included patriotism, hard work, family and religion, while the highly ranked acquired values included independence, the work ethic, and achievement. Mostwin considers this survey group “a prototype in contrast to a poor stereotype of a new Polish immigrant”. M o s t w i n. *The Unknown Polish Immigrant*. “Migration World” 17:1989 nr 2 p. 24-30.

⁶ Mostwin finds this trend continued in her recent pilot survey. Forty-two percent considered themselves “Polish” and 44% identified as “Polish Americans”. The Polish American identity permits the immigrant “to retain his patriotic ethos while at the same time gaining access to a group which is now important and growing in America”. Ibidem p. 29.

⁷ Mostwin presents a theoretical model of world Polonia in *Trzecia wartość. Formowanie się*

clearly correct in asserting that the recent arrivals are Polonia's next generation which will shape its ethnic profile.

There are gaps in this study, which are not author's faulty. The writers and artists who arrived in the United States in the 1980s, and who succeeded on their own without any involvement or identification with American Polonia are not evident. Additionally, the scars that the Solidarity emigration bears because of leaving Poland during martial law, and its aggressive criticism of the political leadership and efforts of the Polish American Congress to lobby on behalf Poland in the late 1980s fall beyond Mostwin's chronological framework, but will be treated in a new study that the author is preparing⁸.

As a scholarly compiler and analyst of her subject, Mostwin adds enormously to our knowledge of the Polish American community changing generational and sociological profile and to its conflicts and tensions. We also have a clearer picture of the complicated structure of Polish emigration to the United States. Mostwin views emigration as a culture creating process [proces kulturotwórczy]. Values are adopted from the new society while certain values from the old retained, creating models of behavior in which the emigrant tries to reconcile the old with the new, and to bend some former values to the demands of life in the new homeland. It is from this process that the culture of Polonia is created, what she has described elsewhere a "third value" (p. 113)⁹. The thesis is not a unique nor, as Mostwin realizes, applicable to only one community. Nevertheless, her study clearly documents the shifting values and contents of the culture of American Polonia brought about by new emigrant generations. This careful and sensitive study of one emigrant group brings into sharper focus the odyssey of immigration and its consequences.

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nowej tożsamości polskiego emigranta w Ameryce [The Third Value. The Forming of a New Identity of the Polish Emigrant in America]. Lublin 1985 p. 93-99. Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego. Reflecting the political times in Poland, this work was censored.

⁸ On the Solidarity emigration see: S. A. B l e j w a s. *American Polonia & The Next Generation*. A review article of Andrzej Krajewski, ed. *Region USA. Działacze "Solidarności" o kraju, o emigracji, o sobie.* [Region USA. "Solidarity" Activists about Poland, Emigration, Themselves]. ANEKS. London 1989. W: forthcoming in "Polish American Studies". 49:1992 nr 1.

⁹ See: M o s t w i n. *Trzecia wartość* p. 13-22.