

BARBARA CIEŚLIŃSKA, *Emigracje bliskie i dalekie. Studium współczesnych emigracji zarobkowych na przykładzie województwa podlaskiego*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku 2012, ss. 410. ISBN: 978-83-7431-293-6.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/sp.2015.8>

Emigration from Poland is changing. American Polonia was built from the early 20th century *emigracja za chlebem* and renewed by the post-World War II *emigracja polityczna*. Subsequent immigrants during the period of Communist dictatorship in Poland generally did not play much of an organizational role in American Polonia [see, e.g., Mary Eerdmans, *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnics in Polish Chicago, 1976-1990* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1998)] and, since 1989, emigration trends from Poland have changed. With opportunities for legal and more closer economic opportunities in Europe and continuing American visa barriers, U.S.-bound immigration is declining. Barbara Cieślińska, of the University of Białystok's Sociology Institute, examines recent emigration trends from the Podlaskie voivodeship.

Podlaskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships have traditionally been major sending regions for U.S.-bound emigrants. Borderland agricultural regions with declining factory jobs and high unemployment rates, local push factors in both are strong. The Podlaskie focus of this book makes it particularly attractive: Poland remains divided internally between have and have not regions, and the impact of that inequality influences local factors fostering immigration. More region-specific studies are worthwhile.

Cieślińska's sociological study is divided into nine chapters. The first six treat various meta-issues. Chapter one deals with deals with theoretical issues and definitions (the meaning of economic emigration today). Five subsequent chapters consider Podlaskie from various angles. These include: a statistical profile of the voivodeship; opinion polls about emigration (trends, destinations, length of intended stays, demographic factors of the emigrant pool, views of those left behind); debates in local academic circles about economic emigration (both in terms of emigrating students and teachers as well as views about the phenomenon in general, irrespective of participation in it); and an overview of one of the author's favorite sources of information about emigration trends – the autobiographical statement/testimony.

The author then follows with three chapters about three leading destinations for today's economic emigrant from Podlaskie: Britain, Germany, and the United States. In each chapter, she considers recent (within the past decade) experiences of Podlaskie economic emigrants in that country, primarily on the basis of interviews and autobiographical testimonies. This review will focus on the United States.

Cieślińska notes that Podlaskie residents permanently emigrating abroad to another country seem to have changed dramatically since EU accession. In 2003, 68.2% of such people were U.S.-bound (compared to 11.8% of all Poles). For Podlaskie, that figure post-EU accession almost halved (to 36.8% in 2006 versus 8.4% for all Poland, 36.9% in 2009, compared to a trans-Poland 10.5%) (p. 290). Quantitatively, numbers also changed: the total number of U.S.-bound Podlaskie residents in 2003 was 376, spiking to 456 in 2006,

then falling to 173 in 2009 (p. 291). From 2003 to 2009, the percentage of emigrating minors to America fell, but thirty-somethings and age 60+ emigrants grew (p. 293).

The author focuses primarily on autobiographical statements of emigrants, most of whom came to American relatives in order to earn money. Some came temporarily, made money, and returned with valuable experience that allowed them to move up in Poland. Some came, earned cash, went home, spent it, and then planned a U.S. return. Others found their American dream became a personal nightmare (losing family in Poland while falling into alcoholism or destitution in America).

Most of Cieślińska's focus, however, was on students who visited U.S. relatives to earn money. They account their experiences in working within Polonia (generally negative) and outside it (generally more positive), their evaluations of Polonians' lifestyle and success (generally not as extravagant or comfortable as they expected) and Polonian culture (quaint but somewhat arrested). Most, however, although they planned to make return visits, thought they wouldn't want to live there permanently.

Students, of course, generally have limited life experience: Cieślińska's students were hardly toddlers when the PRL ended. Their experiences were qualitatively different from earlier travelers who grew up in a Poland characterized by "*nie ma*." In reading students' comments, the reviewer felt that one generation's quest for *chleb i wolność* is another's search for *croissanty z nutellą*.

Cieślińska should have better distinguished between students working legally and illegally in America. Many of her interviewees came on tourist visas, invited by American relatives who subsequently found them illegal employment. But lots of Polish students, especially in the first decade of the 21st century, profited from the American "Work and Travel" visa program, which allowed them to have a legal summer U.S. job, often while polishing language skills. One would think that those two cohorts would have had different experiences.

The reviewer would also have liked to see some study of how Podlaskie immigrants in the United States help each other. During the *emigracja za chlebem*, American-bound immigrants from a particular region or even village tended to attract *rodacy* to follow them. Current U.S. immigration law also reinforces that "chain migration" tendency by its family unification preference. Podlaskie immigrants, like their *góralskie* counterparts, tend to stick together. How that influences emigration from Podlaskie would be an interesting perspective.

That said, Cieślińska has provided an extremely valuable service in focusing on the emigration patterns of one particular region. One would hope others would follow up with comparative studies of other regions, e.g., Warmia-Mazuria, Podkarpackie, and even Małopolska or Lubelskie writ large.

John M. Grondelski
Shanghai, China
e-mail: grondelski[ad]op.pl