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Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*

Abstract

The paper refers to the centennial of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* written by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki along with the overview of commemorating events and publications. Moreover, it consists of commentary on the collective work of various scholars published in *Contemporary Migrations in the Humanistic Coefficient Perspective*.

Key words: migration studies, polish peasant, humanistic coefficient, Florian Znaniecki

From a sociological perspective, the year 2018 was primarily dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the publication which initiated the process of deriving sociology from the influence of naturalism and introduced the role of culture into it, specifically *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*¹, written by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1918–1920). Commemorative events were specially celebrated in Poland for the reason that co-author (Florian Znaniecki) is commonly recognised as one of the founders of Polish sociology; moreover, *The Polish Peasant...* is the world-

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¹ Hereinafter *The Polish Peasant...*

liest distinguishable publication which originates from Polish sociology. Therefore, numerous initiatives which honoured and commemorate this publication were held in Poland². National and international events were supposed to unite scholars who follow steps of Thomas and Znaniecki as well as the diverse sociological society³. Further down, I present some of the most important conferences, seminars and lectures organised in 2018 in Poland⁴.

Methodological seminar, dedicated to the qualitative methodology used and described in *The Polish Peasant*⁵ which occurred on 12 April 2018 – inaugurated a series of four seminars committed to Thomas and Znaniecki which were held at the University of Lodz. Seminars were organised by The Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Lodz, Section of Biographical Research of Polish Sociological Association as well as Sociological Review. The second seminar concerned the subject of social processes and role of the individual, and it was organised on 14 June 2018. The third was dedicated to the subject of migration, particularly social integration, multiculturalism as well as cultural distance and occurred on 18 October 2018. The fourth was dedicated to the matter of social disintegration and crisis; it mainly discussed the subject of social and individual disorganisation, social reconstruction, and the role of the elite in crisis and was organised on 13th December.

Symposium titled *A Centennial of "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America": Inspiration of Thomas and Znaniecki's Work for Sociological Scholarship on the Contemporary Globalization Processes* was organised at the end of May 2018 at University in Poznań by The Institute of Sociology at Adam

² In order to announce and introduce commemorating events, the Poznan's Department of the Polish Sociological Association published in 2018 three bulletins. One of the goals described in the first bulletin emphasized the need to renew and retching the identity of polish sociological tradition (*Znaniecki 2018 – Biuletyn Informacyjny Obchodów 100-lecia "Chłopa Polskiego w Europie i Ameryce vol. 1"*)

³ Detailed description of commemorating events were published in *Znaniecki 2018 – Biuletyn Informacyjny Obchodów 100-lecia "Chłopa Polskiego w Europie i Ameryce"*.

⁴ A reliable analysis of international events unambiguously indicates the leading role of Poland in commemorating the publication of Thomas and Znaniecki.

⁵ Recordings of discussion are available on the youtube channel of University of Łódź: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ-aalM7YXE>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0uix38NoYg&t=36s> (10.11.2018)

Mickiewicz University, The Florian Znaniecki Scientific Foundation, The Haverford Institute of Public Sociology and Florian Znaniecki Association⁶.

Representatives of Institute of Sociology, Institute of Polish Literature and Institute of History and Archival Science from Nicolaus Copernicus University prepared national conference dedicated to memoir methodology in May 2018⁷. The conference was titled *Stories hidden in memoirs. Diary as an object and source of scientific research*.

An international conference took place in Lodz in September 2018. Event was titled *Theoretical and Methodological Reflections on Social Disorganization and "Otherness" in Modern European Societies. Following Biographical and Discursive Approach of Thomas and Znaniecki's Legacy of "Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. The conference addressed recent sociological progresses in social and cultural diversity, cultural nationalisms and cultural "mélange" in modern Europe.

A centennial of *The Polish Peasant* created also an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of Thomas and Znaniecki on paper. Therefore, Poznan Branch of the Polish Sociological Association issued an information bulletin dedicated to this one-hundredth anniversary (*Znaniecki 2018 – Biuletyn Informacyjny Obchodów 100-lecia "Chłopa Polskiego w Europie i Ameryce"*). The bulletin contained important commemorating forthcoming events as well as essential reports from the memorial events that have already taken place. Moreover, it includes essential and important information on other publications and lectures dealing with the legacy of Thomas and Znaniecki.

The celebration of one-hundred anniversary was also noticeable in sociological magazines which published articles related to *The Polish Peasant* such as Eastern European Countryside (Giordano 2018; Głuszkowski 2018; Kaleta 2018) or European Journal of Sociology (Kaczmarczyk 2018).

However, the most extensive work commemorating the legacy of Florian Znaniecki seems to be a book titled *Contemporary Migrations in the Humanistic Coefficient Perspective*, edited by Jacek Kubera and Łukasz Skoczylas, published by Peter Lang. The collection of articles published there not only discuss this pioneer migration study but also present its potential and usefulness in contemporary explorations. Compilation of

⁶ Detail description of this event is posted in this issue of Eastern European Countryside, written by Bogna Kociołowicz-Wiśniewska.

⁷ <https://www.historia.umk.pl/?id=1485>

various texts arose from a need to produce scientific models and schemes to contribute to the development of the social theory which will help to coordinate the flow of modern migrations (following the assumptions of the authors). Moreover, it perceives migration from different perspectives. It discusses essential approaches related to the humanistic coefficient or transnationalism. The publication presents itself as a handbook, a convenient tool to explore migration from various sides. To encourage the readers to read, below I quote and discuss selected articles from the book.

The first two texts written by Ewa Morawska and Marcin Grodzki provide basic knowledge about Znaniecki's and Thomas theory and methodology. Papers not only recall their work but also refresh and adjust their theories to the modern context. Ewa Morawska highlighted the role of humanistic coefficient as a methodological perspective. Making use of various current examples (some derived even from her own life) present the usefulness of Znaniecki's interpretative sociology. Additionally, she mentions various important subjects as multiculturalism, super-diversity, the phenomenon of mediated social-cultural incorporation and presents them as objects of an investigation while running a comparative study or single case investigations. Apart from this, she also discusses the subject of generalisability of collected data. What is interesting is that she postulates opposite to Znaniecki's approach, to make use of *softer language in scientific narrations of gathered data. Given the liquid and polyhedric nature of the world we live in which investigations with the humanistic coefficient are to account for with the greatest possible degree of verisimilitude, the soft(er) language of the propositions formulated in this genre of research is, [...] yet another strength of this approach, not a limitation* (Morawska 2017: 38).

The paper written by Jakub Isański is included in the second part of the publication and dedicated to the use of the humanistic coefficient methodology in detailed explorations. Isański conducted research in Poland concerning post-war western territories. To explore the post-war social life, he investigated the archives of the Institute of Western Affairs in Poznan, principally memoirs collected from 1956 to 1970. The analysis showed a vast complexity and interdependence of various variables influencing social life after the war. The narration of explored documents is presented in a proper post-war context which introduces mass displacement of Germans, deportation of Ukrainians, or mass relocation under the operation named "Wisła". Isański outlined that the newcomers settling in the western areas

were badly experienced during the war – most of them lost most of their possessions and homes. Settlers were very heterogeneous society, coming from various backgrounds and even cultures. Apart from this and delicate political situation local communities started to emerge. Isański was interested to explore how the communities were conducting the process of values redefinition in the contest of looting. *As he conclude, looting played crucial role in the process of social revitalization and integration. In fact looting and the struggle against it became one of the factors underlying the life in Reintegrated Territories. The struggle against looting, which became widespread with time, contributed to the normalization of social life* (Isański 20017: 145).

The third part of the book referred more to the contemporary migration issues and investigations relating to Znaniecki's studies. For e.g. Krystyna Romaniszyn focused on women's migration and its influence on the family organisation, mainly she was exploring polish migrants in Athens and Vienna in the then of XX century. What distinguishes her work is the theoretical background and reference to Znaniecki's theory of disorganisation, which initially referred mainly to institutions and only secondary to men (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927). However, the author conducts analysis and refers to various other family studies to present and discuss how far the current scientific explorations of this topic evolve from original Znaniecki's and Thomas methodology. Elżbieta Smolarkiewicz's paper published in the fourth part of the book took a chance and pondered main subjects from *The Polish Peasant...* in the subject of modern migration studies. This highlighted the economic, structural and political changes that Poland went through. Furthermore, it presented contemporary conditions of movement between the United States and Poland. In order to properly analyse current migration she also refers to the concept of a humanistic coefficient. Her paper presents not only the usefulness of this hundred years old approach but also present inexhaustible potential of Thomas and Znaniecki's work.

To properly discuss the content of this book, it is essential to mention one crucial disadvantage. Even though the publication contains various articles extrapolating on the legacy of Florian Znaniecki, selection of topics as well as discussed works seems to be very narrow. The title of the book *Contemporary Migrations...* suggest that the subjects discussed within the publication refer to contemporary migrations and its global dimension. Whereas the authors of the articles do not discuss the subjects that are

crucial for contemporary migrations, they do not deliberate on topics that are present in international debates. Instead, they refer to various themes that are marginal or simply not contemporary. For example, authors do not refer directly to the subject of migration crisis or labour migration within Europe. Instead, they raise the topics which were explored with a humanistic coefficient and are somehow connected to subject Polish migration. Exceptional are articles describing Beijing migrant workers (Liao and Qin 2018), or migration flows between Algeria and France as well as Mexico and United States (Castaneda 2018).

The publication is worth recommending. Despite the narrow selection of examples mainly connected to Polish immigration, it provides interesting information to both, advanced migration scholars as well as students. It delivers comprehensive information about Thomas and Znaniecki's theories and presents various ways of its use in contemporary studies. Additionally, it highlights the unexplored potential of their studies and inspires scholars to examine migration phenomenon in numerous ways.

To conclude, the year 2018 clearly showed how vital the sociological heritage of Thomas and Znaniecki is for the development of sociology. Its bond with Polish sociology has clearly strengthened. Seminars, lectures and publications were not only a perfect opportunity to commemorate *The Polish Peasant ...* but also a perfect chance to develop and validate its methodology and theory.

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