

# **GENDER, FAMILIES, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE RURAL–URBAN DISCOURSE: THE POLISH PEASANT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA AS A STUDY OF FEARS AND FANTASIES RELATED TO MODERNISATION<sup>1</sup>**

Sylvia Urbańska  
University of Warsaw

*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* was undoubtedly revolutionary for its times. Written in five volumes in the years 1918–1920, it effectively undermined an American moral panic over the 13 million immigrants from East Central and Southern Europe who had reached America’s shores between 1900 and 1914. It was thus received with great reserve, or even an icy coldness, by most of the “social guardians,” “ethical elites” or “moral entrepreneurs” of the day, that is, the politicians, activists, intellectuals, and publicists confronting modernisation (Connelly 1980; Zaretsky 1996). The instigators of the moral panic believed the “moral downfall” of America would be brought about not by the dreadful systemic conditions of life and work in American cities but by the influx of immorality from each successive wave of immigrants (Connelly 1980; Zinn 2016 [1980]). The Polish peasant, and particularly the Polish peasant woman, had quickly come to occupy a special position on the map of Americans’ suspicions of Others.

---

<sup>1</sup> The article was made possible by a SONATA grant from the Polish National Science Centre, “(Non)traditional Traditionals? The Transformation of Rural Families from the Perspective of Women in the Years 1989–2019,” no. 2016/23/D/HS6/00705 (PI, Dr Sylvia Urbańska, Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw). Translation of the text was financed from funds for statutory activities, BST 185400-59 (Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw).

In public debate in America, and in the jargon of workers in social and charitable institutions, the descriptor “Polish” had come to signify sexual lasciviousness, promiscuity, alcoholism, vagrancy, and, among the men, criminality.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants from the remaining countries of East Central and Southern Europe did not escape a similar fate. The moral downfall of the United States was the expected effect of the external onslaught of Others upon Puritan morality. In the public debate this impact was even likened to the destruction of Rome by the barbarians. The arrival of the immigrants was associated with the moral decay of cities as the result of prostitution, venereal diseases, procurement, alcoholism, robbery, and vagrancy. Thus, the monumental *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, as the first to deconstruct the bases of these imaginings, entered history as an innovative work. Its authors, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, showed how the immorality of Polish immigrants was far from being “un-American.” They argued that it was actually *after* arrival in America that the immigrants became immoral as a result of having been uprooted and having to struggle for survival in overcrowded metropolises. The immigrants were thus truly “American” (Connelly 1980: 66).

But was Thomas and Znaniecki’s work really ahead of its time by several decades? In its interpretation of family and gender problems did it really diverge from the mainstream discourse, which was laced with moral fears and fantasies about the effects of modernisation and was focused on the millions of women migrating from the countryside to find employment in the mushrooming urban factories, workshops, and well-to-do households? Did it diverge from the discourse in which the masses were seen as the source of unbridled moral chaos, criminality, revolutionary unrest, or at the very least, irresponsibility? In this article, I would like to show that if we consider *The Polish Peasant* as an analysis arguing against some of the bases for the moral panic over immigrants, then the work can be defended as innovative. It can also be defended as pioneering if we look at the revolutionary methods it introduced, such as the biographical approach, with its analysis of attitudes and values (see Halas 1991). However, as I will try to demonstrate – without overlooking its internal contradictions and complexity – *The Polish Peasant* appears in an entirely different light if it is read as a representation of the typical fears and modernisation fantasies

---

<sup>2</sup> Polish immigrants constituted 25% of the population of newly arrived immigrants to the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Chicago itself, where *The Polish Peasant* was written, there were around 350,000 Poles, making Chicago at the time the third largest city in terms of Polish population (after Warsaw and Łódź).

of its era. Even though, first, the authors intended to introduce the non-ideological theoretical concept of “organisation – disorganisation – reorganisation” aimed at change-resistant Puritan moralists and overtly racist social Darwinist fractions, and even though, second, this concept was to open a window to the recognition of social modernisation in its own right (e.g., urban individualisation, and even conditionally polygamy, as long as it was socially functional and did not harm the upbringing of children), yet the liberal progressiveness of the authors’ assumptions is minimally visible in their analysis or at best sinks into ambivalent contradictions. The seemingly neutral concept saturates the empirical analysis with conservative, ideologised interpretations, full of gender bias and patriarchal schemes. By normalising patriarchal power relations in Polish villages and ignoring evidence of widespread violence against women, the authors create an opposition in which whatever is rural is the cradle of authenticity – of naturalised national and gendered family values – and whatever is urban is dangerous and demoralising due to escaping the former strong rural social control. The authors place equivalency signs between ruralism, a healthy national identity, and healthy social, family, and gender relations. In *The Polish Peasant* the authors thereby construct the morally healthy model of a patriarchal, rural community of families unmarred by individualisation and women’s emancipation. Such a model had a patriarchal form of gender relations, with a hierarchical division of roles within a religiously devout, strong (meaning indissoluble), multi-generational family. In this article I will thus look at the structure of the above model. At the same time, I will indicate how the work omitted important processes which are worth reconsidering: the resistance of the weak and the social emancipation of Polish peasant women (e.g., the liberating potential of new institutions – e.g., courts, social workers – for immigrant women).

Analysis of the patterns of gendered family relations and ideals of femininity and masculinity constructed by Thomas and Znaniecki within the framework of rural–urban discourses must necessarily be preceded by a discussion of the moral values emerging in the United States and Poland at the turn of the century, when *The Polish Peasant* was written. In the first part of the text I compare the symbolic discourses of the two countries in order to understand the moral foundation for the authors’ interpretative categories, in connection with the culture in which they lived. Such a comparison also permits me to understand both the authors’ attitudes toward the subjects of their study and the values, which, as participants of that culture, they cannot escape. From the perspective of a hundred years after the

publication of the monograph, such attitudes are quite visible. I am thus following in the methodological paths the authors themselves first opened for the social sciences, in a note on methodology in *The Polish Peasant* (see Halas 1991; Szacki 2002: 568).

### **/// Gender, Rural–Urban Discourses, and Fears of Modernisation in the USA and Poland**

It is worth remembering that throughout Europe, America, and the rest of the New World (e.g., Australia) “the ‘fears’ and ‘fantasies’ about urban and rural life shaping public sphere conversation after 1900 were almost always informed by ideas about men and women” (Murphy 2010: 2). In these discussions, “women were used as markers for anxiety about urbanisation and modernity in general” (Murphy 2010: 44). The cause was similar regardless of the geographic latitude. The masses of women migrating to industrialising cities at the turn of the century entirely eluded the authority of their rural communities, husbands, and fathers. Work in factories in particular furthered the escape, while working as a live-in servant usually involved falling under a different patron, this time the controlling bourgeoisie. However, women avoided control even more effectively if they migrated abroad. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the emancipation of millions of women and workers in anonymous cities of Europe, America, and Australia evoked a series of moral panics (see Ankum 1997; Boyer 1978; Conor 2004; Murphy 2010; Parsons 2000; Urbanik-Kopec 2018; Walkowitz 1992; Wilson 1992). Thus, although fears were expressed about the mass of working people throughout the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, and various types of authors tried to find a way to obtain and maintain control over the “mindless” and revolutionarily “dangerous” masses (e.g., Scipio Sighele, Gustaw Le Bon, Sigmund Freud; see Urbanik-Kopec 2018), women in the urban proletarian strata were the main subject of ostracism and of hundreds of moral projects (see Zinn 2016 [1980]; Zelizer 1994; Weeks 2017).

In the Polish context of the early-twentieth-century debate in which Znaniecki’s views were formed, working women were blamed for all kinds of social problems, including for prostitution, the epidemic of venereal diseases, for abandoning children for the sake of work, and for minor crimes, but above all for moral depravation. As the social historian Alicja Urbanik-Kopec has shown in studying working-class women in Poland, such a reaction to their growing numbers and emancipation was universal (2018). The

view was shared by both the urban intelligentsia and the land-owning and post-land-owning elites, to which Znaniecki belonged.

Polish liberals, socialists, Catholic conservatives, and emancipationists, regardless of the differences resulting from political orientation and sex, all agreed in perceiving proletarian working women as “bad women, deprived of the qualities traditionally ascribed to their sex” (Urbanik-Kopec 2018: 10). For the public intellectuals of the time, “Their very existence contradicted the traditional role and place of women – they were on the outside, often beyond the care of a father, husband, or employer; they performed work that was previously unknown or that had been to that time ascribed to men. They were a new species of women, impossible to classify” (Urbanik-Kopec 2018: 11). Proletarian working mothers and wives in particular were condemned in public opinion. Publicists, academics, doctors, and even working women’s husbands perceived the work of married women as an attack on the man’s position as head of the family and a violation of the domestic hierarchy. Thus, this group of workers met with ostracism and mothers and wives working in factories were subjected to pressure – from distinguishing them by particular garments in order to protect their “virtue” (in factories in Żyrardów married women wore special mob caps) to repeating endlessly that women in general and mothers in particular went to work not for the purpose of acquiring independence or for any other reason but solely in order, by their self-sacrifice, to save the family from starving to death (Urbanik-Kopec 2018: 66). Even Polish women emancipationists, who came primarily from the upper classes, did not perceive, or even notice, these working-class women as an example of the realisation of their dreamt-of ideals. For instance, proletarian working women were self-sufficient workers, who independently provided for their children and often their parents and younger siblings as well, and this was possible thanks to the women’s enormous solidarity and mutual support. Or, as another example, they initiated the first women’s strike on Polish territory.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, they were viewed by the emancipationists as pragmatic and lacking in ideals, or simply as unthinking, and certainly as morally dangerous. At most, if the emancipationists saw them at all,

---

<sup>3</sup> The first strike by women in the Kingdom of Poland was a spoolers’ strike in 1883. It was the largest workers’ strike in the Kingdom of Poland before the revolutionary revolt in Łódź in 1905. It was prepared, initiated, and conducted exclusively by women factory workers. The men joined the strike considerably later; at the beginning only the young participated. The remaining men, if they did not hinder the strike, tried to persuade the women – their wives, daughters, and mothers – to desist (Urbanik-Kopec 2018).

they viewed them not as being freed by work but as victims enslaved by it (Urbanik-Kopeć 2018: 7).

The Polish socialist movement did not bring anything new to the issue. The party declarations were far from expressing any idea of complete equal rights for women. “The revolution was supposed to be good for them not only because it would allow them to obtain workers’ rights, but also because it would incline them finally to proper behaviour” (Urbanik-Kopeć 2018: 61), which was usually understood as a return to home life, and to their responsibilities as wives and mothers. A strong echo of such discourses can be found in *The Polish Peasant*, especially in the fourth volume. There, Znaniecki and Thomas interpret the practices of female workers newly come from the countryside to Polish cities in categories of sexual laxity. They consider one of the causes for the disorganisation of rural communities to be the explosion of hedonistic behaviour among peasant women travelling abroad for seasonal agricultural work. It is hard to be surprised at Thomas and Znaniecki (particularly the latter) for the conservative perspectives that emerge in *The Polish Peasant* when even emancipationists or socialists could not imagine a more respectable role for a woman than being a wife and mother. And yet the socialists and emancipationists belonged to those circles that had the liveliest interest in ideas of equality and social justice.

Thomas’s views were shaped in a similar ideological context. However, the American version of gendered modernisation fears had the additional dimension of being a xenophobic reaction to a high rate of immigration.

[B]etween 1900 and 1914 [alone] over thirteen million immigrants entered the United States. In earlier periods of the republic’s history, immigrants had come mainly from Germany, Scandinavia, and the British Isles. During the progressive era, however, most immigrants – in some years, 80 percent – came from Italy, Austria-Hungary, Poland, or Russia. Not surprisingly, the “new” immigration (a contemporary reference to the change in national origins) became a major national issue during the progressive years, both for those who sought to deal with it sympathetically and for those of nativist opinion who feared it and worked to restrict it (Connelly 1980: 48).

These fears, though, had a deeper source in enormous civilisational changes. Between the turn of the century and the end of the First World

War, the United States “was transformed from a predominantly rural-minded, decentralized, principally Anglo-Saxon, production-oriented, and morally absolutist society to a predominantly urban, centralized, multi-ethnic, consumption-oriented, secular, and relativist society” (Connelly 1980: 7). Solely in the years 1860–1910, the largest American cities on average increased seven-fold in size. Chicago itself, where the documents for *The Polish Peasant* were collected, increased over twenty times in size to become one of the largest American cities, with 2 million inhabitants (Connelly 1980: 12). It is not surprising then that it was easy for social emotions to turn into moral panic, dominated by a sense of crisis and ending. People were faced with the fact that thousands of small towns and farming settlements around the country, which had formerly been the symbolic centres of nineteenth-century morality, of “civilized morality,” were now “joined in a losing battle with the allure of the new urban life-styles” (Connelly 1980: 7).

In such a context of American urbanisation and industrial revolution, when women were increasingly willingly and numerous leaving households and the provinces to find work in urban industry, there was growing pressure to control the women, and best of all, to keep them at home. Thus the ideology of domesticity, of a “woman’s place,” gained in importance and was taught in schools, churches, and families. The aim was to justify assigning women to their natural space, the home, far from the dangers of the external world, which should be reserved for men (Zinn 2016 [1980]: 161–162).

Thus the ideal of the woman as an “angel of consolation” began to be reinforced (Lash 1977). The essence of this “cult of true womanhood,” which throughout the nineteenth century was set forth in moral and also legal standards, is best described by Barbara Welter: “True Womanhood,” the model for upper-class women, “could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Welter 1966: 152, quoted by Urbanik-Kopec 2018: 66). Nevertheless, the special virtue – over which the “ethical elites” were engaged in a fierce battle – remained “sexual purity,” which was connected with the ideal of a woman as “submissive” and “passive” in relation to her husband. Such traits were supposedly the essential differentiation between femininity and natural male “aggressiveness” (Zinn 2016 [1980]: 161–164). It was assumed that men by their biological nature would sin, but that women must not give into temptation. As a certain male author cited by Howard Zinn wrote: “If you do, you will be left in silent sadness to bewail your credulity, imbecility, duplicity, and

premature prostitution” (Zinn 2016 [1980]: 102). The “idea of household calm,” “the haven in the heartless world,” (Lash 1977) contained the longing for a utopian pre-modern past. It evoked a picture of rural utopia and of stable, religiously strict, small American agricultural towns and farms. In the mass imagination these were asylums, free from the dangers of capitalist modernisation. Some American progressives “were drawn to the fantasy of a prosperous agrarian future which underpinned rural settlement schemes in the period” (Murphy 2010: 9).

The American strategy for dealing with gendered fears over modernisation, in which new cultural significance was accorded to the rural–urban opposition, had a special enemy – immigrant women, who at a certain moment came to be identified with all the prostitution and social pathology of American cities. As new “social devils” they quickly became the focus of dozens of moral panics, national anti-prostitution campaigns, and legislative projects. Engaging all levels of authority, preoccupation with the problem of prostitution was so widespread that up to 1910 there was “a clearly defined national position on the relationships between prostitution and immigration” (Connelly 1980: 60).

“[E]ven though no statistical evidence was presented,” government reports, or reports drawn up by the authorities of the largest cities (the tradition of social vetting), suggested that immigrants had flooded the United States with a wave of prostitution. There was a conviction that the majority of prostitutes and those who benefitted from their work came from Eastern or Southern Europe. Naturally, this view was founded on deep racial and ethnic prejudices, as in the speech of a certain congressman: “Let us not now be betrayed to a Latin or Asiatic laxity of morals, lest we go the way of the great Latin and Asiatic nations that have fallen” (Connelly 1980: 60). Religious bias was another underlying element. In America, beliefs about the sexual depravity of Jews and Catholics derived from fairly vigorous anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic sentiments (Connelly 1980: 64). All of which masked the fact that the problem of prostitution had not been brought from abroad by the immigrant women and their countrymen-procurers but in reality originated in the socio-economic conditions of American cities.

Such multifaceted bias in the United States, and in Poland as well, contributed to form the pattern of public debate on modernity.<sup>4</sup> It was in

---

<sup>4</sup> Following Kathy Murphy’s strategy I define modernity not as a particular historical interval, but as “a state of mind, the sense contemporaries had of their own modernity, an awareness of a break with the past, an exhilarating and frightening sense that they were negotiating uncharted territory” (2010: 1–2).



such a context of anti-emancipation fears and national anti-prostitution campaigns that Thomas decided to write *The Polish Peasant*. He had begun to collect material on migrations from Chicago institutions considerably earlier, that is, at the beginning of the 1910s (Sinatti 2008; Szacki 2002). Znaniecki joined him later, while acting as director of the Emigrants' Protective Association in Kraków. Apart from providing aid and advice to migrants in choosing the best place to immigrate, Znaniecki's role in the institution then was to keep the best educated people in Poland and to facilitate the departure of the others (Wieruszewska 2012: 20). It is not surprising, therefore, that both authors, who were at the time deeply engaged in the public debate and the problems of their countries (see Firlit-Fesnak et al. 2013), decided that the analyses and explanations of causes of disorganisation in *The Polish Peasant* should fall within the rural–urban binary discourse. The rural–urban binary discourse, as Raymond Williams noted in *The Country and the City* (1973), symbolised at the time an “unresolved division and conflict of impulses” between the pre-modern (the traditional, the known, the authentic) and the modern (the unknown, the uncharted) (Murphy 2010: 1). In this discourse the countryside had the role of a symbolic panacea, where traditional social control could be preserved. While in the debates of the era the home was supposed to guarantee performance of the ideal of True Womanhood, the countryside, as a collection of households and a closed social network, was supposed to provide the stability that would ensure its performance to an even greater degree. And although Thomas and Znaniecki do not postulate a return to the pre-modern conservative world, they do not avoid its nostalgic idealisation.

### **/// Constructing a Patriarchal Rural Idyll – The National Mythology behind the Concept of (Dis-)Organisation**

The disorganisation of social life among immigrant families in American cities is not the sole main subject of analysis in *The Polish Peasant* and only the last volume (the fifth) is devoted to the question. For Thomas and Znaniecki, it was more important to reconstruct the organisational model of patriarchal peasant families, the basis of traditional rural society in Poland. In terms of proportions, it is rather telling that two of the three analytical volumes of *The Polish Peasant* concern this model, which has a symbolic function extending far beyond the theoretical aims of the monograph. I will thus consider at what points the authors' interpretations move more in the normative (ideological) direction and towards a roman-

ticising moral discourse. I will furthermore reflect on what issues spark the authors' fears and fantasies in regard to modernisation.

These idealisations are primarily to be found in the way the authors construct their analytical concept as a binary opposition. On the one hand, there is the model of "family organisation" wherein whatever is moral – that is, a patriarchal marriage centred in a strong peasant community of families – can only be located territorially in the rural world of the (Polish) nation. In observing the essence of the organisational model of the peasant family in rural Poland, Thomas and Znaniecki continually underline the value of its unconditional continuity; they explain that such continuity is possible thanks to the subordination of the interests of the individual to the community. Continuity is created in practices of social control and in the principle of group solidarity, which is capable of subduing the resistance of rebellious family members and of directing them toward a higher aim. The aim is always defined by the imperative of the community's indissolubility, which applies regardless of the needs of individual community members, and even in spite of the bad experiences of husbands and wives. The above traits of continuity and solidarity become the basis on which the authors construct a romantic myth of the peasant family in Poland, with the oft-emphasised collective, motivating strength of the family, and hierarchal gender roles. The authors locate everything "disorganised," that is, everything they call depraved and asocial, at the other pole, as if in opposition. What is immoral is identified with the city and with the process of migration to the city. The most important morality issue is the "breakdown of conjugal relations" and of the extended family, but the authors also placed phenomena that lead to this disintegration in the category of the immoral: "economic dependency," the "sexual demoralisations of girls," the "vagrancy and dishonesty of boys," and "murder" (Thomas & Znaniecki 1920, vol. 5: 113–114).

It is worth observing that within the framework of the binary opposition thus constructed (organisation–disorganisation), the reference criterion – the value that inclines Thomas and Znaniecki to judge the process of becoming an immigrant as disorganisation – is a violation of unconditional, sanctified marital continuity, with the patriarchal role of the husband and father and control by the community of extended families. Furthermore, the authors repeatedly underline that the context for disorganisation, that is, demoralisation and the breakdown of marital pairs in the United States, is "the novelty of American legal standards" (1920, vol. 5: 221), which not only make divorce accessible but also have numerous social se-

curity provisions for wives and mothers. As the authors maintain, divorce in America is easier to procure because of “the decay of the large family,” the “weakness of the Polish-American community” (1920, vol. 5: 221), and the significant decline in the number and kinds of church and parish social control over the lives of immigrants:

in this country the large family is no longer a real social body with concrete common interests – for usually only a few members have immigrated and these are often scattered over a vast territory. The community has also only a small stock of old traditions left and cannot efficiently enforce even these unless the individual chooses to participate actively in common life. Further, in spite of the great vitality which the parish has as a social institution the authority of the church as religious institution is much weakened, perhaps for the very reason that the existence of the Polish-American church depends on the free will of the congregation (1920, vol. 5: 222).

Thus we find from the authors’ analyses that immigrants, including Polish women, discovered and took advantage of the new legal possibilities. The consequence was that divorce spread in the peasant and working classes that came to the United States. However, phenomena that might have been recognised to fall within the category of emancipation, that is, phenomena that I called the proletarianisation of divorces, or the transformation of relations between the sexes in families, is described only in categories of immorality and disorganisation.<sup>5</sup>

It might also appear that the binary opposition constructed by the authors in regard to the organisation of the family in rural Poland and its disorganisation in American cities is justified in the light of theory and methodology. The authors were attempting to recreate models and processes relating to individuals’ attitudes and values and their cultural system. The authors’ pioneering approach was moreover a paradigmatic breakthrough at the time. However, a deeper analysis of the work shows that Polish immigrants’ departure from the model of marriage inviolability – that is,

<sup>5</sup> It should be remembered that during this period, at the end of the nineteenth century, the divorce of Catholics was impossible throughout most of Poland, which was divided between neighbouring partitioning states. The exception was the Prussian partition, which had a secular but very restrictive law on divorce. The fully secularised civil right to divorce in Poland was introduced only after the Second World War, in 1946. However, before the Second World War, divorces were rare even among the metropolitan intelligentsia and artists. Even after the Second World War, in the collective imagination divorce continued to be something unknown and rather dangerous, and hardly existed as a real possibility of resolving marital conflict (Klich-Kluczevska 2015: 138).

marital breakdown and divorce mediated by American institutions – is not analysed by the authors from the perspective of the migrating peasant women, nor as a path to emancipation and empowerment. In other words, the important qualitative dimension to the social change revealed in the practices and attitudes of some of the migrating peasant women (thanks in particular to their newly acquired civil rights to divorce, social security measures, and alimony) is not reflected and not perceived in the work. Instead, the entire potential of resistance and revolt disappears within the category of social disorganisation, in which the practices of men and women immigrants are interpreted as demoralisation, immorality, and asociality. Repeatedly, the authors clearly fail to recognise the subjectivity of and reasons for women's resistance. Nor do the authors interpret these strategies and subjectivity in the categories they define as reorganisation; they do not perceive the continuity of the attitudes transported from Poland. Instead, they paternalistically and condescendingly explain the psychology behind the actions and attitudes of women immigrants. Thus, a frequently encountered representation of Polish peasant women and successive generations of their daughters in America is one of "unusual quarrelsomeness" (1920, vol. 5: 254), of wives and mothers who do not care for their homes, and who make use of newly acquired legislation to fight their husbands, always due to a difference of opinion over "trifles."

In the authors' interpretations the strong influence of the Puritan context and of Polish moral fears over modernity in response to women's emancipation are very visible. Above all, women's leaving the home to enter factories and appear in the streets is considered morally suspect as an activity outside the sanctified sphere of the home (the ideology of domesticity). These are not solely categories that emerge from documents written by Puritan American social workers and judges (which form the basis for analysis), but are also categories Znaniecki and Thomas produce themselves. They seem intentionally to choose such fragments about deviances from reports of local visits; they rework notes full of those kinds of images of women, and finally reproduce the images in their interpretations.

The decline of the peasant family in American cities is always presented by Thomas and Znaniecki in contrast to the organised, certain, stable rural past and with a particular focus on fears about the downfall of the patriarchal family in the city due to immoral wives and mothers. Thus a picture of the family and gender relations in the new urban context is presented in categories of decline, break-up, and disorganisation. Let us look at the subject more closely, by analysing passages from the source.

### **/// The Trifling Motivations of Quarrelsome Polish Women versus Wounded Male Dignity – Masculinist Fears over the Breakdown of the Patriarchal Family**

When Thomas and Znaniecki try to prove their thesis about the key role of American law in the breakdown of peasant marriages and families, their model for interpreting the practices of men and women reveals a strong masculinist perspective with strong patriarchal gendered bias. Such bias is especially visible in those passages of the fourth and fifth volumes where the authors refer to women's recourse to the law in order to divorce or to insist on the father's obligation to provide child support. The authors then write of the women's practices in a paternalistic and condescending tone, which is entirely different from the tone they adopt in discussing the practices of the men. Analysis of the differences leads to the conclusion that the authors find civil rights (citizenship) legitimate depending on a person's gender (see gendered citizenship). In practice, this means the authors do not recognise or find justification for the legal measures to which women resort, and that they consider wives and mothers to be second-class citizens.

In the fourth volume, the chapter defining the causes of family disorganisation contains the following illustrative passage:

The acquaintance with the legal standpoint of abstract individualistic justice has contributed in a very large measure to the decay of the family tradition, and the development of litigation has been the consequence. This is particularly marked in Galicia, where acquaintance with law is older than in the Congress Kingdom. Exactly similar is the effect which the American laws on marriage, support of wife, divorce, etc. have in helping dissolve the Polish family life in this country, chiefly by giving the wife an exaggerated conception of her "rights" (1920, vol. 4: 37).

This mode of thinking, in which the "rights" of the wife are placed in quotation marks and awareness of possessing those rights is considered "exaggerated," expresses a lack of recognition for those rights. The authors also demonstrate their lack of recognition for women's rights by making an equivalency between peasant wives turning to the law and their being litigious. Such thinking recurs throughout the work. For instance, the fol-

lowing passage in the fifth volume again reflects the authors' paternalism and condescension:

The consciousness that she can have her husband arrested any time she wishes on charges of non-support, disorderly conduct or adultery is for the woman an entirely new experience. Though under the old system she had in fact a part in the management of common affairs almost equal to that of the man, yet in cases of explicit disagreement the man had the formal right of coercing her, whereas she could only work by suggestion and persuasion, or appeal to the large family. Now not only can she refuse to be coerced, since the only actual instruments of coercion which the man has left after the disorganisation of the large family – use of physical strength and withholding the means of subsistence – are prohibited by law, but she can actually coerce the man into doing what she wants by using any act of violence, drunkenness or economic negligence of his as a pretext for a warrant. No wonder that she is tempted to use her newly acquired power whenever she quarrels with her husband, and her women friends and acquaintances, moved by sex solidarity, frequently stimulate her to take legal action. Such action is, of course, radically contrary to the traditional significance of marriage, but this significance is weak and apt to be forgotten in a moment of wrath, since there is no large family to keep it always alive (1920, vol. 5: 268).

In the above passage it is clear that not only do the authors not speak the language of civil rights, but of human rights in general.<sup>6</sup> The women's motivations are not at all associated with rational, justified, and legitimate actions but are reduced to the emotional impulses of excitement – of “anger” during “a quarrel.” The authors' invalidating view of violence against women and of women's unequal position in the patriarchal system is a serious problem. It is clear from the above passages and many others that the authors do not take violence, drunkenness, or financial neglect as legitimate reasons for divorce – that is, reasons for women to take legal action. The authors do not recognise these circumstances as being significant for women. Abuse and violence are rarely taken seriously, but when mentioned they are seen as an “excuse,” a “pretext”: a “temptation” for women to use

---

<sup>6</sup> Of course, the limitation of their discursive framework could easily be explained by the time context, as women then were legally excluded in essence, without even the right to vote.

their “newly acquired power” of civil and legal rights. The practices of women are thus paternalistically viewed in terms of a battle between the sexes (the women are “moved by sex solidarity”) in which women are the “quarrelsome” side and are motivated by “trifling reasons.” The authors associate women’s actions with the women’s “forgetting themselves” and with a loss of reasonableness in a situation where a monopoly on reasonableness is held by the extended family in rural Poland and, in the United States, by the scattered national elites. Furthermore, the authors frequently – as in the fifth volume – accuse women of attaching too much importance to their newly acquired rights and of attempting to supplant the “moral obligation” of the peasant community with their “exaggerated feeling of coercive power” (1920, vol. 5: 171). Such associations appear frequently in the work, and always where women’s use of legal means is discussed, as in the following example: “if the girl does not prove too contentious or insistent upon her rights, the relation may be established later, voluntarily and without legal pressure” (1920, vol. 5: 269). The authors do not acknowledge the women’s new practices in regard to the law even within the framework of a possible reorganisation: as a model for reorganising the family workings after disorganisation.

A key role is played here by the authors’ category of “temperamental misadaptation” (1920, vol. 5: 145), which is based on implicit premises that men and women in pairs are in equal positions, or that men are in an even worse position on account of their financial obligations, as the authors declare outright in various places. Reducing the sources and causes of marital breakdown to “temperamental misadaptation” is a classic psychologisation procedure that has the effect of invalidating structural factors, even though the authors are aware of their importance. In many places in the text, the authors speak of the structural economic dependence of women, for instance:

In general in the woman the connection between sexual interests and other interests seems to be closer than in the man, though on the other hand her greater economic dependence and stronger affection for the children make her usually willing to lead a double life whenever by breaking her conjugal tie for the sake of a more satisfactory sexual relation she would risk her economic security or be in danger of losing her children. Thence so many of the “boarder” stories which have become a well-known feature of Polish-American life. The woman has a secret sexual relation with

a boarder and at the same time preserves her conjugal relation for economic and family reasons (1920, vol. 5: 258–259).

In a situation of inequality, where wives – especially those with multiple children – are economically dependent on their husbands, such a psychologising view fails to take violence seriously. Let us look at the most important argument for the mechanism of “temperamental misadaptation,” which, according to the authors, appears in most of the instances they cite:

Usually temperamental misadaptation manifests itself more in the behavior of the woman than in that of the man, probably because of organic differences between the sexes and because the woman’s indoor life and household occupations make her ascribe more importance to trifling circumstances. The unusual quarrelsomeness of Polish immigrants’ wives certainly springs for the most part from this source; in man temperamental misadaptation expresses itself in “ugly temper,” often in beating the woman – though beating may also have as its source in sexual jealousy or unsatisfied desire for sexual relations – and regularly in alcoholism, for drinking (particularly drinking with friends outside of the home) is the habitual means of escape from the quarrelsomeness of the wife – an artificial hedonistic substitute for the comfort and response of home life which the man needs (1920, vol. 5: 253–254).

If we group the above interpretation with the real examples to which they refer, we see that what the authors describe as “trifling” and “unimportant” causes are in fact instances of serious abuse and violations of the law. Yet according to the authors the causes lie in biological traits determining the “quarrelsomeness” of Polish wives and their belonging to the private sphere of the home, which is of less importance than the public sphere. The Chicago Legal Aid Society, whose documentation was analysed by Thomas and Znaniecki, was the resort of wives and mothers who had experienced multidimensional violence. The women complained of “maltreatment,” of beatings, rapes, being forced into prostitution (a husband’s attempts at procreation), murder threats, and attempted murder. They started proceedings against their partners/husbands who did not want to pay for the household and children, or avoided paying child support by fleeing, or engaged in cadging, or became alcoholics, or abandoned their responsibilities, or refused to recognise a legally instituted marriage,



or engaged in bigamy, or committed adultery, or molested their daughters, or adopted other forms of violence, including destroying or setting fire to property. That the authors' invalidation of maltreatment is a major strategy can be seen in the following passage, in which the authors claim that in Poland a marriage would not break down as the result of such factors. In a situation where divorce is not available and flight is not possible, "temperamental misadaptation" would be "maintained within certain bounds thanks to the influences of the social environment." In another situation:

even if the extended family and society were unable to control them, the marital pair, being aware that there was no escape from the situation, would feel the need to accept their difficulties and at least to a certain degree attempt to adapt to one another (1976, vol. 5: 162).<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the authors tell us what consequences a woman might have to accept and what practices society sanctioned if her behaviour departed from the accepted norm:

Usually the desire for revenge manifests itself in the man by physical violence – for however indignant the American social worker may be with a husband beating his wife from jealousy this behavior is perfectly sanctioned by tradition and socially normal (1920, vol. 5: 260).

What is curious is that Thomas and Znaniecki do not mention the normalisation and sanctioning of wife-beating in the Polish tradition in order to criticise the practice or raise moral objections, though they do not hesitate to raise such objections in other questions. Wife-beating is also not mentioned by the authors in explaining the practice of women leaving their marriages, that is, they do not speak of women's pursuit of divorce in categories of resistance or rebellion – even though that resistance is clear in the clerical reports of specific family histories or in the declarations made by parties to a dispute and their witnesses. The authors mention wife-beating solely in order to show the strength of patriarchal social control in rural Poland and that peasant men and women cannot divorce there in the event of problems as they can in the United States. The authors emphasise that in Poland a peasant man can unload his frustrations through a socially ac-

<sup>7</sup> Translated from the Polish edition.

cepted resort to physical violence while preserving the sanctified continuity of marriage and the family.

The authors' interpretation of the peasant men's strategies is essentially paternalistic, but above all they interpret the strategies of the peasant women stereotypically and with great simplification, reducing everything connected with abuse to an "unpleasant situation," as in the following example:

Whereas here [in America] not only is there little if any social check to prevent the expressions of misadaptation from indefinitely increasing, but both husband and wife know that they can escape the unpleasant situation – the man by deserting, the woman by taking out a warrant against her husband, and both by divorce. It is this possibility of an escape which, in connection with the original temperamental misadaptation, produces in the individual the feeling that his marriage is nothing but a burden to be rejected as soon as it becomes too heavy, and makes him forget at least temporarily whatever positive elements there may be in his conjugal life (1920, vol. 5: 254).

Let us look now at how very differently the authors interpret the attitudes of men whose partners or wives institute legal proceedings, including for recognition of paternity and child support:

And the action once taken is irreparable, for the husband will never forget or entirely forgive an act which introduced foreign official interference into the privacy of his conjugal relations, *humiliated his feeling of masculine dignity* and put him for the time of his arrest on the same basis as a criminal. [...] The man may be cowed into submission by fear but his marriage relation has ceased to imply any familial solidarity in his eyes and is no longer a voluntary union but an enforced cohabitation and economic contribution which taken together appear much akin to serfdom (1920, vol. 5: 268–269).

The contrast in how the authors treat the two sides of a marriage is striking. They exhibit concern for masculine pride, freedom, and feelings, while evincing a lack of such concern when interpreting women's practices. While the attitudes of the men – their flight from women, their abandonment of the responsibilities connected with marriage, their violence – are

morally justified by the authors, the practices of the men's wives are interpreted by the authors as "trifling," dictated by impulse, and characterised by "quarrelsomeness." The authors believe the men-immigrants do not recognise marital rights and responsibilities defined by institutions that are abstract to them and thus external.

Similarly, the men do not find interference in family matters to be legitimate, particularly in situations where their wives have recourse to the law and official institutions to insist on their fulfilling their responsibilities. The authors explain here, in referring once again to the mythical cooperation of the rural community, that the Polish peasants recognise a responsibility only when it is in the common interest of the primary group (the extended family and the neighbourhood community) as obligations derive from the solidarity of that group. However, the authors do not ask themselves the question of whose interest is ordinarily involved and who is excluded from that group solidarity. The authors do not at all address the issue, although in other places in the text they themselves admit that the unequal position of men and women was the norm in Poland's patriarchal systems. With that awareness, it should not have been hard for them to acknowledge that reproducing the principles and continuity of the Polish primary group was in the interest of male domination, and the principle of solidarity in essence referred to the masculinist vision of the family. The above line of interpretation gains in significance when we see that male pride comes to be injured solely in the United States – precisely when women acquire individual rights and can take advantage of them (as, moreover, they do not hesitate to do). The authors, however, do not interpret the new attitudes of immigrant men and women in categories of the breakdown of the patriarchal world and the erosion of the principle of domination, though such an interpretation might have revealed that the changes produced by migration involved the emancipation of women.

If we look at the practices reflected in the texts that Thomas and Znaniecki selected from the archives of charitable organisations and the courts, a broad picture emerges of the Polish peasant women's structural resistance and emancipation. That emancipation goes almost unacknowledged by Thomas and Znaniecki,<sup>8</sup> even though numerous instances show

---

<sup>8</sup> An exception to this scheme is their way of interpreting young girls' abandonment of household chores (cleaning, cooking) and opposition to giving their earnings to their parents. The authors directly call these practices "revolt" and explain the economic pragmatism at the root of these new individualistic attitudes: "the element of revolt against the drudgery and coercion of home life is very strong" (1920, vol. 5: 336). Fragments in which the authors discuss polygamy in functionalist terms is a similar departure from moralistic discourse. Such perspectives appear in

that the peasant women in America became active citizens, aware of their rights. First they would discover that they had defined rights as wives and mothers in the new country. Then they would take advantage of those rights through legal proceedings and with the support of governmental and philanthropic institutions. Let's look at some of the numerous examples of the agency of Polish peasant women to appear in Thomas and Znaniecki's works on the basis of the *Records of the Chicago Legal Aid Society*. The descriptions were prepared by volunteers helping these women and families:

*Michalski Family*. [...] the Michalski family tried living together once more, rented a flat and bought new furniture. After 2 weeks Stanley Michalski left and **his wife went to the Legal Aid Society** to complain that he was running around with another woman and giving her only \$5 a week. **She was now willing to get a divorce**. Nothing was done in the matter, however. Six months later **she again applied to the society**. The night before her husband had come to her flat and threatened to kill her and Helen. He turned on the gas and tried to choke her into unconsciousness, but she screamed so loudly that he became alarmed and left, seizing a photograph of himself that was hanging on the wall and taking the child with him. **Mrs. Michalski called a policeman**, arrested him and got the child back (1920, vol. 5: 233–234; bold type added).

*Piotrowski Family*. [...] **Usually the matter is brought before the Society by the woman** and only later the man's story is heard (1920, vol. 5: 236; bold type added).

*Wozniak Family*. Stella and Julian Wozniak had been married in Chicago in 1896 and lived together happily for 7 years. When Mrs. Wozniak was pregnant for the third time her husband suddenly deserted, leaving her without a cent. After his desertion John Pawlowski began to "be good to her." They lived together for 4 years and had 2 children. **Mrs. Wozniak then appealed to the Legal Aid Society to get a divorce for her** so that she could marry John (1920, vol. 5: 240; bold type added).

---

Thomas and Znaniecki's book only in the margins and contradict the dominant perspective based on conservative patriarchal assessments.

*Zakrzewski Family.* Zakrzewski never supported his wife nor their 3 children properly, went around with other women and deserted her after 4 years of marriage. But he continued to annoy her occasionally. Twice he went to her rooms and spread such stories about her and created such a disturbance that both times she was asked to move. Five years later he again returned and made a scene, taunted her with being still alive, although tubercular, and said he would have to kill her to get rid of her. **She then asked the Legal Aid Society to get a divorce**, so as to escape being annoyed by him, but she was very ill and was soon taken to the hospital (1920, vol. 5: 246; bold type added).

*Frankowski Family.* Bronislawa had known Peter Frankowski in the old country. She had been in this country about 2 years when she had a child by him and had him arrested, hoping he would marry her. They were married in court but after the ceremony he refused to live with her or have anything more to do with her. He soon returned to Poland and she heard he was to marry another girl there. Bronislawa's people tried to stop the marriage but the priest did not recognise Frankowski's civil marriage as valid. **Bronislawa then asked the Legal Aid Society to have her marriage annulled** (1920, vol. 5: 251; bold type added).

It is not hard to notice that in Thomas and Znanięcki's interpretations there is a lack of acknowledgement that the women were struggling, by means of the courts, to reach the same ends for which the community and the extended family struggled. In requiring their husbands/partners to fulfil their obligations as husbands and fathers they were fighting for the preservation and continuity of the family. Leaving aside the new element that they received from the law – the potential to fight for respect and dignity – we can also see that the pattern is not solely one of disorganisation. There is a growing awareness of the rights and responsibilities of family members and a sense of the real force of the legal instruments ensuring fulfilment of those obligations. In addition, there was the ultimate possibility of resolving the problems in a relationship through divorce. These elements escape the attention of Thomas and Znanięcki, even though they are studying the values and attitudes of peasant men and women. Furthermore, they invalidate the importance of those values and attitudes by interpreting the efforts of American institutions in categories of support for the struggle

between the sexes and by placing men and women in the roles of competitors, of opponents (1976, vol. 5: 170). In effect, they reduce the practices of these institutions to an active role in destroying family continuity, which they contrast with some abstract, hypertrophic, and supra-individual image of community solidarity in rural Poland (1976, vol. 5: 169–170).

The sources of a lack of acknowledgement for structured practices, in categories of the peasant women's resistance and emancipation, can also be explained by looking critically at Thomas and Znaniecki's key use of the category of "temperament." The authors refer to the latter every time they try to explain the sources of the peasant men and women's new practices, which in their opinion were demoralising. According to the authors, when the old Polish social principles automatically lost their significance in the United States, the Polish peasants would base their practices exclusively on temperament, or more precisely, on biological drives, instincts, and the pragmatic desire for security. The new marital and familial practices in America were "based almost entirely on the sentimental attitudes of the individual," or on "sexual desire, the maternal instinct, and to a much lesser degree, paternal feelings, the desire for mutuality, and the desire for security" (1920, vol. 5: 144).<sup>9</sup> It might be thought that Thomas and Znaniecki preceded, by decades, Anthony Giddens and his concept of a "pure relationship," that is, a "pure love," which is possible because it is removed from any economic or social dependence. Such a conclusion would be erroneous, however, as Thomas and Znaniecki, in enumerating the peasants' drives and instincts, practically do not recognise the feeling of love. Thomas and Znaniecki claim that love "is especially rare among peasants, with their traditional subordination of the individual to the group" (1920, vol. 5: 144). They reserve love, along with the "norm of decency," for higher classes, that is, for the elite: "intellectuals," or those in "leading circles," to whom they ascribe "rationally motivated idealism" (1920, vol. 5: 144). Among the lower classes, however, after leaving the fatherland and the strong original social group, the only tie-creating mechanism is the sexual-procreative instinct and economic pragmatism. According to the authors, in America these are "practically the sole forces that draw a pair together and unite them" (1920, vol. 5: 144). By such interpretations, Thomas and Znaniecki deprive the migrants of any patterns of higher moral feelings beyond instincts, impulses, or temperament, and reveal successive layers of

---

<sup>9</sup> Translated from Polish.

psychologising reductionisms.<sup>10</sup> These were also typical ways in which the intellectuals of the period viewed the lower classes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the authors write only marginally about the emancipation of women and then exclusively in categories of women's sexual misconduct and their abandonment of domestic chores. Such categories are typical of the discourse of the era, which saw the practices of proletarian working women and housewives uniquely through the prism of the risk of sexual laxity and irresponsibility. Thus not only is there no picture of peasant women's becoming empowered citizens, but the authors also reduce the emerging dimension of women's entrepreneurship and economic resourcefulness to impulses and instincts. Yet it would have been possible to find patterns of resourcefulness, with a kind of power and consistency, in the wives' and mothers' organisation of their livelihoods – strategies that contradicted the opinions of the Polish and American elites and especially the morally strict officials of aid societies. An interesting example is the story of Mrs Ziólek, the mother of three children, a woman in ill health who was abandoned by her violent husband after eight years of living together and who took in four “boarders” in order to maintain herself. The ChTPP, a charitable organisation, proposed “out of fear for the state of her morality” that she should move to a smaller apartment and promised to help her, perhaps even by obtaining a widow's pension for her. The idea was that as a mother she should give up living with “boarders,” a practice associated with immorality (and in fact, one of her boarders was the father of her third child and afterward married her, but was continually running away). Mrs Ziólek refused the ChTPP's offer, explaining her decision by a lack of faith in the institution's real desire to help her given its refusals of her earlier appeals for financial aid. We can see then that Mrs Ziólek had the courage to stand her ground. She continued to maintain herself from the boarders' payments, which was a strategy she considered more stable and controllable. Perhaps it also ensured her a greater degree of agency than did dependence on the decision of an institution as to whether, as a mother, she deserved help. Such interpretative paths, which perceive the women's resourcefulness as continuing patterns (present in Poland as well), are not to be found in Thomas and Znaniecki's work. They qualify Mrs Ziólek's case as an illustration of marital breakdown due to... the woman's sexuality and immorality (1920, vol. 5: 145). In the authors' interpretation, the necessary pragmatism of single mothers,

---

<sup>10</sup> And although the concept of race did not refer to biology in Thomas and Znaniecki, the ways of categorising peasants bring to mind today's category of cultural racism.

young childless women, or women in ill health, who, like Mrs Ziólek, with unequal opportunities and worse pay, must yet manage to provide shelter for themselves and their family, pay the rent, buy food, and secure health care, is reduced to immorality. They see such pragmatism not as arising from a moral plan but from sexual impulses and as guided by values that they regard as disorganisation. On the other hand, the sexual liberation of women is not, in itself, understood in categories of subjectivity or empowerment. And although in some parts of the text Thomas and Znaniecki appear to suggest liberal interpretations – as in their reference to a rebellion against household duties, or when they discuss polygamy in functionalist rather than moral terms – the liberal interpretations quickly disappear under the weight of their moral judgment or the gender bias that primarily shapes their analysis.

### /// Conclusions

*The Polish Peasant* is indeed a work turned nostalgically towards the past, which is conceived to be a ruralised space with idyllic family relations and hence gender relations. Thus, like other researchers and intellectuals of the period, the authors of *The Polish Peasant* create an opposition in which whatever is rural is the cradle of authenticity, of naturalised national values. These include healthy patriarchal relations in the family and among neighbours, and traditional – thus perceived as authentic – femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, in this opposition, whatever is urban is dangerous due to escaping the former strong rural social control. The anonymous city is a source of disorganisation and thus breaks apart and demoralises the patriarchal family and model relations between the sexes. In *The Polish Peasant* we find the typical moral discourse of the time, with a similar nostalgia for “pre-modern” rural conservative civilisation. Such a nostalgic turn towards the past among the interpreters of modernisation – including, paradoxically, those supporting modernisation – has been perceived by, among others, the Australian social historian Kathy Murphy (2010), who compares the public debate of the era in the Anglo-Saxon countries (America, Australia, and England) and in parts of Europe. She considers that the “rural space or ruralised national identities” were intended as a panacea for the chaos and threats of modernisation. In this discourse of rurality, a special place and role was assigned to women, because “[i]t was also a project about female citizenships, based upon a conviction that the country was the best environment for their ‘natural’ conservatism and



maternalism (the basis of ideal female citizenship) to flourish” (Murphy 2010: 43). Thus, although Thomas and Znaniecki accurately deconstruct the assumptions behind Americans’ stereotyping and racialisation of the Polish immigrant, they do it, as I showed above, by referring to a model of interpretation that was typical of their era. They place symbolic equivalency signs between ruralism, a healthy national identity, and healthy social, family, and gender relations. In *The Polish Peasant* the authors thereby construct a model of a national and patriarchal community of rural families unmarred by individualisation and women’s emancipation. Such a “morally healthy” model had a patriarchal form of gender relations, involving a patriarchal division of roles within a religiously devout, strong (meaning indissoluble), multi-generational family. Women as citizens are located in this model within the household, and preferably within a patriarchal rural family. As in Ferdinand Tönnies’s ideal community (*Gemeinschaft*), this reversion to ruralism contains a kind of idealisation of the world of the patriarchal peasant order, which was disintegrating before Thomas’s and Znaniecki’s eyes. Perhaps there was also an element of the idealisation of the land-owning life, on whose existence the world of the peasant was dependent, and of which Znaniecki was representative. Therefore, although we know that the authors did not want to return to the pre-modern world (some traces of which we find in the work), they did not manage to go beyond the dominant patriarchal discourse of the era.

What makes Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant* such a current and worthy study is that we can observe such idealisations in today’s Poland. As at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, such concepts and gender idealisations of rurality have become popular in response to a wave of contemporary moral fears. Globalisation, mass migration, nationalist movements, and above all intense changes in intimacy, gender relations, and the family, with the emancipation of women, have produced many anxieties, backlashes, and moral fantasies (see Hryciuk & Korolczuk 2015; Korolczuk & Graff 2018; Urbańska 2015). Contemporarily, there is renewed interest in an idyllic vision of the countryside as the cradle and fortress of conservative Polish family values. Such interest shows how timeless the fears and fantasies regarding social change seem to be and how the rural–urban gendered cultural discourse has once again been revived. If we want to understand the importance of ruralism for traditional patterns of defining the ideal of the Polish family, then Thomas and Znaniecki’s work is key to understanding the subject.

## Bibliography:

/// Ankum K., ed. 1997. *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, University of California Press.

/// Boyer P. 1978. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920*, Harvard University Press.

/// Connelly M.T. 1980. *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*, University of North Carolina Press.

/// Conor L. 2004. *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*, Indiana University Press.

/// Firlit-Fesnak G., Godlewska-Szyrkowa J., Żołędowski C. 2013. *Migracje i migranci w pismach Ludwika Krzywickiego, Floriana Znanięckiego, Józefa Chałasińskiego*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR.

/// Hałas E. 1991. *Znaczenia i wartości społeczne. O socjologii Floriana Znanięckiego*, Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.

/// Hryciuk R., Korolczuk E. 2015. *Niebezpieczne związki. Macierzyństwo, ojcostwo i polityka*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

/// Klich-Kluczevska B. 2015. *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm w Polsce 1956–1980*, Wydawnictwo LIBRON.

/// Korolczuk E., Graff A. 2018. “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’: The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 43, pp. 797–821, <https://doi.org/10.1086/696691>.

/// Lash Ch. 1977. *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*, Basic Books.

/// Murphy K. 2010. *Fears and Fantasies: Modernity, Gender, and the Rural-Urban Divide*, Peter Lang.

/// Parsons D. 2000. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, Oxford University Press.

/// Sinatti G. 2008. “The Polish Peasant Revisited: Thomas and Znanięcki’s Classic in the Light of Contemporary Transnational Migration Theory,” *Sociologica*, vol. 2(2), pp. 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.2383/27725>.

/// Szacki J. 2002. *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

- /// Thomas W.I., Znaniecki F. 1920. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Monograph of an Immigrant Group*, The Gorham Press.
- /// Thomas W.I., Znaniecki F. 1976. *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, transl. I. Wyrzykowska, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- /// Urbanik-Kopec A. 2018. *Aniol w domu, mrówka w fabryce*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
- /// Urbańska S. 2015. *Matka Polka na odległość. Z doświadczeń migracyjnych robotnic 1989–2010*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- /// Walkowitz J.R. 1992. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Virago.
- /// Weeks J. 2017. *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 4th ed., Routledge.
- /// Welter B. 1966. “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 18(2), pp. 151–174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179>.
- /// Wieruszewska M. 2012. “Dzieło *Chłop Polski w Europie i Ameryce*, czyli o pożytkach z czytania klasyków,” *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, vol. 38(2), pp. 5–24.
- /// Williams R. 1973. *The Country and the City*, Oxford University Press.
- /// Wilson E. 1992. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, University of California Press.
- /// Zaretsky E. 1996. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. A Classic Work in Immigration History*, University of Illinois Press.
- /// Zelizer V. 1994. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, Princeton University Press.
- /// Zinn H. 2016 [1980]. *Ludowa historia Stanów Zjednoczonych. Od roku 1492 do dziś*, transl. A. Wojtasik, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.

### /// Abstract

The aim of this article is to reread *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* as a representation of the fears and modernisation fantasies of its era. I analyse the patterns of gendered family relations and ideals of femininity and masculinity constructed by Thomas and Znaniecki within the framework of rural–urban discourses. As I will show, in *The Polish Peasant* we find huge contradictions between the liberal and conservative perspectives presented. On the one hand, the authors introduce the concept of “organisation – disorganisation – reorganisation,” which is supposed to be scientific and thus non-ideological. On the other hand, the authors’ patterns of interpreting empirical data show numerous gender bias and patriarchal schemes. As a result, the authors create an opposition in which whatever is rural is the cradle of authenticity, of naturalised national and gendered family values, and whatever is urban is dangerous and demoralising due to escaping the former strong rural social control. In *The Polish Peasant* the authors thereby construct the “morally healthy” model of a national and patriarchal rural community of families untouched by individualisation and women’s emancipation. Such a model had a patriarchal division of gender roles within a religiously devout, strong (meaning indissoluble), multi-generational family. In *The Polish Peasant* we can find both a nostalgia – which was typical of its era – for a “pre-modern,” rural, conservative civilisation, and worry about the moral health of women in the urban world. However, it is an ambivalent nostalgia accompanied by a conviction of the inevitability of social change.

Keywords:

ruralism, gender, family, modernisation, moral panics, rural–urban discourse

/// **Sylvia Urbańska** – assistant professor at the Institute of Sociology in the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Warsaw. Her specialty is sociology of the family and gender studies; she studies social changes in the context of migrations and rural communities. She recently published *Matka Polka na odległość. Z doświadczeń migracyjnych robotnic 1989–2010* [The Polish Mother from a distance: Experiences of migratory workers, 1989–2010], (“Monografie FNP” series, 2015). Her articles have appeared in, among other journals, *Central and Eastern Migration Review*, *Qualitative Sociology Review*, and *LUD*, and in the collections *Pożegnanie z Mat-*

*ka Polka* [Farewell to the Polish Mother] (2012) and *Niebezpieczne związki. Macierzyństwo, ojcostwo i polityka* [Dangerous liaisons: Motherhood, fatherhood, and politics] (2015), edited by R. Hryciuk and E. Korolczuk. She has been awarded a number of prizes, including the Prime Minister's Award for Best Doctoral Thesis. She is a member of the board of the Polish Gender Society and a member of the Polish Sociological Association.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5632-8043>

Email: [urbanskas@is.uw.edu.pl](mailto:urbanskas@is.uw.edu.pl)