

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Jacek Kubera, Łukasz Skoczylas (eds.), *Contemporary migrations in the humanistic coefficient perspective. Florian Znaniecki's thought in today's social science research*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2017, pp. 250.**

In 2018 sociologists around the world celebrated the hundred years of the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* [1918–1920] by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. This monumental book appeared to be of great value to the development of sociological theory not only in general but also within one of its specific domains: the sociology of migration. The extensive use of ethnographic data (letters, diaries and other personal documents) to explore individual migrant trajectories in both the sending and the hosting countries was a new approach to the study of human mobility. *The Polish Peasant* examined the phenomenon in a theoretical manner and on a macro scale. Albeit in the next decades the migration studies were dominated by neoclassic economic orientations that apply quantitative methods of investigation, recently one may observe a shift toward mixed approaches. In contrast to economic analyses, that are questioned for being ahistorical and deterministic [King 2012: 14–16], sociological orientations place the emphasis on a more comprehensive picture of migration dynamics [Górny, Kaczmarczyk 2003: 68], e.g., narrative and biographical studies relying on qualitative materials consolidate the role of sociology in migration analyses [Christou 2011: 249].

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In this context there is a space for the new reading of *The Polish Peasant*. One of the examples is the reviewed book *Contemporary migrations in the humanistic coefficient perspective. Florian Znaniecki's thought in today's social science research* edited by Jacek Kubera and Łukasz Skoczylas. The editors state in their *Introduction*, its goal is “to present the potential of *The Polish Peasant* and other works of F. Znaniecki for contemporary research into migration processes” [p. 7]. Znaniecki's input to theory and methodology of migration studies needs to be revived since, as underlined by the editors, his approach enables not only to reconstruct the inner and outer aspects of migration experience, but also to generalise and theoretical models and, thus, to contribute to the social theory of broader scope. Considering the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, migration is no longer a subject of academic research and discourse but has direct implications for politics and social cohesion.

The book is divided into four parts that, in a supplementary manner, present diverse approaches to Znaniecki's ideas. The first one (*Znaniecki's theoretical and methodological bases of research into migration*) focuses on general presentation of his contribution to sociological theory and methodology and its references to migration studies. Ewa Morawska (paper titled: *Researching migration with the humanistic coefficient: The founding premises, types of questions asked and proposed generalizations*) and Marcin Grodzki (*Beyond The Polish Peasant: Znaniecki's scientific ideal and its potential influence on the contemporary field of transnational studies*) are remind Znaniecki's programme of interpretative sociology and his attempts to raise the scientific level of social science. And despite the ideals of scientific programme for sociology could not be realized since, Grodzki notes, there is no such thing as the final inductive scientific theory, his concepts became pioneering in many aspects. What all the contributors to the reviewed book refer to is Znaniecki's core idea of humanistic sociology framed by the analytical principle of humanistic coefficient. It is a specific approach towards the subject of investigation that assumes the reality should be described according to actors' interpretations so that the researcher can avoid subjective biases.

Znaniecki paved the way for the idea of the social construction of society. In practical terms, this principle allowed him not only to follow real-life stories of marginalized groups (migrants) but also empowered them to talk for themselves. While the approach of linking objective and subjective perspectives seems obvious today, incorporating this human dimension to social studies was, as noted by Ernesto Castañeda in the reviewed book, “a break from the long tradition of elite and armchair scholarship” [p. 172].

What makes the edited book interesting is, however, not necessarily bringing the reader back to Znaniecki's theoretical system and methodology in general, as they were already widely discussed in Polish and international literature [cf. Blumer 1939; Dulczewski 1984; Szacki 1986; Sinatti 2008; Hałas 2010], but presentation of diverse applications of his concepts to contemporary migration studies. Applicability beyond time makes a scholarly work a classic. And indeed, *The Polish Peasant* was more than mere documentation of migrants' transition from rural to urban life, or from one culture to another. Apart from methodological input related to the humanistic coefficient, several other issues were precursory for analysis of migration experiences, including, among others, migration decision-making, integration with the host society, condition of migrant groups, formation of migration networks, importance of family ties, return migrations as well as a sense of migrants' national (ethnic) identity.

And so the second section of the book (*Materials used in the research into migration with the humanistic coefficient*) presents how personal materials used by Thomas and Znaniecki could either be reinterpreted using present-day migration theories or, in contrast, be applied as reference materials in various migration-related studies. Marta Buler and Izabela Grabowska in their paper, "*Social remittances into family lives in the Polish Peasant in Europe and America*" take up a challenge of reanalysing letters of migrant families presented in *The Polish Peasant* with the intention of reconstructing inter- and intra-family transfers of social remittances between migrants and their relatives in Poland. The concept of social remittances that is understood as all non-financial "assets" (ideas, values, norms, practices) circulated by migrants across borders and various social spheres was coined in the late 20. century [cf. Levitt 1998]. Buler and Grabowska show, however, that this phenomenon could be traced back to one hundred years earlier. In the same manner, Eveline Reisenauer (*The "transnational" Polish peasant*) notes that the masterpiece of Thomas and Znaniecki brought evidence of transnational practices undertaken by the migrants and their relatives in Poland. She refers to practices of maintaining and managing family relations through letter writing. Although the concept of transnationality is associated with present-day migrations [cf. Glick Schiller et al 1992], such cross-border activities were occurring at the beginning of last century. *The Polish Peasant* is thus another evidence that contemporary scholars overemphasize the recent "transnational turn" in human mobility. The next contributors, Liao and Qin, in *Beijing migrant workers' parental attitudes toward children* demonstrate that Znaniecki's approach can also be well-suited to study internal migrations and resettlements through content analysis of letters written by workers who migrated from rural areas of

China to Beijing. The collected data enables them to propose the typology of migrant parents' attitudes towards the children they left behind. Methodological constraints of personal documents collected within public contexts are further discussed in Jakub Isański's paper *Pioneers, migrants, looters social context of settlement in the Polish regained territories*. He analyses diaries written by Polish post-war resettlers who were forcibly moved from the Eastern parts of pre-war Poland to the "Regained Territories" in the West of the country. Isański notes one should analyse those memoirs with caution since they were subject to communist censorship and authors' self-censorship. Nonetheless, he applies Znaniecki's humanistic coefficient and typology of personalities to study the process of redefining values at the times of looting and theft after the war.

The third part of the book (*Migration as an experience of being "in between"*) brings evidence of other recent studies that refer to Znaniecki. Krystyna Romanişzyn (*Theory on disorganisation in migrant families in contemporary migration research in Athens and Vienna*) uses Znaniecki's idea of social disorganisation, understood as decreasing impact of existing social rules on group members, to reanalyse the findings of her earlier work on the impact of migration on Polish families. She notes the similarities between attitudes toward the family, marriage and sexual life of Poles in Greece and Austria in 1990s and of those in America described 80 years earlier in *The Polish Peasant* (e.g. leading "double lives", more consent to divorce). In both cases they can be explained through adapting individualistic values that were absent in isolated rural communities in Poland. However, Romaniszyn attests that mobility may also lead to reciprocal tendencies, i.e. reorganisation of personal and family lives. She observed that the Poles in Greece were massively getting married, usually in church and mostly with other Poles. The practice enables her to conclude that Thomas and Znaniecki (and other present scholars) misjudged the significance of religion for integration of migrant groups abroad. Thomas and Znaniecki's postulates were also the basis for Ernesto Castañeda in his study on migrations between Mexico and the USA and between Algeria and France (*Transnationalism in the lives of migrants: The relevance of Thomas and Znaniecki's work to understand migration*) and for Izabela Kujawa who tackles the issue of constructing Polish diaspora in Asia ("*Don't call us 'Polonia'*": *Attitudes towards migration, migrants and diaspora among Poles in South China*). Castañeda resembles that studying *The Polish Peasant* taught him to investigate not only migrants in their destination locations but also conditions of migrant-sending communities, the perspective that had been lost in migration studies until the transnational perspective appeared.

The book's final part (*Present and future of Znanieckian theory*) discusses the elements of Thomas and Znaniecki's legacy that could be inspiring for future generations of migration scholars. Elżbieta Smolarkiewicz (*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America in the context of contemporary migration studies*) returns to pioneering issues tackled in *The Polish Peasant*: assimilation theory, migration networks and processes of social disorganisation and reorganisation. In Thomas and Znaniecki's understanding migration leads to a two-sided relationship between the migrants and the host society that result in interactive creation of a new type of social identity (Polish migrants' adjusting to American reality was not about "merging" with the hosts but about forming a new ethnic group, Polish-Americans). Thus, the key to successful assimilation lies in the processes of disorganisation and succeeding reorganisation (creating new rules of social organisation do not lead to decline of primary groups but to the emergence of new, superior forms). Furthermore, Thomas and Znaniecki saw assimilation as a trigger for migrants' social advancement, similarly to a later concept by Milton Gordon [1964]. Going through next steps of social and cultural initiation was to assure climbing social ladder. Znaniecki also opposed the then-dominant notion that migrants' decisions should have been interpreted as one's compensation for material hardship. He considered migration to be far complex and related to conditions in the receiving and sending countries that facilitate (chain) migration. Concurrent impact of the situation in both countries was later developed into, inter alia, Everett Lee's [1966] influential concept of push and pull factors of migration. And in the last paper (*Towards a revival of Znaniecki's achievements? Florian Znaniecki's theory and methodology: Their presence in citation databases and possible applications in contemporary migration studies*) the book's editors Jacek Kubera, Łukasz Skoczylas together with Żaneta Szerksznis discuss the global reception of Znaniecki. They present bibliometric analysis of the two major citation databases (*Web of science* and *scopus*) to show by which scholars and in what countries Znaniecki's works are used. The authors are aware of their study's limitations (both databases mostly cover American and British journals) but stick to these sources as these remain a major indicator of scholars' reception. The interest in Znaniecki has been constantly growing in the last decades. Articles on Znaniecki (or references to his books) are published in the most reputable journals, however mainly from the USA, England and Poland. Znaniecki's works have numerous supporters and propagators, e.g., Richard Grathoff, Helena Znaniecki Lopata, Jerzy Szacki, and Elżbieta Hałas. Kubera, Skoczylas and Szerksznis propose that publishing his works in open access would make his achievements more broadly known and

attainable for next generations. With reference to the example of revival of Georg Simmel's works in last decades, authors optimistically believe that larger impact of Znaniecki's works is yet to come.

In the end, it is necessary to raise few critical remarks on the reviewed book. It seems that the collected papers could have been arranged differently. Despite almost all contributors declare the humanistic coefficient (and, in few cases, the concept of social disorganization) to be the principal analytic framework for their studies, the duly explanations of these notions appear in later parts of the volume in the texts by Castañeda and Smolarkiewicz (humanistic coefficient) and by Romaniszyn (social disorganization). Placing these concepts at the beginning of the book would make the complex ideas of Znaniecki more understandable for the reader who is not accustomed to his legacy. Furthermore, besides the papers of Castañeda and Romaniszyn that present some critical remarks on Znaniecki's works, no other critique is noted. It would be thought-provoking for it to be confronted yet again with Herbert Blumer's [1939] critical voice on the method used in *The Polish Peasant* that significantly contributed to the later development of empirical sociology. The validity of personal documents as a scientific data source was subject to strong criticism since they failed, as Blumer argued, in meeting the criteria of representativeness, adequateness, reliability and testability. The relation between the rich and extensive empirical data and only few pages of analytical remarks by Thomas and Znaniecki was also broadly cast doubt upon [Sinatti 2008: 6]. In many papers, references to Znaniecki's theory and methodology seem to be a bit exaggerated and not fully justified. In practice, postulates of the humanistic sociology should be a starting point for all humanistic and qualitative-oriented social scientists. References to Znaniecki are a handy explanation for conducted research procedures but at the same time they seem to be a bit an empty term. Finally, the portrait of contemporary migrations presented in the reviewed book would have been more complete if other contemporary migration-related phenomena had been discussed there. For instance, it is somehow surprising that none of the authors took the challenge of utilizing Znaniecki's ideas to analyse the burning problem of forced migrants (refugees) and undocumented (irregular) migrants. The question of intersectionality of class, gender, age or race (not ethnicity, though) in migration processes also remained open. Nonetheless, the reviewed book proves there is a deep sense in reading the classics. In Znaniecki's works one may find clear references to research topics (like transnationalism, migration networks, social remittances) that were conceptualized almost a century later with the illusion of originality. These appear to be new terms to describe

old phenomena. In this context the book is a must-have for all migration scholars interested in application of classic concepts to their contemporary investigations (or interested in avoiding being imitative in their research pursuits).

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