

УДК 314.151.3-054.72(71+73=161.2)“1846/1939”

DOI <https://doi.org/10.15407/nte2020.01.082>

РОМАНЕНКО ОЛЕНА

кандидат політичних наук, молодший науковий співробітник відділу глобальних і цивілізаційних процесів Державної установи «Інститут всесвітньої історії НАН України»

ROMANENKO OLENA

Ph.D., a junior research fellow at the State Establishment NAS of Ukraine *Institute of World History Department of Global and Civilization Processes*

Бібліографічний опис:

Романенко, О. (2020) Поїздка в обидва кінці, або «Міф про неповернення» у східноєвропейській міграції. *Народна творчість та етнологія*, 1 (383), 82–85.

Romanenko, O. (2020) A Round Trip, or the *Myth of No Return* in Eastern European Migration. *Folk Art and Ethnology*, 1 (383), 82–85.

A ROUND TRIP, OR THE *MYTH OF NO RETURN* IN EASTERN EUROPEAN MIGRATION

Анотація / Abstract

Враховуючи труднощі життя емігрантів початку ХХ ст. та їхню суперечливу долю у власній історії еміграції, варто зазначити, що вони не завжди закінчувалися успішно. Період до, під час і після Першої світової війни став особливо активним у посиленні міграційної політики для обох Америк. Регіони Східної і Центральної Європи стали постачальниками робочої сили, насамперед до США та Канади.

Стаття показує деякі випадки неуспішної еміграції до Північної Америки та розвінчує міф, що з початку ХІХ ст. і до сьогодні курсує в середовищі емігрантів: швидке збагачення та краща доля. Приклади, що наведені в статті, переважно відносяться до емігрантів з території Галичини (спочатку як складової частини Австро-Угорської імперії, а пізніше польських земель міжвоєнного періоду).

Ключові слова: міграція, Східна Європа, Австро-Угорська імперія, Польща, богемські землі.

Considering difficulties of the early 20th century emigrants' life and their controversial fate in their own history of emigration, it is worth saying that they did not always end successfully. The period before, during and after World War I became particularly active in increasing migration policy for both Americas. The Central and Eastern European regions became labor suppliers primarily to the USA and Canada.

The article provides an overview of some cases of unsuccessful emigration to North America and unravels the myth, which has been circulating among emigrants from the early 19th century until today: quick enrichment and better destiny. The examples cited in the article mainly refer to emigrants from the territory of Galicia (first as a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and later as Poland's lands during the interwar period).

Keywords: migration, Eastern Europe, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland, Bohemian lands.

Between 1846 and 1940, more than 50 million Europeans moved to the Americas in one of the greatest migrations of human history. Different authors give the numbers from 55 to 58 million of those, who moved to North and South Americas in the mentioned period. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the top supplier of migrants to the United States (more than 2 million people) [11, p. 156]. Some sources underline that the Habsburg monarchy *was one of the main European centers of emigration at the beginning of the 20th century, and between 1876 and 1910, at least five million Austro-Hungarian citizens, nearly ten percent of the population, emigrated* [8, p. 23].

Nearly 70 percent of all migrants to the United States in 1910 were born in Galicia. Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians from this province formed an important part of the *New Immigration* to the USA. Most of the Galician migrants were single men at an age between 15 and 49 [8, p. 17]. Galician migrants dominated as servants and workers in agriculture. They moved to new lands as young unmarried people without families.

Another so-called *family migration pattern* was based on a scheme than one member of the family went first, and after he or she had settled, the relatives followed. It was popular among Bohunks*. In Bohemian lands, more than 20 000 Bohemians received passports to emigrate from Austria in the 1850s, and this number does not include individuals who emigrated illegally [17, p. 11]. Therefore, early Czech nation builders and government authorities responded with alarm to a wave of mass migration to North America. Regional and local officials mobilized their efforts to stop mass emigration. Such measures included the prohibition of emigration agencies and the prosecution of agents, writing agitation and patriotic songs and plays (as *Lesní Panna aneb Cesta do Ameriky* [15] by Josef Kajetán Tyl), destroying stereotypes that America is an ideal place for living.

* Derogatory term for immigrants from the Habsburg Empire (formed from words *Bohemian* and *Hungarian*).

The same ideas we can find in Poland: even people who agree with the existence of labor migration are against emigration of people who permanently leave the homeland, because emigration leads to *demographic losses* and *social sickness*. In Galicia, and elsewhere, the discourse about *travel agents* became part of a much broader and crucial discussion about work necessary for the rise of Polish national consciousness among peasants and their *Polish character* [16, p. 81].

Tara Zahra in her book *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* [17] shows that not all *emigration stories* were successful. According to Tara Zahra, from 30 to 40 % of Central and Eastern European emigrants return to their homes.

Faustina Wiśniewska *was counting days until she could return home, having no intention to live in misery or to kill herself in order to save a grosz* [17, p. 4]. In her letters [10], the young woman wrote to her parents, describing that newcomers needed to be at work in terrible conditions for 12 hours per day, feeling lonely and depressed. Moreover, at that time the journey across the Atlantic took averaging from thirty to forty days and was potentially deadly. Another example, Adam Loboda from Galicia at the age of 16 with other fourteen Austrian boys from his village went for searching his new homeland. Finally, he found a job and had no regrets about his achievements, but four of his friends committed suicide, one shot himself, one hanged himself, one took poison, and one drowned himself. Only two of them became more or less rich. Others like Adam became just the workers [17, pp. 13–14].

Coming back to Polish emigration history, after the restoring of the Polish Republic's independence in November 1918, the new government faced a problem of citizenship and created a new emigration policy for *Polonia*. This term is broadly used until today to name the Polish immigrants. It was firstly used in Poland by Jan Ciemieniewski in 1896 [6, pp. 175–176]. What is interesting, the same word for the same meaning (the imagined community of Polish

immigrants in the United States and elsewhere) had already been used twenty year before in 1875 by Władysław Dyniewicz in *Gazeta polska dla Polonii w Ameryce* [7].

The law from the 20th of January 1920 regulated the issue of Polish citizenship [13, pp. 63–66]: without further formalities, former bearers of German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Russian citizenships, who, as of 10 January, 1920, lived in the area now constituting the Polish territory, were granted Polish citizenship. Furthermore, without any additional formalities persons who were born on Polish territories and parents permanently residing on these territories became Polish citizens, even if on January 10, 1920 (when the law came into force) they did not reside in Poland permanently, but lived abroad. A person without any other citizenship received the Polish citizenship by virtue of the fact that he or she was born on Polish land. People also were required to opt for nationality they would like to keep, because Polish law forbade dual citizenship.

In the interwar period, Poles (and ethnic Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Germans, etc.) having not naturalized abroad retained Polish citizenship: Polish migrants in the world were simply treated as Poles. So the attempts to use the Diaspora for the benefit of a new Polish state were made. According to *law and to the rhetoric of politicians, members of the Polish Diaspora living abroad were viewed and declared to be Poles. The practical consequences of such an approach were... dubious and controversial. In the years 1918–1921, the country faced a problem of repatriation, the return of forced migrants, people who during the war had been expelled from their homes* [16, p. 84].

Some governmental agencies were interested in solving migration problems, such as:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA),
- Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare,
- Ministry of Internal Affairs.

However, the main institution, which was established in November 1918, to solve these problems was the State Office for the Problems of Returning Prisoners, Refugees and Workers

(JUR for short). It existed until late 1920. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and MFA agreed that migration problems *are closely linked with the ideas of general foreign policy, because in fact [migrants] make an impact on attitudes of various countries towards Poland* [5].

To illustrate the controversial policy in accordance to Polonia, let us see the example of Polish migration policy in the USA. Politicians and Polish centers of power expressed interest in return migration from America earlier, before and during the First World War. After the war, thousands of people intended to return. At the same time, the Ministry of Labor proclaimed that *returns should rather be stopped now*. Due to the fear that returnees would more deeply destabilize the bad social situation of the country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proclaimed that *considering the high unemployment and the economic crises in the country, mass reemigration now will have serious and dangerous consequences* [2].

In November 1919, the Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski issued official *Appeal to Polonia*, asking the Poles to remain in America. The Consulate General in New York was discouraging American Poles from applying for passports in order to return [1; 4; 3]. *It is not time yet. Feverish return migration might be harmful for Poland and for the returnees*, announced a press release [12].

In 1920, in order to coordinate the policies of migration and unemployment, the Emigration Office (EO) was formed by the Parliament [16, p. 85]. It was subordinated to the Ministry of Labor by working closely with MFA. Several years later, the situation for the returnees still did not change. In the end of the interwar period, the problem basically disappeared because of a policy of the Polish state in restraining American returnees.

Seven years later, in the *Regulation* of December 15, 1927, issued by the President of the Polish Republic, was provided a new definition of the term *emigrant*. *An Emigrant ... is the Polish citizen who is leaving, or who has left, the territory of the Polish Republic in search of labor, or in order to work, or who went to joint his spouse, relatives or*

kins, who had previously emigrated. By emigrant will be understood a person leaving the territory of the Polish Republic, a person remaining outside the Polish territory jointly with an emigrant, and who is a member of his family [9, p. 178].

Conclusions

The example of Polish government shows that the postwar period was difficult both for citizens of the newly created country, and for the diaspora who wanted to return home. In different years of the interwar period, depending on the economic and political situation, the attitude towards these citizens changed: from the unprompted *come back, we are waiting for*

you to build our Poland to wait, it is not time yet because of a high level of unemployment, economic instability and increasing social problems.

However, ambiguous is the fate of the emigrants who left the country for one reason or another. Some examples show that many of such people just did not want to live in America for a long time, keeping the money for families (to build a house, find a wife, or start one's own business). Some people may have taken three years round-trip (or even multiple round trips). Therefore, the fate of such people will be a huge field of interest for future research.

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