



William J. Galush. *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880-1940.* Boulder: Eastern European Monographs, 2006. 336 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-587-4.

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Moral Community and Polish American Identity

“Polish immigrants came for more than bread,” writes William J. Galush in *For More Than Bread*. “They wanted to earn, but the settlers also yearned for a community embodying their values and aspirations” (p. 217). This book makes a significant contribution to understanding a vital aspect of migration, namely, the formation of identity. In this case, the author’s objective is to explain the formation of community institutions and to define Polish American identity, which the author labels as “moral community,” a process “laden with normative overtones” (p. vii).

One of the greatest strengths of the book is the representative nature of the settlements that the author chose to examine. Historians generally have looked at Polish immigration through the prism of one isolated settlement, Chicago. Galush challenges what he refers to as the “Chicago-centric” inclination in Polonian historiography. Although many scholars have considered this approach attractive, in some cases, Chicago actually proved atypical. Thus, throughout his book, Galush provides numerous examples of how, between 1880 and 1940, Polish settlements in Cleveland, Minneapolis, Utica (in New York State), and New York Mills differed. The author not only compares these localities with one another but also juxtaposes them with the competing visions of Polishness that developed in Chicago. Significantly, his inclusion of “neglected persons of ethnic society,” namely, immigrant women as well as their offspring, combined with an examination of the impact of newcomers and their offspring on the Polonian society, strengthens the author’s approach (p. viii). Galush underscores the importance of examining the origins of immigration. Not only does he list the reasons many left their homeland, but he also points out diverse motivations, stemming from the partitioning of Poland by foreign powers, the state of the economy, and the quality of education of “the developing economy of transatlantic industrial capital-

ism,” which “enmeshed even the backward Polish lands by 1900” (p. 21). As this suggests, diversity also includes divisions within the population (the intelligentsia, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat), caused, among other factors, by rapid population growth and the fragmentation of property. Significantly, Galush explains why political evolution among immigrants was so uneven by pointing to the occupying powers’ policies in Poland. He concludes that the immigrants who had some exposure to politics came most often from the Austrian partition.

What affected the peasantry more than politics, however, was religion. According to Galush, “the contemporary upsurge in devotionism transcended partitional borders in a common manifestation of popular religion” (p. 7). Consequently, new religious movements developed in villages that would later have an impact on the creation of Polishness across the Atlantic (pious societies, charity, temperance, and feminism). In fact, “Poles brought with them religious practices broadly congruent with contemporary American Catholicism” (p. 11). Finally, the author discusses the impact of the American environment, which precipitated a crucial change in the minds of a great majority of immigrants, replacing their original idea of returning home one day with one of establishing permanent settlements in their new homeland.

One of the prevailing questions that the author tries to answer is how representative of the entire Polonian migration Chicago proved to be. To accomplish this, he threads his way carefully through an analysis of other major points of destination for Polish immigrants and juxtaposes these studies with studies of immigrants in Chicago. Just as motivation and sending societies differed, so did the immigrants’ destinations. As Galush points out, Chicago indeed “drew the largest number due to its large size and occupational diversity, but most went elsewhere, dispersing unevenly across the north-

east quarter of the United States” (p. 25). By focusing on residential concentration in Cleveland, Minneapolis, Utica, and New York Mills, he discusses the character of marital relationships, quality of housing, jobs, and class-consciousness entrepreneurship in particular.

Of course, for any ethnic community to flourish and yet retain its distinct features, it needs organization. The middle section of the book focuses on organizing Polonia, and the author particularly examines mutual aid societies, which “took the leading role in defining Polishness” (p. 45). Not only did they shape the Polish community, but they also apparently had a much more inclusive and democratic character than their American equivalents. This does not mean that they were not competitive or that they would accept virtually anyone. On the contrary, “size was an indicator of lodge status,” and they “exercised moral oversight as part of the effort to nurture an ethical order based on propriety as well as legality” (pp. 47-48). The author discusses different variations of Polish fraternalism, including sororities. He also examines the most popular means to “energize the ethnic generality,” the public rally, which, as in the case of supporting the independence of Poland, helped to harmonize the otherwise competing societies and injected them with a spirit of cooperation (p. 51). The political role of Poles, however, was undercut by the slow degree of naturalization. Interestingly, although Poles often saw American capitalism as exploitive, they still believed it provided them a greater chance to improve their lives. Because of that, Poles also strongly rejected socialism, both Polish and American brands. Thus, “a basic conservatism, mingled with hope and openness to innovation, formed the bedrock of Polonian political attitudes,” helped in part by “a powerful if indirect” political influence on the part of the clergy (p. 64).

Galush discusses Roman Catholic congregations that historians have portrayed as “the foundation of Polonian society.” He finds that it is true that “wherever numbers justified the effort, Poles sought a ‘national’ (ethnically segregated congregation)” (p. 69). However, he observes that in reality congregations consisted of a mixture of lay and clerical members, even though “cleric’s demands for obedience and deference increasingly clashed with lay desires for dignity and recognition” (p. 72). Because the pastor was the crucial figure in the parish, the author not only discusses official parochial organization but also offers a critical analysis of the pastor’s influence, including the nature of his sermons, moral concerns he expressed, and the effort to promote spiritual improvement, as well as examining accusations of authoritarianism. Although Galush observes that “different conceptions of

polity could easily become a basis for conflict,” taking into consideration the centrality of the parish government, the relationship between pastors and parish committees was more likely influenced by personality than legality. One thing remained certain: pastors undoubtedly aimed at “asserting control over parishes young in age and membership,” in the process of which they were helped by the very nature of ecclesiastical communication, since the priest was often “the only well-educated Pole and one whose knowledge of English was superior to most of his congregation, especially in the first years of the congregation” (pp. 81-82).

Another important factor contributing to the shaping of Polishness in America proved to be education. Galush presents it as a Janus-faced enterprise of “inward looking to develop a Polish consciousness while simultaneously outward in its concern to prepare the American-born to compete successfully in the larger society” (p. 89). Although the significance of education was never questioned by immigrants, a conflict arose between parochial versus public schooling as well as duration of education. Indeed, Galush concludes that “evaluations of the ethnic schools usually varied by orientation,” which further explains the divide between lay and clerical members of the community (p. 100). Interestingly, he also observes that peasant enlightenment did not start in the United States, but had occurred much earlier in occupied Poland. Ultimately, immigrants’ acculturation progressed with their ability to speak English, reinforced through various sources of contact, including residence, taverns, and cinema houses, which, in turn, led to “more mingling with the larger society” during the interwar period (p. 112).

Galush also discusses the significance of dissent as well as its consequences, isolation, and segregation in what he calls “wars of religion” and “wars of identity.” Studies of Polish immigration generally divide the pre-war leadership into two factions: the conservative, Roman Catholic, and the nationalistic/progressive and secular. The author reiterates the inadequacy of the “Chicago-centric” approach and argues that outside of Chicago the divide was not so obvious. On the contrary, “in many colonies there was cooperation between priests and lay leaders from the beginning with small regard for federation affiliation,” with the primacy of local loyalties over nationally defined policies best evidenced in the case of Cleveland (p. 132). Moreover, diverse impulses created a special ethnic patriotism, especially evident in the pre-war period, where the objective of Polish independence was never questioned. After Poland regained its independence, this “pragmatic unity” ceased to exist due to lack of an equally unifying common goal (p. 138).

Although “the parish remained the most important expression of community,” which explains the causes of the demise of the lay-run fraternal organizations, young people began to assert “an autonomy which clashed with exhortations to a traditional communalism” (p. 175). Galush then provides a contrast between newly arrived immigrants and their offspring in terms of their attitudes toward education, jobs, sports, the automobile, religion, the speed of Americanization, interfaith unions, residence after marriage, entry into corporations, and a general change of attitudes. The author describes the second generation as “truly between wars and worlds,” a situation whose consequence became the creation of Polish Americans, “who were aware of and seldom hostile to their heritage, but eager to participate in the general culture,” thus contributing to “legitimate organized interaction with the larger society” (p. 193). Perhaps “whitening,” “becoming to be regarded as ‘white’ in a social environment where race strongly conditioned employment prospects,” a notion elaborated on by Matthew Fry Jacobson, can serve as one of the most indicative signs of acculturation and assimilation (pp.199-200).

Ultimately, the second generation “reshaped the culture of the ethnic community,” through the process of renegotiation of its normative dimension (p. 203). It did not happen at national and local levels simultaneously

but rather varied from locale to locale. Crucially, it did not only mean Americanization. Immigrants managed to retain what they considered crucial to their existence as Polish Americans. Although many ethnic leaders worried that Americanization necessarily meant rejection of Polishness, Galush demonstrates that it proved to be a “reformation of the definition of the moral community” (p. 216). Moral community, then, the prevailing theme of this book, denoting the formation of community institutions and definition of Polish American identity, proved to be “a flexible concept for Poles in America” (p. 222).

This book is essential for anyone interested in Polish migration to the United States. The author discusses a key aspect of immigration, identity formation. Moreover, his approach challenges the prevailing historiography of Polonian immigration by focusing on local varieties and juxtaposing them with the “Chicago-centric” approach. Perhaps the interconnectedness of the identity formation process and moral community may not seem as conspicuous to the reader as the author envisaged. Similarly, although the reader would find it beneficial to see how the idea of “moral community” came to being, it might overpower the main theme of the book, which is a complex process in itself, greatly deconstructed in *For More Than Bread*.

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