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Polish Immigrant Women's Encounter with the New World

This article analyzes the situation of Polish women immigrants in the United States in the 19th century who did not restrict their activities to the domestic sphere, fulfilling solely the role of mother and wife. In order to break down stereotypes, the text shows women in America as economically, socially and culturally active members of society who were able to organize themselves into coalitions and fight for shared values. As a result, they formed a joint women's organization in 1898 – the Polish Women's Alliance in America. This association, inter alia, provided insurance to single women, organized courses, and tried to maintain contact with Poland. As a result of these activities, other Polish organizations changed their attitude towards women immigrants.

Polish women in America – first contact with a new reality

Although women have always been a part of migration, for many years interest in women's issues was very limited. In academic reflection, changes in the former perception of women – or, in spite of their constant presence, the imperceptibility of women – started in the 1970s. Thanks to the development of feminist criticism, and the feminist movement itself which developed this theory, a woman began to be seen as an autonomous object of study. Feminism was a consequence of women's emancipation, which was understood as being set free from legal and moral dependence on men. The theory of gender, which was based on differentiation between biological sex and gender, became an essential tool of feminist criticism (Kusiak 121).¹

¹ A consequence of this change in terminology was also the comprehension that the subordinate status of women, their servitude, dependency and powerlessness in the political and social spheres which lasted for centuries, had not been imposed upon them by the laws of nature, but was a social, political and cultural construct that has been historically conditioned and is therefore subject to change (see Bogucka 8). Gender studies recognized that sex is of great importance not only as a way of experiencing and linguistically creating the world, but also in history, which is accompanied by a diversity of social roles. Rudimentary to gender history is J.W. Scott's article "Gender. A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986).

This article analyzes Polish immigrant women in 19th-century American realities not only as people attached to traditional roles of mothers or wives, but rather as economically, socially, and culturally active individuals. It presents Polish women who, when they found themselves in the United States of America, managed to organize and fight together for common goals, and tried to subvert the stereotypical image of inactive and unorganized “masses” of Polish women immigrants.

From a traditional point of view, immigration processes have been dominated by young men. Women have often been left in their country of origin, waiting for the return of their husbands. They learned to farm, manage family affairs and take care of finances. As a result of immigration, the position and authority of women was specifically strengthened (Walaszek, “Polskie imigrantki” 27). Women who emigrated often followed their pioneer husbands, paving the way for family reunification.

In Mieczysław Haiman’s book *Ślady polskie w Ameryce*, one reads:

Antoni Gerard was an engineer from Kalisz and participant of an uprising, from a family partly Polish, partly French. He came to America with his wife in 1832. His wife, a person of higher education and of great decency, a good Pole, the best mother, who was respected universally, gave music lessons and taught languages in New York and became a guardian of Polish exiles (142).

Was Ms. Gerard² the first Polish woman in America? Maybe there were a few Polish women at the same time, or earlier, or a little later – in any case, even if there were, it was a very small number. No one paid much attention to women. Often their names were not even specified, and just information that a woman was somebody’s wife / sister / daughter was provided. The situation changed only when economic emigration started and Polish peasants began to arrive in America. They were well aware of the fact that it would be difficult to manage without the help of women – thus peasants came with their families (Karłowiczowa 19).³ One hundred families were brought from Upper Silesia by Father Leopold Moczygęba in 1854, and from that point onwards more and more women came to America (Kruszka 3). Nowadays we know that in the immigration of that time the participation of women (often traveling alone) was greater than previously thought (Gabaccia).⁴

Did women after crossing the ocean start to understand their position differently? As Krystyna Slany suggests, “Migration could radically change the traditional sense of femininity and social roles traditionally attributed to women, and tear the stiff cultural corset binding them to the world of home and native land” (“Co to znaczy

² Elizabeth Candy Stanton explained to the Women’s Rights Convention of 1856: “A woman has no name! She is Mrs. John or James, Peter or Paul, just as she changes masters; like the Southern slave, she takes the name of her owner” (qtd. in Sanchez-Eppler 19).

³ The concept of family was very often synonymous with a woman and children, while a man functioned as an autonomous entity.

⁴ Women who emigrated as pioneers blazed a new trail, creating their own type of “chain migration” which, through the dissemination of migration networks, facilitated subsequent journeys. Modern scholars dealing with women’s issues are most interested in answering the question of how immigrant women participated in the formation and development of migration networks (Walaszek, “Polskie imigrantki” 27; Praszalowicz, “Polskie studia na temat” 55; Malek 14).

być migrantką?" 9). But migration could also be a process which supports performance of traditional social roles (Małek 41). And so, for Polish immigrant women, was emigration a liberating process or, on the contrary, one that strengthened the old divisions? The answer to this question is not a simple one.

On the one hand, traditional patterns and duties taken from the old country to a large extent determined the behavior of Polish immigrant women in the United States. In peasant families, for example, formal education was not considered to be something girls needed, because the necessary skills, such as sewing and cooking, could be learnt at home, continuing the work of their mothers. If, however, women had to go to school, it was a convent school (where they remained under the strict control of nuns), not a public school. Working as domestic servants was more valued, because it was considered as a kind of training before taking over duties after getting married. The place Polish immigrant women possessed in the American occupational structure reflected an underestimation of women's education in the Polish community (education of boys also was not given very much attention) and excessive concern for their morality⁵ (if one took a job outside the home). Even after getting married, women were suspected of violating the norms of behavior. The traditional female role model was subjected to strict socialization in every period of her life (Znanięcka-Łopata, "Rodziny polonijne" 353).

Immigrant women in America took care of the house, cooked, and raised children – duties traditionally assigned to the private sphere. On the other hand, contact with American reality inclined a woman and even required her to establish contacts in order to seek employment and enrich the family budget. The new realities substantially differed from those to which women were accustomed in Poland. American cities offered unmarried women of Polish descent a whole range of new, previously unknown possibilities, which resulted in them gradually acquiring financial independence.⁶ Polish immigrant women took jobs in various types of services: in laundries as laundresses, in stores as salesclerks, in factories as workers, as well as maids (Anker 30-31). They also worked in restaurants or canteens, which often were family-run businesses where wives helped their husbands.⁷ Women sometimes supported the family budget by renting rooms and preparing and selling meals for "boarders" (Znanięcka-Łopata, "Rodziny polonijne" 357; Pienkos 9). Beyond economic and social aspects, these jobs became an opportunity for women to achieve some kind of independence from their husbands (Walaszek, "Polskie imigrantki" 39). Thus, immigrant women performed traditional activities associated with the home sphere, but when the economic situation demanded it, they undertook work outside.

⁵ W.I. Thomas and F. Znanięcki, scholars from the Chicago School, focused in their monumental work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1976), especially in the third part, on showing the pathological processes of community disorganization among Polish immigrants, such as the "sexual immorality of girls" or criminal behavior of boys. Dorota Prasałowicz writes that in the book, Thomas and Znanięcki "reversed the proportions and put an accent on the negative consequences of the process of migration" ("Polskie studia nad procesami" 73).

⁶ All single women worked (Walaszek, "Polskie imigrantki" 31).

⁷ Agnieszka Małek, citing numerous studies, drew attention to the fact that women taking a job in ethnic businesses often did not receive her salary (43).

Immigrant women in their communities – creating their own space

Work experience gave Polish immigrant women (apart from salaries and social contacts) the opportunity to learn new, previously unknown, sometimes even rebellious behavior (Walaszek, "Polskie imigrantki" 36). An example of such attitudes were strikes in which women often actively participated. In Cleveland, Ohio, in 1885, during a loud strike, women joined men not only to discuss the tactics of combat, but also to picket in front of the factory gate of the Rolling Mills Company (Walaszek, "Polscy robotnicy" 175). When at the beginning of 1912 the salaries of employees of one of the largest loom and spinning centers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, were cut, women – Poles, Italians and Lithuanians – began disruptive strikes, and on January 11th they went to the streets, formed a procession bearing the American flag and shouted, "We want bread and roses" (Walaszek, "Krnąbrni przybysze" 16). Meeting places where information was exchanged were porches, bathhouses, and shops, in which women, more often than men, talked about their wages and working conditions. Houses and flats served mainly as kitchens, where women served strikers soup and other food such as bread, beans and molasses (Walaszek, "Polscy robotnicy" 145). Polish women actively participated in strikes, including a bakers' strike in 1915 in Hartford, Connecticut, during which they took to the streets manifesting their support for the strikers' demands. Eventually the protesters were successful (Anker 31). Polish women have also played an important role in dramatic events that took place in the years 1894-1922 in slaughterhouses and surrounding neighborhoods of Chicago. Janina Horowska and Maria Janik (hereinafter Polish Mother Jones) were among the leaders of a strike which began on December 5th, 1921. An atmosphere of intensifying economic crisis resulted in the breakdown of trade unions⁸ by employers and wage reductions. The strike ended in defeat on February 1st, 1922⁹ (Walaszek, "Polscy emigranci" 77).

During the last week of July, 1935, a group of Polish women living in Hamtramck organized, under the leadership of Mary Żuk, the Action Committee Against the High Cost of Living, which began a boycott directed against an increase of meat prices. The boycott was also joined by women from German, Jewish, and other Slavic groups, and even African-American women (Radzialowski, "Klasowość, etniczność" 58).

Participation in the strikes not only demonstrated the involvement of women, but was also an opportunity to initiate their political activities, which later manifested themselves in the struggle for trade unions. An example of such an attitude

⁸ L. Lamphere expressed the view that the participation and role of women in strikes "were shaped by the nature of trade unions, dominated by men." Adam Walaszek disagreed with this statement; in his review of the book he wrote that much more important than the dominance of men was the prevalence of Irish people in the unions (i.e. in the 1922 strike). However, he admitted that in the above statement there was undoubtedly a "grain of truth" (Walaszek 1991: 155-158).

⁹ Polish immigrant women also played an important role during strikes in the automobile industry in Detroit. During the strikes, women defended factories, formed human barricades and supplied the striking workers with food (Walaszek, "Polskie imigrantki" 40).

was the aforementioned Mary Żuk – the leader of the revolt of Polish women in Detroit. In 1936, Żuk initiated the creation of the Hamtramck People's League, and thanks to its support she was elected to the city council. Mary Żuk heavily engaged in the organization of labor unions, particularly for women (Radzialowski, "Family, Women" 77-78).

The new and active position women achieved in the New World manifested itself in the growing involvement of Polish women in work for their communities, including educational activities. A special role in this field was played by nun-teachers. The Felician Sisters, the largest of the Slavic Catholic religious orders, were involved not only with teaching children of Polish immigrants in parishes, but also published textbooks, and ran schools and colleges (e.g. Felician College in Lodi, New Jersey) (Hilburger 65; Praszalowicz, "Przemiany oświaty" 232). There were also several other Polish religious orders in the United States which conducted educational activities. Suffice to mention the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and their Academy of the Holy Family, which for a long time was the only Polish-American high school for girls, and the Sisters of the Order of Resurrection and their Academy of the Resurrection established for girls (Kumor 336; Kruszką 119, 123; Leś 171).

The range of activity of Polish religious orders in the U.S. was impressive. The nuns not only ran schools, even though the main function of religious congregations in the United States (as opposed to Europe) was education,¹⁰ but also took care of orphanages and homes for elderly people. These activities led to nuns holding an extremely important position in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Large institutions and numerous staff remained under the direct control of nuns. In addition, nuns possessed huge capital, which they used to meet their needs and to achieve the objectives they set for themselves (Galush, "Polish Americans" 86).

Charitable ventures within the ethnic group had long been the domain of men, but women were also entering more boldly into this sphere. Among other things, they engaged in the project of establishing a Polish hospital. The greatest achievements in this field were made by Anna Klarkowska, Boleslaw Klarkowski's wife. Beginning in 1891, he, along with other doctors, supported a campaign for the creation of an ethnic hospital, which was opened three years later. Then in Chicago, in 1905, the St. Elizabeth Charitable Society (*Towarzystwo Dobroczynności pod opieką św. Elżbiety*), with the help of the Felician Sisters, opened a clinic and began distributing money to poor Poles (Karłowiczowa 21).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Polish clergy had begun not only to accept, but also to expect the presence of lay women in their charitable activities. This is evidenced by, inter alia, the hierarchical structure of the Chicago Polish Association of Charity (*Polskie Stowarzyszenie Dobroczynności*), founded by the first Polish-American bishop, Paul Rhode. In this association, women, clergymen and laymen were treated as equal officials (Galush, "Purity and Power" 11; Karłowiczowa 22).

¹⁰ Polish language schools, run by laity, functioned in the Polish community. There were 6 such schools in Chicago in 1908. Propagators of the Polish language included Janina Dunin and Jadwiga Krasowska-Stopowa. Around a thousand students attended these schools annually. In 1932 there were already 16 Polish language schools with three thousand students in Chicago (See Pastusiak 9).

On the eve of World War I, Polish women already had a recognized role in the ethnic community. At the news of the outbreak of war, Polish immigrant women actively engaged in various types of actions to help their homeland. An example of this stance was, inter alia, the charity committee of the opera singer Marcelina Sembrich-Kochańska. During World War I, for the purposes of propaganda, the committee published flyers and postcards that depicted the extent of the war in Poland. In order to obtain money for the Polish rescue fund, Sembrich-Kochańska not only gave concerts, but also tried to reach out to prominent people on the American political scene and gain their support for her homeland (Plygawo 266-268). Another example was the Legion of Young Polish Women, founded on September 2nd, 1939, right after the outbreak of World War II, by a handful of young women (mostly Kosciuszko Foundation Scholarship holders), the president of which was the pianist Adelina Preyss (Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann 41). To characterize women's war activities, William J. Galush has used the term "patriotic feminism." It became part of the overall national movement (Galush, "Purity and Power" 13).

Societies – the beginning of organizational activity

Before immigrant women became active in the Polish community, for some time the only Polish women's associations in America were Rosary Societies (*Towarzystwa Różańcowe*). In addition to reciting prayers, female members of these societies worked for the Polish church, and sometimes in return received modest support in times of disease, death benefits or reimbursement of funeral costs. Their efforts largely led to the establishment of parishes, and subsequently Polish parochial schools. Women's interest in Polish organizational life began precisely with female religious societies.

Most Polish women were devout and not initially interested in membership in national organizations. Other groups of immigrants (Czechs, Slovaks and Irish) overtook Poles in establishing societies, and then larger organizations (*Głos Polek* 19 May 1938: 10). However, in church singing societies and choirs, the socio-political consciousness of women matured and the interest in Polish organizational life began. Some local Polish women listened to the fifth convention of the Polish National Alliance (*Związek Narodowy Polski*) (PNA) in 1885 and even submitted a "patriotic address." The first women's organizations also began to appear, such as the Polish Grosz Society (*Towarzystwo Grosz Polski*) (1884), which was established to support the National Treasury, the Star Victory (*Gwiazda Zwycięstwa*) (1887), the Polish Women's Central Association (*Towarzystwo Centralne Polek*) (1887) and the Polish Women's Patriotic Club (*Klub Patriotycznych Polek*) (1895). All of these organizations were established in Chicago, but the movement also had an impact on other Polish centers including Buffalo, Philadelphia, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York (Brożek 67). The Polish Women's Central Association (*Towarzystwo Centralne Polek*), founded on the south-eastern side of Chicago by the poet Teofila Samolińska, turned out to be the only long-lasting association.¹¹ Samolińska was one of the most active

¹¹ Samolińska was also one of the authors of the letter to Agaton Giller, a former member of the Polish government. It is thanks to the exchange of correspondence with the Polish community activists and his own observations on the emigration that Giller wrote his essay titled

women engaged in the creation of female societies in the U.S. and was considered the leader of Polish women's emancipation in America (Waldo 30).

The final step – women creating their own organizations

Undoubtedly these women's associations filled the gap in organizational life of the Polish-American community. It has to be remembered that the legal and social position of women at that time was very limited. In Western European countries (mainly in England) and the USA, the suffrage movement¹² was founded, fighting for equal rights of women. Polish women also wanted to join this movement. However, American suffragettes at the turn of the century demanded the right to vote mostly for white women, which they considered "better American women" and as such superior to former slaves or immigrants (underlined by the author) (Graff 58-59). Thus, there was no universal woman, and one cannot talk about the universality of women's experiences.¹³ Polish immigrant women therefore came to the conclusion that in order to gain certain privileges, to achieve their objectives, they must be organized and act within their own ethnic group.

The situation of Polish women in exile was exceptionally difficult. They often arrived without knowledge of the language, without any profession, and many of them could not read or write. Their first encounter with America often turned out to be a painful confrontation of myths and misconceptions about the country of immigration. Among the multitude of immigrant women, however, were those who decided to fight for the rights of women and thereby change the surrounding reality. In addition to these efforts, those Polish immigrant women who were already settled in America wanted to help newcomers and protect them from exploitation.¹⁴ Added to this was homesickness heightened by the strangeness of a new environment and distinctness of language and customs. Polish immigrant women began to be aware of the fact that protection against denationalization through the preservation of the language, faith and traditions of Poland can only be effective in an organized group. In the late 1880s, they began to undertake steps to unite Polish women in the United

Letter on the Organization of Poles in America, which gave impetus to the establishment in 1880 of the Polish National Alliance (see Florkowska-Francič 84).

¹² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Coffin Mott, and Martha Coffin Wright organized in 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York, a meeting that was called the first convention of suffragists. This marked the beginning of the suffrage movement. The proceedings ended in the development of the Declaration of Sentiments. The entire text of the declaration can be found in the book *The Woman Movement, Feminism in the United States and England* by W.L. O'Neill (108).

¹³ Only after the movement of black women and black feminists began in the 1980s, the first research theories which included the interaction of ethnicity, class, race, and gender appeared (see Warat 66).

¹⁴ The symbolic PWA emblem was related to these principles, presenting two women shaking hands against a background of the golden sun (a symbol of freedom) over a starry banner (a symbol of a new homeland) and the Polish flag (a symbol of Polish origin). One represents a Polish woman in America, the second a Polish woman connected to her country of origin. The handshaking gesture expresses willingness to help, mutual understanding and the desire to maintain national ties (see *Głos Polek* 2, Jun. 1938: 4).

States in one central organization, in order, inter alia, to awaken their innovation¹⁵ and develop a social life (*Pamiętnik*).

A breakthrough in the Polish women's movement¹⁶ in America came in 1898. In May of that year, the first meeting of the Society of Polish Women's Alliance in America was convened at Stefania Chmielińska's initiative. The aim was to organize Polish immigrant women in a female national organization. At the meeting, the group of women adopted the name Polish Women's Alliance of America (PWA) and decided to publish in the Polish press in the U.S. a statement titled *Odezwa do Polek w Ameryce*¹⁷ (Karłowiczowa 26). The first constitution of the PWA was adopted on February 6th, 1900.¹⁸ The main objectives of the organization were to provide women with insurance, "strengthen the national spirit," and equality of rights (Karłowiczowa 28; *Głos Polek*, 30 Jan, 1913: 1-2; *Głos Polek*, 5 Feb. 1911: 3-6). The first parliament (*sejm*) was held in Chicago two years later (*Głos Polek*, 3 Mar. 1988: 1). In the end, after lengthy discussion and several attempts, Polish women immigrants set up a fraternal organization for social insurance.¹⁹ A woman could not insure herself, only a father or a husband could do so on her behalf. And single women did not have the right of insurance in any organization existing at that time (*Głos Polek*, 2 Nov. 1950: 4).

Members and also addressees of activities of the PWA were mainly immigrant women. Initially, the organization grew in Chicago, and its birthplace was the St. Adalbert Parish. Soon the idea of an independent women's organization spread to other states, and branches of the alliance were formed in many communities (*Głos Polek*, 11 Jun. 1997: 16).²⁰ The association grouped women doctors, women insurance agents, women teachers and women engaged in commercial activities. The areas of activity of the Polish Women's Alliance of America were socio-ideological, within which female members were instructed how to change the pattern of their behavior and become more independent. The alliance also put emphasis on the education of children, keeping order, and taking care of health and personal hygiene (Znaniacka-Łopata, "Rodziny polonijne" 358).

In addition, the Polish Women's Alliance became very active in the socio-economic field, where matters relating to real life problems cumulated. The organization's

¹⁵ Innovation is the most constructive way of adaptation in the host society. The extent to which immigrant women have an innovative attitude is particularly interesting from the perspective of gender studies (Slany, "Trauma codziennego" 328; Praszalowicz, "Polskie studia na temat" 52).

¹⁶ I define the women's movement (following Sławomira Walczewska's concept) as any form of organizing women outside of family structures in order to improve their situation related to gender (24).

¹⁷ "Odezwa do Polek w Ameryce," *Kuryer Polski*, Milwaukee, October 25, 1898, is reprinted in Karłowiczowa (26-27).

¹⁸ This date of enactment of the constitution is provided by Jadwiga Karłowiczowa (1938: 30). Angela and Donald Pienkos write of November 20th, 1899 (2003: 29). Unfortunately, as Karłowiczowa mentions, the first text of the constitution was lost (1938: 30).

¹⁹ For the genesis of Polish-American organizations and how to distinguish insurance systems of mutual assistance, see Wawrykiewicz 100-104.

²⁰ From the beginning of the Polish Women's Alliance, it had its own newspaper, *Głos Polek*. Publishing activity was not only limited to editing their own newspaper and distribution of the organization's program, but also included the publication of books (see *Pamiętnik*).

activities in this area consisted of sharing with women knowledge of effective ways of saving money for future needs, avoiding unnecessary expenditure. The PWA also provided work training, as well as legal advice. It organized courses, which often served not only as a venue for disseminating the ideology of the alliance, but also as an opportunity to expand one's own worldview through an exchange of opinions (*Głos Polek*, 16 Dec. 1912: 8).

The effects of the creation of the Polish Women's Alliance of America

The creation of the Polish Women's Alliance of America was certainly a very visible expression of emancipation and empowerment of Polish women in the United States, as membership offered an opportunity to perform leadership functions. The alliance also put emphasis on better education of children, cultivation of the Polish language and culture, and social networking, but perhaps primarily on developing activities in the social field (Znanińska-Łopata, "Rodziny polonijne" 358).

Another very tangible result of the creation of the Polish Women's Alliance in America was to persuade other mutual aid organizations to give women equal rights. The first parliament of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America (PRCUA) (*Zjednoczenie Polskie Rzymsko-Katolickie*), held in Buffalo, New York in 1899, passed a motion which granted equality of rights to women belonging to the organization. From then on, women could become members on an equal footing with men, and, two years later, four female delegates took part in a session of the PRCUA parliament. As a result of the establishment of the PWA, the extraordinary convention in March 1900 of the largest Polish-American organization – the Polish National Alliance – offered women insured on their husbands' certificates full insured membership status. As of August 1st, 1900, women were not only accepted as members, but also encouraged to create their own societies within the alliance. Later on, the Polish Women's Alliance also inspired the establishment of the Department of Women within the PNA, as well as other local women's organizations, mostly for insurance purposes. The Polish Women's Alliance also encouraged the formation of auxiliary women's branches in different societies (*Głos Polek*, 6 Aug. 1977: 9).

Conclusion

The above text presents only some reflections on the activities of Polish immigrant women in America. The subject matter of women in the Polish community is a very broad issue, far beyond the capabilities of this article.

When the suffragettes were fighting for women's rights to work and obtain social privileges, women courageously and in large numbers went beyond the private sphere, restricted only to domestic life, into wider fields of work and organizational life, i.e. the public sphere.²¹

²¹ The private sphere was considered the domain of women, associated with family, motherhood, parenting and the role of wife, while the public sphere included professional and political activity and was supposed to be an area of men's activity. "Thus locating female

The discovery of these previously unknown aspects of the social and cultural reality of American society was possible largely due to the growing influence of the women's liberation movement, which, as Teresa Hołówka wrote, "inspired the social sciences, and created a veritable avalanche of works devoted to different aspects of 'women's problem'" (5). It has thus become possible to present histories of "ordinary," previously often unnoticed immigrants, not only famous Polish-American women such as Helena Modjeska or Pola Negri.²²

Polonia's women took an active part in setting up Polish parishes, orphanages and mutual assistance organizations. They were involved in charity, scientific and artistic work, as well as in sustaining the culture of everyday life.²³ They gave their life overseas a new meaning, but within the framework of their own cultural values. In terms of identity, women in the U.S. created a new quality rather than holding on to the "cultural baggage" of the past or precisely adopting the identity of the country of settlement (Praszałowicz, "Polskie studia nad procesami" 75). This interweaving of American influence, native and migrant experiences shows the active role of women in maintaining the migration network, in activities towards the ethnic community and also in their involvement in the life of the new society (Warat 71).

This presentation of the role of women in the Polish community strongly contradicts them being viewed as having a passive attitude. Through their activities in ethnic societies, Polish immigrant women found a common living space and created "their own world," making the confrontation of their everyday reality with the myth of America turned out to be easier.

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and male roles in different activities' contexts, private and public, marked the 'proper' ways of being a woman and a man" (Boksańska 143). Helena Znanięcka-Łopata, using American society as an example, wrote about the fact that "[...] the ideology of the two spheres, which the Americans developed, not only separates the private life from public, but also includes the stratification model, in which the public sphere is above the private sphere and thus creates stratification by sex" (Znanięcka-Łopata, "Przenikanie się" 536).

²² Invisible economically, and thereby statistically, women were working illegally, like the so-called "wakacjusze." This term was used to define a group of Poles who were using their temporary stay in the United States to work for a profit, usually illegally (Rokicki 106). In literary terms, this concept was popularized by Zofia Mierzyńska's book *Wakacjuszka*, in which the author broke the taboo of illegal emigration to the United States and presented the story of Anielcia, a forty-year-old woman from a Polish village, who went to Chicago to earn money to buy a tractor. Zofia Mierzyńska's novel deserved to be called a documentary, because the author, with a reporter's sensitivity, presented everyday problems of "illegal immigration." The first part of *Wakacjuszka* was released in 1983 (Mierzyńska). In 1987, Ryszard Kantor published a review of the book in *Przegląd Polonijny* (119-120).

²³ Statistical information on women's participation in the cultural life in exile, and a bibliography on this subject, was presented by B. Klimaszewski (128-135).

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