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'I met several students in Tokyo', wrote Feliks Gross to his mentor Bronisław Malinowski in January 1941. Gross was in Japan hoping for an American visa, having escaped Poland through the Soviet Union. Malinowski was at Yale, on sabbatical from the London School of Economics (LSE). 'Your works are well known here and quoted in lectures', wrote the younger scholar. 'The cousin of the King of Afghanistan is studying education here', Gross went on, affably.[1]

In 1939, Gross had been due to take up a position at LSE at Malinowski's invitation. Then the war began. Fleeing first the Germans and then the Soviets, from Kraków to Lviv to Vilnius, Gross hoped to get to London. However, following the invasion of Poland, LSE rescinded its offer and Gross's application for a British visa was refused. Vilnius, meanwhile, was a tenuous refuge at best, and Malinowski threw himself into finding a place for Gross in the United States. He wrote to Oskar Lange, the economist, in Chicago; the New School; the Rockefeller Foundation; and the Jewish Labor Bund. 'My dear Gross', began Malinowski's letters—his sculpted English, sounding irony-tinged even when sincere, in sharp contrast to Gross's headlong Polish. The news was not good, but he saved the worst for his reports to Feliks's brother Ludwik, whom Malinowski had already helped find a position in the U.S.: four letters to Fisk had gone unanswered; Tulane, already hosting four refugee scholars, had refused. Only two years into the war, compassion-fatigue had set

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1 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, May 25, 1940, London School of Economics (hereafter LSE) MALINOWSKI/36/43.

in across American academia.

Finally, however, on March 26, 1941, Malinowski wrote to T.B. Kittredge of the Rockefeller Foundation with better news. 'Dear Kit, ….Nature has run its course. Gross escaped from Lithuania, moved across Siberia, went to Yokohama, then to San Francisco. Now he is in New York, so to speak, on my hands'. Using an old term meaning 'counterclockwise', Malinowski said of Gross: 'His course has run straight against that of the sun. Widdershins'.[2]

Many who knew Malinowski found him abrasive or arrogant, but Gross remembered him with affection and gratitude. As he later wrote to Józef Obrębski – another of Malinowski's former students – Malinowski had been 'uncommonly friendly [to Gross and his family] and simply good, very good and humane' (here he used the word *ludzki*, literally 'human' - i.e., a *mensch*). 'I won't write what a great blow his death was, even for us,' he added, 'already so accustomed to the death of our near ones'.[3]

In this essay, I explore how two of Malinowski's Polish protegés, Feliks Gross (1906-2006) and Józef Obrębski (1905-1967), sought to rebuild careers in the United States after World War II. Reading the scholars' correspondence of 1946 to 1948, exchanged while Gross was commuting between jobs in New York and Wyoming and Obrębski was conducting fieldwork in Jamaica for the British colonial research council, I analyze the confidence, excitement, and sense of discovery with which the two refugees sought to transplant theories and methods, once cultivated in interwar Poland, into new soil. Indeed, Gross and Obrębski optimistically approached exile in America precisely as a chance to 'go global' with Polish social science.. What is so striking, indeed, in the

2 B. Malinowski to T. Kittredge, Mar. 26, 1941, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/44.

3 F. Gross to T. and J. Obrębski, Oct. 10, 1946, University of Massachusetts Amherst W.E.B. Dubois Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Manuscript Group 401, Joseph and Tamara Obrębski Papers (herafter 'UMA JTO'), Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1946/1947 Box 4, Folder 1.

Gross- brębski correspondence is the scholars' conviction of the portability of method, premised on the recognition and knowability of their new surroundings – their confident belief that Jamaica or the Arapaho reservation could, in fact, be thought *through* Poland. This provided the scholars with an important resource, I argue, for what this issue calls 'reconfiguring the global'. Here, I consider how the scholars drew on their prewar experience in East Central Europe to produce new ways of thinking about nationality, globalization, and decolonization in the postwar world.

Gross and Obrębski, of course, did not succeed in transforming U.S. or global social science, although their ideas prefigured both the constructivist and 'world' turns that would come to the field in later decades. In a sense, then, this is a history of scientific failure; in particular, the brilliant Obrębski 'failed' in the New World to live up to the great expectations of those who knew him. The purpose of this essay, however, is not to explain that failure but to explore the significance of place and displacement in social science history, with a particular emphasis on the 'locality'[4] of East Central Europe and its meaning for social scientists like these between the two World Wars.

Malinowski's own trajectory of displacement lays the groundwork for this exploration. Malinowski belonged to a cohort, intellectuals from the fringes of the multinational Eastern and Central European empires, that went abroad as a matter of course to study and build careers in the metropole. With the collapse of those empires, many brought their cosmopolitan entanglements back home as teachers and founders of disciplines in the new states created at Versailles. As illustrated by Joanna Wawrzyniak in her article on Stefan Czarnowski in this issue, such scholars normally dropped off the international radar, even as their legacies extended over generations in local intellectual cultures, feeding traditions that would only much later re-enter international circulation if at all.[5]

[4] See 'Introduction' in this issue, [page].

5 Joanna Wawrzyniak, 'From Durkheim to Czarnowski: Sociological Universalism and Polish Politics', this issue, [pages].

By contrast, those scholars like Malinowski or Mannheim who remained in the metropole would disappear in a different way: they would henceforth be described as 'British' or 'German' thinkers, their origins in the poor and politically volatile reaches of central and Eastern Europe ever-so-politely downplayed.[6] Malinowski's response to such questions of identity was publicly ironic and performative; as his daughter recalled, he donned a British or Polish guise 'instrumentally and in the spirit of self-mockery'.[7] Malinowski's drag of the pipe-smoking, tweed-wearing English gentleman was interspersed with self-exoticisation: in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, for instance, he hypothesized to his English-speaking readers that he was intrinsically gifted in participant observation, as 'perhaps the Slavonic nature is more plastic and more naturally savage than that of Western Europeans'.[8]

In private, Malinowski took a more sociological approach to the question of origins and intellectual formation. As his biographer Michael Young has shown, the anthropologist described his childhood as a 'double life, at least', suspended between two worlds. One was his familial milieu of declassé nobility in Kraków; the other, the village where he spent his summers in the Beskid Mountains. At home in the ancient, gracious city, his family used French at home, imagining itself into the far-flung community of civilized Europe. In the mountains, he ran barefoot with the peasant children, speaking their dialect, 'looking after sheep & cows, running away for days, learn[ing] fairy tales'. One of those fairy tales was of 'paved roads and carriages': to his

6 E.g., https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bronislaw-Malinowski and https://www.britannica.com/biography/Karl-Mannheim (last visited 23 Mar. 2018); Roy Ellen, 'Preface', in Roy Ellen, ed., *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), xx.

7 Helena Wayne (Malinowska), 'Forward', in *Malinowski Between Two Worlds*, xiii.

8 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Routledge, 2014 [1922]), 21.

friends in the isolated village, everyday life in Kraków could be imagined only as myth. This, he wrote, was his first 'experience of duality, of the multiplicity of the world of culture' upon which ethnological exploration rests.[9]

The strangeness of the familiar, and the familiarity of the strange: this was the lesson, according to Malinowski, he had learned from Poland's uneven developmental landscape. One could travel to another world without leaving home. Between the wars, at Malinowski's urging, both Obrębski and Gross turned their ethnographic gaze on the near abroad, on the 'other' who was a 'brother': Obrębski, on Macedonian villagers, then Slavic minorities in the Polish border region of Polesie; Gross, on orthodox Jews in Kraków's Kazimierz neighbourhood and in Vilnius. As Grażyna Kubica has suggested, Malinowski, ever alert to the epistemological value of an insider/outsider position, should perhaps be considered one of the earliest proponents of 'anthropology at home'.[10] By looking at how two of Malinowski's students took 'home', in this sense, with them into exile, I hope to complicate familiar narratives of intellectual exile that privilege alienation as a source of intellectual innovation, suggesting a more complex and nuanced dynamic of physical, cultural, and epistemological dis- and re-placement.[11]

Not why, but how

Malinowski once quipped that Feliks Gross came from a family of such high repute as 'to

9 Michael Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 14-15.

10 Grażyna Kubica, '"The Survey of the Ghetto" in the Time of Anti-Semitism: Feliks Gross and His Unfinished Fieldwork on the Jewish Quarters of Krakow and Vilna, 1938-1940', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2014, 333.

11 For a critique, see David Kettler, *The Liquidation of Exile: Studies in the Intellectual Emigration of the 1930s* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 1-2.

have been regarded always, even by anti-Semitic Poles, with respect and sympathy'. For the 'true Krakauer' Gross, this 'paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion' would indelibly mark his life in Poland.[12]

Gross completed his doctorate in law in 1930 at the Jagiellonian University under the noted legal historian Stanisław Estreicher, writing on criminal law in 'primitive' societies. While working on his dissertation, he spent six months in Geneva and Paris at the International Labor Organisation and Institute for International Problems, respectively, before conducting further research in Germany, on the basis of which he completed a habilitation on nomadism with Estreicher, published in 1936.[13] At Estreicher's suggestion, Gross contacted Malinowski, who agreed to contribute an introduction to the book. Malinowski also invited the younger scholar to London, where he visited the LSE anthropologist's famous seminar.[14] According to Kubica, Gross's meeting with Malinowski 'changed his entire life'. Gross resonated strongly to Malinowski's Krakovian sensibility and sense of humour; even the older scholar's 'intelligent' nastiness, Gross felt, made him, too, a 'true Krakauer'.[15] Their close bond would endure until Malinowski's death in New Haven, at which time he and Gross were working on a study of nationalism.[16]

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12 B. Malinowski to L. Seelye, 1940 or 1941, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/78. Grażyna Kubica beautifully situates Gross in his Kraków milieu in '"A Real Krakauer": Feliks Gross and His Cracovian Roots', *The Polish Review* 52:2 (2007): 147-70. The quoted phrase is, of course, Larry Wolff's in *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 7.

13 Kubica, '"A Real Krakauer"', 157-60.

14 Feliks Gross, *Koczownictwo. Studja nad nomadyzmem i nad wpływem tegoż nad społeczeństwo, ustrój i prawo* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Kasy im. Mianowskiego, 1936).

15 Kubica, '"A Real Krakauer"', 160.

16 Gross, 'Malinowski', 565; Bronisław Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*

Malinowski's support was especially meaningful for Gross in light of two strokes against him in the 1930s: his Jewishness and left-wing politics. Gross had become active as a student with both the Academic Union of Pacificsts and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), extending his activism to pro-bono legal defense of destitute and political clients in the late 1930s.[17] He simultaneously worked with the PPS's adult-education wing, or 'Workers' University',[18] coordinating a sociological seminar in which participants carried out research in their own workplaces and communities.19 (It seems likely that Malinowski's 1930 application to the Rockefeller Foundation for Gross to conduct ethnographic fieldwork at the Syria-Palestine border was turned down because of these political activities.)[20] By the late 1930s, furthermore, antisemitic quotas in Poland had dashed Gross's hopes of a university appointment.[21] Speaking of this in a letter to Malinowski, Gross noted that 'the reckoning of us as foreign is already our own personal drama'. While predicting that 'this wave, too, will pass', Gross nonetheless saw emigration, at least in the short term, as the best way 'to preserve both one's dignity and enthusiasm for scientific work, … and stay faithful to one's beliefs and to science.'[22]

Malinowski tried to help Gross through another (unsuccessful) application to the Rockefeller

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

17 Kubica, '"A Real Krakauer"', 155-8.

18 *Ibid.*, 161-2; Feliks Gross, *Metoda i organizacja oświaty robotniczej (plan pracy oświatowej T.U.R.-a)*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Nakładem Towarzystwa Uniwersytetu Robotniczego w Krakowie, 1935), 14.

19 Feliks Gross, 'Nowe doświadczenia oświaty robotniczej', *Światło* 3 (1937), re-published at http://lewicowo.pl/varia/viewpub/tid/2/pid/223.

20 Kubica, '"A Real Krakauer"', 161.

21 *Ibid.*, 160-64.

22 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Dec. 6, 1938, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/44.

Foundation and to his employers at LSE. The outcome was Gross's appointment to lecture on urban cultures of Eastern Europe; to secure it, Malinowski had to guarantee the university that he would see to Gross's departure from Britain in the event of war or worsening antisemitism in Poland. The news, however, lifted Gross's spirits tremendously, as he wrote to Malinowski, all the more so as he had learned that a position promised him at the Free Polish University had gone to 'Obremski' (although 'he completely deserves it and will be a very good scholar').[23]

As Gross's misspelling suggests, the paths that would ultimately bring him and Obrębski together in the New World had met only tangentially before then. Unlike Malinowski and Gross, with their roots in the cosmopolitan Habsburg city of Kraków, Obrębski grew up in what is now rural Ukraine and Belarussia, in an area under Russian rule. Like Malinowski, however, Obrębski had experienced the duality of a childhood split between the Polish *dwór*, or manor-house, and the Slavic village, and he spoke fluent Belarussian, Ukrainian, and Russian. Upon Polish independence, Obrębski would experience yet another duality: that of being an ethnic Pole who felt 'at home' among Eastern Slavs, minorities subject to the young nation-state's drive to Polonize the borderlands.[24]

Obrębski completed his MA in Slavic ethnology at the Jagiellonian University with Kazimierz Moszyński in 1930. His thesis on farming implements in the Balkans, based on his fieldwork in 1928/30 in Bessarabia, Dobrudja, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, reflected Moszyński's 'critical evolutionism', which by studying variations in material culture attempted to reconstruct the geographic spread of cultural forms over time.[25] Obrębski later expressed frustration with this

23 B. Malinowski to F. Gross, May 28, 1939; A.M. Carr-Saunders to F. Gross, Jun. 5, 1939; F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Jun. 14, 1939, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/44.

24 Anna Engelking, 'Polesie Józefa Obrębskiego', in Józef Obrębski, *Polesie*, Anna Engelking, ed. (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2007), 11.

25 Jadwiga Klimaszewska, ed., *Kazimierz Moszyński. Życie i twórczość* (Wrocław: Zakład

approach, commenting that 'our entire university training...detached us from direct issues of social and cultural life'. The search for signs of long-ago cultural contacts and concurrent lack of interest in present-day realities meant, Obrębski wrote, that 'going to the Krakovian village, we did not see the Krakovian village, but we saw here Tibet, here China, there Northern Africa'. In 1930, he broke with Moszyński, applying for Rockefeller funding to conduct Ph.D. studies with Malinowski at LSE, 'mainly in a sociological direction,' as he wrote to Malinowski, 'and based on your methods, known to me from your work, from which I have benefited a great deal'.[26]

Indeed, Malinowski's functionalism, oriented toward the present and a holistic understanding of culture, had developed in many ways in reaction against evolutionist and diffusionist approaches like Moszyński's. It sought to understand, in Malinowski's words, how 'beliefs, ideals, and practices are welded into bigger systems', approaching culture as 'a vast apparatus by which man is put in a position the better to cope with the concrete, specific problems which face him in his adaptation to his environment in the course of the satisfaction of his needs'.27 While Malinowskian functionalism was subsequently much criticized, the anthropologist Elizabeth Colson stressed its heuristic aspects: 'We were trained to look for interconnections across fields of action in a systematic fashion and to ask, "If this changed, what else would happen?".... While functionalism never was very much a theory, it provided a good working method' that in another time might have been called 'developing working models, or writing thick description, or adopting a holistic approach'.28 Gross would recall that in seminar, Malinowski asked participants to discuss

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Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1976).

26 Engelking, 'Polesie', 11-12.

27 Malinowski, 'Introductory Essay: The Anthropology of Changing African Cultures' in International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa*, Memorandum XV (Oxford: 1938), 42.

28 Quoted in Thomas Weaver, 'Malinowski as Applied Anthropologist', in Weaver, ed., *The*

not 'why', but 'how'.29 Equally important, and not coincidental, to the learning experience was the seminar's eclectic mix of 'Jews, white [and black] colonials, continental Europeans, women, and reputed leftists'.30

After Gross's return to Poland, he attempted to apply Malinowskian functionalism close to home. Following the rejection by Rockefeller, Malinowski had suggested that Gross conduct fieldwork in the Kraków 'ghetto', the historically Jewish district of Kazimierz. In a letter to his mentor, Gross described how he was 'trying to approach the Jewish quarter as a whole made up of interdependent and functioning elements irrespective of their origin'. Like Obrębski critiquing Moszyński, he dismissed the historical method of someone like the American anthropologist Melville Herskovits, aimed at discovering the roots of different cultural elements; this 'would not show the ghetto of today'. For Gross, rather, 'this whole medieval system, this enclave, functions as in a motor with elements of contemporary culture, which express themselves through it'.31

Nonetheless, the secular, cosmopolitan Gross had some doubts. Kazimierz was, to be sure, an intriguing new world: he described with excitement one of his new acquaintances, a *sofer* (Torah scribe), and his discovery of 'whole schools...followers of particular rabbis/wise men, who visit "*stiblakh*" (something between a synagogue and a club or society) and hold fierce discussions'.32

Dynamics of Applied Anthropology in the Twentieth Century: The Malinowski Award Papers (Society for Applied Anthropology, n.d.), 18.

29 Kubica, '"A Real Krakauer"', 160.

30 Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, 'Custom, Modernity, and the Search for *Kihooto*: Kenyatta, Malinowski, and the Making of *Facing Mount Kenya*', in Helen Tilley, ed., *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 183.

31 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Jun. 14, 1939, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/44.

32 *Ibid*.; Kubica, '"The Survey of the Ghetto"', 318-40.

Although he had acquired some Yiddish, however, he felt that his previous distance from traditional Jewish life was a handicap. 'I never had doubts, or very few, about writing about the proletariat. I studied the environment for many years, saw many incidents and events, knew all the literature on the subject. It's different with the ghetto', he wrote, noting that gaining a reasonable familiarity with talmudic literature, for instance, would take years. 'On the other hand, the fact that I come to it as an outsider, but also a Jew, allows me to make some rather interesting observations'.33

At Malinowski's urging, meanwhile, Obrębski would also not go to Tibet or China to ferret out unusual cultures and practices, but to Macedonia, completing a dissertation on 'Family Organisation among Slavs as Reflected in the Custom of Couvade' (1933).[34] The dissertation shows very clearly how functionalism, in addition to everything else, offered Malinowski's eclectic mix of students a weapon against assumptions of white Western European civilizational and racial superiority. Through what could be called a thick description of Macedonian family structure and gender ideology, Obrębski offered a functionalist reading of couvade, a custom in which a husband symbolically enacts aspects of childbirth while his wife is in labour. Obrębski located couvade within what he called the 'paradoxes of the patriarchal regime': male attitudes toward women in Balkan culture often led to marital conflict, while couvade served as a counterweight, 'appealing to marital solidarity and contributing to the cohesion of the parental group'. Couvade thus understood was consistent with a universalist view of culture, whose wellsprings, whether 'in a nomadic tribe in a virgin forest or in a civilised community of sky-scrapers and broadcasting' consisted in human beings' drive to survive and propagate.[35]

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33 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, May 25, 1940, LSE MALINOWSKI/36/43.

[34] Obrębski, 'Family Organisation Among Slavs as Reflected in the Custom of Couvade', Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1933.

[35] Obrębski, 'Family Organisation', 43, 'Abstract' [n.p.], 6

Whether or not it had been Obrębski's conscious purpose, the topic of couvade was well chosen to maximize a putative contrast between 'civilized' West and 'savage' East. Obrębski acknowledged the discomfort that the idea of this gender-transgressing performance might provoke among his readers, apparently defying 'all that in our European opinion passes for decent, reasonable and serious'. The idea that such a 'sensational..., ...drastic, absurd, and even ludicrous' practice could have any positive, creative purpose, he admitted, might be difficult for the 'convinced representative of the Western European civilisation'. Turning the tables, however, he stated that it was no problem for him: 'I am, after all, a Slav myself, born and brought up in the most archaic and primitive parts of Eastern Europe' (cared for, in fact, by a Belarussian nurse whose culture practiced couvade).[36]

Unlike Malinowski in *Argonauts*, though, Obrębski referred to his own semi-savagery to make a larger epistemological point. The problem with existing anthropological theories of couvade, he argued, and with many other 'far-fetched' theories about exotic cultural practices, was that they assumed a 'savage mentality,...entirely different from ours'. As a Slav himself, with knowledge derived not just from anthropological observation but 'intimate bonds of friendship' in the regions studied, he could not share this assumption.[37] In short, only when 'unhampered by the inherent belief of the Western European in the superiority of his rational outlook and civilised habits' could anthropologists hope to find explanations for 'absurd' customs that were not, themselves, absurd.

Natives' views, opinions, and utterances

If the study of couvade had allowed Obrębski to bring the world to Eastern Europe, turning the gaze of global anthropology on one small region of the Balkans, his work on Polesie in a sense

36Obrębski, 'Family Organisation', 1-5.

[37] Ibid., 5.

brought Eastern Europe to the world, turning Poles' attention to the dynamics of colonial domination on their own doorstep. Polesie, a marshy territory straddling Poland's borders with the Belarussian and Ukrainian SSRs, was considered the most 'backward' region of the Polish Second Republic. Obrębski's growing reputation in interwar Poland upon his return from London in 1934 was based largely on his work in this region. As Gross somewhat mildly put it, Obrębski's 'findings [in Polesie] were in a certain sense revealing. The Poleshuks at that time did not show ethnic identification of the kind which was expected both by the administrators and scholars'.[38]

Obrębski referred to himself an 'ethnosociologist',[39] and beyond simply signalling his departure from diffusionist or evolutionist models, the moniker accurately described the institutional and methodological range of his work in this period. Such disciplinary convergence was facilitated by the fact that both Malinowskian functionalism and interwar Polish sociology privileged the dimension of subjective meaning. While Malinowski stressed the importance of collecting and confronting 'natives' views and opinions and utterances', the sociologist Florian Znaniecki cultivated the study of autobiographies, collected through prize-competitions, to gain access to the interplay of subjective and objective forces—the process through which, he had argued with W.I. Thomas in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, social reality was constructed.[40] This so-called Polish (or autobiographical) method of memoir-based research was

38 Feliks Gross, 'In Memoriam: Joseph Obrębski. February 18, 1905-December 28, 1967', *Polish Review* 13 (1968), 98. Obrębski's writings on Polesie have been brought together by Anna Engelking in Obrębski, *Polesie*. See also Engelking, 'Poleska ekspedycja etnosocjologiczna Józefa Obrębskiego w latach 1934-1937. Organizacja. Metody badań. Problematyka. Uczestnicy', *Etnografia Polska* 45:1-2 (2001), 23-45.

39 Anna Engelking, 'Józef Obrębski. Etnolog i socjolog warszawski', *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 29 (2006), 91-92; Ewa Nowicka, 'Obrębskiego współnoty wyobrażone', in *ibid*., 110-11.

40 Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 21; 'Methodological Note' in William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki,

taken up by a number of other prominent Polish researchers and research centres in the 1930s. As assistant director of the Institute for Rural Culture from 1936-9, Obrębski helped organize the most extensive competition of the interwar period, directed at rural youth.[41] Gross, too, conducted a memoir competition through TUR's sociological seminar, resulting in the compilation *Workers Write*.42

Obrębski's interest in autobiographical method had its corollary in his developing theories of nation and ethnicity. Obrębski lambasted Polish scholars and officials who treated the Uniate Catholic population of the marshes as ethnically Polish but 'pre-national', based on studies of so-called 'objective' criteria of nationality such as dress or language.[43] By contrast, Obrębski focused on the emerging 'subjective' national identification of peasants in Polesie, understanding the nation as an 'imagined...creation':

The community that exists among its members is based on the fact that a

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The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1958). See also Katherine Lebow, 'The Conscience of the Skin: Interwar Polish Autobiography and Social Rights', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, 3 (2012), 297-319.

41 UMA JTO, Box 1, Folder 1. The competition of the Institute for Rural Culture was directed by Józef Chałasiński, who analysed the results in *Młode pokolenie chłopów* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1984 [1938]).

42 Zygmunt Mysłakowski and Feliks Gross, eds., *Robotnicy piszą. Pamiętniki robotników* (Kraków: Księgarnia Powszechna, 1938).

43 Wojciech Śleszyński, ed., *Polesie w polityce rządów II Rzeczypospolitej* (Białystok-Kraków: Instytut Historii Uniwersystetu w Białymstoku - AVALON, 2009), 7-19; cf. Kathryn Ciancia, 'Poland's Wild East: Imagined Landscapes and Everyday Life in the Volhynian Borderlands, 1918-1939' (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).

> series of cultural values are recognized as common group values.... The deciding factor in membership to a nation is not this or another quality or characteristic of a person, but his feeling of connection to the whole group and expressions of solidarity with it through collective actions.[44]

Although such a constructivist approach had already been developed in the work of contemporary Polish sociologists like Znaniecki, Obrębski's innovation was to apply it to a well-researched case study of a 'nationally indifferent' group.45 Obrębski's findings were damning: with the 'Pole' already deeply embedded in Polesian folk-culture as a figure of conquest and exploitation, he showed, local peasants' alienation had only increased since independence; adversarial encounters with Polish police officers, tax collectors, settlers, and teachers meant that a Polesian 'national world-view', rather than a Polish one, was the likely outcome of Polish state-building in the eastern borderlands.[46]

Reminding readers that the history of Polesie was one of conquest and enserfment, Obrębski criticized widespread nostalgia for an idealized golden age of Polish aristocratic life in the so-called '*Kresy*', or eastern borderlands. (Referring to the archetypal Polish *dwór* – the sort of manor house his own ancestors would have possessed – he drily noted that, 'although not every manor resembled Versailles, each had something in common with the Bastille').47 Obrębski saw the power-ridden

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44 Obrębski, 'Lud bez ojczyzny', in *Polesie*, 186-7; Ewa Nowicka, 'Obrębskiego współnoty wyobrażone', *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 29 (2006): 109-21.

45 E.g., Florian Znaniecki, *Miasto w świadomości jego obywateli* (Poznań: 1931) and *idem*, *The Sociology of the Struggle for Pomerania* (Toruń: Baltic Institute, 1934); Tara Zahra, 'Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis' *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010), 93-119.

46 Obrębski, 'Dzisiejsi ludzie Polesia', in *Polesie*, 304.

47 Obrębski, 'Polesie archaiczna', in *Polesie*, 43-4; see also Grażyna Borkowska, 'A Post-Colonial Perspective on Polish Soil: Some Questions of a Skeptic', *teksty drugie* 1 (2014), 51-3 and

dynamics of contact and conflict in Polesie, in this respect, as similar to that in other global societies including 'Eurasian Soviet villages, the tribes of Congo and the societies of Morocco, Indochina and Siam'.[48]

Obrębski's writings on Polesie echo some of Malinowski's writings from the late 1930s on what the older anthropologist called 'transculturation', that is, cultural change resulting from contact between Europeans and colonized peoples. Malinowski increasingly felt this process could only be understood with the context of the colonial violence, racial domination, and economic exploitation that shaped it.[49] Obrębski, however, would go further than his teacher in postulating the impact of transculturation not just on colonized peripheries, but on the centre itself. In particular, he would theorize the positive cultural creativity of marginal and subaltern groups as a kind of engine for democratic change, an idea that would become central to his work in Jamaica and to his 'sociology of rising nations'.

Our Jamaican jungle

Gross planned to leave for England in November 1939. On the fourth day of the war, he and his wife, Priwa, fled Kraków for Lwów with a rucksack of belongings, and then (following a tip-off about Gross's impending arrest by the NKVD) Vilnius. In a letter to Malinowski, Gross described the collapse of Polish authority during the September campaign: ordinary soldiers' suicidal attacks on tanks, officers who fled abroad in requisitioned cars, streams of refugees, burnt villages, wells drunk dry. In the course of their flight he came across '"sociological time capsules"', Jewish

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Borkowska, 'Daleko od mitu. Kresy według Obrębskiego', *Prace filologiczne* LV (2008), 123-30.

48 Obrębski, 'Dzisiejsa wieś polska', in *Polesie*, 33-4.

49 Malinowski, 'Introductory Essay', x, xx-xxi. See also Weaver, 'Malinowski as Applied Anthropologist', 21-3.

shtetlakh 'where progress has halted since the 16th century.... But there was no time for study because I was part of a great terror which chased us from place to place'. Apart from the horrors witnessed en route, 'there were many sad news items'. Gross named a number of prominent academics who had been killed by the Germans, including his mentor Estreicher. At the end of one letter, Gross reported that the writer Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz) had slit his wrists when the invasion began, apparently not knowing that Witkacy was Malinowski's closest childhood friend. Gross also mentioned, misspelling his name again, that he had 'seen Obremski' while fleeing Poland. [50]

After LSE withdrew his invitation and his British visa was denied, Gross wrote to Malinowski that he had 'channeled all his energies into studying the Jewish quarter in Vilnius'. He was spending much of his time at the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO), which was providing a small but welcome salary in exchange for some work with students. In Vilnius, Gross admitted, he was coming to grips with the existence of traditions that seemed to have no functional purpose - traditions *qua* traditions. He admitted not knowing, for the time being, how to make sense of this.51 However, the time for solving this conundrum was running out. Slightly more than a year later, Gross was in New York and the Jewish community of Vilnius was slated for annihilation.

Obrębski was reticent about his wartime experiences and we know little about them. The younger sociologist Stefan Nowakowski remembered the Obrębski villa in Warsaw's Mokotów neighbourhood as an 'open' house during the war, where anyone needing a bed and a meal was welcome, and a transit point for conspiratorial publications. The house was destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising.[52] A copy of Tamara Obrębska's c.v., written a few years later, is suggestive.

50 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Dec. 23, 1939; F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Feb. 20, 1940; LSE MALINOWSKI/36/43.

51 F. Gross to B. Malinowski, Feb. 20, 1940; LSE MALINOWSKI/36/43.

52 According to the sociologist Aleksander Hertz, the Obrębscy helped save the lives of several

Tamara had studied with Malinowski, Harold Laski, and Jean Piaget in the mid-1930s and worked as a researcher and lecturer in economics in Warsaw. After listing her academic achievements and work experience, under 'Other Experiences', she included 'the short periods I spent in Russian and German prisons, my experience as a destitute person and passive and active participation in a few minor battles'. These, she added, had 'contributed greatly to deepen[ing] my understanding in the fields of sociology and social psychology'.[53]

Obrębski spent the first year after the war in Łódź. In 1946, he was offered a professorship at the University of Warsaw; before accepting the post, however, he travelled to Oxford on the invitation of E. E. Evans-Pritchard to present a series of lectures on 'The Changing Peasantry of Eastern Europe'. These synthesized several of Obrębski's main research interests heretofore. As in his work on Polesie, he took up the transformation of rural culture under the impact of modernization. This he theorized as transition away from a (pre-modern) system based on 'structural dichotomy of the national society, divided into an upper class living in the national civilization system, and the peasant mass, atomized into its village communities'. Since the end of feudalism, however, the peasant, as a paid laborer, migrant, or most recently, (notional) citizen, 'was part of the national scene; but he was not admitted as a full participant in the values, activities and institutions of the nation'. Peasants occupied the physical space of the nation, but not its social space.[54]

One of Obrębski's key examples was cultural conflict around education in rural

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Jewish colleagues. Elizabeth Nottingham, [Obrębski obituary], UMA JTO Biographical Material, Box 1, Folder 2. Stefan Nowakowski, *Sylwetki polskich socjologów* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 1992), 248-52.

53 UMA JTO Biographical Materials, Box 1, Folder 8.

54 Obrębski, *The Changing Peasantry of Eastern Europe*, ed. Barbara and Joel Halpern (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976), 48-49.

communities. Obrębski traced the 'slow, cumbersome and roundabout way' that education was not only embraced by peasants in the 1930s, but creatively mobilized as a tool for transforming national culture. Many peasant families, he wrote, had resisted sending their children to school, failing to see the value of an education that had no obvious connection to rural life. In the end, however, the ideal of education penetrated village society not at its strongest point (the family), but its weakest—among children themselves, or specifically the shepherd 'play-group'. Out of these unregulated, rather gang-like groups of shepherds, too, arose extremely active and effective peasant youth organizations, which spearheaded the creation of village libraries, agricultural improvement courses, and so on. Finally, youth groups served as the foundation for networks of so-called 'peasant universities', experimental, egalitarian high schools for rural youth aimed at meeting the needs and reflecting the values of rural society. 'National civilization', then, had 'penetrated the peasant community through its most exposed periphery'.[55]

Instead of taking up his professorship in Warsaw following his stay in Oxford, Obrębski joined the West Indian Social Survey (WISS), headed by former Malinowski student Edith Clarke and funded by the British Colonial Social Science Research Council, for the study of family structure in rural Jamaica. On May 3, 1947, Obrębski wrote to Florian Znaniecki in Illinois that he had no desire to return to Poland. 'I have no illusions about the prospects for the development of Polish sociology in the current situation'. He was also, however, uninterested in pursuing a possible career in England. 'I confess that only after my last sojourn in London did I fully understand how much we all in Poland owe [you for developing the field].... I don't feel up to reforming English sociology on my own [earlier in the letter, he had mentioned that British sociology was affected by "a flood of statistics" and "reportomania"], and I don't desire to share the fate of that tragic nation. Truly, their leading elites are merely "well brought up people" in the most unfortunate sense of the term.... Even Mannheim was lost on them'. Meanwhile, however, working with Tamara in Jamaica,

55 Obrębski, *The Changing Peasantry*, 65-77.

'the biographical and ecological method that we are applying is producing splendid results'.[56]

In an undated letter to friends in the U.S., Obrębski reiterated the exhilarating sense of discovery that he and Tamara felt in Jamaica and the conviction that they had brought over a priceless theoretical and methodological toolkit. Describing life in their 'Jamaican jungle' (although not much of the jungle was actually left in the literal sense, he noted, the human and 'civilizational' one was extraordinary), Obrębski explained, 'we have the ability here to study the capitalist system in its most dismal form: in a society shaped by purely economic manipulations', one whose ideology, values, and social structures have been stamped by slavery and its 'inextinguishable traditions'. In the course of these studies, he added, 'the methods that were developed and refined in Poland haven't let us down'. Sometimes, he joked, he and Tamara thought their discoveries might rival those of Columbus (but with 'less tragic' consequences). Adding that the war seemed to have turned them into ascetics who cared only for their work, he noted, 'my interests do not go beyond the confines of "backward" societies on the verge of transformation into national societies'.[57]

The best-known output of the WISS, and one with a long-lived impact on West Indian anthropology, was Clarke's book, *My Mother Who Fathered Me* (1957).[58] While widely criticised for its lack of theoretical and methodological rigor, the book nonetheless received mostly glowing

56 J. Obrębski to F. Znaniecki, May 3, 1947, UMA JTO Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1946/1947 Box 4, Folder 1.

57 J. Obrębski to 'Kochani Państwo', n.d., UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1948/1949, Box 4, Folder 2.

58 Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Families in Three Selected Communities of Jamaica* (Barbados: The University Press of the West Indies, 1999); M.L. Black, 'My Mother Never Fathered Me: Rethinking Kinship and the Governing of Families', *Social and Economic Studies* 44, 1 (1995), 49-71.

reviews.[59] Praise focused on its illumination of the supposed terra incognita of West Indian family life, particularly, supposedly high levels of sexual promiscuity and illegitimacy, a decades-long obsession of British colonial officials and reformers.[60] Through three community studies, *My Mother Who Fathered Me* attempted to discover how the 'contemporary situation…made it impossible for [Jamaican lower-class] men to perform the roles of father and husband, as these roles are defined in the society to which they belong'.[61] Based in strongly normative assumptions about sexuality, gender roles, and family structures, the book seemed to offer 'scientific' backing for stereotypes of feckless, absent West Indian fathers and 'masculinised' female heads-of-household,[62] contributing to what one observer called 'an emergent transnational disourse of family dysfunction in the African diaspora'.63

Clarke and Obrębski were notoriously at loggerheads throughout the survey. While British sources unflatteringly depicted Obrębski as having poor English and mostly 'sitting in the window of his room reading newspapers', there was clearly a difference in attitudes and styles of work. The Obrębscy may have transgressed 'subtle racial etiquette', for example, by allowing eight-year-old

59 Cf. reviews by Mary Proudfoot in *International Affairs* 34, 2 (1 Apr. 1958), 226 and R.T. Smith in *American Sociological Review* 23, 4 (Aug. 1958), 474-5.

60 Clarke herself campaigned against 'irresponsible' unwed fathers. 'Soroptimist Club of Jamaica Letter', in Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, Appendix 3.4, 210; M.G. Smith, 'Introduction', in *ibid*., xxiii; Vivian Durham, 'Edith Clarke: A Model Worth Emulating', in *ibid.*, 226.

61 Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 5.

62 Black, 'My Mother Never Fathered Me', 50.

63 Barbara Bush, 'Colonial Research and the Social Sciences at the End of Empire: The West Indian Social Survey, 1944-57', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, 3 (2013), 466.

Stefan to play with local children.[64] This, of course, is exactly what Obrębski – and Malinowski before him – had done as a child: play barefoot with local peasants. A more obvious source of conflict is the fact that Obrębski's conclusions were fundamentally at odds with Clarke's.[65]

Obrębski, first of all, rejected the very premise of widespread illegitimacy in Jamaica. In a 1956 conference paper, Obrębski described two competing and concurrent familial patterns among Jamaican peasants: one paternal (or 'parental'), headed by a father; the other maternal, headed by an unwed mother. This distinction, he argued, rather legal wedlock, was what counted in village society according to 'thatch-roof' (rather than colonial 'tin-roof') law. Indeed, in a given 'paternal' family unit, the co-habiting parents could be either married or unmarried; in either case, however, the arrangement was patrilineal and patriarchal. Furthermore, even in maternally-headed families, many offspring (the so-called 'outside children') were not 'illegitimate in the social sense': these were children whose paternity was recognised by the community, who carried their father's name, and who were entitled by social convention to his financial support.[66]

Marriage, in short, had no functional role as a regulator of sexuality and procreation in the Jamaican village. Like Clarke, Obrębski saw the institution of marriage as a reflection of class and wealth, but also of race and gender. For instance, concubinage, the least desirable familial arrangement from a woman's point of view, was most common between wealthier, lighter-skinned men and poorer, darker-skinned women. While showing, then, that the family practices described were far from 'disorganised', Obrębski nonetheless posited 'striking structural paradoxes

64 Bush, 'Colonial Research', 460-1; Stefan Obrębski, 'In Memory of My Father', *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 29 (2006), 324.

65 The anthropologist Joel Halpern asserts that Obrębski and Clarke fell out over matters of 'academic integrity'; 'Reflections on Józef Obrębski's Work in Macedonia From the Perspective of American Anthropology', *Ethnologia Polona* 24 (2003), 34.

66 Obrębski, 'Peasant Family', 305-10.

and...dysfunctions' within them. The problem was not that too few couples married; it was that the 'grammar' of the family system taught 'acquiescence with a regime of social inequalities...of sex, colour, economic condition or circumstances of birth'.[67]

Obrębski used the case at hand to reflect further upon the implications of globalization (or what he called the 'global process') for functionalist theories of culture and vice-versa. Functionalism, he explained, had first developed in the study of societies that evolved gradually over time; such societies exhibited a 'high degree . . .of functional adequacy' or internal consistency between institutions and values. Generalizing from such cases, functionalist theories had posited such consistency as a universal attribute. That in reality some cultural practices (such as those observed among Orthodox Jews by Gross) could seem to have no functional purpose, or even appear incoherent or even destructive (such as some of those observed by Obrębski in Jamaica), resulted from changing historical processes since about 1500. This change was distinguished everywhere by the sudden decrease in cultural 'self-containedness' of collectivities, but its character varied tremendously: in some areas, it led to the absorption of 'folk-masses' into the 'national structure', a process that was, according to Obrębski, essentially inclusive and democratic; in others, like Jamaica, it was regressive, leading to the creation of 'secondary peasantries'. These 'infant formations' evolved in a compressed time-frame and in a context (i.e., slavery and its inextinguishable traditions) that was 'culturally discordant, incongruous, and lacking coherence of human relationships'.[68]

Yet the take-home lesson was one of human agency and creativity, not of pathology. For all its malintegration, the Jamaican family system was ultimately an 'achivement in human values'. If slavery had degraded the family, Obrębski wrote, Jamaican peasant culture, returning the family to a central place in the social structure, represented its 'revindication': 'The people have built their

67 *Ibid*., 310-11.

68 *Ibid*., 306-9.

own social and cultural system in the pursuit of elementary values of human existence and in defiance of a deviant Western pattern hostile to them'. For this reason, it seemed likely that the Jamaican family would continue to evolve to the point where it could form the basis of an egalitarian national society.[69]

A car is good as long as it runs

In correspondence with the Obrębscy, many of their friends in North America in 1946-48 discussed the burning question: return to Poland, or stay in America? For Gross, the answer was clear. In October 1946, Gross wrote to Obrębski, possibly put in touch by their mutual friend Oskar Lange, advising him on how to get a position in the U.S. 'I would really like you to come', Gross wrote. 'We could collaborate a little on anthropology and sociology. Whatever happens back home, the right place for you is in the States or England. Back home those honorable know-it-alls will drag you down, simply out of fear that you'll go over their heads. Our Republic was always thus—[Kazmierz] Dobrowolski [another of Malinowski's students, about whom Gross had earlier made some unflattering comments] stayed in the country; [Ludwig] Gumplowicz, Malinowski, Znaniecki [went] abroad'.[70]

Gross kept up his sales pitch over the next two years, offering encouragement and doing what he could to smooth Obrębski's way. His strategy was threefold: to suggest the possibility of institutional research arrangements for Obrębski that would reproduce prewar Polish conditions, but

69 Obrębski, 'Peasant Family', 311. See also Obrębski, 'Legitimacy and Illegitimacy in Jamaica: A Non-Deviant Case', *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 29 (2006), 296-304 and Robert Ciski, 'Joseph Obrebski, the West Indian Social Survey, and the Ethnology of the West Indian Family', *Phylon* 41, 4 (1980), 345-55.

70 F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębski, Oct. 2, 1946, UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1946/1947, Box 4, Folder 1.

on a transnational scale; to demonstrate that his and Obrębski's values were alive and well in the United States; and—a kind of secret weapon—to bring Obrębski on a visit to an Indian reservation.

This latter offer was repeated multiple times throughout the correspondence. Judging from anecdotal evidence, the prospect of such an excursion was highly attractive to Polish social scientists newly arrived in the U.S. in the 1930s-40s.[71] For Gross, spending time on an Arapaho reservation in Wyoming in the summers of 1947-48 meant fulfilling Malinowski's once-expressed hope that Gross would conduct fieldwork on nomadism, an opportunity scuppered by his failed funding bids of the 1930s.72 Gross published some loosely edited field-notes on Arapaho migratory practices in the journal *Ethnos*. Asking why the Arapaho, who had readily adapted a multitude of Western technologies, were resistant to farming, which would have brought clear economic benefits, he showed that it would have interfered with the migratory festivals and events (not just the traditional Sun Dance or peyote celebrations, but, for example, the rodeo) that Gross's informants so greatly enjoyed. For the time being, anyway, Gross concluded, a nomadic system of values trumped Western-style economic rationality.73

The English of the *Ethnos* piece is relaxed and folksy; Gross seems to have had an ear for the local idiom (although he did perhaps misjudge his audience in describing one national park as 'as long as the whole Western border of pre-war Lithuania and half of Latvia').74 Simultaneously, there was an outsider's eye for detail. Gross showed great interest in the famous 'American way of life' seen both on the Indian reservation and in American cities. On the reservation, Gross noted the

71 See, e.g., O. Lange to L. Krzywicki, Jun. 23, 1938, University of Warsaw Library, Manuscripts Division, Collection 1447, pp. 196-97.

72 Malinowski, 'Introduction', in Gross, *Koczownictwo*, xiii.

73 Gross, 'Nomadism of the Arapaho Indians of Wyoming and Conflict Between Economics and Idea System', *Ethnos* 14, 2-4 (1949): 65-88.

74 *Ibid*., 79.

washing machines, frigidaires, and automobiles (no matter if they were old and 'rattled mostly like rattlesnakes . . . A car is good as long as it runs').75 Fresh off the boat from Yokohama, when he and Priwa had eaten at a dockyard workers' cafeteria in New York, he had been amazed to see that pineapple, a luxury by European standards, was workingman's food. In a 1946 brochure entitled *Humanist Socialism*, Gross took aim at fellow leftists who begrudged the worker's 'American dream [of having] his own home, car, and comfortable possessions'. This was a vision of 'society [as] some sort of dead economic machine' with 'no place . . . for human feelings and passions', in which 'one person [was] as similar to another as two drops of water'.[76] One senses his admiration for the Arapaho, who – buoyed by shared oil profits since 1947 – seem to have cracked the system, having their 'American dream' and eating (their peyote), too.

In the letter of October 1946, Gross updated Obrębski on his activities since leaving Poland. He wrote about his work as co-founder and secretary general of the Central and Eastern European Planning Board and involvement with Polish socialist and labor organizations in New York. He described his teaching duties at NYU and Wyoming – 'together modest earnings but the pleasantest of work, which sometimes allows one to forget about the tragedies'. His one regret, voiced repeatedly in his letters, was that he was 'recognized [in the U.S.] more as an expert on international politics and area studies' than on sociology and ethnography. 'Life', very simply, had pushed him in the direction of contemporary affairs, 'although anthropology still pulls at me'.[77] The Wyoming research would be his last anthropological fieldwork in a conventional sense.

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75 *Ibid*., 66.

76 Gross, *Socjalizm humanistyczny* (New York: Związek Socjalistów Polskich w Stanach Zjednoczonych, 1946), 12-13, 18, 20-1.

77 F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębscy, Oct. 10, 1946, UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1946/1947, Box 4, Folder 1; F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębscy, Jan. 6, 1948, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1948/1949, Box 4, Folder 2.

In December, Gross mentioned two possibilities that might interest Obrębski. One was that Gross hoped to establish, together with Robert McIver at Columbia, an international institute of social science—which, he explained, would be like 'our IGS', only on a global scale. (The IGS, or or Institute for Social Economy, directed by the prominent leftist sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki, had conducted innovative research on economic and social conditions in interwar Poland.) Gross had proposed Obrębski as a consultant for the future organization's agrarian division. Second, he mentioned plans for an international research center on 'agrarian (peasant) issues'. Clarence Senior at the University of Puerto Rico had tried to organize support for such a center among Polish peasant party leaders, among others; it would have been 'completely up your alley'. Although it had fallen through, Gross urged Obrębski to drop in on Senior in Puerto Rico, so long as he was in the neighborhood. Closing the letter, Gross congratulated Obrębski on his lectures at Oxford and more generally 'on your great scientific achievements—you're modest and perhaps don't recognize them'. With atypical formally, he added, 'it makes me truly glad that we will have in you a new Bronisław Malinowski'.[78]

In January 1948, Gross apologized for the delay in responding to Obrębski's last letter; he had been busy helping his sister, a Ravensbrück survivor, who had been ill and moved back to Poland. He complained again that his own work was constantly deflected from anthropology to politics, but in the summer, Gross hoped to make a trip to the reservation ('I would happily bring you along to my Shoshone'). Gross then turned to his main subject. First, whatever Obrębski might have heard about universities in the U.S. was probably wrong. 'Universities here are not reactionary', he assured him. 'On the contrary, [they're] very progressive, more so than ours—and the liberals here are sincere'. Explaining that the U.S. had strong radical agrarian and labour traditions, Gross noted that some 80 per cent of his students were working and studying at the same

78 F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębscy, Dec. 21, 1946, UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1946/1947, Box 4, Folder 1.

time. 'It looks different', he added, 'from up close'. He was not only convinced that Obrębski would feel at home in the U.S., but that his work would be highly valued. Comparing it favorably to Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the American Male* ('ultimately Kingsley [sic] discovered that in New York there is some sexual life, especially on weekends'), he bemoaned that 'here everything is packed up in statistics. An intelligent study like yours of rural colonial issues would have a big impact'.[79]

In the last letter of the series, dated May 1948, Gross yet again apologized for slowness; he had just finished correcting the proofs for his book *European Ideologies*.[80] Obrębski had sent him an outline for an unnamed study that Gross found 'excellent—hugely interesting question—rural city, as you called it—a completely new approach.... I, too, thought that the autobiographical technique...could be very interesting. Recently, my colleague from Brooklyn, Dyk, used the autobiographical method in a study of the Navajo Indians'.[81] Gross mentioned that he would soon be returning to Wyoming ('I hope that from there, I'll yet again go to the Arapaho reservation'), but that he had been much occupied by political themes, including 'the social implications of the discovery of the atom'.[82]

Gross's comments point to a paper Obrębski presented at the First International Congress of

79 F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębscy, Jan. 6, 1948, UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1948/1949, Box 4, Folder 2.

80 Gross, *European Ideologies: A Survey of 20th Century Political Ideas* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).

81 *Son of Old Man Hat: A Navaho Autobiography*, recorded by Walter Dyk (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938).

82 F. Gross to J. and T. Obrębscy, May 19, 1948, UMA JTO Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1948/1949, Box 4, Folder 2; Gross, 'Some Social Consequences of Atomic Discovery', *American Sociological Review* 15, 1 (1950): 43-50.

Sociology in Zurich in 1950 called 'The Sociology of Rising Nations'. The essay wove together many of the themes he had been developing since the break with Moszyński: processes of change and modernization within traditional societies and their methodological implications; the persistence of a 'structural dichotomy of the national society, divided into an upper class living in the national civilization system, and the peasant [or native, or colonized, or ex-slave] mass' that was excluded from that system; and the cultural creativity that arose from the margins of the 'folk' society, and that led to organized, self-conscious movements aimed at transforming and assimilating national life to its values.

Eastern Europe thus became the template for a broadly comparative, global model, for its social realities, Obrębski implied, were more representative of the global norm than those few societies with 'all-inclusive national structures' like the U.S. or northwestern Europe. Obrębski called both for the elimination of disciplinary boundaries between anthropology and other social sciences ('the transformations which non-literate societies and their civilizations undergo in our contemporary world gradually deprive anthropology of its *raison-d'être* as a distinct discipline') and for comparative study of phenomena rarely grouped together. This included such processes as the 'annihilation of indigenous folk-groups' and their replacement or absorption by settler groups, as in the New World; 'full transformation of pre-existing social structures through the rise of new social classes and the growth of new cultural forms', as in Communist China or Eastern Europe; the 'growth…of new national culture groups from the peripheries of European civilizations and from their slavery systems imposed upon imported African populations', as in the Caribbean; or 'the disintegration of...indigenous folk-cultures under the pressure of Western economy and the influence of Western civilization', as in Africa. Obrębski put forward the autobiographical method, finally, as the best technique for studying these processes.[83]

83 Obrębski, 'The Sociology of Rising Nations', in *The Changing Peasantry,* 8-20.

Malinowski's children

By the time of giving his paper in Zurich, Obrębski had been living in the United States for two years. He, Tamara, and Stefan arrived in New York on 11 Sept. 1948, a journey that Tamara described in a detailed letter home: the flight via Cuba and Miami, the view from their Manhattan hotel room, the price of shirts, the layout of their ground-floor Queens apartment. Everyday life fed sociological reflection: slightly amused by all the 'little buttons' in her fully electrified kitchen, Tamara planned on getting a camping stove, just in case – and wondered at her American neighbours' blithe unconcern about the possibility of a power outage.[84] (Two years later, Gross would note that the harnessing of energy had created unprecedented social interdependence: 'In this sense a peasant in the Balkans who is using a candle for his light, wood for heating, water from his well and a horse as traction power is much more independent'.)[85]

Meanwhile, Stalinism was in full swing in Poland. A letter from sociologists (and former participants of Malinowski's seminar) Maria and Stanisław Ossowski in 1952, requesting books and medicine for the failing Stanisław, wistfully described the 'true pleasure' that Tamara's last letter—full of 'colorful, lively, exotic' news—had brought them. The stamps on the envelope, depicting Party leader Bolesław Bierut and the massive industrial project of Nowa Huta, respectively, spoke volumes.[86] Poland was no longer any place for Polish sociology, attacked as a 'bourgeois science' under high Stalinism. But what was?

Obrębski worked at the United Nations as senior social affairs officer of the Trusteeship Council until 1959. From 1962, he taught at the C.W. Post College of Long Island University. He

84 T. Obrębska to father, 28 Sept. 1948, UMA JTO Correspondence, Personal: Polish 1948/1949, Box 4, Folder 2.

85 Gross, 'Some Social Consequences', 45.

86 M. and S. Ossowscy to J. and T. Obrębscy, Aug. 7, 1952, UMA JTO, Correspondence, Personal: Polish, Box 4.

was invited to spend 1968-69 in Warsaw organizing the Department of Ethnography there, but died unexpectedly in 1967 at the age of 62. Obrębski's work never had the 'great impact' Gross had predicted. Unlike Gross himself, who published some twenty books, Obrębski's postwar publications were largely limited to his studies for the U.N. In an obituary, Gross argued that Obrębski's 'publications did not adequately reflect his talents and work.... He was a kind of perfectionist, never satisfied with his own work, always in need of additional revision and editing'. Recalling the intellectual atmosphere of the 1930s, when Obrębski had been a rising star, Gross evoked his brilliance in conversation and his deep humanism.[87] His comments are reminiscent of Obrębski's own description of the 'personality ideal' of the East European *intelligent* as someone measured not by personal achievements, but by 'educational qualifications and personal values'.88

Obrębski's perfectionism, however, cannot be blamed for the failure of his and Gross's project—a vision (admittedly, the ebullient Gross was always more optimistic about this) of building a new city on a hill, exploiting Polish methods and American freedom. Obrębski rediscovered his Polesian peasants in the Jamaican hills, Gross his working-class scholars in Brooklyn. Exile was not tragedy. First, the real tragedy had already taken place, on Polish soil. Second, Gross and Obrębski came from a long line of emigrés, including Gumplowicz, Znaniecki, and of course, Malinowski. Their homeland was theory and method, and it was portable. The America of 'area studies' and development economics, however, resisted infection by their enthusiasm.

East Central Europe as a geographical concept is premised on its 'betweenness' in relation

87 Obituary of J. Obrębski by F. Gross in UMA JTO, Biographical Material, Box 1, Folder 2. Halpern also stresses Obrębski's perfectionism, but suggests that he entered a 'downward spiral' after the conflict with Clarke and isolated himself from potential sources of funding and support; 'Reflections', 34-40.

88 Obrębski, *The Changing Peasantry*, 64.

to East and West. For those like Gross or Obrębski, however, Poland's temporal suspension between two historical moments was in some ways more salient than its spatial betweenness – a position clearly expressed in Obrębski's historicizing revisions of structuralism. What today we would call interwar Poland's uneven development made it a harbinger of globalized modernity, a fruitful terrain for 'reconfiguring the global'. Social scientists sought new methods to capture this newness and unsettledness, moreover, and the creativity that accompanied it. Autobiography was one means; there were no representatives to speak for the people, so ways had to be found for them to speak for themselves.

Meanwhile, Gross and Obrębski experienced their own ambivalent suspension between (or among) multiple subject positions. Polish ethnographers did not have to travel far to see 'savages', and those savages were at the same time fellow Slavs (or Magyars, etc.). This raised questions about how much (or what kind) of critical distance was possible between researcher and subject. The Jamaican hills may have been the last place Obrębski truly felt at home; Malinowski told Gross, while conducting research in Mexico in his last years, 'You know, it's so pleasant in these small towns. There is mud, dirt roads, just like in the old country.... It's nice to see that again'.[89] Whiffs of sentimental identification with the dispossessed and trampled—a reverse snobbery of sorts—can be found throughout the letters between Gross, Obrębski, and their interlocutors.

But that identification, as an ethnologist would know better than anyone, went only so far. Back in pre-war Poland, in relation to those Slavic peasants, the researcher was still *Pan* (master), the representative of feudal power. Once during the war, Malinowski made some dismissive remarks to Gross about Polish American immigrants. Gross countered with praise for the 'intelligent, dedicated, and progressive people' he had come to know in the immigrant labor movement, adding, 'You may not know them'. Malinowski 'thought a moment and said curtly: "I know them. One of my ancestors was cut in half with a saw in Rabatsia"'--referring to the peasant

89 Gross, 'Young Malinowski and His Later Years', *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986), 565.

uprising against the Galician nobility in 1846. The distance from gentry *dwór* to rural hovel, however short measured in footsteps, was a vast field of power, conflict, and unfinished business.[90]

For Malinowski's post-Versailles children, the putative beneficiaries and stake-holders in a modernizing, developmentally conscious nation-state, it was abundantly clear that 'ethnographic work has indeed been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated. It enacts power relations. But its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic', as James Clifford put it.[91] They brought this message to America when positivism was at its apogee in U.S. social science, precisely when such reflexivity was least wanted. Later, with the rediscovery of biographic methods in sociology or the 'world turn' in anthropology, their voices might have resonated more.[92] But in

90 *Ibid*.

91 James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 9.

92 On positivism in postwar U.S. social science, see Hamilton Cravens, 'Column Right, March! Nationalism, Scientific Positivism, and the Conservative Turn of the American Social Sciences in the Cold War Era', in *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*, Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 117-36; Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate Over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918-1941* (Duke University Press, 1994); and George Steinmetz, 'American Sociology Before and After World War II: The (Temporary) Settling of a Disciplinary Field', in *Sociology in America: A History*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 314-66. On countervailing trends, see Daniel Bertaux, ed., *Biography and Society: The Life-History Approach in the Social Sciences* (London/Beverly Hills: Sage Publishers, 1981) and Howard Brick, 'Neo-Evolutionist Anthropology, the Cold War, and the World Turn in U.S. Scholarship', in *Cold War Social Science,* 155-74.

early postwar America, Obrębski and Gross, with their 'Old World' ways and thoughts, must have seemed to some like relics of a strange, backward corner of Europe, not harbingers of a new vision. They were, like the peasants of Polesie, 'yesterday's people'. Widdershins.

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