

The Notion of »Home« and the Issue of Identity in the Emigrant Correspondence

Miha Zobec

B.Sc. of History and Sociology

Assistant and Doctoral Candidate

Faculty of Arts, Department of History

University of Maribor

Abstract

The present contribution aims to shed light on some key issues of migrations that are observed by the analysis of the family correspondence. The collection of letters, photos and material objects – the sources in my case study - belongs to the family Vrabc which members emigrated in the interwar period from the territory of then Italian Julian March to Argentina and France respectively. Through time, a network of support and solidarity as well as new feeling of belonging were formed. Immigrants from the village of Pliskovica in the present Slovene Karst started to adopt the identity of the societies they became part of. However, becoming Argentinians did not mean breaking the ties with their home place. In the letters of the protagonists of my research, it is clearly evident that the place they all truly called home never ceased to be their native village. Furthermore, the evidence shows that the characters of the presented story could not be inserted into simple models of adaptation into the new society. What is more, it displays that the issue of identity should be addressed not only by the study of what is explicitly written in letters, but by the whole process of dialogue where silences, omissions and not intended words were present too. The material objects in exchange formed part of that dialogue as well. They did not play a significant role in this triangle of correspondence by their material content, but by the meaning that was ascribed to them. Construction of meaning was an inherent part of the dialogue as the family members were constantly striving to bridge the distance that separated them. Ultimately, it also brings us closer to the phenomenological approach to the study of correspondence which will be combined with oral history in order to address the issues of “home”, identity and familial memory.