

# Studies on Social History

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## SOCIAL HISTORY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

I have written an article under a similar title for the collection of studies *Metamorfozy społeczne (Social Metamorphoses)*, which was published in 1997<sup>1</sup>. Nine years have gone by since then — from a historical perspective it is not a very long period, yet long enough to return to the questions which were raised then, concerning the assessment of scholarly achievements and prospects for future studies on social history.

Writing on social history at that time, I meant a clearly defined this research line, which has been developing, until recently, in numerous countries as a metodologically leading one, and widely practised by those scholars who have been interested in long-term social trends. Representatives of this line were convinced that by crossing the borders of old-fashioned narratives, which used to show separate events or local shifts and transformations (often isolated from the wider period and civilization context), they were creating a higher level of histori-

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\* This paper was written as an introduction to the second collection of studies *Metamorfozy Społeczne 2 (Social Methamorphoses 2)* published (in Polish) in 2007. It includes the author's considerations on the contemporary condition of the social history in Poland and abroad. As an introductory text it contains my opinion and doesn't adduce the enormous scholarly literature on the subject.

<sup>1</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna: nadzieje, rozczarowania, perspektywy (Social History: Hopes, Disappointments, Prospects)*, in: *Metamorfozy społeczne. Badania nad dziejami społeczeństwa polskiego XIX i XX wieku (Social Metamorphoses. Studies on the History of the 19th and 20th Century Polish Society)*, ed. by J. Żarnowski, Warszawa 1997, pp. 9–34.

cal knowledge. Such social history was to be written in stark contrast to traditional political history, which was repeatedly ridiculed, functioning in the space between descriptions of great battles and the proverbial Cleopatra's nose. In the 1970s and 1980s, among the most influential representatives of this line was the German *Sozialgeschichte*, grouped around a periodical "Geschichte und Gesellschaft". Earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, historical studies were largely influenced by the French school of "Annales"<sup>2</sup>, associated with École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales<sup>3</sup> and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

In 1997 I noticed a crisis in social history in the form developed in the 1970s and 1980s, which I regarded as a phenomenon that was both obvious and existing for decades. This crisis could be ascribed to a surfeit of the prevailing research line, quite natural, as a matter of fact, after the long period of its dominance. Such dominance always has its dark side: comprised of scientific institutions known as more conservative, less modern, often provincial, which in turn eagerly criticize the "leading" school. Especially that this school — concerning both Germany with *Sozialgeschichte* and France with "Annales", and their subsequent embodiments, including *la nouvelle histoire* proclaimed in the 1970s — laid claim additionally to possess the exclusive

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the sub-title of this periodical has been changed: "Économies-sociétés-civilisations" till 1994, from then on: "Histoire, Sciences Sociales". A short justification for this change, presented in issue № 1 of 1994, is rather enigmatic. The change of the sub-title, which for the first time contains the term *history*, was most probably to stress the simultaneous revision of both orientation and the editorial staff of the periodical, being another stage in the process of transformations of one of the most influential and prestigious historical periodicals worldwide. First hints of criticism of the old, Braudel stage in the historiography of 'Annales' appeared as early as in the 1970s, and in the years 1988-1989, following a discussion, the board of editors declared a new opening, which expressed the influence of new tendencies that had gained exclusiveness in the Anglo-Saxon world long before. However, a series of subsequent events in the French historiography did not confirm in full the hopes which were placed on this new opening, for the criticism, increasingly growing for a long time, did not lead to the birth of a new concept, whose strength would be, at least approximately, the same as the ideas presented by E. Labrousse and F. Braudel. See: *Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, "Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales", vol. 49: 1944, № 1, pp.3-4. See also: T. Wiślicz, *The "Annales" School and the Challenge of the Late 20th Century. Criticism and Tentative Methods*, "Acta Poloniae Historica", vol. XCII: 2005, pp. 207-235.

<sup>3</sup> The previous name: École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sixième Section).

rights to scholarly history. “Scholarly” history as such was to be more worthy of cognitive trust than traditional historiography associated more with *lettres* rather than with *sciences*, that is only partly “scholarly” in a positivist sense, and partly literary. Now the time has come for the circles which had for long been critical of “scholarly” historiography to take revenge.

This crisis could also be associated with the revolutionary political changes which swept away communist systems in Europe. “Scholarly” theoretical justification for the existence of those regimes (Marxism — Leninism) had begun to be taken with a pinch of salt long before, not only by academics but also by party ruling elites across communist countries, and most certainly in Poland, where the crisis of the communist ideology was of the earliest origins and of deepest nature. However, those political systems, and at least the parties which ruled within them, kept referring to Marx and Marxism till the very end. Therefore, political changes both in Western democracies and even more intensely in post-communist countries, discredited in the eyes of the public Marxism on the whole, not only in its communist — Soviet version. Meanwhile, the concepts by Marx combined with other, nineteenth century ideas that explained the history of society, constituted one of the foundations of erst-while social history. Their scholarly accuracy was already limited towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they rather belonged to the history of social thought, yet their real contents were, as a matter of fact, loosely related to communist ideology super-structured on Marxism, which was named by Stalin ‘Marxism — Leninism’. Obviously, turning points of history act according to their own rules and in numerous cases it is not only individuals and groups but also ideas and scientific structures — that in a sense contributed to the development of scholarly awareness, and retained certain or even considerable reserves of their explanation potential — which fall victim to them.

Years elapse but traditional social history, as it was understood before the 1980s, has not been returned to one’s good graces, and this does not only concern graces of any official research centres, academic, state ones etc., but the most important test, which is constituted by interests and choices of respective scholars who examine one or another period in the history of society. Writing an article which at present refers to

that text, I have been trying to define excessive simplifications of social history from the times of its glory, the way it overestimated certain dimensions of social life and underestimated others, and, first of all, glorified its own, supposedly the 'only scholarly' method or, perhaps, mainly the style? At that time I expressed my hope that 'there will be a wider interest in the discipline that discovers other [than political history — the author's present note] aspects of the past and — as I think — remote sources of the transformations which are later reflected in the political, legal and ideological agenda<sup>4</sup>. This hope has not come true in a wider scope, and the crisis of social history has turned out to be, perhaps, deeper than it seemed to be ten years ago.

One had the right to believe that, after this crisis was over, there would appear a new line in social history, perhaps in a place different from previous model centres for the study of social history, if not in Paris, Bielefeld or Berlin, then for example at one of the British or American universities, in Canada or Italy. However, this has not happened yet, even though different parts and aspects of old societies have continuously belonged to major fields of scholarly study.

In present historiography, as it appears to me, also postmodern extremity has ceased to sound natural and it finds few proponents. To be more precise, I mean the tendencies, described in my previous article, to undermine foundations of historical perception, deny an interpersonal basis of historical examination, and extreme individualism which effectively hampers confrontation and, in practice, any scholarly activity. Attempts were made to replace this activity with practices of purely linguistic nature, suggesting that narration has no point of reference apart from itself ("it is only texts that exist") and is, therefore, entirely dependent upon a narrator — historian. Thus it can be perceived as a quasi-literary work which requires the application of criteria completely different from the harmony with *reality* which, if it exists at all, is anyway hermetically sealed from an observer — historian, as he has not a direct access to it, if any at all. As a matter of fact, such was the meaning of the trend which is defined as *linguistic turn*. Let us add, after all, that a historian uses sources which also include the narration of the witnesses

<sup>4</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna: nadzieje, rozczarowania, perspektywy* (*Social History: Hopes, Disappointments, Prospects*), *ibidem*, p. 29.

of past events, still equally independent from any factor different from their author's own consciousness. The only outcome of such an approach towards a historian's work can be to remove history from the list of sciences, no matter what we call them, humanities or social ones. Such consequences of a radical depiction of postmodern criticism are so obvious that they rarely produce their natural results. But, on the other hand, such views are less frequent today than a few years ago. That is true, but still there appears no new trend in social history.

Contemplating the evolution of historiography, one cannot lose one's grasp on the contemporary evolution of societies, which also has its impact on the way historians perceive the past. I shall limit myself to two remarks. The first one regards the proportions between a social and community factor on the one hand and an individual one on the other hand in contemporary society. I have already written in my other work<sup>5</sup> that the individual factor has a more significant meaning now than in the past, which stems from the inborn or acquired preferences of an individual. In present highly developed and rich Western societies, an individual has more opportunities to organize living conditions according to one's ontogenetic preferences, and that is why those preferences become more important now than in the past.

As it usually happens, at the same time one can notice a factor that works completely conversely, namely, the standardizing influence of the media, whose scope, potential, and interaction constantly increase, and which already standardize attitudes on a supranational and global scale. However, despite all this, the individualization process continues (especially during a period of prosperity and stability), and society becomes more like a collection of diversified individuals rather than of social groups or other social categories. Also the divisions among individuals, who comprise society according to their own preferences, systems of values, views, habits, and tradition, become increasingly

<sup>5</sup> See: J. Żarnowski, *Rodzina w czasach cywilizacyjnego przyspieszenia: Europa i Polska 1918–1989 (The Family During Civilisation Acceleration)* in: *Rodzina–prywatność–intymność. Dzieje rodziny polskiej w kontekście europejskim (The Family–Privacy–Intimacy. History of the Polish Family in the European Context)*. The Collection of Studies, ed. by D. Kalwa, A. Walaszek, A. Żarnowska, Warszawa 2005, pp. 37–58 (The paper was delivered at the 17th General Convention of Polish Historians in Cracow 2004).

important and at times dominate the separation which results from differences in the financial and professional sides of life.

This circumstance draws our attention to divisions different from the class, stratified or other hierarchical — stratified ones, also in relation to the past. This induces us to perceive a historical individual not only as a member of a group, but also as someone special and unique. Yet, a question remains whether, with reference to older societies, we are entitled to apply the same criteria, as we do towards contemporary, highly modernized and developed ones, where, after all, the new qualities, described here, appeared quite recently, as late as a few decades ago?

In a sense these phenomena, which also consist in shifting the meaning of differences and social conflicts from vertical to horizontal ones, can be explained by ostensible levelling of consumption in highly developed Western societies. This is based on the dissemination of possessing certain goods, formerly reserved for the elites, and at present commonly accessible to most of society. Among them are the following goods, both material and spiritual: spacious homes, cars, modern electronic equipment, freedom of movement around the country, continent, world, travel to foreign countries and tourist trips, but also the liberty to choose a family and sexual lifestyle, place of permanent residence, not only within one country, but on the continent or elsewhere in the world, etc. etc. Even though this popularization conceals inequalities, “objectively” or quantitatively often deeper than in the past, they concern more the quality of the goods in possession than the possession itself, and this, in consequence, gives birth to certain egalitarian illusions. They induce individuals to emphasize their own preferences, which reduces the intensity and scope of social conflicts conditioned on vertical, stratified differences, to the benefit of horizontal ones, mostly stemming from individual, and subsequently from community and other group options<sup>6</sup>. Of course, this does not remove from the agenda conflicts associated with the revenue sharing among respective social strata.

<sup>6</sup> Sociology and political science have noticed this phenomenon, which in the latest (of 2006) German lexicon of political science was called post-materialism and associated with post-industrial society. See: Klaus Schubert, Martina Klein, *Das Politiklexikon*, Bonn, Dietzverlag, p. 238 (entry: *Postmaterialismus*, *Postindustrielle Gesellschaft*).

But how to write a history of society composed of individuals diversified in a way which makes it difficult to classify, typify, divide into such and such groups, highlighted according to a standardized rule? It would be an extremely atomized society. It is, of course, not a completely new issue as regards contemporary societies, because social atomization has been confirmed in different societies and circumstances. One of most atomized societies was to be e.g. communist society, where the system of government destroyed many of the former and more recent types of social bond, replacing them with forcibly imposed deficient ones. This was discussed by Polish sociologists in the decade that preceded 1980, yet the question still remains whether a course of subsequent events did not undermine those arguments. Social atomization in general is not absolute and its occurrence in one area is usually compensated by the strengthening of a social bond in another one. Thus for example the hypothetical social atomization in the Polish People's Republic was supposedly accompanied by the strengthening of bonds at the level of family and private life.

At any rate, this partial social anomy, if it ever exists (a complete anomy may not be possible at all), puts historical and social studies in a new difficult position of fundamental character. Social history and almost all sub-disciplines of historical studies formulated their statements against the background of categories, types and models. If permanent bonds between individuals cannot be identified, it is actually impossible to state anything about society as a whole. In fact, it is obvious that current society has not changed so radically. Social bond and social groups keep functioning and still new kinds are formed. The process of individualization has not reached such an extreme level, and, most likely, it will never happen. We mention this problem rather to stress new difficulties that appear on the way to synthesize social history, besides, not only in this area, but in all studies concerning contemporary societies.

The other remark, on the contrary, refers to community behaviour. It boils down to the emphasis that the most violent and significant conflicts in contemporary world occur between ethnic communities, ethnic and tribal, ethnic and religious, and simply religious ones. Vivid and increasingly noticeable symptoms of growing ethnic and community bonds indicate that the weaken-

ing and individualization of social bond may concern largely the groups which are constituted as a result of stratified and vertical differences in character. Whereas, these horizontal, ethnic conflicts often seem to overshadow social conflicts associated with material and stratified differences. In consequence, we face the diminishing of significance of vertical differences, mostly hierarchical in character, to the benefit of horizontal ones, based on the sense of community and alienation from other communities. This phenomenon can be observed not only and not so much in the most developed countries, where at the same time tendencies to build local communities develop, e.g. the European integrity, but also and first of all in societies within the so called *developing zone*. This way, however, an argument about the contemporary preponderance of the horizontal bonds and conflicts over the vertical ones finds its confirmation not only in the most developed capitalist, post-industrial countries, but also elsewhere.

Another thing is that in the days of globalization<sup>7</sup>, vertical differences, conflicts which stem from diversities in class status and wealth, are conveyed, to a large extent, to the international and inter-regional ground. These days, instead of hearing of *poor and dangerous classes*<sup>8</sup>, we tend to hear of *backward countries (and nations)*, or more euphemistically, *developing countries*, and some other time, from among those latter countries, of *countries which support terrorism*, sometimes in German 'Schurkenstaat'<sup>9</sup>. A conflict between rich and poor nations, often equally defined as a conflict between the North and the South, as well as a conflict between the West and the East, is of social and civilizational character, even though some of the factors that identify those 'rival' civilizations are, after all, ethnic, ethnic — racial and religious, and finally civilizational dissimi-

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<sup>7</sup> Globalisation is a continuous process which originated in the past, and what is understood under this term now is its contemporary acceleration. However, it is evident that the germ and earlier stages of this process date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>8</sup> The title of the famous book can be evoked here, which belongs to the circles of French social history and emphasises a class nature of the major social conflict in the 19<sup>th</sup> century France: Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris, pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Paris 1978 (five editions, the latest in 2002).

<sup>9</sup> In German: "criminal state".



larities ('the Arab world' against 'Zionists' or against 'crusaders', like in Iraq, black Africa against white 'colonialists' or 'neo-colonialists', Latin Americans, Creoles or Native Americans against 'American imperialists', etc.).

If one was to accept these observations, the centre of gravity in studies on social history would have to move significantly. In my previous article of 1997 quoted above, I emphasised the truth, already obvious then, that a number of aspects of social diversification, which should be accounted for by a social historian, grew if compared to previous social history studies<sup>10</sup>. However, the vertical structure, to be meant as basically the class and stratification one, and stratification structures in general seemed at that time to be the axis which formed the foundation for the majority of other divisions, important for the characteristic of society. In the light of what has been discussed above, such a diagnosis of reality seems to be no longer valid. A new model has to be looked for, a new central point of reference, a new view on global society and, in consequence, the way to approach such categories as a national society, which today still constitutes the most perceptible structure. At least, this can be observed in Europe, North America, former British Dominions, Japan etc. The category of *national society* also functions in numerous post colonial countries, including great countries inhabited by a number of ethnic communities which differ deeply, in terms of language, one from another. Such model countries are India and Indonesia. But there is also the example of contemporary United States of America — a state society, which embraces various consolidated and recognized ethnic and ethnic-religious groups. These are seemingly national societies of a new type, at least if compared with Western Europe, which are still in the process of formation. There are also regions typical for their lack of co-ordination between the state and ethnic-tribal structures, including Africa as the prime example. In turn South American states owe their specific character to their genetic and linguistic community which results from the history of colonization of this continent, thus the problem discussed here has got its local shade. On a global scale, however, this argument that ethnic-state communities prevail as fundamental and the most

<sup>10</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna (Social History)*, pp. 30–32.

active elements of our global society seems to be justified, and the symptoms of regional integrity (Europe, but also other continents) do not rule out its significance.

Nevertheless, how can one outline this new way of reflecting upon society, so also upon social history? Perhaps at this stage it would be helpful to analyze scholarly interests of foreign research centres which deal with social history, as well as the subjects discussed during congresses held by the International Committee of Historical Sciences. These latter ones are the only all-historical meetings in the world, because all the other congresses, conventions and conferences represent a particular specialty, branch, aspect or geographical area (understood as a regional representation of historians or the subject of studies).

If we consider the subjects of the latest three international congresses of historical sciences (Montreal 1995, Oslo 2005, Sydney 2005)<sup>11</sup>, those “classic” problems of social history in their meaning from 20–30 years ago was reflected, and on the periphery of major debates, only at the first of them, i.e. in Montreal. In general, nothing similar to this can be found within *Major Themes* at the three congresses, and even within *Specialized Themes/Sections spécialisées*. In Montreal the “Round Table” sessions (the lowest level of congress meetings) took place, entitled *Structures and cultures of European bourgeoisie in the 19<sup>th</sup> century* (organizer Jürgen K o c k a), *The political role of the working class — myth and reality* (organizer Janusz Ż a r n o w s k i), *Masculinity and the working class in Canada and Great Britain* (organizer Valerie B u r t o n). These themes can be classified as most traditional social history; one also has to notice another, to some extent revisionist trend in this history: *The shaping of social identities* (organizer Roger C h a r t i e r). Two other subjects concerned the workers’ movement, the studies of which sometimes neighboured on social history — namely radical socialist movements (i.e. communist) in the interwar period, and ‘international communist education’.

In Oslo we can actually find only one “Round Table” devoted directly to the problems of our interest, namely the one orga-

<sup>11</sup> See: *18th International Congress of Historical Sciences 1995, Montréal. Programme final*, Oslo 2000, *XIXe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Programme and registration*, *20<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences, Programme*, 3–9 July 2005, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

nized by Antoni Maćzak, entitled: *Nobilities in Comparative Perspective*. In Sydney, social problems in modern times were reflected in the discussions of one Specialized Theme Section, which dealt with informal social relations (patronage, clientele, etc. — subjects examined thoroughly by Antoni Maćzak, who died recently), and as regards most modern times, during the Round Table session on workers' autobiographies<sup>12</sup>.

It is clear that traditional issues discussed within social history have been, as a matter of fact, eliminated from the agenda of international congresses, the agenda which is shaped, after all, depending on trends that dominate scientific interests, and partly on fashion. A question arises what subjects presented during congresses can and should belong to social history in another, perhaps wider depiction?

Let us try, accordingly, to review the list of problems discussed at the latest International Congress of Historical Sciences in Sydney, in order to single out research subjects and discussions which referred to society in a more precise sense of the word. Because in a wider sense, the whole history, its every course and event happens within society. We would like to focus, however, on the interest put on society as such, but not only as a framework for the examination of other particular phenomena and events.

Actually, society in this meaning cannot be traced as a separate subject of studies. It is mentioned in subject № 3 (War, Peace, Society and International Order in History), yet mainly depicted from a political and international perspective, as war is, first of all and primarily, a political event. As involved in gender issues, society appears in one of minor topics (*War, Violence and Gender*), in general, however, this is not the major focus of attention for historians, for *Major Themes* seem to be the subjects regarded as the most significant and most timely. Among specialist sections, apart from the section debating informal structures in modern times — already mentioned above, one interesting section on mi-

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<sup>12</sup> Full information on the subjects discussed at meetings of organizations affiliated to the International Committee of Historical Sciences and its permanent thematic Commissions is not, unfortunately, available, as such information is always published by these organizations themselves, and thus difficult to access. Some of the scientific meetings of these organizations have been attended by the author and in these cases the information is first handed.

grations and their social consequences draws our attention, as well as the section where the role of education in integration and social alienation is discussed. Among the Round Tables — one of them was devoted to a civil society, among others, from a gender perspective, other sessions debated problems of the children age (children and war) and of the old age in different societies. Finally, to some degree a discussion entitled *Body Politics: The Politics of the Body* (where a number of issues related to the human body and physical aspects of human beings were contemplated), and a session devoted to societies living in mountain areas.

That is to say — these are largely diverse issues, which rarely touch upon the traditional subject of social structures — sometimes connected with gender studies but more often with a social evolution which runs through migrations, alternation of generations and the educational system serving its different social functions, including the one of the factors of social changes, e.g. social and cultural promotion, a centre for the formation of elites, etc. In any case, one can notice a shift towards the problems of a more cultural and customary nature if compared with the previous fascination with economic and social changes and their quantitative analysis.

In order to sum up this remark, one needs to admit that at present the following issues remain the focal point of interest among those who research society: gender, ethnic-cultural community, migrations and attitudes towards extreme situations: wars, natural disasters. Besides, migrations are in themselves an extraordinary phenomenon, and in numerous cases the result of extreme phenomena, such as wars, moving borders, etc. This is the picture of the history of society discussed at historical congresses.

Let us now examine the subject matters discussed by some periodicals and during historical conferences. The information we get has been selected from numerous possible sources but it represents different countries where social history has been widely researched.

Here is how the “Journal of Social History”, published in George Mason University (Fairfax, Virginia, near Washington) defines *New Topics in Modern Social History*<sup>13</sup>: bodies and iden-

<sup>13</sup> The internet website of “Journal of Social History”: [www.historycooperative.org](http://www.historycooperative.org)

tification, emotion and cheerfulness, personal relationships, consumerism in different societies, student movements, social history and geographic scope, social history and politics, gender inequality, explorations in new aspects of birth control, disability and social movements, the AIDS epidemic, social history issues in Africa and the Middle East.

We are also browsing the content of the latest, 38<sup>th</sup> issue of this periodical, including dozens of articles. It lacks the items which would represent traditional social issues in the strict sense of the word, that is the characteristic of the structures of global society or its respective segments. It is the studies on the history of sexuality and issues known as gender problems which come to the fore, as well as the characteristic of numerous groups and matters associated with childhood, youth and education. Other aspects of social history are present on this list only in the form of single items: tourism (including *Kraft durch Freude* in Hitler's Reich), consumerism, workers' circles in the times of Chartism and in interwar Manchester.

Let us now deal with the specification of conferences on social history in Great Britain in the academic year 2005/2006, published by the Institute of Historical Research — The National Centre for History at the University of London. Here social history is understood in a wider scope than the above quoted American list. Gender issues do not prevail here and the range of problems discussed is much broader. Thus we find issues such as: captivity from Babylon to Guantanamo Bay; experience of imprisonment; poverty; modernization versus prodigality; Methodists' missions and their social role; religion and politics 1200–1600; sorcery and masculinity in the early modern times; integrity and social exclusion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; all-out war epitomized by the Spanish civil war of 1936–1939; Oxford and its role in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; a political emigration of the royalists after 1640; shopping 1600–2000; trade and fashion; pharmacists, medicine and architecture in Georgian England (i.e. during the reign of the first three kings of the Hanover dynasty who bore the name George); radicalism in Great Britain 1550–1700; from Voluntary Organizations to Non-Governmental Organizations in the period from 1900.

The contents of this list would therefore suggest that social history is meant as everything that differs from pure political

history, the history of kings, battles and treaties. Admittedly, the obliteration of differences between social history and cultural history is noticeable and even declared also in other countries, e.g. in Germany, but here some other fields of historical research appear, especially political problems somehow 'entangled' in social problem matters.

In turn, we shall quote here the most important periodical representing social history, which prevailed in Germany not long ago — "Geschichte und Gesellschaft" of 2004 and 2005<sup>14</sup>. It would not be amiss to cite here the definition of the subject of the periodical, which is included in the programme presented by the Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht Publishers and undoubtedly comes from the editors: "Geschichte und Gesellschaft" ist eine Zeitschrift für den gesamten Bereich der historisch-sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung. Sie wendet sich an Hochschullehrer, Studenten und Lehrer, an Historiker und Soziologen, Politikwissenschaftler und Kulturwissenschaftler, für die es wichtig ist, Fragestellungen und Ergebnisse der historischen Forschung zu kennen, und die sich für neue Entwicklungen interessieren. Gegenstand der Zeitschrift ist die Gesellschaft und ihre Geschichte — Gesellschaftsgeschichte, verstanden als die Geschichte sozialer, politischer, ökonomischer und kultureller Phänomene, die in bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Formationen verankert sind. Im Mittelpunkt stehen Darstellung und Analyse des gesellschaftlichen Wandels.» As a matter of fact, this definition could equally refer to earlier *Sozialgeschichte*. Especially that the phrase *historischsozialwissenschaftliche Forschung* is applied here to suggest a sociological approach, directed at scientific patterns of a more rationalistic and positivist nature rather than a narrative-literary one, as it is now fashionable. It should be emphasised that since 1994 also "Annales" has been similarly subtitled: "History. Social Sciences". The term: *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* underscores that a number of aspects of social life have been considered, not only its class and social thread, which used to serve as the axis of earlier social history. In the prospectus "Geschichte und Gesellschaft" the stress was put on the links between certain and, as it results from the above review, very diverse issues and a specific society without deter-

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.v-r.de/titel/117111>.

mining which category is the axis of the analysis. One could notice that no historical phenomenon occurs outside society and, even if this happened it could not be noticed by society members at all, including historians. But let us not be small-minded. Also in these matters *c'est le ton qui fait la chanson*.

The contents' analysis of the recent issues of the periodical does not help at all to define the scope of the concept of *social history* as understood by the editors. Some issues were focused on specific problems and, e.g. issue № 1/2004 contains articles devoted to ideological and cultural problems of stalinism, issue № 2/2004 brings up the social significance of science in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, issue no. 4/2004 — social aspects of religious life, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, issue no. 1/2005 focuses on slave labour and the policy towards workforce in the Third Reich during the war; issue no. 3/2005 concentrates on social, political and nuclear problems in India.

A range of subjects within the framework of these thematically grouped issues is so considerable that they do not form a compact unit. And here are other subjects discussed particularly in the other issues published in recent years and months: German Jews 1870/1871; society in Łódź — Manchester of the East; the pogrom in Lvov in November 1918; the category 'anti-social lifestyle' in the German Democratic Republic (GDR); the concept of ethnic-based nationality in social consciousness in Great Britain 1914–1918; psychological consequences of war, escapes and expulsions and a German generation of the expelled children; Upper Silesia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century — a region misunderstood; capital punishment in the USA for Afro-Americans 1930–1972 — almost a judicial murder.

One can notice at most that the subjects are placed, as it has been heralded, within the scope of specific societies, i.e. there are no considerations which would go beyond modern and contemporary times or refer to processes that occur across the centuries. There are no discussions either which would link the phenomena that happen in different contemporary civilizations, though problem matters from outside Europe are eagerly reached for. However, political, ideological, ethnic, religious and scientific issues are reflected here without privileging any of them. Thus no attempt is made here to describe general mechanisms which

would be able to rule each of those fields or even the whole society. Whereas all the considerations, in accordance with the announcement made in the prospectus, regard the functioning of specific societies, so they are not introduced in isolation which would be, as a matter of fact, a logical conclusion of postmodern postulates. This explains the intentions of the periodical's representatives who underscore an intrasocial character to this work, which at first sight can be seen as obvious and banal.

We shall now have a look at existing issues which are discussed in "Annales". However, before I list its subjects of current interest, I shall, also in this case, quote the present definition of the periodical, which comes from the EHESS publisher's and has been, of course, prepared by the editors<sup>15</sup>. There we read that: "Fondées en 1929 par Marc Bloch et Lucien Febvre, dirigées ensuite par des historiens de grande renommée comme Fernand Braudel, Marc Ferro, Jacques Le Goff ou Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, elles sont devenues depuis longtemps une revue de référence pour les historiens français, dont l'audience internationale est largement reconnue. Les "Annales" symbolisent l'historiographie française dans sa dimension la plus novatrice. L'ambition de la revue est double. Il s'agit de présenter les recherches historiques dans toute leur diversité, de l'Antiquité à l'époque contemporaine, avec une attention particulière pour les temps actuels dont l'intelligibilité passe en partie par le regard de l'historien. Reflet des recherches historiques les plus variées, les "Annales" offrent une pluralité de points de vue sur les manières de penser et d'écrire l'histoire. Elles privilégient aussi le dialogue avec les autres sciences sociales telles que la sociologie, l'économie ou l'anthropologie." In addition to the emphasis put on the uniqueness of the periodical, regarded as the most innovative<sup>16</sup>, we find here — as has already been mentioned — a similar manifesto reference to the relation with the areas of knowledge, understood more scientifically (perhaps, with the exception of anthropology), which in the present view fully deserve to be called just sciences not literature, *science* not *lettres*, thus **social sciences**, *Sciences sociales*, in German *Soz-*

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ehess.fr/Editions/revues/index-revues.html>

<sup>16</sup> It is the sign of a traditionally high self-esteem in this circle, however, it is difficult to figure out to what extent this high self-evaluation is still up-to-date. This declaration should be referred mostly to French periodicals.



*ialwissenschaft*, the word which still exists in the prospectus of the German periodical.

Here are the subjects of some issues of the periodical, which were given the highlighted title, of 2004 and 2005 (of course, as in previous periodicals, the subjects do not exhaust the whole content): *New Israeli historians*; — *After the collapse of slavery (repossessions and problems in Cuba, the French Antilles, Jamaica and Columbia)*; — *Central Asia (migrations and cultural exchange among China, Mongolian, the Turkiestan and other Muslim areas, nomads in Central Asia, Islam and the political activity of the Uzbeks, Uygurs, and the stabilization of the Afghan state in contemporary times)*; — *Palestinian historical studies*; — *The history of India (reflections of Indian historians on the identification of Indians and Muslims against the background of the caste system and critical moments in the Middle Ages, modern times and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*; — *Educated circles, communities of scholars (and their social impact and transmission of knowledge in Mesopotamia, the Roman Empire, in the early Muslim world and in the Kerala state in India)*; — *The periphery of Byzantium (and its influence on the Muslim and Western-Christian neighbours)*.

And here are a few other subjects which have found their place among the issues discussed in “Annales” within the last two years, next to the title problems being a showcase of some of the volumes: *Medicine and society (the problem of organ transplants)*; *The Romanization process (of Palmira, the areas on the Euphrates and the Roman province of Achaia, i.e. Greece)*; *Revolution and credit (mortgage credits in France 1780–1840)*; *The legitimacy of the dynasty in Mediaeval China*; *Slavery and prices of the betrothed in Ancient Tracia*; *Science and religion in China (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries)*; *Political history of Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and historical studies*; *Documentation and family memory in Italy and neighbouring countries between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries*; *The emergence of ethnic identity in Ancient Italy along the Adriatic in the transitional period between the Antiquity and the European Middle Ages, and in the Ottoman Empire (Tunis) in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries*; *The resistance movement and war against civilians: Italy 1943–1944 and Nicaragua*.

As one can see it, the dispersion of problems here, as regards both chronology and geography, is strikingly considerable, which, after all, is on a par with the competence of the circles

of “Annales”, and general preferences of French historians, who have always been closely related to geographers. Undoubtedly, the editors of “Annales” venture into the more distant past more boldly than the other research centres for social history which have been mentioned here. Of certain importance is, among others, the imperial past of France. In consequence, they are more daring in crossing barriers between civilizations and epochs, and in comparing with one another similar phenomena from distant civilizations and epochs. But such substantial diversification makes it even more difficult to define the subject of social history, and to determine this *differentia specifica*, without which no definition can exist.

These breakdowns of the subjects that are currently studied in a couple of Western research centres — which, until recently, have been the model institutions in terms of modern historical studies and dissemination of innovative approaches to social history — incline me, as I believe, to draw negative rather than positive conclusions. In other words, one can determine what social history surely is not today, whereas it is harder to define its subject matter and decide what it should be. Definitely, the term *social history* should cease to be associated with a hierarchical structure which, as a matter of fact, used to fill the whole landscape of the past. Such a structure used to be mostly identical with the class and social strata system, and it was in practice acknowledged to be of central meaning, that is, in the final instance, the one which determined all or almost all social phenomena. Of course, such a well-ordered look was convenient from the point of view of *economics of cognition* and facilitated putting the historical world in the right pattern (and to some extent, also the surrounding reality as a whole). Yet the times of such a cognitional order will surely not return, even if a more extensive and more common comeback to the interests which gave birth to social history from old times, takes place.

Today, after all, in certain retrospect, it becomes increasingly obvious for a scholar that such a picture of social structure used to stem from, first of all, observation of industrial society. The appearance of societies known as post-industrial, induces one to relativize this strictly structural view, also in examining societies at the stage of industrialization and those already industrialized.

On re-examining once again those *materiae disiectae*, the cast or scattered issues which are dealt with within social history, we arrive at the conclusion that they are not associated with one another according to a pattern which could be articulated. What is more, each of these issues could be placed on the list of research problems within historical sub-disciplines, such as history of culture, history of customs, political history, history of religion etc. Only the problems which strictly belong to economic history are almost missing from the list, because the attractiveness of this field of knowledge among wider circles of historians — apart from specialized centres — has diminished even more, as it seems, than the interest taken in social history.

If one wished to establish any ties which would link those scattered interests, the above quoted formula of “Geschichte und Gesellschaft” comes to my mind, which says that all the listed problems are examined within certain societies and in cooperation with other *social sciences*. It also has to be noticed that it is exactly this work — as regards subject matters — which remains to the highest degree within the framework of the European civilization, and more precisely its Western circle, with particular consideration given to the modern and contemporary history of Germany, which is obvious. In such a view, social history is oriented towards what interests a German reader the most, the explanation of the background of a political evolution from the Spring of Nations through Wilhelman Germany until the phenomenon of the Nazi state and (this time to a lesser degree) later development of divided and united Germany. The programme of social history of 1960s–1980s was primarily based on the attempt to explain Nazism through the concept of social ‘deficiency’ of Germany, the German middle class and, in consequence, German democracy. After all, it is difficult to assess how successful that programme was, i.e. whether the studies of social history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany indeed contributed significantly to the understanding of the phenomenon of Nazism, its background and peculiarity. It appears to me that the most monumental works were written outside the area of *Sozialgeschichte*.

No matter how it was, however, such assumptions cannot be the pattern for social history in other countries, as they are of a too local, and therefore not universal enough, dimension. Thus we need to carry on searching.

In British tradition, social history has actually meant for a long time all historical subjects which do not belong to traditional political history, focused on the history of the state, monarchy, politicians and thinkers. It has already been discussed together with the quoted British list of the subjects on social history. According to this presentation, society is understood as a correlate and the opposite of the state. For historians who identify themselves with social history as a historical sub-discipline dealing with a specific object, which is society perceived as a certain structure, such a view seems to be too broad. However, if we fail to define social history in a way different from presenting it as opposed to the history of a state, that is political history, discussed mainly through its institutions, there will be no choice but to accept such an approach.

The problem which then appears concerns social and historical matters of political life, which have always been of interest to social history and which, with such an approach, would belong more to a state and its history rather than to society and its history. This is not, however, a significant objection. Perhaps, it is biographic studies, whose part, e.g. biographies of statesmen, belongs to political history, which would be a more serious problem, but at the same time they, especially in their mass segment (i.e. prosopography) form the foundation of social and historical research.

Such an understanding of social history would deserve to bear the name of minimalist, or perhaps, eclectic, but since neither in our country nor abroad anything more specific or more compact as the subject and the scope of our subject — history of society, has been proposed, so perhaps, it would be a good idea to contemplate the extension and determining the scope of social history in just such a way.

Therefore one would have to begin with dividing historical interests into the ones associated with the **state**, its institutions and policies, and the ones which refer to **society**. There is no need to add that such a distinction is just a matter of convention, and a plethora of problems all at once belong to both categories. This is, however, natural, as important issues cannot be defined sharply at all, and it is only simple and banal objects which can be defined easily. While, on the other hand, if we evaluate historical problems regarding 'society', it is again the studies

on such objects as workers, middle classes, peasants, the intelligentsia, aristocracy, nobility, townspeople, bourgeoisie, gentry etc. etc. (so on the categories associated with class and stratified structure, which has almost been abrogated) that will re-appear, whether we like it or not. These categories appear and will most likely appear either as the objects of a thorough analysis (the description of one stratum or social class in a specific country, on a certain territory, within a certain period), or entangled in other problems — e.g. educational, cultural, “gender” etc. Let us consider, for example, the everyday life of women belonging to one of the categories listed above, here such subjects include, among others, a stratified qualification. One cannot imagine social history without these categories, the only point is that social history also can and has to cover subjects which are not directly linked to the categories of stratification and vertical diversification. Presumably, periods of intensified interests in that latter diversification will always occur, withered occasionally by other subjects, at least by sheer surfeit.

The subjects, which as a matter of fact go beyond diversification and vertical as well as hierarchical structures, include widely researched and discussed problems under the banner of *gender* — which can be classified as a separate and clearly isolated trend in historical and social studies, also associated with the history of customs, science (including medicine), civil and criminal law, and, from a broader perspective, with philosophy, methodology of sciences and history of religion, as well as with historical sociology, where, however, vertical categories sometimes appear.

Those latter issues are often associated with the history of customs. This branch of the history of culture carries a number of possible conceptions and aspects, but it is most frequently linked to everyday life, profiles of communities, rites of initiation and passage, and it can be in general ascribed practically to every aspect of social life. These problems appear separately under such a name, but most often as an easy-to-identify element of investigation focused on a specific subject, e.g. while the culture of respective parts, strata or circles of society is characterised or during the analysis of differentiation of society, based on gender identity, generation, or, especially, on ethnic or similar background. And in this case, the problems concerning

customs cannot usually be examined as separated from historical and sociological depictions, thus as separated from the characteristic of strata or social classes. Therefore, also here vertical divisions, which part of former historians of society distance themselves from, interfere with one another and impose themselves. Yet in most cases, culture is closely connected with ethnic, as well as local and regional dissimilarities, which will be discussed below. As a matter of fact, the history of customs is, evidently, part of the history of culture in the broader sense of the word.

The history of the family is closely related to the history of customs, and it is also associated with *gender* studies. However, the history of the family and family life is, to a certain degree, a separate and very complex subject. Here I am contemplating it in the context of vertical and horizontal diversification, as it belongs to both spheres. Perhaps it is the horizontal factor that prevails, since the family is more a functional rather than hierarchical community, yet families are deeply entangled in the social structure in the most traditional meaning of a social hierarchy. There is no doubt that this problem remains at the very heart of social history, that is the history of society.

Another issue within our domain, which is among the top ones in the list and even *trendy* today, is the *body*, which has appeared quite recently under this banner, but issues associated with this term were also dealt with in the past. They were in particular connected with the history of medicine. After the history of medicine, regarded as a separate profession (the favourite subject of doctors dealing with history), has been isolated, an illness itself and its treatment remain, so in turn a patient turns up, with a specific physical and spiritual condition. We are almost approaching the area where, e.g. 'early' Michel Foucault's creative activity left its deep imprint at some time. This field belongs to social history but also to a number of other sub-disciplines of history and social sciences, such as history of science, education, customs, psychology or cultural studies.

It has been mentioned above that diversification, characteristic features, ethnic conflicts and the like (tribal, racial) played, as though in recent years, a more significant role, since they acquired importance, perhaps as a consequence of already described contemporary processes of weakening 'pure' social con-

flicts, at least those born as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus class conflicts in particular. Obviously, conflicts of ethnic origin are very often entangled in social contradictions, and these contradictions sometimes even play a key role in inducing ethnic conflicts, yet in this case we mainly face conflicts, contradictions and differences of a horizontal nature, thus genetically different from the vertical differentiation of social pattern. Besides, horizontal divisions very often intersect with and even overlap vertical ones. For us, of vital importance remains the question to what degree the problems of diversification, contacts, contradictions, ethnic conflicts and related subjects (e.g. racial, tribal, regional, religious and ethnic) — common both in older and contemporary Europe, as well as outside the continent — belong to social history, or the history of society. The thing is that ethnic problems are closely related to political history as contemporary statehood is, in Europe in particular, of ethnic nature. So, what remains of it for social history? Surely, everything that is associated with vertical diversification, tradition and with other problems outside institutionally determined politics with its war-themes extension, statehood and its political ideology. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine a society without an intellectual thus ideological factor.

Therefore we notice that these particular ethnic issues remain within the framework of social history and in a wider scope than earlier — especially in a social, community and stratified context. The questions of co-existence among different ethnic groups on a local, regional and national scale, with a special preference for direct co-existence within a small group, a village or town, serve as a classic example. The issues of similar nature appear in connection with relations between ethnic and religious groups — especially where religious divisions converge with purely ethnic ones. In this territory social history borders on and even converges partly with ethnology. We know this from practice that co-operation among the researchers representing those two fields can be prolific, and the results — very interesting.

Therefore, one should acknowledge the questions which are more or less closely associated with ethnic communities, their characteristics and their social features, as being of equal value within social history in a broader sense.

As it has been mentioned, the issues linked to neighbourhood, co-existence, conflicts and processes of religious transformations are closely related to ethnic problems. They often intermingle with them as in numerous cases ethnic identification (and the related one, e.g. tribal) also contains religious identification (and the other way round, there is a surplus of examples). These issues always remain the focal point for a historian of society, who naturally approaches them from a different angle than a historian of religion, first of all allowing for their social, community aspect. Besides in numerous cases, changes and arguments regarding even apparently unrelated and abstract concepts and formulae had their far reaching social consequences or they served as a pretext or disguise to show wide-range social conflicts and struggles for power. The most such examples are certainly delivered by the Christianity of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, but also in our times such examples are noticeable<sup>17</sup>. At any rate, social and religious issues belong as a rule to horizontal diversification and put down their name in the list of non-vertical diversification, which is currently discussed, even though — as it has been mentioned — these divisions often intersect with each other and overlap.

It is noteworthy that the issues presented at congresses do not differ much from the ones listed above as the contents of periodicals and scientific conferences, which have already been discussed. All the material mentioned here allows us to gain some knowledge regarding preferences of those historians who are interested in history of society as an object of research, not only as a community or framework of events. Perhaps such an approach would facilitate drawing a distinction between the issues which at present can be associated with social history and other historical subjects. Such a rule would be, perhaps, more justified than the above mentioned highlighting of social history, according to negative selection, as being the opposite of political history.

The question arises, however, whether we can distinguish precisely enough between research into society as the only object and the one into different historical processes which gives

<sup>17</sup> Attacks on Confucianism in China during the times of Mao Tse-Tung can serve as a good example, yet Confucius himself was the one who originated social and moral philosophy rather than religion.



less attention to the social context. It seems to be quite difficult. Do we, for example in our research on an ethnic — cultural community in a small territory, examine it as an element of society? Or, perhaps, we tend to be interested in a given community despite the social context — for its own sake, and we do not care about its place within a global, state or national community etc. etc. Supposedly, the latter approach is less frequently practiced. Thus in our research on a hypothetical ethnic or cultural community, of civilization etc., we most often set our minds on reconstructing a certain aspect of history of society.

It would be of crucial importance to be able to differentiate between the research goal which is to shed light on or to reconstruct a fragment of lives of historical societies, and the goals which are completely autonomous and separated from the social context, as this would introduce a fundamental distinction to our classification of the researched subjects in social history. We raise the question of whether such a completely autonomous approach towards researching historical objects and the whole past and present social life is at all possible. Even if we investigate the most abstract philosophical doctrine or — even better — the development of scientific thought in such areas as logic or mathematics, where a certain inner logic of discoveries that increasingly enter the heart of the matter occurs, largely dependant on the nature of the subject and little on the environment — it does not remain outside the social and historical context. Yet even if one cannot make a precise distinction between the two research attitudes mentioned, some quantitative differences still remain, the differences in fundamental perspective, which play a significant role in determining the way historical reality is treated. Thus we have for example studies which are mostly or almost exclusively oriented towards a pure history of thought — ideological, scientific, esthetic, or history of artefacts of utilitarian or artistic character, and their typology. Such examples can be multiplied but those will be in general the subjects of peripheral importance as regards the picture of contemporary historiography.

In consequence, these borders of social history or the history of society that we can suggest, will not be sharp, which is not necessarily our special concern. They will go somewhere between the loosely outlined history of society understood as

opposed to the history of politics, diplomacy and war, and social history considered as studies on the image and internal composition (structure!) of society, or most often — the specific state and national societies or those associated with a particular civilization or a historical epoch.

We have listed a few big issues, which certainly belong to social history, namely first of all vertical diversity of societies, creating social bonds and communities in a sense of strata, classes and similar macro-structures. Besides, diversification and communities, mainly of horizontal nature, have been mentioned, such as ethnic and religious groups, sexual diversity, problems related to family history, and also (historical) questions regarding the *body*, thus a physical constitution and different physical states against the background of diverse cultures and civilizations as well as in their sexual diversity, questions of health and illness and their social consequences. This is not a full list of issues that remain within the subject of society and as such are included in social history in a broader sense, which I have discussed and suggested above. For example, history of everyday life is also the subject of our interest, being a simultaneous, as if another, slightly marginal but in fact the most significant for most 'ordinary people' history of each walk of social life, such as work, education, family life, school and school life, the town and the country, systematic journeys and even long-lasting wars...

In this place an association should be made with a close relation of history of everyday life, that is micrography and microhistory, which has become one of the inventions of postmodernist criticism of social history.

In an article by Hans Medick a defence of such understanding of microhistory can be found, which does not stand in contradiction to all generalisations — since such tendencies did occur in reaction to generalising preferences of old social history — but rather serves as their supplement and, in particular, verification. In numerous cases, detailed research contradicts generalisations, even those commonly recognised — this has been experienced by every historian who has researched some mass phenomena, especially with the use of mass period sources. It concerns to an even larger extent the research of a single point, one place and one local community, which often give us an image that largely differs from the paradigm accepted by the au-

thors of syntheses, perhaps consistent and logically convincing but not finding, in many cases, enough confirmation and therefore, as it seems, not reflecting the majority of facts. The authors of syntheses are too prone to rely on own intuition, they tend to skip from one subject to another, whereas reality is much more complex than it appears to them. Accordingly, one would have to wish a considerable amount of detailed research devoted to 'small' objects, 'small' communities, and finally individuals or single families. Such research has brought social historiography a fresh look (e.g. works by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg). Microhistory may increase an inductive factor in formulating general theories, at the same time completing the postulate by Clifford Geertz of 'dense depiction' (in this case of old reality)<sup>18</sup>. The only thing is that one should avoid drawing methodological, theoretical and cognitive conclusions, merely based on the microhistoric method.

In this field, on the other hand, one should be beware of an illustrative approach, looking for, first of all, examples to confirm general truths (or untruths). In any case, research on small groups, local communities, on history of individuals, not necessarily ordinary ones but, perhaps, the ones who show particular distinction and significant intensification of individual features, can constitute one of the possible ways to return to an interest in the history of society. A lot of interesting things can happen, e.g. on the margin of the tendency, noticeable today, to reconstruct family history and a family tree of a contemporary living individual. Everyone interested in a *real image of the past*<sup>19</sup> must be pleased if, as a result of research on a historical and social microscale, the theories and pictures commonly and unreflectively stuck in the consciousness of researchers become called into question, which in fact are the result of an interpolation or extrapolation. The necessity to make use of those latter approaches is, after all, sometimes caused by the fact that studies on relevant sources are not 'dense' enough.

Therefore, the preference given to a number of micrographic works should become one of the proposals for our social history,

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<sup>18</sup> I have already mentioned this issue, J. Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna (Social History)*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> As I assume, together with a significant majority of practical historians, that such a concept is legitimate!

e.g. in the field of the history of women, family, local history set to extract peculiarity rather than confirm general truths, including the smallest places, villages, settlements and little towns.

In this way we proceed from the issues concerning international historiography to the ones concerning our local, national ground. In my reflections so far, I have tried to depict contemporary and current issues within social history, that is the history of society, as they arise from the review of subjects discussed at international congresses and in foreign periodicals. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of this paper is to arrive at conclusions and draw up proposals for our native history of society.

The first issue that in my view should be postulated here is raising the level of methodological self-awareness of practicing researchers and the improvement of their knowledge of current research problems, disputes and discussions about the place social history should take within historical studies and in general — against the background of social studies. Only on this condition do the proposals have a good chance of success and acceptance.

These proposals are designated for further discussion and they do not aim at introducing a programme like a compact pattern of steps to be taken. Such an approach would not be proper with reference to social history. It is political history that still takes the offensive. For a significant part of the public it is the synonym of historical studies as a whole. The collapse of communism and the opening of new opportunities to write on formerly prohibited or restricted subjects, reminiscent of Polish-Russian and Polish-Soviet relations or the international policy of the communist block, the USSR and Russia in general, bears fruit in the form of an avalanche of more or less scholarly works within this scope. In numerous cases the myths which were officially publicised before 1989 are being replaced by other myths, following a completely different trend. These are phenomena understandable as such for a historian in general and an observer of history of historical studies in particular. The pendulum, now swayed to one side, will swing back as time goes by, and later it will presumably sway to the other side.

Social history in Poland researched by historians of older and middle-aged generations, was additionally burdened by the

practice of the 1970s and 1980s, when it was imposed on historians, research centres and groups of scholars within the system of the so called key issues, with the aim to partially eliminate dangerous political history. No wonder that negative traces of those practices have remained in memory of some historians until now<sup>20</sup>. Yet it is still likely to influence the selection of subjects historians make, to the disadvantage of those associated with social history.

In Poland, the centres which specialise in this sub-discipline are few and far between, whereas research on diverse, usually strewn subjects within the above discussed scope is also done in other centres. These studies reflect scientific interests scattered across different areas. It can be associated with the areas of research, outlined above, on the history of society in other countries, and in particular in those places where this research, having been done earlier, served as a pattern for other research centres, which were less known in the world as they published in their vernacular 'non-congress' languages. If we consider how difficult it is to define what social history constitutes and what it deals with today, it will be equally difficult to outline a programme which would go beyond one of those sparse Polish research centres. However, it is possible to list a number of programmes of a more limited range, according to the dispersion of scientific interests. Here are a couple of more detailed subjects — though the same subjects form huge scientific complexes: the intelligentsia as a key social issue of Poland, the evolution of its role, the extension of our erstwhile knowledge onto regional and professional communities, as well as the investigation into its function as part or a surrogate for the middle class (?). Real or ostensible upgrading of Polish society during the period of Communist rule; the impact that cultural transformations in the world had on Polish society between 1944 and 1989. Woman, family and customs — key complex of studies for the characteristics of social transformations between 1944–1989. This is closely associated with already developed research on the history of women, their situation and potential, within the framework of gender studies where, after all, attempts have been made for some time now to depart from examining the issue from unilat-

<sup>20</sup> See: J. Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna (Social History)*, p. 22.

eral, women's perspective. The creation of a new Polish society from mixed territorial groups and as a consequence of mass war and post-war migrations, as well as those linked to industrialisation and urbanisation. It is historical and sociological issues, which cease to be timely for sociology, that already begin to appear on the horizon. Here, it is the problem of the middle class that comes to the fore, directly associated with the assessment of the position and role the intelligentsia played in communist and post-communist Poland, which has been discussed above.

In previous years, the questions of alternation of generations and regional history did not draw much attention. However, research on the history of women has developed significantly, as they now fill in the majority of *gender* studies. Today women constitute a considerable part of all subjects within social history, irrespective of the way it is defined. Surely, this will also continue in future.

On the border between *gender* studies and more traditional social history lies the history of family, which begins to draw the attention of an increasing number of scholars. This issue has a good chance to be found soon among often discussed questions in the field of social history in Poland. Works within this scope are already noticeable.

The most important matter, however, whose promotion in the hierarchy of issues examined by social history has already been mentioned above, is research on particular communities as well as ethnic and cultural questions. These problems are the most obvious for the times and areas where different ethnic communities have appeared. There, every single investigation into an ethnic community is simultaneously, which is understandable, the study of communities, contacts and social conflicts. Such situation actually occurred in all Polish provinces, and later in the Polish state till the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, since the beginning of the post-war period (i.e. after WWII) the Polish population has constituted an overwhelming majority among the inhabitants of the country and, even though problems of coexistence and ethnic conflicts have not completely vanished, their significance to social and everyday life of town and country dwellers has become rather marginal. The more so, the question becomes increasingly evident: what is to be or what can be the role of social history in the studies of the Polish ethnic

community, a national society? Part of these ethnic issues are within the range of political history. This also concerns part of ideological matters, e.g. political thought. Nevertheless, on the other hand, such fascinating problems as the attitude of respective circles and parts of Polish society towards the idea of national community during 1945–1989, which at one time was spotlighted in detail by sociologists in such an interesting way (let the name of Stefan Nowak and his studies of the character of social bonds in the Polish People's Republic be the reminder), make a complex of issues never to be taken up outside social history. Another matter, which belongs to our sub-discipline, from the history of the same period: a profile of major cultural circles and evolution of cultural stratification of society depending on social development (or against the lack of it and its distortion), economic transformations, shifts in education, migrations, the influence of the West and East on the Polish culture of this period.

I consider the history of Polish society from 1944 or 1945 till the present time to be the most timely problem among those which should be solved by future social history. Yet at the same time equally valid are the social and historical questions which stem from history of Polish society and society of Polish territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the interwar period and during WWII. I will not elaborate on these issues as I have discussed them many times, and social history of the interwar period in particular. I shall only mention that ethnic and ethnic-cultural questions come to the fore, next to the issues defined by the codeword *gender*. Jews and Polish-Jewish relations, assimilation, Ukrainians and their coexistence with Poles, advances and delays in introducing equality of rights for women in Poland — all these are the questions which shaped the social history of interwar Poland in a way slightly different than earlier. Besides, a number of previously discussed and investigated questions remain topical, especially, e.g. the history of the intelligentsia, regional history — both in the context of previously practised history of social structures and mentioned above local and microhistory. Yet also the period of partitions (including the First World War) continue to be an ocean of subjects, in particular within the broader contexts outlined here, which is suggested for social history. May I only remind you of a large new auto-

biographic material, which sometimes introduces brand-new and previously unnoticed questions, after all not only for this slightly older period but also for later times, especially the inter-war years and WWII. For some decades at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is the issues under the banner of *gender* and social-cultural history of women that remain, for the time being, the major trend in studies of social history.

A few remarks, which appear in this text, are an attempt to arrange the issues of social history in the light of world trends, and to sketch probable and possible trends and postulates. In the face of the heterogeneous nature of contemporary social history, such an arrangement of discussed problems can only be made on a limited scale. Perhaps, in the course of further discussion a more precise criterion for identifying and arranging the subject(s) of this division of historical studies can be found.

*(Translated by Robert Bubczyk)*