

JANUSZ ŻARNOWSKI  
(26 APRIL 1932 – 9 MAY 2019)

In the entire course of his career as a scholar, which lasted over sixty years, Janusz Żarnowski was primarily a social historian. Following his short adventure with orthodox Marxism, which he would use in his first studies on the social activity of Polish working class in the early interwar period, he joined the circle of modern social history, emerging at that time at the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of History [IH PAN] around Professor Witold Kula.<sup>1</sup> Later in the 1950s and the subsequent decade, he entered into close cooperation with the *Annales* circle, contributing to the creation of a new social history. The idea behind the project was to combine all the advantages and reliability of classical historiography with the use of inspiration of the fast-developing social sciences – ethnology, cultural anthropology, and sociology, in the first place. It was with sincere enthusiasm and optimism that Żarnowski welcomed the idea. As he would write in 1964: “Research into social history, particularly focusing on the evolution of social structure, have become fully legitimate in the international historical science – once the scholars realised that it is only in its integral conception that history is able to answer the questions posed by its contemporaries. An integral concept of history is possible when an elementary balance is struck between the results achieved in the research on individual spheres of societies' activities: political, cultural, social, and economic. Today, there are only few historians internationally who would be willing to restrict historical research, virtually, to political history”.<sup>2</sup> For Żarnowski himself, the social milieu of the

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<sup>1</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, ‘Strajk kolejarzy i strajk powszechny w lutym-marcu 1921 r.’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 4 (1956), 55–88.

<sup>2</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Struktura społeczna inteligencji polskiej w latach 1918–1939*, viii (Warszawa, 1964). It is worth realising that his doctoral thesis, published 1965,

intelligentsia and the working class became the research field within the new social history, with a chronological focus on the interwar period. It was a pioneering approach, given the fact that studies of the French social historians, who inspired (not only Polish) researchers at the time, would not exceed the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1962, Żarnowski completed a book discussing the social structure of Poland's interwar intelligentsia (*Struktura społeczna inteligencji w Polsce 1918–1939* – The Social Structure of Intelligentsia in Poland, 1918–1939), and had it published in 1964; he qualified as assistant professor (receiving his 'habilitation') on its basis. The study is an in-depth analysis of intelligentsia as a major social and professional stratum within Polish interwar society. Based on diverse sources, from statistics to literary works, he estimated the entire intelligentsia population and described its categorisations in line with different criteria, grouping them into a vertical (managers/experts and executive brainworkers on the one hand or by education, income, material status on the other) and a horizontal classification (professional or vocational groups, territorial, demographic, etc. divisions) – including, in particular, education, method of gaining means of subsistence, workplace, abode, and ethnicity. The major vocational groups were moreover briefly described. One of the main arguments was the identification of the process of fast differentiation of intelligentsia (as a broad concept) into the milieu's narrow elite (intellectuals, freelancers, experts, and an upper white-collar class) and a broad group of medium- and lower-level brainworkers.<sup>3</sup> In methodological terms, the study in question can be regarded as a sort of research reconnaissance in the quest for the author's own path of analysis and description of (the) society as a whole, rather than its specified stratum or strata. No less important, from the standpoint of reliable knowledge on Polish society, were his studies on the history of the working class – unjustly treated as politically imbued and attracting not as much interest among the broader reading public.<sup>4</sup> Żarnowski

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is classifiable as political history (though with extensive social reflection): Janusz Żarnowski, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna 1935–1939* (Warszawa, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> For an interesting (and much more easily available today) considerations on this particular subject-matter, see Janusz Żarnowski, 'Problemy badań nad strukturą inteligencji w Polsce 1918–1939', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 2 (1962), 380–98.

<sup>4</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Klasa robotnicza w Polsce międzywojennej. Struktura i ewolucja* (Warszawa, 1988).

made use of his research experience gained during his studies on selected social milieus or circles in the subsequent stage of his career when he sought to reconstruct the image of the entire society of interwar Poland.

1973 saw the publication of Janusz Żarnowski's most important study, entitled *Spółeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [The Society of Interwar Poland]. The author intended it as an initial synthesis of interwar Poland's social structure, which in parallel was designed to set the framework and determine the questionnaire for further long-term research. Referring to the methodological foundation of the study, he wrote: "In examining the diverse forms of social differentiation, the point-of-departure is the Marxist thesis on the special and central role of class, or class-and-stratum, division amongst the various types of the said differentiation".<sup>5</sup> However, in his opinion, the class/stratum-based structure did not exhaust the aspects of importance for a complete description of society: "Apart from the class/stratum division, there are other types of structuralisation functioning, among whom hierarchical systems are particularly prominent, based on income, education, participation in power, cultural structure – taking into account cultural centres and stratifications within a national society and national cultures coexisting within a given area – and, finally, the spatial-and-ecological structure".<sup>6</sup> The proposition to describe the social structure of the Second Republic has been virtually completely accepted by experts in contemporary history and a broad circle of those interested. In a matter of several years, Professor Żarnowski's core argument was reflected in school textbooks. Without gross misinterpretation, it can be stated that Żarnowski has, directly and/or indirectly, shaped the way in which several generations perceived the society of interwar Poland. All the more so that he made use of the view of the society, as it was defined in the 1970s, in his (co-authored) popular synthetic social-history works, notably as co-author of the books on Polish society between the tenth and the twentieth centuries (*Spółeczeństwo polskie od X do XX wieku* and *Spółeczeństwo polskie w wieku XX*), broadly read to this day.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Spółeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, vii (Warszawa, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 7–8.

<sup>7</sup> Ireneusz Ilnatowicz, Antoni Mączak, Benedykt Zientara, and Janusz Żarnowski, *Spółeczeństwo polskie od X do XX wieku* (Warszawa, 1979) (4th & 5th eds., Warszawa,

The proposition dated 1973 would have probably remained to date the last word of Polish historiography describing the society of Poland between the two World Wars, had it not been for – again! – Żarnowski himself. In 2009, he prepared a research project on *The Society of the Second Republic of Poland: a new attempt at synthesis*, funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (subsequently, by the National Science Centre) and headed the work until 2014. And, he summarised the research and discussions of several dozens participants thus: “The main correction to the picture I proposed in my 1973 book has been a combination of equivalent structures without them being separated from one another and without searching for a marshaling, or perhaps dominant, role of stratification by class and/or stratum. A description thus integrated is much more difficult, and its application comes across source-related problems, including unavailability of statistical data adapted to the units we have applied. Its strong point is, instead (and I should hope so), its closeness to the reality”.<sup>8</sup> Żarnowski’s enormously valuable contribution to the work on the new synthetic description of interwar Poland’s society was the particular focus on the role of the state as a co-creator of the social structure and a factor influencing its changes.

Modernisation became one of the most discussed problems in international social and economic sciences in the 1960s. Mechanisms were analysed of the processes of transformation of pre-industrial societies into modern industrial ones, in the leading countries in terms of the progress of capitalism and industrialisation as well as in (various categories of) peripheral areas and dependent, mainly colonial, territories. In this context, Żarnowski posed the question about the course and mechanisms of modernisation processes in prewar Poland and resolved to investigate the problem through analysing the relations occurring between the level and development of technology and the condition of, and changes in, economy, society, and culture. Specific findings regarding the Second Republic were meant to contribute to the answer to a general question regarding the ways in which technology informs the social and economic development in the historical evolution of modern and earlier societies, taken as a whole.

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1999–2005, with a chapter on the period 1945–89); Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, Szymon Rudnicki, and Janusz Żarnowski, *Spółczesność polskie w XX wieku* (Warszawa, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 25.

In his book *Polska 1918–1939. Praca – technika – społeczeństwo* [Poland in 1918 to 1939: Labour – Technology – Society], published 1992, he asked: “Will the example of Poland confirm the role of technology as an independent variable of social development, or, would such independent variable have to be looked for elsewhere?”<sup>9</sup> And he demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, an insular character of modern technology in interwar Poland: “Modernity and high technological level concentrated on great industry ... whereas small-scale production was characterised by technological and social backwardness. Technological progress was to be seen primarily in installing single pieces of machinery or appliances ... whereas comprehensive mechanisation of technological processes was still in its infancy. The changes taking place in agriculture were minimal, given the actual needs”.<sup>10</sup> In parallel, “rather paradoxically, the influence of a new technological civilisation has expressed itself in culture. Mass culture underwent rapid development in the interwar period, its content having been composed of new or modernised mass media”.<sup>11</sup>

Over the entire period of his activity as a scholar, Janusz Żarnowski was in search of methodological tools that would enable to possibly precisely, as well as clearly, (re)arrange the enormous resource of information regarding the social reality under study, while remaining loyal to a historian’s basic mission: make sure that the knowledge based on analysis of specific historical sources take the upper hand on model conceptualisations. He would remain open to Marx’s thought – taken as a proposition of an intellectual perspective for description of analysis of social reality – during his entire career as a scholar. At the core of this thought, there still stood materialism of historical processes, recognition of the fundamental role of economic premises for the shaping of a social reality, and existence of reconstructible and researchable (with use of scientific tools) social structures forming altogether a vertical and a horizontal profile of a global society. Żarnowski would interpret the categories of social structure(s) in a much broad manner. As he pointed out, some of them are created with the use of ‘hard’ criteria, such that are measurable in terms of income or affluence, social

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<sup>9</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Polska 1918–1939. Praca – technika – społeczeństwo* (Warszawa, 1992), 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 360.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 364.

function, profession, and descent, while others ensue from intangible premises – cultural, or mental. Albeit, for different periods, he would ascribe a different role to specific structures in the formation of social realities (taken as a whole), he always warned against the danger of absolutising any of the criteria of social categorisation (such as national/ethnic or class-based). Żarnowski's last work, on the Polish intelligentsia in the twentieth and early twenty-one centuries, records his attempt to balance the importance of the numerous factors forming the social environment.<sup>12</sup>

The methodology of social history is the central issue in the 2011 study *Historia społeczna. Metodologia – ewolucja – perspektywy* [Social History. Methodology – Evolution – Perspectives].<sup>13</sup> There are two aspects making this book highly valuable. First, it offers a competent account of the history of the main currents in social history on an international scale and within Poland; it is all the more valuable that the author personally took part in the development of the main research centres of this particular field of expertise – in France (the *Annales* circle, in 1960s and 1970s) and Germany (the *Sozialgeschichte* current, between the seventies and the early twenty-first century).<sup>14</sup> His presentation of the development of social history in Poland is not only interpretative: there is an added value to it, as the author offers us an account of a direct participant in the trend's development.

While primarily remaining an academic scholar, Janusz Żarnowski was heavily involved in popularising reliable historical knowledge. He penned two books designed for a broader audience, both connected with the sixtieth anniversary of Poland's independence. The popular character of these publications was mainly a matter of their approachable narration style and limited scientific apparatus – with no restriction on technique- and/or content-related standards, and taking full responsibility for the proposed opinions. In the book *Ojczyzną był*

<sup>12</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Inteligencja polska 1918–2018*, series: 'Metamorfozy społeczne', xxiii [forthcoming].

<sup>13</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Historia społeczna. Metodologia – ewolucja – perspektywy*, series: 'Metamorfozy społeczne', iii (Warszawa, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Publication of a collection of Janusz Żarnowski's articles on twentieth-century social and political history, in English, came as a token of international recognition of his output: Janusz Żarnowski, *State, Society and Intelligentsia. Modern Poland and its Regional Context* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2003), xiv+312 pp., 'Variorum Collected Studies Series', 759.

*język i mowa. Kultura polska a odbudowa niepodległości w 1918 r.* [The Language and the Parlandce Was Their Motherland. Polish Culture and the Reconstruction of the Country's Independence in 1918] (published by Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza), Żarnowski documented the argument that "changes in the awareness, which means changes occurring in the sphere of culture, turned out, as a matter of fact, to be the most decisive factor in the future national liberation".<sup>15</sup> In the study *Listopad 1918 [November 1918]*, published a few years later, he proposed his own interpretation of the tangle of political events in the international and Polish domestic dimension, founded upon the (contextually viewed) social processes taking place in the Polish territories before and during the First World War. The considerations of the position and role of November 1918 and the interwar-period experiences in Polish national history, expressed in this book, proved important from the standpoint of academic science and public debate on Polish history.<sup>16</sup> 1999 saw the publication of Janusz Żarnowski's book on 'twentieth-century societies' (*Spółczeństwa XX wieku*), which came out as part of the Ossolineum publishing house series 'Zrozumieć Europę' [Understanding Europe].<sup>17</sup> The study deserves particular attention as it forms a summary of the social history of our continent in the twentieth century – probably, the only such attempt in Polish historiography. The considerations contained therein were based on the author's own research on the societies of Poland and East Central Europe, his readings of German, French and British social historians, a rich sociological literature, and his personal experience based on the long years of close cooperation with members of international historical milieu, particularly in France and Germany.

Janusz Żarnowski actively participated in academic life and held a number of posts of importance to the scholarly milieu and society as a whole. For more than forty years would he run research laboratories and departments, including as Deputy Director of Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences, in 1973–6. As head, since 1966, of the Department of the History of the Soviet Union and Central Europe, he took an active part in international cooperation, mainly with the Czech and Romanian circles of historians.

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<sup>15</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Ojczyzną był język i mowa* (Warszawa, 1978), 264–5.

<sup>16</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *Listopad 1918* (Warszawa, 1982), 205.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

He initiated, was an academic editor and contributor to several important publications on the region's history, remaining scientifically valuable till this day.<sup>18</sup> From 1967 to 1981 he headed the editorial board of the journal *Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowowschodniej* [Studies in the History of the USSR and East Central Europe]. As a long-standing head of the Department of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Social Transformations, he initiated the publication series 'Metamorfozy społeczne' [Social Metamorphoses].<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s he became a member of German-Polish Textbook Commission and systematically partook in the body's activities for almost thirty years. In 2003–11, he chaired the Polish Academy of Sciences' Committee for Historical Sciences. Moreover, he represented Polish historians' milieu with the International Committee of Historical Sciences, taking an active part in its world congresses – in Montreal (1995), Sydney (2005), and Amsterdam (2010). Since 2009, he was a member of the Warsaw Scientific Society.

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<sup>18</sup> These include: *Ład wersalski w Europie Środkowej* (Wrocław, 1970); *Dyktatury w Europie Środkowej* (Wrocław, 1973); *Przyjaźnie i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1918–1939* (Wrocław, 1977); and, *Dictatorships in East-Central Europe 1918–1939. Anthologies* (Wrocław, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Volume one was published in 1997 as *Metamorfozy społeczne. Badania nad dziejami społeczeństwa polskiego XIX i XX wieku* (Warszawa, 1997).