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ON THE BOOK OF DOBROCHNA KAŁWA

Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej. Dylematy środowisk kobiecych (The Active Woman in Inter-war Poland. The Dilemmas of Women's Milieux), Kraków 2001, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Historia Jagiellonica”, 178 pp.

Dobrochna Kałwa's book is not the first written work of this young historian connected with the Jagiellonian University. Several years ago she introduced into Polish historiography a problem which is very important to research into social mentality — that of the press debate on the penalization of abortion and on birth control in the inter-war period¹. Her work on active women in the inter-war period is also of a pioneering character. In fact, we have not got so far any general treatment of the women's problem, of obtaining by them full civic rights and the possibility of realizing their own intellectual aspirations in the period of the rise of a modern state (in the sense used by Weber).

While picking up Kałwa's book, a historian will ask what is the actual subject of this work, that is what is meant by the term “an active woman”. Feminists *in gremio* and feminist historians are most frequently and justifiably accused of not defining or specifying clearly the subject of their works. It goes without saying that one cannot subject to analysis simply “women”, or “men”. The other “sin” of feminist historiography is that it extends the behaviour and attitudes of the feminine élites (academics, intellectuals, social activists, members of the artistic avant-

¹ D. Kałwa, *Głos kobiet w sprawie planowania rodziny w świetle prasy z lat 1929–1932 (The Women's Voice on Family Planning in the Light of the Press of 1929–1932)*, in: *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego. Wiek XIX i XX*, ed. A. Żarowska and A. Szwarc, Warszawa 1997, pp. 123–132.

garde) over the whole community of women². The author of the work under discussion has defended herself against such an accusation at the very outset, by openly defining the circle of the women under analysis precisely as the élite. This does not mean that her book does not contain any interesting information concerning the everyday life of average women, however, this provides only the distant background of her deliberations.

Kałwa has departed from the pattern of historical narration most preferred by Polish historians, that is from chronology, in favour of taking up particular problems, or even presenting models. The successive chapters of her book present precisely the models of women's activeness: that of a housewife (chap. 2), mother and educator (chap. 3), guardian of morals (chap. 4), social activist (chap. 5), working woman (chap. 6), woman-citizen (chap. 7), military woman (chap. 8), feminist activist (chap. 9). The author creates the models of women's characters in the inter-war period on the basis of the press, memoirs, fiction and film. Let us add that the subtitle of the book (*The Dilemmas of Women's Milieux*) suggests that we may be dealing here with the history of mentality. In fact the author analyses, in keeping with the title, various forms of women's activeness as well as their social reception, without paying much attention to the nuances of personality. She completely leaves aside the deep psychological or psychoanalytical analyses which can be found in the works of literary critics³.

Let us now dwell upon the methodological questions. Kałwa declares that her book can be ranked among "women studies", a field of historical research on the one hand connected with the

² Let us cite Gertrude Himmelfarb's criticism of feminist historiography (among other books, the famous work by Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, London 1991), which extends the bohemian style of life into the whole of society. Himmelfarb writes: "<Sexual anarchy> is an apt description of the fin de siècle, so long as both expressions are understood to apply to particular groups and movements in that period and not the period as a whole.(...) The <free spirits> of the late-Victorian period had no such democratic or revolutionary aspirations. They thought of themselves as rare beings, capable of a degree of independence and nonconformity that most people did not aspire and could not attain (...) In the language of our day, they were content to be <marginalized>, eadem, *The De-moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, London 1995, p. 218.

³ The examples of such analyses are the portraits of Narcyza Żmichowska, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Maria Konopnicka suggestively presented by Grażyna Borkowska in her book, *Cudzoziemki. Studia o polskiej prozie kobiecej (Outlandish Women. Studies in Polish Women's Prose)*, Warszawa 1996.

development of the second wave of feminism (from the end of the 1960s), commenced in English-speaking countries⁴, and on the other with the postmodernist trend in social sciences and broadly conceived humanities, connected with the names of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. It is worth noting that the second wave of feminism reached Poland, as well as other countries of Central-Eastern Europe, with a long delay. As early as the 1970s in the West of Europe historiography gradually departed from the traditional description of women through the prism of their exceptional, unique and untypical role in history (rulers, beatified women and saints, outstanding artists) in favour of research into women's mentality, the emancipation discourse, changes in consciousness, relations within the family, educational aspirations, shifts in the occupational structure, etc., while in Poland the "old" pre-feminist research paradigm, dominated by biography, continued. Feminist methodological criticism has settled in Polish historical studies fairly recently. "The feminists hold", writes Kałwa, "that the only element that discriminated women, was the lack (partial or complete) of their picture in the view of the past. The basic charge raised by feminist theory against the traditional (pre-feminist) historiography was its tendency to confine the researchers' interests to the areas of activity and experience of men, where the representation of women who went beyond or acted despite the female social roles, was very small. (...) On the other hand, traditional researchers ignored the specificity of the experience and life of women. In its studies of the history of large social groups (nations, classes, local communities), traditional historiography took into account the data relating both to men and women, generally without making any distinction between the two genders in its description.(...) Female feminist historians questioned, e.g. the presentation of social progress in historical studies, and especially the processes of the democratization of

⁴ For example, in England as early as 1967 Historical Workshops were created that brought together wide circles of Marxist historians and started a feminist trend in historiography. In 1971 the "History Workshop Journal" was founded, which from its first issue bore the subtitle "journal of socialist and feminist historians". This was the first institution that could be referred to by various projects of "gender studies". The 5th Historical Workshops were entirely devoted to women's question. Cf. Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, *Historia zwykłych ludzi. Współczesna historiografia dziejów społecznych (The History of Ordinary People. Contemporary Social Historiography)*, Kraków 2003, pp. 168–170.

political life in the 19th century, which referred to the whole of society, without taking women into account". (p. 7). The author presents with much insight the essence of this controversy between the traditional and feminist (and postmodernist) treatment of the history of women. It is worth noting, however, that this controversy had more axes than one between feminist historiography and traditional historiography. From the 1980s onwards feminist methodology inspired by postmodernism was also directed against the research methods of social historians. The British, American or German social historians were convulsed by the appearance of the phenomenon called "linguistic turn", which after conquering literary studies (of text and language), social sciences (anthropology and sociology), affected historical studies. Its essence was calling into question the possibility of learning the objective reality with the help of language. Every language, every type of communication, said the postmodernist adherents of the "linguistic turn", creates its own structure and projection of reality. In a radical postmodernist approach the concept of "linguistic turn" questioned at the epistemological level the usefulness of historical sources for the description of reality, since the sources do not reflect any objective reality (which does not exist), and they exclusively represent themselves. As a consequence of the adoption of such an extreme stand, not only the methods of historical research were called into question, but also the very work of a historian as an intermediary between the past and the present⁵.

The concept of "linguistic turn" did not exert much influence on the works of Polish historians, but it left its clear mark on the research and literary criticism concerning the history of women. One can venture to say that the Polish historiography devoted to women, which willingly invokes the concepts of social class or stratum, is much closer to modernist social history, while such

⁵ M. Kurkowska-Budzan says: "The «linguistic turn» makes social historians realize that all the events, structures and processes of the past do not exist beyond their representation in the sources, beyond the historical discourse, beyond their conceptualization and political context. This certainly undermines the foundations of the paradigm of social history. Idea, text, event were here examples which had their social structural context, indispensable for understanding their meaning. The *linguistic turn* turned the situation upside down — there is no structure beyond the idea, text, and event, there is nothing they could be related to or that would endow them with an appropriate, real meaning". Eadem, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

authors as Maria Janion or Grażyna Borkowska, to mention the most significant representatives of this new trend, have adopted the whole assortment of postmodernist research techniques⁶.

Dobrochna Kałwa's book situates itself closer to social history, but modified and modernized by the adoption of the concept of "gender", as an important, (though as the author says, not the only) factor of social stratification. Gender, Kałwa writes, is in contrast to the biological sex, constructed by culture. The category of "gender" reflects the desirable and socially accepted patterns of behaviour, it is a product of culture and its needs. Let us remember that the category of "gender", most frequently used for description in "women studies", reflects both the traits of "femininity" and "masculinity".

The book is divided into 9 chapters. The first is an essay on the social, legal, and political position of women in the inter-war period. Kałwa emphasizes that the acquisition of full civic rights did not automatically signify the abolition of the law which discriminated women and was inherited from the partitioners. The regulations on the strength of which a woman on getting married automatically received the citizenship of her husband, were retained. There were also some detailed regulations, issued after 1918, which made it difficult for women to enter such legal professions as a judge, legal adviser or barrister. In 1924 regulations were issued concerning the dismissal of married women from state offices, and in 1926 the Silesian Diet issued the so-called act of celibacy, introducing in the Silesian district a law about the automatic cessation of the employment of female teachers who got married. Such and other symptoms of discrimination against women were not only, Kałwa argues, characteristic of Poland. Similar regulations, and even more frequent practices consisting of dismissing married women were applied both in England and Germany. In this chapter the author cites many other examples in social life and politics, which clearly show that the slogans of women's emancipation at such a rudimentary level as the law, to say nothing of social consciousness, had always been topical and never fulfilled.

⁶ M. Janion, *Kobieta i duch inności (Woman and the Spirit of Otherness)*, Warszawa 1996; G. Borkowska, *op. cit.*; *Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury (Feminist Criticism. A Sister to the Theory and History of Literature)*, ed. G. Borkowska and L. Sikora, Warszawa 2000.

The subsequent chapters are devoted to the analysis of the models (mentioned in the title) of women's activeness in private life (woman as a housewife, mother and educator, and guardian of morals) and public life (woman as a social activist, working woman, citizen, feminist activist). All the models presented by Kafwa concern the thread, fundamental from the point of view of the history of ideas, of relations between the private/public sphere and the activeness of women.

This thread accompanied the campaigns of suffragettes from the very beginning. In Britain the protest against granting political rights to women created an extraordinary union of conservatives, socialists, trade union activists and ... women. In 1889 an anti-suffragette petition was placed in Parliament, called "infamous"⁷ by Deborah Epstein North. It was signed by over a hundred women, including Christina Rossetti, Eliza Lynn Linton, Beatrice Potter (later known as Webb) and many women who were known not as much for their own activity, as for that of their husbands⁸.

While the protest of conservatives was understandable, and one can easily imagine what set of arguments they used in anti-suffragette debates, the protest of socialists and women is intriguing to say the least.

Socialists (such as H. M. Hyndmann — the leader of the Social-Democratic Federation, Karl Pearson — Marxist and eugenicist, Frederic Harrison and E. S. Beesley — liberal socialists, John Ruskin — art critic and critic of capitalism, members of the Fabian Society), trade union activists (Henry Broadhurst) and liberals (such as John Moreley, James Bryce, William Harcourt, Lord Asquith, William Gladstone) had all a good pragmatic ground for not supporting the project of granting women the right of vote. They maintained, not without reason, that women were attached to traditional values and constituted a potential conservative electorate⁹.

⁷ D. Epstein North, *Neither Pairs Nor Odd. Female Community in Late Nineteenth-Century London*, "Signs", Summer 1990, p. 753.

⁸ The names from this list have been cited by G. Himmelfarb, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁹ G. Himmelfarb cites an interesting discussion between Lord Acton and W. Gladstone. Acton warned Gladstone against the political cost of giving the franchise to women, since, as he anticipated, most of their vote would go to the Tories. Acton thought that even if a part of the female electorate gave their vote to the Liberals, even then the balance between the two parties would be too unstable to justify supporting the women in their campaign for enfranchisement. Cf. eadem, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

This pragmatic, at any rate non-ideological ground for the protest against women's suffrage voiced by the majority of politicians (and female adversaries of the suffragette movement) was backed up by arguments about an allegedly "inborn" moral superiority of women over men, a superiority which would be destroyed in contact with the brutal world of politics. Due to women's "natural" ability to offer assistance and protection, as well as their readiness to sacrifice themselves for others, only the private sphere — that is the home — was saved from the "dirt" of politics and the spirit of capitalist rivalry. Feminists protested against this opinion and pointed out that the theory of women's moral superiority served and sanctioned a double morality which in fact was the source of women's humiliation. Feminists emphasized that double moral standards concerned not only the narrow relation between a concrete woman and man, but also gave rise to a pathology of social life, e.g. prostitution, which spread venereal diseases. Hence large popularity was gained by the feminist slogan: "Votes for Women, Chastity for Men". The author of *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill, agreed that extolling women as guardians of morals relegated them to the "old", private sphere. On the other hand his protest against the stereotype vision of femininity was also based on pragmatic reasons. He argued that women exerted a positive influence on social sensitivity in a society dominated by the ideal of manhood, which had lost its relevance long ago. Modern morality departed from the ideal of "knightly virtues" in favour of justice. Mill argued that by crossing the barriers of the private sphere and entering the public sphere women exercised both a beneficial and a harmful influence. The negative influence of women was marked in the sphere of charity, where they were especially active because of the specificity of their upbringing, which prepared them for "feeling" rather than for "understanding". Short-sighted charity weakened the "sterner virtues", such as: "self-respect", "self-help", and "self-control"¹⁰.

At first sight the granting of political rights to women was carried out in Poland almost without any discussion¹¹. It was not

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹¹ In Polish conditions the discussion concerning granting women political rights was not as stormy as in England, though it did take place. This subject has not yet been discussed by scholars.

preceded by press debates that would engage wide opinion-making circles. Also the character of enfranchisement was here different from the British model. In 1918 full political rights were given to all women regardless of their education, profession or public activeness, while the theorist of feminism, John St. Mill, proposed to grant full civic rights in the public sphere to women rather as to individuals, persons than a class or gender¹². To put it in a nutshell, the Polish variant of women's enfranchisement referred rather to the principle of the citizens' equality, while the British to their freedom. The former was a socialist project, the latter a liberal one. In connection with these differences, one can ask some provocative questions: did the lack of a wide public debate preceding enfranchisement affect the state of consciousness of Polish women as active citizens? To what extent did they make use of the privilege (right) of making political decisions? Did they perceive politics as a sphere due to which the position of all the women in Poland was in the process of improvement? Did they finally acquire the ability to distinguish between two different planes of activity: the private and the public? We may seek the answers to these questions in Kałwa's book or in the threads which she does not discuss, but merely mentions. Let us then focus on the starting point, that is the year 1918 when Polish women acquired full civic rights.

It seems that Polish women understood their enfranchisement in accordance with its message: as a right and privilege. In the first elections to the Legislative Sejm in 1919 the overpowering majority of women went to the polls¹³. The attendance of Christian women (that is Polish women) at polling stations in

¹² Paradoxically, a similar stand on this question was taken by the journalist of "Przegląd Powszechny", Jesuit Jan Urban. This is expressly emphasized by Kałwa, who says: "Not long before women acquired civic rights he argued the point of the adversaries of women's rights and voiced more concern about the universal franchise than about admitting enlightened women, with adequate education and property, to the poll". Eadem, *op. cit.*, p. 119. Cf. J. Urban, *O prawa obywatelskie dla kobiet (On the Civic Rights for Women)*, "Przegląd Powszechny" 1918, vol. 138-139, pp. 276-293; vol. 139-140, pp. 414-431.

¹³ Ludwik Haas emphasized: "In the upshot of the war in many regions of Poland women were the majority of those with the right of vote (for example in Warsaw 57.9%, in Łódź 55.9%, in Cracow 57.6%, in the Łódź district 52.3%, in the Cracow district 55.1%), cf. idem, *Aktywność wyborcza kobiet w pierwszym dziesięcioleciu Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (Women's Participation in Elections in the First Decade of the Second Republic of Poland)*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki w niepodległej Polsce 1918-1939*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and A. Szwarc, Warszawa 1998, p. 74.

Warsaw and Łódź was only by 5% lower than the attendance of men (in Warsaw 75.7% of men and 75.2% of women entitled to vote went to the polls, while in Łódź 82.2% of men and 81.7% of women). In the provinces, in the under-urbanized regions of central Poland, the attendance of women was even higher (*sic!*) by 3.5 — 12.9% than in the capital¹⁴. It seems that the elections in which women for the first time took part *en masse*, should have given the majority vote to the parties which consistently and clearly formulated the programme of women's enfranchisement, that is the socialists. The universal adult franchise of all the citizens regardless of their sex was introduced a few weeks earlier by a decree of Jędrzej Moraczewski's socialist government. Despite expectations, the elections gave the majority vote to the National Democracy, who at the last moment and clearly for the sake of tactics supported the enfranchisement of women. In Congress Poland the national democrats were supported by 46% of male and female voters, while the socialists from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), merely by 9%. In Galicja (the former Austrian sector) the election victory was won by the peasant party (PSL "Piast" won with 34% of votes), while socialists from PPSD landed in the third place with 18% of votes. This shows that it was rather the rightist than the leftist electorate that gained by giving women access to politics. Although the feminist organizations such as the Union for Polish Women's Rights (ZRKP) of Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmitt inclined rather towards the Left and the Liberal Centre¹⁵, the political sympathies of the totality of women went in the opposite direction, of the morally traditionalist Right. Roman D m o w s k i, the leader of the National Democrats who were victorious in 1919, even in the inter-war period retained a stereotypic vision of women, relegating them to the private sphere. The author of *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka (The Thoughts of a Modern Pole)*, was to say: "Why should woman have the franchise? She either agrees with her husband, so that even if she did not have it, the results of elections would be the same, or she gives her vote against him, which causes discord in the

¹⁴ Cf. L. Hass, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁵ Cf. K. Sierakowska, *Aspiracje polityczne Związku Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich (Political Aspirations of the Union of Polish Women's Rights)*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki. Polska na tle porównawczym w XIX i w początkach XX wieku*, ed. A. Żarnowska and A. Szwarc, Warszawa 1994, p. 253.

family, and frequently leads to a catastrophe”¹⁶. We do not know whether the socialists took into consideration the fact that women would give their votes to the Right, which was what Lord Acton warned the Liberals against, or whether this was a triumph of idealism, in the name of which the socialists sacrificed their “cause” for the ideal of equality.

While taking part in the first political elections of 1919 and 1922 Polish women apparently did not feel a need for solidarity within the framework of the “feminist world”, an idea that in the 20th century took the name of “sisterhood”. Nor did they harbour a special sense of gratitude towards their predecessors — the suffragettes. This is testified by the fortunes of the first women’s election lists: one prepared by Iza Moszczeńska–Rzepecka in 1919, which included the most active female propagators of the women’s cause, or by Michalina Mościcka and Maria Jaworska in 1922. All these lists suffered a spectacular defeat. Much more successful was the political activity of women within the framework of party sections: the (National Democratic) Organization for the Election of Polish Women, the (Socialist) Women’s Section of the Polish Socialist Party PPS, the (pro–Piłsudski) Union of the Civil Work of Polish Women, and here women, despite their small representation in Parliament scored considerable success. The Polish female parliamentarians, few as they were, motivated by a wish to improve the social position of all women, knew how to co-operate above their political divisions in creating the necessary modern legislature concerning labour, and the social welfare system (the act on the protection of the labour of adolescents and women of 1924)¹⁷. Women’s activity presented itself most advantageously within the framework of civic society (non–political organizations that nevertheless had some links with politics), that is in various social organizations such as: The Political Club of Progressive Women, The Polish Association of Women with Higher Education, The General Council for the Economic Education of Women in Poland, The Union of Female Commercial Workers, and many others.

¹⁶ M. Niklewiczowa, *Wspomnienia o Romanie Dmowskim (Recollections of Roman Dmowski)*, Józef Zieliński’s Folders, Polish Academy of Sciences Library, Kraków, MS 7810, p. 26, cit. from Urszula Jakubowska, *Kobiety w świecie polityki Narodowej Demokracji (Women in the World of Politics of National Democracy)*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki*, p. 147.

¹⁷ Cf. M. Śliwa, *Kobiety w parlamencie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (Women in the Parliament of the Second Republic of Poland)*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki*, p. 62.

The failure of feminist lists shows that the plans to endow politics with a “gender” character were definitely rejected by Polish female voters. Kałwa says, not without regret: “The idea of creating a common supra-party women’s lobby, which would be able to introduce a strong representation of women to the legislative bodies, was not put into practice. Poland did not see the creation of any women’s clubs, on the American model, that would try and unite the women’s world, or work on political, economic or social reforms...” (p. 131). On the other hand, while reading other fragments of the book, we get the impression that there was some specificity of women’s political work in Poland, both among their representation in Parliament and female citizens at large.

The first generation of women — active citizens of the Polish state — was most involved with the social element of politics. To follow the trace of Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, their actual sphere of activity was the household (*oikos*, the root of the word “economy”). Even if we agree that as early as the beginning of the modern era the social sphere (economy, but also social issues) forced its way into politics and changed its significance once for all, the culmination of this process must be admitted to have taken place in the case of parliamentary and political activity of women between the two world wars. The public sphere was not perceived by women as a separate field of activity, but rather as an area to be recognized only through the prism of home and family. Let us cite Dobrochna Kałwa again: “With the entry of women into the political life there also appeared a specific code of communication (...) The political texts addressed to women instead of invoking ideology, referred to the idea of their mission and their common experience connected with their duties. In fact a woman started her political work in her surroundings — home and family, so as to transfer it later to the area of parliament. Thus the state was compared to a household, political reforms to tidying up, (the analogy between state and family budget emerged as a matter of course), while the family was frequently used as a metaphor for the nation or society (...) This kind of reducing politics to ‘household terms’, specific to the women’s agitation, sprang from a search for a linguistic code clear and discernible to the female electorate” (p. 127).

Kałwa also says (p. 125) that side by side with circulation of the press, meetings, publishing campaigns, or other accepted forms of political agitation, female politicians, wishing to activate the passive part of the female electorate, also reached with their agitation the private homes. These examples, in my opinion, show that the barriers of private life separating women from the world of politics not only had not been broken, but that on the contrary, the women's privacy forced its way into the world of politics and filled it with its contents. "A <woman-citizen>," Kałwa says, "was a continuation of <Mother>" (p. 134). Instead of bringing up her own children and caring for the well-being of her own family, she started to care for other children, to focus on the poorest, leaving high politics to men. This apparently innocent merger between these two spheres was characteristic of the inter-war period, but in practice entailed dangerous consequences, since it created unprecedented conditions for the interference of the state in the private life of citizens. It was not by accident that the form of social engineering called eugenics, that is scientific breeding of people, gained a large group of fanatic votaries, including many well-known female activists¹⁸.

Another and no less interesting thread of Dobrochna Kałwa's book is the problem of feminism. The author writes: "among a great number of women's organizations in inter-war Poland, which set themselves as an aim the solution of the women's question, there were actually no strictly feminist ones. The statements of the activists of women's organizations say nothing about their identification with feminism, although they voiced the slogans and realized aims close to the European and American feminist movements. No women's movement, even the most radical one, called itself <feminist>" (p. 145). The reasons for this

¹⁸The active members of the Polish Eugenic Society were Zofia Daszyńska-Gołńska, Teodora Męczkowska, Eugenia Waśniewska, Julia Świtalska, and Maria Szczodrowska. Apart from them many wives of famous doctors and social activists also engaged in its work. Leon Wernic, the *spiritus movens* of the Polish eugenic movement was a co-founder and activist of the Polish Committee for Combating the White Slave and Children Traffic. Eugenists were in contact and co-operated with women's organizations, e.g. The Christian Society for the Protection of Catholic and Protestant Women, The Jewish Society for Women's Protection, The Union of the Civil Work of Women, The Council for the Moral Protection of Young People. Cf. M. G a w i n, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego (1880-1952)* (*Race and Modernity. The History of the Polish Eugenic Movement, 1880-1952*), Warszawa 2003.

state of affairs are sought by the author in the negative connotation of the term "feminism". Consequently, we must consider whether the term "feminism" is not abused when applied to those women's milieux which did not use it or consciously avoided it. This is a problem that worries not only Polish historians. There was a contention in English historiography whether this term may be applied to the times before it came into common use (the first decade of the 20th century), namely to the attitudes and views of women who were active earlier. Among the adherents of its wide application was Olive Banks, who thought that it could be referred to the milieux which tried to change the position of women in society, or to particular conceptions of solving the women's question. In this way, he argued, one can show various "faces" of feminism as a reflection of various diagnoses of the situation of women¹⁹. On the other hand, Nancy Cott maintained that the term "feminism" should not be applied to women's milieux and groups who were active before 1910²⁰. She argued that by coming into common use in the second decade of the 20th century the word "feminism" as if symbolically closed the first stage of women's movement, centred on the struggle for the franchise, and opened the second, feminist stage, which placed emphasis on freedom and broadly conceived women's rights. Another author, Philippa Levine, associated feminism with feminist consciousness and a sense of solidarity within the women's world²¹. It seems that the decisive argument was used by Barbara Caine who rightly remarked that most political concepts, such as e.g. liberalism and socialism are used in retrospection to define individuals, groups or particular ideas. Neither history of politics nor any political theory would be possible unless we used the above terms broadly and retrospectively²².

Dobrochna Kałwa is also the person who proposes to use the term "feminism" in a broad (though not completely optional) sense. She refers it both to female socialists and women's organ-

¹⁹ Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as Social Movement*, Oxford 1986, p. 3.

²⁰ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of the Modern Feminism*, New Haven, London 1987, p. 3.

²¹ P. Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, London 1987, p. 19.

²² B. Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford — New York 1992, p. 5.

izations of national–Catholic provenance. She perceives its symptoms wherever the slogan of women's rights was understood as a process which did not only refer to democratic procedures and legal regulations, but also to the sphere of mentality.

To finish my deliberations I should like to emphasize that in contrast to many contributory works dealing with the inter-war 20 years, Kałwa's book introduces many innovative observations and conclusions. This successful book, not overpacked with redundant facts, is however weaker when it comes to the thread of generations. Although the author mentions generation differences (p. 158) between women living in the inter-war period, she does not treat this problem more extensively. The emergence of the generation of G o m b r o w i c z's Miss Młodziak (the ridiculous, over-progressive young girl from his *Ferdydurke*.) in the 1930s, who read "Życie świadome" (Conscious Life — a supplement to "Wiadomości Literackie", a progressive literary journal propagating birth control), the books of Theodoor Van de Velde and Ben Lindsey, must have changed considerably the prevailing picture of women as guardians of repressed morality. We also regret the author does not present some comparative background. We would like to learn whether such processes as reducing the sphere of women's political views (and the language of politics addressed to women) to "household terms" were a universal, or rather local experience. Whether this process was everywhere as intensive as in Poland, and whether the exclusively social dimension of women's political activity was not the result of the weakness of Polish political culture. Such questions could be multiplied. This shows that the book *The Active Woman in Inter-war Poland*, apart from providing the background for taking up further historical research into women's problems, indeed arouses our reflection. Another indisputable asset of this book is that it is simply very interesting.