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Cultural Borderland in sociological perspective : the case of Upper Silesia

Prace Naukowe. Pedagogika 8-9-10, 981-995

1999-2000-2001

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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Marek S. Szczepański (Tychy – Katowice)

Cultural Borderland in sociological perspective (the case of Upper Silesia¹)

People were not born to live in borderline/frontier situations, they try to avoid such situations or to disengage from them as quickly as possible. However, men do encounter such situations everywhere, they can be seen and felt anywhere... Border means stress, even fear (much more seldom: liberation). The notion of border may entail some extremity, the doors can slam behind us and trap us forever...

Ryszard Kapuściński (Contemporary Polish writer & journalist)
(*Imperium – The Empire*)

One day we, Upper Silesians, will vanish. Even now we are already scattered, like Jews, all over the world. Even though each of us cherishes in himself that piece of motherland, that piece of borderland.

Horst Bienek (German writer who was born in Upper Silesia)
(*Opis pewnej prowincji – Description of a Certain Province*)

The borderline region: preliminaries

The text that I submit contains sociological reflection upon the multidimensional concept of borderline region. My paper is also another attempt at reinterpretation of results of empirical studies carried out in Upper Silesia in the years 1985–1999, the region being a typical, in my opinion, case of cultural borderline². Their

¹Throughout my paper I apply the term **Upper Silesia (Górny Śląsk)**, lacking precision. That lack of precision is, indeed, due to the fact that the historically shaped Upper Silesian region, belonging after World War II almost entirely to Poland, comprises a substantial part of Katowice and Opole provinces (voivodships), as well as a small portion of the Częstochowa province (voivodship). Many researchers also include the Cieszyn Silesia (Śląsk Cieszyński) into Upper Silesia, which region administratively belongs to the Bielsko-Biała province (voivodship), although those opposing such delimitation stress that Cieszyn Silesia – after Silesian wars – belonged to the Habsburg monarchy, and leaned towards Galicja, whereas Upper Silesia was part of the Prussian kingdom, and leaned towards Great Poland (Wielkopolska). The paper is – indeed and due to content limitation – devoted mainly to the Katowice part of Upper Silesia.

²Some results of empirical studies are included in the following papers: M.S. Szczepański: „Miasto socjalistyczne i świat społeczny jego mieszkańców” (‘Socialist Town and the Social World of its Inhabitants’), Uniwersytet Warszawski: Warszawa, 1991; W. Błasiak, T. Nawrocki, M.S. Szczepański: „Górny Śląsk 2005. Scenariusz restrukturyzacji”, Towarzystwo Zachęty Kultury: Katowice, 1994, English version of the book: ‘Upper Silesia 2005. The Restructuring Scenario’ Katowice, 1994 (W. Błasiak, T. Nawrocki – co-authors, M.S. Szczepański – Scientific Editor); M.S. Szczepański (ed.):

summarizing recapitulation need to be preceded by at least a preliminary analysis of key words and notions, which constitute the internal logic of the paper and its organization. Those notions constitute a triad, based on similarity or closeness of meanings (**borderland – geographic borderland – cultural borderland**).

The notion of **borderland** is very capacious and universal, referring to phenomena which commonly occur. There is a borderland between wealth and poverty, between good health and illness, between well-being and ill-being, between happiness and unhappiness, between high and low culture, between love and hate, there are borderlands between social classes: high, middle, and low. Borderland is present in all societies and all communities, there are also borderlands in individuals themselves. *Each of us* – as has been pointed out by Horst Bienek, the German writer who was born in Upper Silesia – *carries his piece of borderland in himself*. How common and universal the notion of borderland is has been oftentimes stressed by Zbigniew Kwieciński and Lech Witkowski, when writing upon the pedagogy of borderland³. The universality of the notion of borderland, already mentioned, leads – however – to difficulties in forming a precise definition which *per saldo* entails limited explanatory value.

„Dilemmas of Regionalism and the Region of Dilemmas. The Case of Upper Silesia”, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice, 1993; M.S. Szczepański (ed.) „Raport o stanie oświaty województwa katowickiego” (‘Report on Education in the Katowice Voivodship’), Kuratorium Oświaty: Katowice, 1993; M.S. Szczepański (ed.): „Górnicy górnośląscy – ludzie zbędni, ludzie luźni? Szkice socjologiczne” (‘Upper Silesian Miners – Redundant People, Loose People? Sociological Sketches’), AMP: Kraków–Katowice, 1994; M.S. Szczepański (ed.): „Górny Śląsk – na moście Europy” (‘Upper Silesia – on the European Bridge’), Towarzystwo Zachęty Kultury, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Katowice, 1994; M.S. Szczepański (ed.): „System oświaty w województwie katowickim: 26.05.1990 – 31.12.1993 – 30.06.1995. Próba porównania i bilansu” (‘The System of education in the Katowice Voivodship: 26.05.1990 – 31.12.1993 – 30.06.1995. An Attempt at Comparison and Assessment’), Kuratorium Oświaty: Katowice, 1995; M.S. Szczepański (ed.): „Tychy 1939–1993. Monografia miasta” (‘Tychy 1939–1993, Monography of the Town’), Zarząd i Rada Gminy Tychy: Tychy, 1996; M. S. Szczepański: *An Old Industrial Region in the Face of Radical Reconstruction (The Case of Upper Silesia, Poland)*. In: J. Musil, W. Strublet: *Raumliche Auswirkungen des Transformationsprozesses in Deutschland und bei den ostlichen Nachbarn*. Leske + Budrich: Opladen 1997, s. 205–221; M. S. Szczepański: *Economic Restructuring and Employment Promotion in the Katowice Voivodship, 1989–1996*. In: *Regional Development and Employment Policy. Lessons from Central and Eastern Europe*. Ed. by M. Keune. ILO: Geneva, Budapest 1998, pp. 97–125 (in collaboration with A. Cybula).

³Cf. Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski (ed.): „Ku pedagogii pogranicza” (‘Towards the Pedagogy of Borderland’), Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika: Toruń, 1990. Cf. also: J. Nikitorowicz: „Pogranicze – tożsamość – edukacja międzykulturowa” (‘Borderland – Identity – Intercultural Education’), Filia Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego: Białystok, 1995; T. Lewowicki (ed.): „Poczucie tożsamości narodowej młodzieży. Studium z pogranicza polsko-czeskiego” (‘National Identity of the Youth. Studies from the Polish–Czech Borderland’), Filia Uniwersytetu Śląskiego: Cieszyn, 1994; T. Lewowicki (ed.): „Społeczności młodzieżowe na pograniczu” (‘Youth Communities in the Borderland’), Filia Uniwersytetu Śląskiego: Cieszyn, 1995; T. Lewowicki and B. Grabowska (ed.): „Społeczności pogranicza – wielokulturowość – edukacja” (‘Borderland Communities – Multiple Cultures – Education’), Filia Uniwersytetu Śląskiego: Cieszyn, 1996.

A more narrow notion, thus easier to define, is that of **geographic borderland**, which distinguishes between clearly separated regions and areas, delineated by artificial or natural borders (such as water reservoirs, rivers, mountain ranges, etc.). A specific case of geographic borderland is the administrative and political one, delineated by frontiers between states, provinces, departments, Länder, and other big administrative–political units. Areas located on both sides of political frontiers are labelled frontier regions or areas, while those located on one side of the frontier are labelled borderlands⁴. Often, yet not always, in such regions one can find ethnographic, ethnic, national, or nationalistic borderlands, which means that there various ethnographic and ethnic groups, or national minorities meet⁵.

The first of those notions (**ethnographic group**), treated by some researchers as synonymous with the second⁶ (**ethnic group**), applies to a group distinguished by ethnographers on the basis of objectivized cultural features (e.g. type of costume or type of dialect). Ethnographic groups, most often delimited for research and analyti-

⁴Cf. Z. Rykiel: „Region przygraniczny jako przedmiot badań geograficznych” (‘Frontier Region as Subject for Geographic Studies’), *Przegląd Geograficzny*, vol. LXII, 1990; Z. Rykiel: „Koncepcje granic w badaniach geograficznych” (‘The Concept of Borders in Geographic Studies’), *Przegląd Geograficzny*, vol. LXII, 1990; Z. Rykiel: „Rozwój regionów stykowych w teorii i w badaniach empirycznych” (‘The Development of Frontier Regions in Theory and in Empirical Studies’), Ossolineum: Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, 1991.

⁵Cf. G. Babiński: „Pogranicze etniczne, pogranicze kulturowe, peryferie” (‘Ethnic Borderland, Cultural Borderland, Peripheries’), *Pogranicze*, vol. IV, Białystok, 1994; G. Babiński: „Religia i konflikty etniczne” (‘Religion and Ethnic Conflicts’) *Nomos*, No. 7–8, 1994; A. Sadowski: „Socjologia pogranicza” (‘Sociology of the Borderland’) in: A. Sadowski (ed.): „Wshodnie pogranicze w perspektywie socjologicznej” (‘Eastern Borderland in Sociological Perspective’), Filia Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego: Białystok, 1995; E. Nowicka: „Przyczynek do teorii etnicznych mniejszości” (‘A Contribution to the Theory on Ethnic Minorities’), in H.Kubiak (ed.): „Założenia teorii asymilacji” (‘Assumptions for the Theory of Assimilation’), Ossolineum: Wrocław, 1980; Z. Jasiewicz: „Grupa etnograficzna” (‘Ethnographic Group’) in: Z. Staszczak (ed.): „Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne” (‘Ethnologic Dictionary. General Terminology’), PWN: Warszawa – Poznań, 1987; A. Kwilecki: „Mniejszości narodowe w Polsce Ludowej” (‘National Minorities in Polish People’s Republic’), *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, No. 4, 1963; S. Łodziński: „Polityka państwa polskiego wobec mniejszości narodowych w latach 1989–1993 (Na tle rozwiązań prawnych obowiązujących w państwach europejskich i regulacji przygotowywanych w ramach prac Rady Europy)” (‘Policy of the Polish State towards National Minorities in the Years 1989–1993 (Against the Background of Legislation in Europe and Regulations Prepared within the Council of Europe Framework’), *Przegląd Polonijny*, No.1, 1995; D. Simonides: „Tożsamość pogranicza. Z prof. dr D. Simonides rozmawia J. Górdziałek” (‘Borderland Identity. J. Górdziałek interviews Professor D. Simonides’), *Śląsk* No. 1, 1996; M. Szczepański (ed.): „Dilemmas of Regionalism and the Region of Dilemmas”, Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1993; Z. Staszczak „Pogranicze polsko–niemieckie jako pogranicze etnograficzne” (‘Polish–German Borderland as Ethnographic Borderland’), UAM: Poznań, 1978; K. Wódcz: ‘Regional Identity – Regional Consciousness. The Upper Silesian Experience’, Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1995; C. Żółtowski: „Mniejszości narodowe w Polsce” (‘National Minorities in Poland’), in: Polska ‘95. Raport o rozwoju społecznym (Poland ‘95. Report on Social Development), UNDP: Warszawa, 1995. Cf. also: M.S. Szczepański (ed.): *Ethnic Minorities and Ethnic Majority. Sociological Studies of Interethnic Relation*”, Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1997.

⁶This was applied, e.g. by Jan Stanisław Bystroń (1892–1964), a Polish researcher who identified ethnographic groups with ethnic ones.

cal purposes, are part of wider ethnic groups, and exist either within the latter or at their borders. It is usually assumed that an *ethnic group* is a community whose cultural identity is – albeit not always – connected with a given territory (*ethnic territory*), having its own identity regarding culture, language, history, sometimes even economy, which – however – does not make up a separate nation, although is equipped with some features of a nation. Using the terminology by Stanisław Ossowski, ethnic group has its *private motherland* (*personal motherland*) and *ideological motherland* in the state which it inhabits, while its national option is typically analogous with the choices made by the majority of inhabitants of that state. Among such ethnic groups in Poland one may list the Kashubians (Kaszubi) or Silesians (Ślązacy).

National minority, in turn, is an ethnic group located at the territory of a state as a result of historic phenomena (e.g. re–location of frontiers, migration, forced migration or re–location of population), which declares a different national option than the one dominating in the state in which it presently inhabits. In other words, *Heimat* (private motherland) for many members of the German national minority is located within the territory of Poland, while *Vaterland* is situated outside the Polish border, in the Federal Republic of Germany. National minorities, and also minority ethnic groups concentrate mainly – yet not exclusively – in historic regions of cultural borderland, or in regions of *tout court* borderland (*geographic borderland*). Sometimes the region of geographic or political–administrative borderland acquires the features of a cultural borderland, to which this paper is mainly devoted. A region of cultural borderland does not have to be located near political or administrative frontiers, what is more, it may be situated away from such frontiers.

The culture of borderland region – considerations regarding the definition

For several years one could easily notice in Poland the symptoms of ‘revival of local and regional tendencies’, symptoms of revolution of ethnic or religious minorities, of radicalization of local revindication movements⁷. In case of many social groups and individuals one can notice an ostentatious return to traditional local and regional values, to historic institutions, customs, and habits. The symptoms of sanitation and revitalization of small communities can be easily noticed in nearly all regions of Poland. They are, however, particularly conspicuous in the historic regions of the borderland, that is in ‘corner’ areas, thus labelled once by the reverend Emil Szramek⁸. The notion of **region of cultural borderland** applies to such areas

⁷Cf. M.S.Szczepański: „Górny Śląsk – lokalne ruchy rewindykacyjne. Socjologiczne studium przypadku.” (‘Upper Silesia – Local Revindication Movements. Sociological Case Study’), in J. Wódcz (ed.): „Niektóre problemy społeczne w województwie katowickim” (‘Some Social Problems in the Katowice Province’), Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1993, pp. 24–42.

⁸E. Szramek: „Śląsk jako problem socjologiczny” (‘Silesia as a Sociological Problem’), „Roczniki Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk na Śląsku”, vol. IV, 1934.

of the state – usually located peripherally – in which there is a clear consciousness of social separateness, while the regional cultural structure is the result of many years of intermingling of numerous cultures and traditions, of different origin⁹. Borderland region, throughout centuries, changed their national and administrative status, being influenced by various political, administrative, and economic systems. As a result of that, the inhabitants of those regions are characterized by diverse and varied options regarding nationality, while indifference to nationality is by no means marginal. *The result of prolonged infiltration, that is of mixture of nationalities*, wrote reverend E. Szramek regarding the Silesian borderland region, *are individuals who are not only bilingual, yet also bi-national similar to milestones placed on frontiers, bearing a Polish stamp on one side, and the German on the other, or similar to a pear-tree growing right on the border, giving fruit for both sides. These are not people with no backbone, but with backbone of the frontier*¹⁰. National self-identification is, in case of a typical man of the borderland, dispersed, and even divided; when pondering upon that phenomenon it may be useful to use the aid of adopted and processed concept of the *marginal man* by Robert Ezra Park, of the Chicago School. Such a man belongs to two – or more – worlds of culture¹¹, in the context of Upper Silesia those would be the worlds of Poland, Germany, Bohemia (Czech) or Morava.

Such a type of social consciousness is also labelled the **borderland consciousness**, characteristic for the Polish regions of borderland¹². Borderland – according to Józef Chlebowczyk – is a *territory of confrontation of various lifestyles and social values. Stemming from that are the processes of radiance and mutual penetration of various influences regarding culture, civilization, language, economy, demography,*

⁹Cf. Z. Staszczak: „Pogranicze polsko-niemieckie jako pogranicze etnograficzne” (‘Polish-German Borderland as Ethnographic Borderland’), UAM: Poznań, 1978; K. Kwaśniewski: „Zderzenie kultur. Tożsamość a aspekty konfliktów i tolerancji.” (‘Culture Clash. Identity vs Aspects of Conflicts and Tolerance’), PWN: Warszawa, 1982; Z. Rykiel: „Region przygraniczny jako przedmiot badań geograficznych” (‘Frontier Region as Subject for Geographic Studies’), *Przegląd Geograficzny*, vol. 62, 1990.

¹⁰E. Szramek: „Śląsk jako problem socjologiczny” (‘Silesia as a Sociological Problem’), *Roczniki Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk na Śląsku*, vol. IV, 1934, p. 35; cf. also W. Świątkiewicz: „Śląsk jak problem socjologiczny” – w pół wieku później (Refleksje wokół socjologicznych i historiozoficznych koncepcji księdza doktora Emila Szramka) (‘Silesia as a Sociological Problem’ – Half a Century Later. Reflections upon Sociological and Historiographic Concepts by the reverend Doctor Emil Szramek’), in: W. Świątkiewicz (ed.): „Społeczne problemy Górnego Śląska we współczesnych badaniach socjologicznych” (‘Social Problems of Upper Silesia in Contemporary Sociological Studies’), PTS: Katowice, 1993, pp. 287–301.

¹¹Compare R.E. Park: ‘The Collected Papers’, Univ. of Chicago: Chicago, 1967, Vol I–III.

¹²Cf. J. Chlebowczyk: „Obszary pogranicza językowo-narodowościowego we wschodniej Europie Środkowej XVIII–XX wieku” (‘Language and Nationality Borderland Regions in Eastern Central Europe, 18–20 c.’), in W. Zieliński: „Z problemów integracji społeczno-politycznej na Górnym Śląsku przed II wojną światową” (‘From the Problems of Social and Political Integration in Upper Silesia before World War II’), Śląski Instytut Naukowy: Katowice, 1980; cf. also W. Błasiak, T. Nawrocki, M.S. Szczepański: „Górny Śląsk 2005. Scenariusz restrukturyzacji” (‘Upper Silesia 2005. Restructuring Scenario’), Towarzystwo Zachęty Kultury: Katowice, 1994.

politics. Prevailing in them – not constantly, but **periodically**, are those circles of culture and civilization, and those social and political relations which, for various reasons, prove to be most attractive and real for the local inhabitants¹³.

One of the anonymous informers told one of the scientists [using Silesian dialect]: *It was always like that here in Silesia. One had to state who one is. Grandpa went to the army back in 1912 and they asked him who he was. So he said he was German. They replied that he is a stupid Silesian, not knowing his German properly. After World War I the Poles came, and they looked at us as if we were only half-Polish, or even totally German... . During Hitler's time they applied a magnifying glass to all of us, grouping us like pigs for the slaughterhouse. Poles came again [after the war] so it started: 'Jerries', 'Bastards' (Krojczoki), 'Hitler's children', 'Germans', that is what they called us. During Gierek's time, they started sending us to Germany, it was labelled family reunion... . Solidarity came and we even turned German ourselves. You see, we have got the German minority here in Silesia... . Who am I? I am Polish, as my father was in the uprisings. My brother has been living in Germany, since the last war. My sister left [for Germany] in 1976. My two grandchildren are also there. One of my sons was in the party and really Polish. So who am I, who is my family? Polish-German, German-Polish, Silesian? It's better not to talk about it¹⁴. Says an interlocutor interviewed by Krzysztof Karwat, a renowned Silesian journalist: *We here, in the goddamn Upper Silesia always have to be careful. One never knows whether one day some people will appear, 'turn the shirt on the left side' and tell me I am a Jerry. Or a Pole, because one never knows what people like¹⁵* Talking to a journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, says Celina Brzozowska from Łędziny: *After 1945 people came to Silesia from the outside. They frowned at me whenever I used a word of the Silesian dialect at work. They used to say 'Those Germans murder the Polish language', they nagged us for the Volksliste, they called us the Wehrmacht. Adds Henryk Konsek from Gotartowice: *In Wehrmacht the Germans said we were Polish. After the war Poles said we were German. The recruits from Poland labelled us 'Hanysy'. A university graduate told me straight in the eye: How I hate the Silesians¹⁶.***

¹³Cf. J. Chlebowczyk: „Obszary pogranicza językowo-narodowościowego we wschodniej Europie Środkowej XVIII–XX wieku” (‘Language and Nationality Borderland Regions in Eastern Central Europe, 18–20 c.’), in W. Zieliński: „Z problemów integracji społeczno-politycznej na Górnym Śląsku przed II wojną światową” (‘From the Problems of Social and Political Integration in Upper Silesia before World War II’), Śląski Instytut Naukowy: Katowice, 1980; J. Chlebowczyk: ‘On Small and Young Nations in Europe’ Ossolineum: Wrocław, 1980.

¹⁴M.G. Gerlich: „O poczuciu przynależności narodowej i stosunku do ‘obcych’. Uwagi na marginesie badań nad świadomością narodową współczesnych Górnoszlązaków” (‘Upon the National Identity and the Approach to the ‘Strangers’. Remarks to the Research on National Consciousness of Contemporary Upper Silesians’), *Konteksty*, No. 1–2, 1994, p. 131.

¹⁵K. Karwat: „Ten przeklęty Śląsk” (‘That goddamn Silesia’), Towarzystwo Zachęty Kultury: Katowice, 1996, p. 15.

¹⁶D. Kortko: „Na jabłonka godom płonka.” (‘I label the apple tree appel’), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 03, 1996, pp. 20–21.

Using the shortcuts and metaphors applied in literature, one may say that a typical man of the borderland was born in Gleiwitz yet grew up in Gliwice, stayed in that town after World War II or was forced to leave it, or may be left for Germany willingly; he was then too Polish for the Germans and too German for the Poles; leading his life of somebody driven out [expelled] or that of an emigrant he sometimes undertook a sentimental journey to his *Heimat* (motherland), but only occasionally returned for good; sometimes, however – to use the expression by Siegfried Lenz – burned his ‘museum of the motherland’ to the ground. The one who remained in Upper Silesia would have problems with national self-identification and self-definition; the only thing that posed no problems was that of belonging to the region, and the local social world, to the private motherland, to the *Heimat*. Wrote Stanisław Bieniasz in *Biografia (Biography)*, one of the plays staged in 1991 by the Teatr Śląski (Silesian Theatre) in Katowice... *We Upper Silesians always sit between two chairs. Whichever way we are thrown, we always lack something: a part of our soul always remains on the other side of the border. It is time we somehow reconciled and came to terms.* Such typical men of the borderland, often advanced in age, are getting ever more scarce in Upper Silesia, yet they still can be met, mainly in traditional local communities, small towns, or villages. Those places are the laboratory enclaves of the cultural borderland region.

Upper Silesia as the borderline region¹⁷

Upper Silesia is a good – though by no means unique – example of a Polish borderland region. For many a century it was subjected to strong cultural, social, political, and economic influences from Bohemia (Czech) and Morava, Austria, Prussia, Germany, and Poland. The historic fate of the region was also, to some extent, influenced by the Jewish community living there. Throughout the centuries Upper Silesia and its individual sub-regions belonged to different states, being a place where many cultures met or clashed, remaining under the influence of various political and economic systems. Those conditions had to influence the present shape and character of Upper Silesia. Because a borderland region is a territorial

¹⁷There is a wealth of ethnographic and ethnologic literature documenting the borderland character of Upper Silesia. Cf. eg. M. Gładysz: „Z zagadnień procesów kulturowych pogranicza etnicznego” (‘From the Problems of Processes of Culture in the Ethnic Borderland’), *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Prace Etnograficzne*, vol 6, 1972, pp. 7–41; Z. Staszczak: „Pogranicze polsko-niemieckie jako pogranicze etnograficzne” (‘Polish–German Borderland as Ethnic Borderland’), UAM: Poznań, 1978, p. 4; „Kultura ludowa śląskiej ludności rodzimej” (‘Folk Culture of Silesian Native Inhabitants’), D. Simonides (ed.), Ossolineum: Wrocław–Warszawa, 1991; M. Lipok–Bierwiazczonok: „Więzi kulturowe pogranicza polsko-czeskiego (Śląsk Cieszyński, Śląsk Opawski, Raciborskie)” (‘Cultural Bonds in the Polish–Czech Borderland (Cieszyn Silesia, Opawa, Racibórz region)’), prepared for the Fundacja Przestrzeni Górnego Śląska, Katowice, 1994; Dilemmas of Regionalism and the Regional Dilemmas, M. S. Szczepański (ed.), Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1993; Regional Identity – Regional Consciousness. The Upper Silesian Experience, K. Wódcz (ed.), Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice, 1995; Region and Regionalism. Culture and Social Order, W Świątkiewicz (ed.), Uniwersytet Śląski: Katowice, 1995.

unit, as well as a socio-cultural entity, in which the long-term historic, political, social, and economic processes find expression. In the Upper Silesian space there still exist, having their own dynamics, the results of chaotic urbanization and industrialization of the region, organized by the Germans during the late XIXth and early XXth century. The calculation was to quickly and effectively exploit the raw materials available locally and regionally, coal in particular. Until today, at least to a degree, among the local inhabitants there prevail the historically shaped patterns of social mobility and professional career, as well as elements which crystallize the regional and local ethos of culture.

Upper Silesia, the region of cultural borderland, should then be perceived in the perspective of its *long lasting* (*la longue duree*). That notion was introduced to social sciences by Fernand Paul Braudel, an eminent French scientist, one of the founders of the *Annales School*¹⁸. He was of the opinion that the main task facing a historian, sociologist, or economist cannot be just registering facts, even in the most conscientious, scrupulous, and exhaustive manner. A scientist representing the field of social sciences should rather describe structures and institutions which seriously resist fluctuations of history, and which shape the changes of the present day. F.P. Braudel himself, when analyzing the process in which the relatively integrated Europe was formed, recalled the example of incidents, institutions, and structures from the *long 16th century* (1450–1640). It may be assumed that the methodological imperative, formulated by F.P. Braudel, should be applied both in studies of the Silesian region, and those concerning the space in the individual towns of which the Upper Silesian conurbation is made. In Polish borderland regions, such as Pomorze (Pomerania), Wielkopolska (Great Poland), or Śląsk (Silesia) the debate was restarted – especially in the late 1980s – over the issue of *new regionalism*, over the problem of complicated ethnic relations in those regions and areas, over the tasks facing regional and local revindication, over the indispensable processes of economic and social restructuring. Also local institutions were set up to consolidate the efforts of movements working to those ends, turning the movements into institutions (e.g. Związek Górnośląski – Upper Silesian Union, Unia Wielkopolan – Great Poland Union, Zrzeszenie Kaszubsko-Pomorskie – Kashubian-Pomeranian Association)¹⁹.

¹⁸Cf. F.P. Braudel „La Mediterranee et le monde mediterraneen a l'epoque de Philippe II”, Armand Colin: Paris 1949 (IVth edition, revised and amended, Paris, 1979); Polish edition „Morze Śródziemne i świat śródziemnomorski w epoce Filipa II”, vol. I – 1976, vol. II – 1977, Wydawnictwo Morskie: Gdańsk; F.P. Braudel „Histoire et sciences sociales; la longue duree.”, Annales: Economies, Societes, Civilisations, Armand Colin: 1960; F.P. Braudel „La dynamique du capitalisme” Arthaud: Paris, 1985 (in particular Chapter II: Les jeux de l'echange, and Chapter III: Le temps du monde).

¹⁹Cf. „Kaszubi. Monografia socjologiczna” ('Kashubians. A Sociological Monography'), M. Latoszek (ed.), WSP: Rzeszów, 1990; M. Błaszczuk-Wacławik, W. Błasiak, T. Nawrocki: „Górny Śląsk szczególnie przypadek kulturowy” ('Upper Silesia – a Specific Cultural Case'), Szumacher: Kielce, 1990; „Regionalizm jako folklorizm, ruch społeczny i formuła ideologiczno-polityczna” ('Regionalism as Folklorism, Social Movement, and an Ideological-Political Formula'), M. Latoszek (ed.), Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe: Gdańsk, 1993; „Regiony kulturowe a nowa regionalizacja kraju”

The debate in Upper Silesia, regarding *new regionalism* takes place in a specific context. Upper Silesia is not only an interesting example of a borderland region, but also an area where social, economic, political, cultural, and ecologic problems have acutely accumulated. No wonder, then, that the protagonists – those who construct distinct visions of development for the region – draw up various balance sheets grouping the advantages and drawbacks, the former simplifying, the latter – on the contrary – inhibiting the way out of a serious civilization disease.

Cultural identity of the Upper Silesian borderland region

Regional identity is understood as a collection of spiritual and material values which are characteristic for the regional community, as well as the heterogeneous local communities which constitute it, inherited from one generation to another, and legitimized by tradition. Regional tradition, on the other hand, which constitutes the cultural borderland for the region, can be understood in a threefold manner. Firstly, it is a set of ideas, viewpoints, and notions attributed to certain segments of the regional community, especially to various generations and groups of origin which constitute it. Secondly, tradition means social transmission that is transfer and reception of socially important values. Thirdly, then, this is the past accepted and respected, consciously or involuntarily, which finds expression in social activities. In the environment undergoing quick civilization changes, all the above three forms in which tradition may function, and be further transferred, have been shaken. It happened especially in big cities of Upper Silesia, where the new arrangement of space favours the atomization of social life, widening generation gaps, as well as those between different environments (e.g. in case of demolishing old districts and quarters, and replacing them with clusters of blocks of flats).

As sociological studies indicate, the main source of the cultural identity of the region, consolidated during late 19th and early 20th century, was the workers' ethos of labour. That got strengthened and crystallized through the strong connections of native inhabitants with the Catholic church, local priests and church institutions. Said Kazimierz Kutz, an eminent film and TV director, in his interview for 'Gazeta Wyborcza': *Silesia maintained the traditions of tribal culture which, with time, was transformed into that of parish community. Later the community of workers and inhabitants [of blocks labelled 'familoki'] was added. It all grew up for centuries and remained until today in native enclaves. All those processes were linked by local dialect and folk Christianity. The priest was always somebody local, native, and reminded the proverbial shepherd guarding his flock of sheep. Yet the foundations were in the family, in the clan, and in strong matriarchate. Silesia remained Polish thanks to the strong family bindings. The primeval was thus preserved. And family was what always sickened the circles of power, and what those circles tried to use.*

Of important influence was also the feeling of ethnic separateness, coupled with some forms of social consciousness and national identification, as well as attachment to a given *place* and *space* – to use Yi-Fu Tuan terminology, attachment to a wider family, and a well developed level of self-organization (clubs and circles for singing, associations, and local clubs, etc.)²⁰. As Czesław Robotycki rightly noted, those attributes are not unique for the Upper Silesian identity, as they were present, their intensification varying, all over the Latin Europe²¹. Incidentally, those very attributes, in line with his own *licentia poetica*, were recalled by the late Horst Bienek, a German writer born in Upper Silesia. He wrote: *Coal-mine, pub/inn, church, bed – these are the four posts of the Silesian canopy, to be more abrupt: to work, to drink, to pray, and to copulate, that was basically what made an Upper Silesian happy. Truly, he would like to earn some more money to buy some more booze, and he would like to fuck more, in order to confess more often...*²²

The core elements of regional cultural identity influenced the course of social changes and shaped the face of many local communities. The cultivated ethos of hard physical labour surely influenced the state and dynamics of education or life aspirations. It is worth stressing here that on the eve of transformation – in the years 1989–1990 – the education capital of people employed in the province/voivodship was modest, and in no way matched the demands set forth by the planned restructuring activities. As regards the percentage of inhabitants with university education, in the total number of labour force, the Katowice voivodship ranks 32 in Poland (among the total of 49 voivodships), when the college and vocational education is considered, Katowice voivodship takes 48th position in the ranking, while in percentage of secondary education, the voivodship ranks 41st. Also the level of formal qualifications of the inhabitants, measured by education, proved relatively low. In 1989 2% had not completed their primary education, 36% did complete that, 31% had vocational education, 25% – secondary one, while only 6% were university graduates.

Respect for the tradition and core elements of cultural identity, identified in regional community, can by no means indicate their idealization without any criticism. It is known that some elements of tradition, understood most widely, are impossible to be reconciled with the restructuring of Upper Silesia, already under way. It is absolutely unthinkable to cultivate the conviction that extractive industries should be maintained, which would support the ethos of hard labour. It is also equally difficult to accept the duplication of patterns of vocational education, and the ‘inheritance of professional traditions’ among miners or metallurgists. As a matter of fact only the *positive nucleus* of tradition need to be preserved, which will be one of the sources

²⁰Yi-Fu Tuan: „Przestrzeń i miejsce” (‘Space and Place’), PIW: Warszawa, 1987.

²¹Cz. Robotycki „Śląska historia i śląska tradycja.” (‘Silesian History and Tradition’), *Śląskie Prace Emograficzne*, M. Lipok-Bierwiazzonek (ed.), Katowice, 1990, vol. I

²²H. Bienek: „Opis pewnej prowincji (Fragmenty)” (‘Description of a Certain Province. (Excerpts)’), *Naglos*, No 15/16, 1994, p. 118.

for preserving cultural identity, that is the individual or collective identification with a definite normative and axiologic system, customs, habits, and symbols.

The process of decomposition of preserved elements of cultural identity is surely connected with the calculation of losses and gains, both of the material and non-material kind, which result from preferring new values and attitudes. Such dependencies were indicated years ago by Stefan Czarnowski in his studies upon the wandering of ideas in society, the acceptance or rejection of ideas²³. It is thus important that in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the region the conviction gets fixed regarding the importance of university education, of development-enhancing function of traditional and modern services, or of inevitable expansion of information technology. Such processes have already been initiated and they accompany regional transformation.

Social system in the region of cultural borderland

Social systems in regions of cultural borderland are usually rich and multidimensional. The traditional division into professions, social strata or classes is also extended by cultural differences, connected with regional origin of inhabitants. Some of the major groups of inhabitants from the Upper Silesian cultural borderland are worth a wider mention. The first of them constitutes of Silesian people, inhabiting the region for generations (*hanysy*), the second consists of people arriving in Upper Silesia in search for their place in the world and of a new private motherland (*gorole*, also labelled *chadziaje* in the Opole area of Upper Silesia), while the third is made up of native inhabitants of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region (*gorole-Zagłębiacy*) and that part of Małopolska region which, due to the reform of administration, was included in the Katowice province (voivodship). The label *hanysy* – pejorative in meaning – derives most probably from the name *Hans* and is, in fact, synonymous with the word *German*. The etymology of the word *gorol* has not been satisfactorily explained as yet, it is only known so far that it applies to non-Silesians and is usually connected with negative labelling. Those who arrived in Upper Silesia hardly ever were interested in the world, culture, of community they found there. They came mainly in search for better housing conditions, better living, and new urban construction meant a substantial symbol of civilization advancement. The majority of them described their housing situation, before obtaining a flat in Silesia or Zagłębie, as critical. Only after some years, part of the original *gorole* group strengthened their emotional links with the region and a *lesser heaven*, that is the new, additional private motherland.

The social world of Upper Silesia has not been, and is not, dichotomous and poor; previous sociological studies indicated clearly that besides *gorole* and *hanysy*

²³Cf. S. Czarnowski: „Dzieła” (‘Works’), vol. 1–5, PWN: Warszawa 1956, *passim*. Cf. also T. Banaszczyk: „Durkheim i protagoniści” (‘Durkheim and Protagonists’), Oddział PAN w Katowicach, Ossolineum: Katowice, 1996, particularly pp. 67–87.

one could also come across *krojczoki* in the region. Originally, that label was applied to children from mixed *hanys-gorol* marriages, later it also became a wider notion, comprising *those who arrived and married into a Silesian family* and even children of *gorole*, yet born in Silesia. The local colour of the towns of Bytom, Gliwice, of the *Celina* housing estate in Tychy is shaped by *kresowiacy*, who came to those towns as a result of post-war frontier corrections, which made them leave behind their private motherland behind the Bug river. Other classifications or divisions, which take into consideration the period of residence, can be discovered in various parts of the region, such as e.g. the towns of Bytom, Ruda Śląska, Katowice (*pnioki-krzoki-ptoki – roots-bushes-birds*).

Also the two key social and cultural categories, those of *hanysy* and *gorole*, are inherently differentiated. The former is divided into *hanysy from blocks [of flats]* (*those who live in blocks of flats and are not gorole*), *familokorze* (inhabitants of old housing estates for workers) or *pamponie* (rich Silesian farmers and their descendants). An important axis for divisions is that of nationality, thus we have Silesians who opt for Polish or German nationality, and those who remain indifferent in this respect. Also *gorole*, due to their regional origin or location in urban space are subdivided into particular categories (e.g. *werbusy*, *hoteloki*). In some parts of the province the label of *cysoroki* is still applied to the former subjects of Kaiser Franz Josef.

Social relations in the region of cultural borderland: re-sentiments and conciliatory attitudes

In the region of cultural borderland, region of unique social mosaic, social contacts and relations between native inhabitants, living in the area for centuries, and the varied community of those who arrive there, are extremely interesting. The relations between *hanysy* and people from the region of Zagłębie, or – in broader terms – that between *hanysy* and *gorole* in Upper Silesia were often described in the past. It was more rare, especially in the Katowice area of Upper Silesia, to describe the relations between *kresowiacy* (people from the eastern territories of pre-war Poland) and the native inhabitants of Silesia²⁴. The former of the above arrived in Upper Silesia with subsequent waves of transplanted inhabitants from the eastern territories of Poland, after frontiers changed following World War II. In analyzing those social relations, of great help prove to be private statements, letters, diaries, autobiographies, reminiscences, which all can be collectively labelled as *personal documents*, that is the label attached to them since the publication of the fundamental work *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce* (*Polish Peasant in Europe and America*) by Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas²⁵. Such contacts have been recalled by the Silesian, Maria Lipok-Bierwiazzonek, in her statement published in the monography of the town of Tychy: *We were able to find out that it was a different social*

²⁴In the Opole area of Upper Silesia such investigations were carried out by Stanisław Ossowski, among others.

²⁵Cf. „Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce” (‘Polish Peasant in Europe and America’) by Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas, vol. 1–5, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza: Warszawa, 1976.

world very soon indeed, the following Sunday. We were amazed to find on that day that streets and muddy paths were swarmed with mass of strangely dressed people, going to church. Our attraction was drawn particularly to women, in their long dark jackets and white kerchiefs on their heads, wearing high black knee-boots – and the month was August! Soon our block saw families moving in, who dressed equally strange. Doctor M. Lipok-Bierwiazzonek, at present the custodian of the Ethnographic Department of Silesian Museum, continues: *The yard, still bearing the traces of digging, filled with children: girls in long cretonne frocks reaching the middle of their calves (me and my friends used to wear short dresses) and boys in ... pyjamas, which their mothers evidently took for proper clothes to wear in the summer. I knew then, already, that those peculiarly dressed people, who also spoke in a strange manner – as it soon turned out – had been transplanted from behind the present eastern border, though as a child I did not understand that last notion too clearly*²⁶. In that case the first contacts initiated the processes of cultural integration, mutual taming and adaptation. M. Lipok-Bierwiazzonek continues: *The transplanted families gained more and more respect in our eyes, due to their diligence, which helped them overcome the initial poverty, due to modesty, to being helpful and always lending their hand to neighbours whenever that was needed in small repairs, due to their religiosity, etc. That approval found expression in establishing friendly relationships between families originally coming from different territories; I do recall a friendship between a Silesian and a transplanted family from our neighbourhood. It may be that the reduction of gap between those two groups was also due to the social consciousness that the fate of kresowiaczy and that of native Silesians had much in common, as both were evicted or transplanted, threatened and unsure, in frantic search for a small motherland or afraid to lose it. Also the statement delivered by Bruno Kozak, representing the Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Niemców na Śląsku (Social and Cultural Society for Germans in Silesia) is of similar tone. The following statement was delivered during the conference entitled 'Multicultures – a Problem or a Blessing?' and goes like that: *If anyone talks to us, living here since 1945, and to us who were born here and lived to see 1993, to us surrounded by that complicated reality of ours, about reconciliation, we simply cannot respond to it. I have reconciled, I will express that in German, as it is a very good expression „mit der polnischen Umwelt”. I shall state that simply: with our Polish surroundings, in the 1940s, 1946 at the latest, as all our colleagues that arrived here from Lviv or Tarnopol, or other such places, have often been very dear friends to me until today. In that context, appealing to us to reconcile is not really talking to us*²⁷. It is hard not to note, however, that not all ethnic challenges, induced by meetings between native inhabitants and those who arrived were or are free from conflicts. This applies mainly to the relationships between the German minority*

²⁶Cf. M. Lipok-Bierwiazzonek: „Moje pierwsze tyskie lata” ('My First Years in Tychy'), in M.S. Szczepański (ed.) „Tychy 1939–1989. Monografia miasta” ('Tychy 1939–1989. Monography of the Town.'). Zarząd i Rada Gminy Tychy: Tychy, 1996, p. 191.

²⁷Cf. „Wielokulturowość – problem czy bogactwo?” ('Multicultures – a Problem or a Blessing?'), Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Gliwice, 1994, p. 101

located here in Upper Silesia, and the Polish majority. The sensitive relations have also been influenced by the collective historic memory on both sides, where the atrocities of war, evictions and persecutions have been registered. Wrote bishop Alfons Nossol in his shepherd letter issued for the Lent of 1991: *The mass crimes committed in concentration camps find no justification, and cannot be compensated for. Yet one also should not be quiet about, or forget about, the Polish camps founded after 1945, e.g. that in Lammsdorf or other places. Victims who perished there deserve to be preserved in our memory. Reconciliation between Poles and Germans require both sides to be ready to acknowledge the truth uncovered by historians. That reconciliation will not comprise the „experienced generation”. Whatever explanations will be provided will not be enough; deep cuts will always remain painful: in Poles, in the evicted ones, in Germans that remained in their motherland.* This important *memento* by the bishop of Opole rightly shows the need for the truth of history to be revealed, although for many living in the cultural borderland it may prove painful, connected with individual or collective dramas.

That fear and uncertainty regarding loss of the small motherland found in the north and west of Poland after World War II have not been eliminated, may be proven by the founding, in April 1996, in the town of Zielona Góra of Społeczny Ruch Uwłaszczeniowy Ziemi Zachodnich i Północnych (Social Movement for Land Granting in Western and Northern Territories). It is worth mentioning here that those who arrived from the east were not granted – in exchange for the property they were forced to give up in the east – land ownership rights, but the so-called ‘perpetual usufruct’ for the period of 99 years. Says lawyer Adam Krej: *People in Zielona Góra, Opole, or Szczecin have a reason to be afraid that, as Germans say, although the issue of western borders of Poland has been settled, the issues of ownership still remain open.* In mid-October, 1996 the above mentioned Movement – in which hundreds of thousands of those who have *perpetual usufruct* in 14 provinces (voivodships) of northern and western Poland – was transformed into Polski Związek Posiadaczy Zależnych – PZPZ (Polish Union of Dependent Possessors). Stresses Tadeusz Weber, one of the three PZPZ coordinators: *Before Poland joins the European Community the ownership issues must be cleared in those territories. Otherwise, applying international legislature, we will be just tenants of the land on which we have built our homes*²⁸.

Conclusion

The paper presented above had, as planned by the author, a cognitive aim. They should allow for a preliminary and fragmentary reflection upon three notions – important in the ethnologic, anthropologic, and sociological tradition – those of borderland, geographic borderland, and cultural borderland. The empirical point of

²⁸M. Urbanek: „Wieczność na 99 lat” (‘Perpetuality for 99 years’), *Polityka*, No. 44 (2061), November 02, 1996.

reference and the counterpoint of research for that pondering upon notions and labels could be found in the Upper Silesian region of cultural borderland. Features have been indicated which constitute that type of borderland region, as well as complicated social relations, and elements of preserved regional identity. Albeit the text studies but one borderland region, the remarks it contains have – as I take the freedom to believe – a more universal meaning. They may refer, careful as one should be stating that, not only to other Polish regions of cultural borderland (Pomorze – Pomerania, Warmia, Mazury), but also to regions of such a kind, which would be located outside Polish state and outside the continent of Europe.

Katowice, October – December, 1996

June 1997,

April 2000.