

**Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska. *Dziecko, rodzina i płeć w amerykańskich inicjatywach humanitarnych i filantropijnych w II Rzeczypospolitej* [The Child, the Family, and Gender in the American Humanitarian and Philanthropic Initiatives in Interwar Poland]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2018. 419 pages.**

Whether the result of careful planning or a lucky coincidence, the timing of *Dziecko, rodzina i płeć w amerykańskich inicjatywach humanitarnych i filantropijnych w II Rzeczypospolitej* by Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska couldn't have been better. In 2018, when the monograph entered the Polish academic market, the whole world celebrated the centennial of the end of WWI, and Poland commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of regaining independence after 123 years of political nonexistence on the political map of Europe. Moreover, the year 2019 marks another important centenary: the establishment of U.S.-Polish diplomatic relations. As it happens, it is exactly those events of 1918 and 1919 that constitute the starting point of the engaging history of American humanitarian and philanthropic activities in restored Poland throughout the interwar period 1918-1939 told by the Author in her voluminous monograph. She situates the motivation behind the American humanitarian presence in Poland/Europe after WWI at the intersection of US geo-political interests and the strong ideological impulse of American Progressivism. The book approaches the history of the American aid from the perspective signaled by the title concepts: the child, the family, and gender. The argument is organized around four groups of principal Polish welfare recipients in the considered period identified by the American humanitarians as primarily important in the reconstruction of the war-devastated Polish society: deprived children, dysfunctional families, women in their maternal role, and male youth. Kuźma-Markowska formulates several research questions concerning the four selected areas and, by answering them, attempts a comprehensive historical panorama of American humanitarian operations in interwar Poland, a synthesis much needed when the relevant Polish and American historiography is still fragmentary and dispersed.

The study may be appreciated at two main levels. The enthusiasts of traditional historiographic narratives will value ample factual information about the American political and philosophical motives behind the humanitarian activity in post-war Europe; the main American philanthropic organizations operating in interwar Poland; their Polish institutional partners and successors; biographical references to the main American and Polish activists; careful attention to the chronology of various humanitarian endeavors; geographical sketches of American welfare provisions in Poland, and the inclusion of interesting—often previously unknown—human and financial statistics of the American relief ventures. While some of this factual information is drawn from secondary sources, Polish and American, the Author's remarkable effort to retrieve new evidence from a wide range of primary archival materials must be fully acknowledged.

Although praiseworthy, the conventional methodological apparatus is not the main strength of the monograph, but its combination with the cultural studies critical paradigm of sex-gender/race-ethnicity/class. Due to this methodological

decision, Kuźma-Markowska presented a unique socio-cultural history of prolonged contact between two geographically distant as well as materially, mentally and politically different cultures happening not only among political and intellectual elites but—most importantly—amid the common people of restored Poland. It is a story of a cultural clash between American ethnocentrism, rationalism, progressivism and trust in scientific philanthropy represented by the US relief organizations on the one hand, and the disintegrated, materially devastated and physically undermined Polish nation struggling with poverty, massive illiteracy and major economic difficulties on the other. But it is also a story of ordinary Americans, their generosity, charitable disposition, sense of moral responsibility, and of dozens of volunteers ready to travel overseas and work hard helping a distant unfamiliar nation in its predicament, often in the atmosphere of reluctance and distrust.

Detailed aspects of the culture contact are explored across five main book chapters. Chapter 1 presents and critically discusses three dominant aspects of Poland's post-war situation generated in America by the humanitarian activists via mass-circulation press and eye-witness reports: pervasive rural and urban homelessness, maternal poverty, and the ordeal of child war survivors. Kuźma-Markowska confronts the emotionally charged sensationalized presentations, evocative illustrations, and photographs with historical facts and points to the reasons of their bias and selectivity: diagnosing the plight of Polish peasants and urban underclass by middle-class professional American philanthropists; faulty generalization about the entire country on the basis of the deprived Eastern borderlands, and overextending Poland's post-war humanitarian crisis well into the 1920s. Chapter 2 draws a complex picture of "rescuing" Polish children by American philanthropic organizations characterized by the financial and operational priority of nutrition and physical rehabilitation, the American scientific dietary principles confronted with Polish reality, and the logistics of food preparation and serving, among other factors. An important fact highlighted in this section is ethnic segregation of children's aid adopted by the American Relief Organization based on the recognized Jewish-Christian polarization of Polish society. The ethnic division of American philanthropy was deepened by the parallel operation of the Jewish Distribution Committee, an American organization offering aid to Jewish populations in central and eastern Europe. Although the Author blames the adopted system for intensifying ethnic frictions and assimilation problems in the multiethnic interbellum Poland, she acknowledges its practical effectiveness in reaching the most destitute children of both groups, especially in the immediate post-war period.

The restoration of broken and dysfunctional Polish families as the American philanthropic strategy of helping war orphans makes the content of chapter 3. The discussed solutions such as support for orphanages, propagation of financial and legal adoptions by American citizens, creation of foster families in Poland, facilitating family reunifications and reintegration of children across the Atlantic leaves one in awe at their scope and variety as well as at the personal involvement and goodwill they required. Kuźma-Markowska points to the difficulties of making them more effective, such as the effort of recruiting adoptive parents in the US, the cost of transatlantic transportation, strict American immigration laws, lack of sufficient public and church facilities for orphanages and day-care centers in many areas. She also stresses the

crucial importance of American—philanthropy for Jewish orphans systematically neglected by the regional state administrations in favor of Christian children.

Chapter 4, devoted to the central role of women in the child-centered American humanitarian projects, constitutes a fine example of women's history closely linked with the feminist concerns with women's family role models, particularly maternal, paid employment and domestic labor, and the intersection of the public and private life. Polish women were not primary targets of the American philanthropic institutions; nevertheless, the recognized importance of their maternal and child caring functions got them involved in many rescue programs dedicated to the youngest generation. While the many presented forms and problems of working with destitute Polish pregnant and newly delivered women and young mothers constitute a good read, the chapter's most engaging aspect is the simultaneous elucidation of the profound cultural disparities between the traditional Polish and new medicalized American views on pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, infant care, and hygiene. Many of the American interventions were certainly good and much needed. Yet reading about Polish women's reluctance towards the institutional male-supervised encroachments on their traditional maternal sphere (considered by Kuźma-Markowska as an instance of Foucauldian biopolitics), one cannot avoid a reflection on how many of the once discouraged non-scientific practices of midwife-assisted home childbirth, non-medical pain relief, and breastfeeding on demand have recently been reclaimed by obstetrical and nursing sciences. Another impression left by the section on working women is that, albeit under necessity, many Polish lower-class widowed and abandoned women paradoxically came much closer to today's norm of the working mother and the female family breadwinner than the model American housewives in patriarchal middle-class families.

The final chapter deals with the American attempts at the physical and moral regeneration of Polish male adolescents and young men undertaken by YMCA and its Polish continuator. As in the preceding chapters, Kuźma-Markowska links the chronological account of the implementation of the YMCA programs and construction of facilities with parallel reflection of how they were meant to propagate the contemporary Anglo-American middle-class ideal of the muscular Christian gentleman characterized by manliness, discipline, self-control, and the moral and physical beauty of athleticism. She demonstrates how in many respects the YMCA goals were being transformed by the Polish conditions and priorities. For instance, strong interest of young Polish males in team and combat sports stemmed from remodeling the ideal of the muscular gentleman to that of a muscular soldier. Moreover, the Catholic and single-sex identity of Polish YMCA closed its centers to Jewish males and all young women. YMCA also failed to replicate its mass character in Poland, and became politicized in the Eastern borderlands by its involvement in the resistance to Russian communism and Polonization of culturally "savage" ethnic minorities.

One may have a few minor regrets concerning the monograph. One, applying to most Polish history books, is the lack of a truly useful back-of-the-book index with thematic and geographical entries, not sufficiently compensated for by the provided index of names. Another is the absence of at least one general map of interbellum Poland visualizing the spatial network of the American relief centers. The book could

also have been richer in photographic reproductions, particularly when discussed in the text (341, 352). For an author evidently well acquainted with Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and American archives, Kuźma-Markowska offers a rather modest indication of the needs and possibilities of further research on American philanthropy, suggesting instead a closer look at the penetration of American popular culture in contemporary Poland. Yet these omissions do not diminish the overall high value of this well-conceived monograph based on rich primary sources. Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska paid due tribute to the generous and tireless efforts of many American institutions and individuals who helped the most vulnerable members of Polish society in the time of greatest need. She met the challenge of doing humanitarian history described by Yves Denéchère as the necessity of combining “social history, political history, history of international relations, but also cultural history and history of mentalities” (6). She achieved it by intertwining political, economic, class, ethnic, and gender reasoning. She made a valuable contribution to the dynamically developing studies on modern international humanitarianism. Hers is also a timely and valuable historiographic response to the current interest in the American humanitarian activities as a form of pursuing specific political objectives by the US governments and the heralded decline of principled humanitarianism.

### Work Cited

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Irmina Wawrzyczek  
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

**Nikki Skillman. *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. 352 pages.**

Many know that love, in its early stage, releases neurotransmitters identical with those released by regular addictive drugs. Most others suspect it, without knowing exactly or even roughly how it works. Regular craving for new love will not get us into an addiction recovery center, although, from the biological point of view, it is unclear exactly why it won't. Love is missed in the same way as a shot of opium. The materialism of the mind sciences is inherent in so much of the present discourse. Although it doesn't exactly occupy our mind, it structures our intuitive understanding of our condition and our moods.

Nikki Skillman, currently an Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University Bloomington, had quite a brilliant idea to explore how the biological, physiological, and neuroscientific descriptions of the mind—accounts of the machinery of reason, emotion, grief, memory, love—have impacted the lyrical poetry whose very domain has been traditionally these emotions. While one would expect poets to resist the notion of mind thoroughly embodied, Skillman finds them in fact