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Critical Sociology in Poland and its Public Function

Abstract: The text describes how the public task of the social sciences could be linked with the practice of critical sociology. Recently, interesting changes have occurred which extend this prospect. In the last years, aside from critical analyses of changing social conditions, there have also been auto-reflections on the social entanglement of knowledge about the transformation. Critical analysis of the public function of scientific diagnoses and the engagement of sociologists is the result of earlier thinking about the model of imitative modernization. The source of the latter's domination can be sought in the social characteristics of Eastern Europe; the basis is recognition of the area's historical peripheralness and long-lasting economic backwardness. The growing interest in critical sociology in Poland not only broadens the interpretative palette, but above all raises questions about the originality of interpretations: that is, it addresses the mechanism of import or local creation in the interpretation of social phenomena in the post-communist sphere.

Keywords: Polish sociology, post-communist transformation, critical theory, public sociology

One of the characteristic and lasting traits of Polish sociology has been its public function, which consists in the engagement of researchers in holistic and macro-social issues, and particularly those requiring the diagnosis of major social and political questions. From the first analyses of Polish society, the issues that have been chosen have been those considered essential to an accepted vision of society's development, social progress, and process of modernization. Sociologists assumed the role, proper to the intelligentsia, of leaders of a society that needed to make up for its historical backwardness and hasten the development not only of its economy, but also of its cultural and mental attributes. What mattered to them was to point out the main social problems and to participate in planning future systemic solutions. In the interwar years, sociologists were to provide rational, conscious leadership, aiming, as Ludwik Krzywicki wrote, to 'citizenize the masses' (cf. Szacki 1995). In the communist period the engagement of the social sciences grew: first under the influence of the universal ideology of social revolution and a new beginning, and later, after the rebirth of sociology in the last decades of the People's Republic of Poland, as an important element criticizing the system of 'real socialism' (Kwaśniewicz 1995).

My aim is to consider how the task of the social sciences, as understood in Poland, can be connected with critical sociology. I would like to address what is involved in critically oriented sociology in local, Polish conditions. I believe that interesting changes, involving the spread and deepening of the critical perspective, have occurred in this question in recent years. The critical approach in Polish sociology has been

gradually increasing: drawing from various inspirations, but referring back to the task of civil engagement that has long been present.

In thinking about critical sociology, I chiefly have the tradition of critical theory in mind, but I also adopt a wider understanding of the critical approach in sociology. While traditional theory concentrates on facts, assigning them the status of direct data in the cognitive process, critical theory notes that they are socially constructed in a dual sense. Both the subject and the object are marked by their social nature. Thus they are treated as creations of the historically variable intellectual activities of man. Furthermore, it is premised that research work will be engaged in nature, or even markedly political. This critical engagement in the contemporary social world is based on the conviction that the existing state of affairs does not encompass all the possibilities. Consciousness of the historicity and dialogical nature of social knowledge, which is enmeshed in cultural and political conditions, and a clear engagement in the practical situation, are therefore proper to this approach (cf. Calhoun 1994: 11; Szahaj 2008). Further, it is supposed to encourage the disclosure of hidden mechanisms of oppression, inequality, and violence in the surrounding world. The final aim of critical sociology is thus the emancipation of society through the provision of a new view and different interpretation, and by enabling its emergence from false consciousness. The constructivist bases of this approach point toward the always historical, contextual, and thus temporal nature of the interpretation of reality, including the interpretations offered by critical sociology as well. In our case, it is a matter chiefly of seeking descriptions of Polish society that will, in a new manner, by revealing unobvious and hidden social mechanisms and looking critically at existing traditions and understandings, suggest different interpretations of the social changes after communism's fall. In this way, sociologists participate in the public debate over the shape and prospects of Poland's development, and become engaged in the project of transformation.

Reconstruction involves the analysis and interpretation of macro-social phenomena connected with the processes of systemic transformation (cf. Kolasa-Nowak 2010). The achievements of mainstream sociology have been taken into account. My aim is to outline the trajectory of the dominant discourse in Polish sociology of the last quarter century. At the beginning, it is worth mentioning the ideas of Jerzy Szacki, who observed that basically there has been no sociology in Poland other than the sociology of succeeding historical breakthroughs (Szacki 1993: 167). For a long time this has meant for science the necessity of reacting to a situation of complete and profound social change. The diagnoses of sociologists have usually concerned succeeding systemic projects and social processes which they evoked. The history of Polish society in the 20th century comprises such fundamental events as the end of more than a century of belonging to three foreign states, the emergence of an independent Polish state, and the organization from the ground up of modern state institutions. The Second World War brought the experience of the institutions' breakdown and destruction, and the postwar years were a period of imposing on society a complete and revolutionary political plan. The fall of communism in 1989, preceded by a long period of social conflict and renewed civil struggle, opened the latest, still unfinished, phase of deep changes.

Poland's successive breakthroughs and situations of radically rebuilding the rules of collective life have occurred in a peripheral society, whose main focus has been overcoming the lacuna of development and making up the distance to the successes achieved in Western Europe. Thus the idea of modernization, understood as a project to make up for lost time and for emerging from backwardness in various fields, has lain at the basis of Polish thought about society. Polish sociology's cognitive tasks and methods were formed in such specific conditions. These conditions also produced sociology's public function and its close connection with social practice.

In the Polish People's Republic period, particularly in the last decade, sociologists studying the system, which was descending into crisis, were strongly engaged in its critical analysis. The most important subjects were unambiguously political issues, which called attention to themselves and whose analysis was significant in forming the public space and in articulating the universal dissatisfaction. Sociologists described the increasing social conflict and the growth of the Solidarity social movement and sought the mechanisms of the progressing delegitimation of 'real socialism'. In revealing the mechanisms of the system's downfall, they contributed to its loss of legitimation and provided arguments to its opponents. The strategies of the individual in playing with the rules of communism were also the object of sociological studies. On the one hand, these strategies resulted in the gradual erosion of the system's rules, but on the other they created negative phenomena in the collective mentality, such as 'desocialization', by which is understood the disappearance of social ties and cohesion (Marody 1991).

In concentrating on the dismantling of the communist order, researchers emphasized that their position was an objective one and referred to scientific research methods and existing theories and models in sociology. They declared their distance and neutrality in doing research and formulating explanations. At the same time, the results they presented were strongly critical and undermined the then social order. They showed the processes of the system's fall and the growth of mass conflict.

This critical analysis was conducted in the name of a society deprived of voice, i.e., chiefly in the name of that part contesting the communist system. The reference points were both Western social conditions and the mainstream academic discourse of Western societies. Such a manner of engaging in the social sciences was an act of protest and an expression of public engagement. As a dichotomous picture of the world predominated then in the situation of general conflict, an engaged and civil sociology was a relatively clear, unambiguous undertaking, confirmed by the widely accepted moral correctness of protesting against the communist regime. The public functions of the social sciences were clearly exhibited and accepted. At the same time, the manner in which research was conducted was far from adhering to the tradition of critical sociology. In premise, the social sciences distanced themselves from their ties with ideology and did not reveal their political convictions directly. Engagement was typical for the social sciences propagated by the communist authorities. An ideologized worldview dominated, and analysis was supposed to justify the idea of "an advanced communist society." Thus while in premise analyses at the decline of the People's Republic were objective and referred to the existing sociological canon, they had the ability to reveal contradictions, to show the loss of legitimacy and the

slow erosion of communism. Studying the crisis of the system and showing its internal sources and dynamic simultaneously undermined its legitimacy and uncovered the exhaustion of its ideological and axiological bases.

After the fall of communism, new tasks for sociological analysis appeared. It was necessary to explain the phenomena and mechanisms produced by emerging from the declining system and building of the democratic project and free market order. From that time, the majority of sociological descriptions of the transformation began to fit into the paradigm of imitative modernization, understood as a form of widely accepted westernization. Being the main interpretative and value-giving context of the transformation in Poland, it acted as the transformation's ideology, at least in the first period after 1989. The idea of modernization justified the costs and legitimized the reform project. For a long time, the relatively rapid transition to the intended final state was not questioned in the discursive sphere in which issues relating to the transformation's goals were raised. The social sciences thus found themselves, as Jerzy Szacki wrote, 'in the phase of absolute certainty that the destiny of changing countries is to rapidly adapt to the norms established in modern times by the western world. The first years of the 90s passed in the atmosphere of entering a new era, but devoid of pathos, and governed by the myth of an accelerated "return to normality"' (Szacki 1996: 7). The knowledge gathered by sociologists about society was to explore the potential sources of failure in achieving the goal, which was to make up the deficits of the communist period and level the differences between Poland and the development model of Western Europe.

The declared ideal of the sociology of transformation was therefore an engaged sociology, although one still referring to the ideal of an objective, quantitative, and neutral science. The task of the social sciences consisted most often in supporting the project of change. Society was treated as an object of engineering measures. It was most often viewed as a source of difficulties in the modernization process, and explanations were made of its immaturity in regard to meeting the challenges of an exceptional time. The causes were located in the negative influence of conditions of real socialism on Poles' mentality and behaviour. In the first years of the transformation, critical accents in sociological analyses centered thus on only two motifs. Most often, the mental deficiencies of Poles in rising to the challenges of the new, post-break-through situation were diagnosed and criticized. The second, more extensive, subject concerned the ideological bases of the new order. The phenomenon of 'post-communist liberalism' as a specific graft on the foreign ground of Eastern European society became the object of the first critical analysis and numerous commentaries (Szacki 1994; Wnuk-Lipiński 1996). It was observed that liberalism contained a competing variation of modernization in regard to communism and this explained its unquestioned popularity. In Poland, it took the form of neoliberal orthodoxy, and was of the nature of a new ideologized 'jargon'. As a result of its spread among the political elites leading the reforms a world of concepts appeared that did not match the daily experiences of most people (Morawski 1993: 6). The effect of accepting this idea in top-down projects was 'state liberalism' and thus a hybrid political system, which was 'inevitable in our situation of a mixed political system' (Wnuk-Lipiński 1996: 61). Its

particularity was marked on one side by a top-down, statist manner of governing, and on the other, by social resistance in the spirit of egalitarian and post-communist social ideas. For the first time, the creation of singularities in the post-1989 transformation was observed. These were the effect of implementing an exterior solution, which in post-communist conditions had to acquire a peculiar, localized form.

On the other hand, researchers considering the communist heritage concentrated chiefly on those components of the old habitus that were not only unfavourable to rapid and fruitful changes but were the very opposite of social attitudes that were now thought desirable (cf.: Rychard 1993; Sztompka 1991; 1997). Their opening passages described the *communist residues* that acted as a barrier to modernizing changes (Marody 1991a: 256). The idea was often used of *homo sovieticus*, signifying—for the requirements of the transformation—a durable and negative mental type (Świda-Ziemia 1990; 1994). An acquired helplessness, low tolerance for social inequalities, the lability of norms, and a particular attitude to the law were counted among communism's negative and change-resistant remainders (Wnuk-Lipiński 1991). The still prevalent collectivist approach and resulting lack of a desirable individualist attitude was supposed to be harmful ballast (Marody 1991b: 35–39). The axiological conservatism of Poles (meaning chiefly egalitarianism and the high level of social expectations from the state), was criticized (Grabowska et al. 1992). The mental equipment of Polish society was appraised severely for various absent civilizational competences. Not only was the Poles' lack of abilities and attitudes necessary for market conditions and democracy pointed out, but also the universality of the opposite mental habits formed under the People's Republic (Sztompka 1991; 1997). Poles were not thus prepared to meet the challenges of modernization. It might even be said that with their communist mentality they constituted an obstacle to successful transformation to a fully modern society. To introduce new institutional rules appeared to be significantly easier than to make them universal and applicable in accord with the reformers' intentions.

In the first stage of the transformation, social reactions to the reforms were criticized, while the direction, content, and manner of introducing the changes were usually accepted without deeper reflection and without skepticism. This approach was so dominant and universal that in 1994 Antoni Sulek, then chairman of the Polish Sociological Association, in inaugurating the Polish Sociological Congress in Lublin, considered it necessary to appeal to Polish sociologists to return to the attitude of 'standing on the side of society', which they had had at the end of the communist period, and to throw off their technocratic engagement in implementing the liberal political project on the conviction that once again 'some sort of historical necessity was occurring and an invisible hand was leading society towards democracy and the free market' (Sulek 1995: 5). In sociologists' declarations, they described their public task then as helping society to 'regain its sovereignty, to achieve self-knowledge and the ability to participate in public life' (Kubiak 1996: 439, also: Ziółkowski 2000: 185). This, as it was called, Promethean function of the social sciences, was to be achieved by widening the social imagination and facilitating people's understanding of the new situation in which they found themselves (Kubiak 1996: 445). However, outside of reflections on the project

of liberalism after communism, sociologists did not attempt to look at the new conditions from an objective distance, nor did they reflect on the public tasks that were emerging. Mention was occasionally made of solely those social roles that emphasized sociologists' shared responsibility for the quality of the transformation project.

At least in the first years after the systemic breakthrough, ambitious public goals, referring back to the traditions of civil sociology at the beginning of national independence, were not realized. The feeling was fairly widespread that sociology had not been able to provide a complete and useful interpretation of what had happened in Poland. The tendency to describe events predominated, and the emphasis fell on registering and documenting historical processes. The lack of theoretical reflection and self-reflection resulted in the adoption of unconscious, hidden premises about the 'obvious' and accepted nature of the changes taking place (Sufek [1992] 2011: 276). An affirmative attitude predominated, which did not touch the premises of the transformation project and did not provide space for thinking about the relations between knowledge and social practices. In effect, sociologists no longer shaped the discussion about Poland's prospects, as was the case before 1989 (Szacki 1993: 175), but were connected, as never before, with the institutions of power in the role of experts (Sufek [1992] 2011: 280).

Gradually, new questions and motifs began to appear in the sociological discourse. These concerned the undesirable effects of the changes occurring, particularly their social costs. The growing social inequality and poverty were noticed; gradually attention was also paid to the phenomenon of social polarization. This time, the causes were sought not only in people's adaptive strategies but also in the structural conditions that were the effect of the chosen direction of change. For the first time, the critical gaze of the researchers fell on the project of transformation itself. These analyses were not only to reveal the growth of new, usually disadvantageous phenomena, but also the consciousness of their negative effects, both for Poland's development potential and on account of the growing moral indignation at the new inequalities (Słomczyński, Janicka 2008: 125 and 136). An interest began to be taken in the defects of the new system, including corruption, clientelism, favouritism, and activities hidden from public opinion (such as, for instance, the activities of the new and former secret services) (Gadowska 2002; Zybortowicz 1993; Wedel 2007). The dysfunction of the new order was located in the institutional sphere. Most often it resulted from the imperfection of the new rules or from their mutual contradiction or incompatibility.

The division of democratic institutions into two camps, which risked decomposing the democratic order, was also subjected to critical analysis. Sociologists attached a large amount of importance to the phenomenon, as it was supposed to carry over to the identity of the whole order and thereby to have a hampering influence on the development of the rules and practices of democracy. In addition, it resulted in decision-making processes being shunted outside the formal institutional framework. Researchers saw in this phenomenon a threat to the emerging democratic system (Mokrzycki, Rychard, Zybortowicz 2002). They also analyzed the complicating influence of hybrid, unclear, and incoherent ties between the public and private sectors, and between the authorities and business, which prolonged the unfinished and incom-

plete consolidation of democracy. The new order's source of stability was placed in the low-level balance between the promoters and opponents of change, or in general social demobilization (Rychard 2002: 154).

In the analyses it was emphasized that the democratic system had maintained its façade-like nature, to the detriment of its democratic substance. The 'institutionalization of non-responsibility', that is, the weakening of political and civil control of democratic mechanisms, was criticized. One of the causes of this situation was considered to be the deficit of social dialogue in Poland. The public discourse was described as empty, inauthentic, ritualized, and dominated by the rhetoric of moral principle rather than of instrumental effectiveness (Hausner, Marody 2000: 151; cf.: Czyżewski, Kowalski, Piotrowski 1997).

In a critical picture sketched by Jadwiga Staniszkis, the market and the state are formed of a web of mutual ties, of clientelism and political connections, and hidden institutional relations. The role of the special services in this concept is important: as groups connected with the emergence of the 'top-down revolution' ending communism, they were 'the main transformative force' (Staniszki 2001: 49 and 118). At the beginning of the 90s, behind the façade of democracy were the scattered, but essential, centers of actual power (Staniszki 1994: 98).

The growth of these phenomena was treated as a proof of errors in the transformation project, or the transformation itself was understood as the result of such pathological activities. Thus analyses taking a critical view of the post-communist transformation itself and its main effects began to appear on a large scale. An awareness of the project's ineffectiveness began to manifest itself and a search began for deeper, less obvious, or hidden mechanisms, which, naturalized, had escaped the researchers' attention. Such critical reflection into the transformation was treated by the authors as personal engagement in the public debate (Sojak, Wicenty 2005: 17–18; cf. also: Zybortowicz 1993). Sociologists were aware that in the case of a social system whose shape is not set and which is subject to fundamental changes, 'the role of the intellectuals formulating warning prognoses, putting forward new ideas, or drawing attention to the overlooked consequences of the decisions of political actors' was respectively greater (Mokrzycki, Rychard, Zybortowicz 2002: 9). Researchers, in identifying the threats and hidden sources of distortions in the modernization changes appeared thus in the name of society and, as they believed, still furthered the 'growth of society's control over its destiny by investigating the burning social issues' (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005: 41). However, society constituted for them solely an imaginary, passive, and little differentiated public, with poor possibilities for its own articulation. In consequence, the relation between sociologists and society was of a paternalistic nature. The critical attitude of researchers toward many phenomena approximated the beliefs of their social group, that is, the Polish intellectual elites.

After a few years in which the analyses of sociologists concentrated on the deficits of post-communism, reflections began to appear on the manner in which social conditions had been presented up to that point. For the first time, thought was given not to the objects of the studies but to the premises and trajectory of explanations in the studies themselves. The subject that led the way was the increasingly clear difference be-

tween the accepted model of transformation and actual conditions. Questions of how to qualify the local peculiarities that had appeared after a few years of transformation first produced reflection into the role of tradition and then into the meaning of the past for understanding contemporary social processes. In the second decade of the transformation, this question came to the fore in public debate. At the same time, it had always been strongly present in the scientific discourse. The conviction that marked the beginning of the dispute was well summarized by Zdzisław Krasnodębski, who claimed in his book *Demokracja peryferii* [Democracy of the Periphery] that ‘the outcome of modernizing changes depends on how they are combined with one’s own tradition’ [Krasnodębski 2003: 221]. The ideas contained there were typical of the growing polemic with the dominant liberal ideology and criticism of the model of imitative, top-down modernization. The position expressed in this book was additionally—and more importantly for the sociological discourse—a criticism of a constructivism that treated society and its resources exclusively as a passive object for reforming activities.

However, sociologists had already somewhat earlier begun to notice and critically analyze the weaknesses of the ‘transformative’ achievements. There were warnings of the danger of scholarly analyses becoming trivial as a result of ‘being subject to pressures from the general consciousness or from the canon of intellectual-political correctness’ (Ziółkowski 2000: 186). The source of this lack of originality and ingenuity in intellectual achievements was located in attachment to the imitative model of transformation. This idea was well reflected in the claim that the lack of seeking new interpretations and deeper understanding for the phenomena occurring in Poland was the result of ‘Polish sociologists’ being charmed by the idea of modernization’ (Sosnowska 2004: 14). It was chiefly for this reason that sociological explanations were characterized by conventionality, in the sense of operating exclusively within the sphere of ‘recognized, legitimate academic discourse’ (Bukraba-Rylska 2004: 154) and its issues (Bińczyk 2001: 86).

Sociologists began to consider the social conditions in which sociological knowledge is created. The pro-Western and liberal attitude of the elites was pointed out, as well as their ‘fascination with Western social development and its civilizational effect’ (Sosnowska 1997: 61). Poland’s imitative modernization began to be understood as a repetition of the former scenario of Polish leftist intellectuals. Finding themselves on the peripheries, ‘desirous of breaking free from enslaving particularity’ and longing for ‘life according to universal principles’, they did not want to accept Poland’s ‘lack of normality’ (Krasnodębski 2003: 219). The related ‘rationality gap’ between the elites conducting the top-down reforms and society subject to the changes was also written about (Staniszki 1994: 93).

In the years when Poland was preparing for accession to the European Union and the debate in Poland was growing over post-communism as a separate phase, the trend of appraising the previous path of changes became increasingly widespread. It was characterized on one side by a broader context for viewing the changes, and on the other by a deepening of the time perspective. Sociologists also participated in the debate. They attempted the task of deciphering the transformation in the broader, European and global, context.

For this purpose, the importance of the past was recognized—particularly the more distant past than that of the communist times—and the long-duration perspective was adopted. This provided a basis for reflection into the historical circumstances that shaped the development chances of our region of Europe. As a result, it was suggested that the change of system should be looked at as a succeeding attempt at modernizing Poland, under conditions of being on the periphery and of lasting backwardness (Sosnowska 2004: 340). The project of integration with Europe emerged then as an opportunity to overcome this historical burden (Misiak 1995). Exiting the communist era meant not so much hope for normal development on the pattern of Western societies as, at most, a return to Poland's prewar position on the periphery. From that time, attitudes to the country's peripherality became an important source of political difference (Sosnowska 1997). Sociologists began to set forth their own convictions on the subject and perform the public functions of their discipline in regard to it.

The category of peripherality became an important tool both for analyses that undermined the sense of using the ideology of imitative modernity and those that remained within its framework. Thus, for instance, it was useful to justify not using Polish organizational culture for the requirements of the contemporary market. Then our country's historical affiliation with the Eastern European economic complex was pointed out, and the supposed survival into contemporary times, as a result, of the manorial style of management (Hryniewicz 2004: 212). In such views it is assumed that Poland's economic development has long been occurring by means of cultural import from Western Europe, hampered by remainders of the mentality of pre-capitalist times (Hryniewicz 2007). The past was treated exclusively as a local source of ballast, weighing on attempts to make up for economic backwardness and appearing mainly in cultural content, habits, and traditional mentalities. No attempt was made, however, to indicate in what manner these criticized elements of mentality have survived till today. More often sociologists have been inclined to see peripherality in categories of durable economic inequality, which in conditions of globalization and the resulting 'compression of time', strengthen its determining significance. In fact, a picture was created where elements from various historical stages in the development of capitalism coexist: the most developed regions and also the peripheral post-communist countries subject to a delayed modernization (Staniszki 1994; 2003). 'Educated, wealthy inhabitants of Prague, Warsaw, or Budapest live in accord with Western European time at the beginning of the 21st century. The Ukrainian kolkhoznik, the Polish agricultural worker, and the Romanian peasant from a Carpathian village cobbled out of boards are still existing in the 19th century, and miners, metal workers, and steelworkers in a kind of in-between time, somewhere in the first half of the 20th century' (Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2002: 118). Thus Poland's 'two vectors', in which 'the journey from Warsaw to a village in the northeast is a trip in time' (Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 264) were written about.

The category of 'mixing' traditional and modern elements and 'compressing time' had semantic insights in common with the idea then popular in public debates and academic studies of a hybrid political system and hybrid capitalism.¹ These new

¹ Analogies can be seen in these ideas to Witold Kula's historical studies on the backwardness of Eastern Europe (Sosnowska 2004: 240).

motifs and the broader treatment of the transformation undermined faith that the ballast of the past could be dispensed with as a result of successful implementation of the modernization project. The category of globalization and analyses of new global dependences were frequently referred to. The inspiration of critically oriented sociology became clearer and the search for hidden elements of domination became more popular. At the end of the 1990s it began to be noticed that the transformation had brought a change in the economic hegemon of our region (Sosnowska 1998). Earlier, such a holistic view had not appeared at all. Only Jadwiga Staniszkis in her book *Władza globalizacji* [The Powers of Globalization] had analyzed the threat of globalization to the development of Poland and other post-communist countries. In these new conditions, the peripheral capitalism of our region might not manage to meet the challenges and could lead to the maintenance of historical backwardness. Thus contemporary processes, and particularly globalization, were ‘pushing us back into the past’ more than the communist era (Staniszki 2001). This was one of not many critical analyses showing the external, structural limitations—arising from permanent divisions and global inequalities—of the opportunities of the transformation.

For a decade after the systemic breakthrough, critical descriptions of its social effects gradually increased in sociological reflections and awareness developed of the external conditions of the post-communist order. More time needed to pass, however, before auto-reflections on the social involvement of knowledge about the transformation appeared. Critical analysis of the public functions of scientific diagnoses and the engagement of researchers was the effect of earlier thinking about the model of imitative modernization. The obligatory model of social change began to be seen as a type of false consciousness, hampering perception of the factual nature of the transformation, and above all overlooking the causes of Polish society’s non-adaptation to the projected direction and aim of transformation. The source of the domination of this model was sought in the social specificities of Eastern Europe. Fundamental to this view was recognizing the fact of the historical peripherality and permanent economic backwardness of our part of Europe as being of key importance. Here the critical analysis of the social sciences was combined with the critically oriented sociology of Polish society. Social diagnoses began to explain how the sociology of the transformation was performed. In addition, the recent, growing popularity of the constructivist approach heightened interest in the social conditions creating scientific knowledge and its public function.

Studies of the social and cultural dimensions of divisions along the axis of the centre and the peripheries consider the particular role of intellectual elites, including sociologists, in understanding and diagnosing the peripheral status of Poland (Bauman 1999; Zarycki 2007). As early as 1999, Zygmunt Bauman, in weighing the importance and nature of sociologists’ work, had pointed out that sociologists analyzing modernizing changes in the countries of Western Europe, i.e., those located in the centre, had experienced them as new, unknown, and startling events. For this reason they had not become distanced from their own societies, which they were studying. They described the changes in the course of their progression as seemingly natural phenomena, which only required interpretation. On the other hand, in the peripheral

areas, where the modernizing changes occurred later and in a planned and imitative manner, social researchers did not have any other choice than to adopt some external—in this case, western—viewpoint. In effect, their analyses contain evaluations of the degree of backwardness or descriptions of the chance of making up for lost time in regards to the West, and engaged participation in the top-down implementation of the project of change can also be seen. More importantly, modernization must be understood here as a process of ‘removing the individual traits of the modernizing society and bringing about its likeness to a model society, embodying the aim and end of historical development’. The elite of the periphery were thus inevitably engaged in constructing the ‘new’ and ‘life passed them, between the drawing board and the construction site’ (Bauman 1999: 35).

It was possible to look at the situation of Polish sociologists of the transformation in this manner and explain the public function of their analyses as well. Critical auto-reflection, which appeared a dozen or more years after the breakthrough of the political system, concerned precisely the effects of the peripheral entanglement of researchers’ consciousness and the tasks presented to the social sciences in conditions whose measure is making up for lost time, minimizing the distance, and reducing the historical backwardness in development.

It was noticed that this approach caused researchers to perceive our local situation and its conditions as unspecific and of little importance because transitional and temporary. What mattered was movement in the direction of the development aim. Sociologists’ own society was treated with reserve and in categories of ‘foreignness’ by, as Izabela Bukraba-Rylska wrote, the ‘comprador elite’ (Bukraba-Rylska 2004: 157).² From the beginning, mainstream sociology supported and developed the dominant discourse of neoliberal reform. The attitude of sociologists to society was characterized by a familiar paternalism, marked by what Józef Chałasiński once described as the attitude of aristocratic or gentry Poland to peasant Poland (*ibid*: 164). However, for a long time, sociologists did not consider what social mechanisms were behind that historically defined relationship of the intellectual elites toward their objects of study.

The category of periphery, backed by the research perspective of post-colonial studies and Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, provided the tools for a deeper analysis of this problem. A critical diagnosis of the situation of peripheral societies usually aims to reveal hidden historical mechanisms of domination and inequality. The essence of such studies is the problem of power relations. Currently, analyses of economic dominance are being joined with recognition of the cultural dimension. Thanks to the works of Pierre Bourdieu, the question of the influence of the reigning ideology has been extended to include cultural domination in the broader sense. In addition, the popularity of the critical discourse analysis is contributing to emphasis being placed on the struggle for power in the discursive space and to investigations being made into its hidden mechanisms.

Post-colonial analyses are becoming more popular recently in Poland’s humanities and social sciences. They are used as inspiration for describing the complex legacy of

² This term also appeared in descriptions of the traits of post-communist countries and the ‘comprador service sector’ formed in them (Drahokoupil 2008).

the remote Polish history, but also to seek ideas for understanding the contemporary post-communist condition of Poland (for instance: Zarycki 2009a; 2014). Such use is related with the problem of overcoming the historical situation of subordination and developmental gap. Researchers usually then have in mind treatments concerning the discursive space and various competing interpretations of the past. In accordance with the spirit of the critical approach to such diagnoses and manners of describing the peripheral situation, a fair amount of importance is attributed to emancipation. As Jan Sowa, who undertakes such 'peripheral struggles', writes in his anthropologizing analysis, 'the stake is objectivity as such; getting away from the compulsion to repeat allows control to be achieved over what formerly controlled the object' (Sowa 2011: 442). This is accompanied by a awareness of the important public functions of knowledge as the provider of pictures and interpretations enabling a different view and the undertaking of a new type of activity. The public, even political nature of such knowledge is brought into being through the conducting of discursive games, struggling against embedded historical interpretations, and proposing new readings of the past.

Meanwhile, however, Jan Sowa claims, 'post-colonial theory is developing weakly in Poland, because it would be necessary to say many true things that would be difficult to swallow. We would have to recognize our peripherality and post-colonial position' (*ibid*: 443). It is hard to agree today with this idea. I believe after all that that status has been recognized in recent years and in effect an increasing number of studies are being done which take into consideration the various aspects of peripherality and are inspired by critical sociology. Discussions are underway thus over how we understand it and what purpose such critical interpretation could serve. Finally, attention is focused on pointing out possible paths and opportunities for overcoming a situation that is disadvantageous from the viewpoint of development. Of particular importance in this context is to understand the key role of the elite, and particularly intellectuals, in this task. In the case of social researchers it is a matter of engagement and the public functions of the sociological analyses and diagnoses they produce.

One of the aims of authors writing in this trend is, for example, the deconstruction of the 'practice that is still strong in the Polish public discourse of covering the real condition of Poland with fantastical constructs' (*ibid*: 483). In this striving to find the hidden substance determining the essence of Polish issues, priority is given to cultural factors. The field of battle over a new, liberating interpretation is the discursive sphere, in which what is most important appears to be the tension between traditional and modern values. The great popularity in Polish sociology of Pierre Bourdieu's critical theory has already found expression not only in analyses of post-communist conditions, but has also inspired reflections into the limitations of creating a critical sociology in peripheral conditions (Warczok, Zarycki 2014). The result is reflection and discussion on reinterpreting the past, which is to contribute to broadening the field of debate into contemporary development challenges. Then the most important thing for diagnosis of the Polish situation is discussion of the meaning and role of the modernizing discourse. The central problem is thus still the understanding of Poland's struggles with underdevelopment and peripheral status over the space of the last century.

The idea of accelerated development pervading the entire post-communist transformation is now being considered in light of the historical circumstances and global context of Poland's spontaneous attempts to emerge from backwardness through holistic state projects in the interwar period and in the communist era (Leszczyński 2013). In analyses referring to the achievements of post-colonial studies the question is raised of the chance of inhabitants of the periphery to their own, autonomous, and original articulation of their situation (cf.: Spivak 1988). This is connected with establishing who speaks in the name of the collective and this in turn calls attention to the issue of the social divisions in the periphery. Among the most important subjects here are two interrelated questions. One is the abovementioned dominating role of the elite as managers of the discursive space, and the other concerns the issue of the lower classes' ability to elaborate and articulate their own position. In this discussion radical theses appear, such as the claim that the transformation of the 1990s 'will always remain a brutal and unjustified rape of Polish society by its own elite' (Sowa 2010: 39). The question arises of what substance is contained in the idea of society and in whose name the elite's various forms of abuse of that imagined, undifferentiated, and rather abstract category are unmasked. Doubtless, following in the traces of post-colonial and subaltern studies, it is a matter of seeking the viewpoint and interests of groups in Poland that are disadvantaged, deprived of voice, and marginalized.

I believe the beginnings of such interests can be tracked. Analyses concentrating on the appearance of new class divisions in Poland have appeared in the works of young sociologists. A good deal of attention has been devoted to social distances: particularly to such distances in regard to the situation of the lower classes and the new manner in which they are being manifested (for instance, Gdula, Sadura 2012). Researchers have also returned to subjects that have long been present in Polish sociology but have been less studied in recent years, concerning the centuries-long processes of nationalization of Polish peasants (Łuczewski 2012). However, there is still the not entirely articulated and thought-through question of what the emancipating function of such diagnoses and interpretations should be, outside of 'giving voice', which as always is performed by a representative of the intellectual elite, to which social researchers belong as well. No doubt it is the expression of an attitude in which the engagement of the sociologist is combined with the search for original understandings, with new interpretations, of important social processes in Poland.

From the examples mentioned above it can be seen that diagnoses concerning peripherality are often concentrated on the cultural dimension, which is considered capable of overcoming the historical burden. That strong accent on the meaning of cultural factors finds an interesting explanation in the analyses of Tomasz Zarycki. There in particular he seeks the conditions of the special role of the intellectual elite, including sociologists in contemporary Poland. In his explanations he makes use of the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, and particularly Bourdieu's concept of different kinds of capital and discursive violence. The description of relations along the axis of the western core and periphery has been enriched by the emphasis placed on the relational, bilateral nature of the arrangement. It is presented as a 'dialogue and continual negotiation of the position in a special system and an exchange, both a symbolic one

and a closely related material one' (Zarycki 2009a: 9). Therefore what is most important becomes analysis of the centre—periphery discourse and the social group that this discourse shapes and leads. An important novelty is the idea of the particularly large role played in our region by cultural capital as a substitute for economic capital, of which there is a historical deficit on the peripheries of Europe (Zarycki 2009a: 14, 2009b: 110). Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley (1998) have a related idea about the compensatory role of the intelligentsia as a sort of 'cultural capitalist' class, replacing the negligible and weak urban capitalist class. Cultural domination constitutes thus in our conditions a particularly important, if not the main, dimension of ruling and inequality. This idea simultaneously reveals a social mechanism specific to the periphery, as well as providing bases for popular criticisms in the academic discourse and public statements treating our Polish preoccupation with issues of identity, tradition, and culture as an expression of irrationality and the 'result of the confusion of the inhabitants—either as a result of the backwardness of the traditions prevailing there or the manipulation of the economic elites, who want to lead the political debate toward questions that are not dangerous to themselves' (Zarycki 2009b: 112).

Therefore, critical sociology in Poland must ultimately turn to self-diagnosis and the self-portraiture of its own representatives. A critical understanding of the social situation of the intellectual elites is more important here than in countries not belonging to the periphery. The idea of analysing the mechanisms of creating scientific knowledge in historical context, is also more strongly pursued. The most far-reaching ideas are those of Tomasz Zarycki, who claims that in Poland the task of critical sociology meets with serious difficulties, resulting, among other things, from its dual entanglement. The source of discursive domination, when revealed, turns out to be the key role of intellectuals in the discourse's creation and maintenance. This means that critical sociologists themselves are engaged finally in deconstructing their own dominant position, by not being able to refer to any position external to themselves. The problem of self-criticism and auto-deconstruction, which is familiar from the classical texts of critical theory, takes on even greater significance in our conditions. There is after all the risk that 'criticism of the role of the structure of cultural capital in the society that privileges it could be read not only as an attack on the key symbolic resources of a given country or society, but also as undermining the status of one's own group by the person presenting such criticism' (Zarycki 2009b: 115). However, in their recently published analysis, Tomasz Zarycki and Tomasz Warczok present the idea that in Poland's semi-peripheral conditions, critical discourse is a tool of legitimating the social order and facilitating the naturalization of the social hierarchy (Warczok, Zarycki 2014). This means that sociologists who make use of this perspective do not at all expose themselves to the risk of the intellectual elites' losing their dominant position, but on the contrary, lead the struggle for recognition in regards to the main line of division in peripheral conditions, which concerns affirming or contesting relations with the centre. The sociological discourse can be viewed as occurring in parallel to the poles of the political scene: on the one side, a liberal, modernizing, and pro-Western attitude, and on the other a traditionally patriotic and anti-Western outlook, elevating the importance of traditional local values. I think, however, that in recent

years, along with the growing popularity of various trends of critical thinking, this dichotomy does not envelop all the positions that appear. The outstanding feature is now the search for new interpretations, the going beyond a simple modernizing discourse and thinking about the historical and spatial contexts of Poland's changes (Kolasa-Nowak 2014). For years, the heritage of communism hampered the spread of a critical approach in Poland. After 1989, use of the language of leftists could result in a person being automatically classified on the post-communist side of the political scene. It seems to me that with the change of generation, the strength of this association is weakening. Thus the importance and popularity of the critical view has grown considerably, particularly for young researchers seeking a new key to understanding and evaluating the social processes in Polish society and placing them in the external comparative perspective.

The problem of the public role of scholars, which has been present in Polish sociology from the beginning, has grown recently to the rank of an important issue. It turns out to be a necessary element in understanding the characteristics and specifics of this society. It seems that the cultural elites, including sociologists themselves, have most to gain intellectually from the process I have reconstructed of critical sociology's development in Poland. The outline I have made here of the evolution of Polish sociology shows the durability of its public function and inevitable engagement in fundamental public debates. Apart from the clearly civic sociology of the 2nd Republic and the final phase of the People's Republic, in the last two decades these functions have changed from being affirmative of the transformation project, to being civic, that is, standing on the side of society and fulfilling the role of 'guardian of democracy', to having an increasingly clear critical role—although only in the sense of recognizing the entanglement and complexities of the traditional role of the sociologist in Poland as an engaged citizen. At the current stage of critical sociology, the most interesting subjects concern the analysis of production of knowledge on the peripheries, particularly on the premise that discursive domination and cultural capital have a particularly important position here. Those parts of critical theory in which the revelation of hidden structural determinants in the development of knowledge are postulated—and particularly ideas about the exceptional role of cultural capital and its bearers—are compelling. In this manner the question of the intelligentsia and its importance for society, which has long been present in Polish sociology, is returning. Thinking in categories of the centre and periphery reveals the tension in the role of the social researcher as a peripheral intellectual stretched between the logic of thinking that is proper to being 'here' and 'there' simultaneously. Furthermore, in peripheral conditions it is not easy to determine in whose name and from what viewpoint critical analysis is being conducted.

This specific perception of the sociologist, which is characteristic of intellectuals in modernizing countries, can be considered beneficial, as paradoxically it may turn out to be more useful for the challenges of contemporary times. Adam Leszczyński notes that the requirements of modern global capitalism prefer a strategy of comparing local social phenomena with conditions in the dominant modernized societies rather than seeking clarification at the origin (Leszczyński 2013). But it is precisely

such a cognitive strategy that provides the perspective of the peripheral researcher, who is inevitably stretched between the ‘model’ conditions of highly developed regions of the world and the provincial ones implementing modernizing strategies. To these should be added reflection on the growing importance of the public tasks of sociological analyses. A good expression of this conviction is Zarycki’s idea that ‘we are presently witnesses in Poland to a growing process of redefining and renegotiating the language in which we will describe our relations with the West in the broad sense and our separate interests. In other words, a debate is under way to determine the new borders of mainstream political discourse, in particular of a critical language in which a generally acceptable sphere of discourse between the poles of nationalism and cosmopolitanism will be set forth’ (Zarycki 2009b: 118). In current sociological thinking in Poland, not only is the popularity of the critical approach increasingly visible, but awareness of the public function of the discipline is also growing. One of the opening impulses of the discussion was the voice of Michael Burawoy promoting the idea of public sociology. Such a manner of engaging in the social sciences should stimulate public discussion of our own society, or of the ‘specificity of its value, the gap between ideas and reality, the illnesses affecting it and the trends that are appearing in it’ (Burawoy [2005] 2009: 530). Critical sociology, being a reflective core of the whole discipline and an expression of its self-awareness, should support the cultivation of such an engaged public sociology and act as a bridge between it and academic sociology (Burawoy 2011: 200). The close interweaving of various styles of engaging in a discipline is characteristic of peripheral areas, where descriptions of society are created for the purposes of a policy of modernization and making up for developmental backwardness. The growing interest in critical sociology in Poland not only broadens the interpretive palette, but above all presents important questions about the extent of autonomy and originality within the discipline. It is chiefly a matter of the mechanisms of influence, import, and the local creation of interpretations of social phenomena in post-communist regions. It would seem that for the production of sociological knowledge in Poland, a larger awareness of the role of external contexts in its creation and an understanding of its ongoing involvement in the public discourse could be beneficial and inspiring.

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