

ON THE DIFFERENT CRITERIA OF GLOBAL AND LOCAL SUCCESS FOR SCHOLARS IN PERIPHERAL SOCIAL SCIENCES

A RESPONSE TO REVIEWS OF MY BOOK

THE POLISH ELITE AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES:

A PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

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In their insightful comments on my book, Agnieszka Kolasa-Nowak, Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, and Hubert Knoblauch have pointed out its many weaknesses, as well as its not always fulfilled ambitions and promises, both in the theoretical and empirical dimensions. I agree with them on most of the imperfections and shortcomings they have indicated. These certainly include the not entirely consistent and coherent discussion of the history of Polish linguistics and literary studies. However, a sense of similar disappointment, or even embarrassment, accompanies me after finishing each of my books. When they are completed, I am always convinced that they should have been written differently, more consistently, more thoroughly and carefully, and preferably from the beginning. It is only when I finish a book that I really know what was most important in it, and it is only then that I see how it should have been written to make it really coherent. Therefore, if I make another effort to work on the same subject in some form, or if I have the opportunity to prepare a new or Polish edition of my book, the comments of these reviewers will be very helpful, and I am very grateful to them.

From the many valuable comments made by the three reviewers, let me select a few to which I can respond in what I hope will be a clear additional presentation of some of my assumptions and conclusions. I will start with a positive remark by Agnieszka Kolasa-Nowak (2022: 360), claiming that with my book, I show

that there is a possibility of overcoming this structural fate by creating a theory on the periphery that describes our uniqueness in a universally attractive way. Today the growing impact of global academia on the Polish social sciences is changing the individual trajectories of Polish scholars. We are increasingly striving for international recognition.

I think that, unfortunately, such an optimistic opinion about the role of the work in question for the placement of Polish science in the global context is definitely premature. I will be very pleased if it proves true, but it is impossible not to notice that the ability to build a social theory effectively is related to the ability to present it internationally in a way that will get it widely noticed. A theory, in order to be considered effective, must be used to some extent by the scientific community of a given discipline, or at least this community should refer to this theory in some way, if only critically. I do not know what the fate of my book will be and to what extent the theoretical considerations presented in it will be of interest to the international sociological community. However, as I have shown, the long-term trend does not seem optimistic for the Polish social sciences. Since the early 1970s, the international visibility of the Polish social sciences and humanities, especially in terms of theoretical production, seems to have systematically declined. Nor do the structural (which also includes geopolitical) conditions I wrote about in the pages of my book indicate that Polish social theory has prospects of becoming more influential. The general global tendency towards increasing polarisation between the centres and peripheries of scientific production, and not only in the case of Central and Eastern Europe (Gomez et al. 2022), also contributes to the situation.

Hubert Knoblauch (2022: 347) questions whether the perspective adopted in the book “does not represent a form of *methodological nationalism*, essentialising Poland to a categorically bounded unit intellectually and thus almost excluding the possibility that Poland is (politically as well as intellectually) an integrated part of the EU and NATO.” In response to

this remark, I wanted to clarify that my ambition was precisely to move away from methodological nationalism as far as possible and to show the importance of Poland's international positioning, in particular in the context of the empires of the nineteenth century and the Soviet Bloc, but also in the context of contemporary Western international institutions. In my book and in a number of other studies on Polish scholarship, I have tried to show how Poland's reintegration into the world system since 1989 has clearly affected the academic field and its selected subfields. One of these effects was, one might say, paradoxical. Thus, in a number of disciplines of the social sciences, there has been a relative weakening of international activity and visibility, and an even greater isolation from the international circulation of knowledge, understood as participation in a common global game of specific disciplines. This is particularly true of the decreasing number of top Polish scholars who can be regarded as important points of reference in world science. At the same time, the autonomy of most disciplines in relation to global fields of scholarship has increased. However, these disciplines have usually become more international in their discourse (e.g., through an even stronger orientation towards Western classics, although not always the most contemporary ones). Thanks to state support and numerous additional sources of income for individuals, scholars are not subject to strong pressure to participate actively in the international fields of their disciplines. A well-known consequence of this state of affairs is the rather low position of Polish universities in most international rankings, in particular, if compared to Poland's GDP per capita or the country's population. Nowhere are the mechanisms producing this state more evident than in Polish political science, as was shown in a detailed study I produced with Tomasz Warczok (Warczok & Zarycki 2018). This is the case even though after 1989 Polish political scientists became for the most part extremely pro-European and follow political debates in the West closely. At the same time, they defend, like most scholars in the Polish humanities and social sciences, the right to be judged primarily according to national criteria of academic excellence and to publish mainly in Polish. In turn, they very rarely try to compete in the global field of political science by submitting their work to the best journals or publishing houses. At the same time, they define their duties as being, first and foremost, service to Polish society, which they should inform, enlighten, and educate. They are also primarily remunerated for fulfilling this role and assessed according to such locally defined criteria. This is possible thanks to the firm autonomy of these sciences and the

stable state funding of their institutions. At the same time, many scholars supplement their modest basic salaries with additional income related to advising, or activities in the media or in political or economic fields. It can be noted that these external sources of income limit the autonomy of political science vis-à-vis the fields of economics, politics, or the media but increase its independence vis-à-vis the global field of the discipline.

Thus, it can be said that the increasing post-1989 nationalisation of many disciplines in the Polish social sciences and humanities – particularly in the sense of their orientation towards a purely national audience and being dependent on financial resources distributed mostly domestically (even if their origin is sometimes foreign, as in the case of Western foundations, which moreover do not necessarily act purely on the basis of reasons related to scholarship) – is not a normative assumption made in the book but an empirical finding that I have tried to reconstruct in this and my other publications. It is also a tendency that can be explained using the methodology proposed in the book. In particular, by showing the relation of the specific fields of science to the Polish field of power and by pointing to the way the Polish intelligentsia, of which practically all scholars and intellectuals are members, functions. The phenomenon in question is, of course, a kind of paradox that is worth emphasising. In particular, we can note that after 1989 Poland opened politically and economically to the Western world. It has also been integrating with successive Western institutions and is increasingly open to Western culture. However, at the level of most of the social sciences and humanities, institutional isolation from their global fields is increasing, as specific disciplines in Poland benefit from the autonomy offered to them by the configuration of the Polish state and the power of the Polish intelligentsia. Thus, while Polish politicians appear in European institutions in Brussels and numerous Western investors and managers appear in Warsaw, Polish social scientists are, in fact, reducing their presence among the elite of global scholarship. At the same time, Poland is becoming less interesting for Western scholars, especially if we compare the intensity of cooperation between Polish and Western social sciences in the 1960s or at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Although a huge number of global economic players have entered the Polish market, the scientific field and the educational market at the university level remain entirely national. The number of graduates of Western universities who find employment in Polish universities is minimal. Thus, it can be said that neither Poland's membership in the EU nor in NATO has had a strong impact on the integration of the Polish social sciences and humanities into

their European or global academic systems. In my book, I attempt to explain some aspects of this paradox.

In this context, I also wanted to address one of several issues raised by Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, namely the transformation of Poland's social sciences after 1989. She mentions in particular "the pauperisation of the academic intelligentsia under post-socialist capitalism in Poland" (Nowicka-Franczak 2022: 353). As I see it, we should rather speak of the petrification of the Polish intelligentsia. Its ranks, especially if we define them in broad categories of people with higher education, have increased significantly in recent decades. However, this has also meant an increasingly sharp division of this group into the elites, who after 1989 gained significant influence on the government as well as numerous material privileges, and the rest, who usually could not count on access to any such resources despite the promises that had been made – in particular, the promises related to higher education, whose massification brought considerable material income to the elite of the field (who often worked several jobs in this period) but also resulted in a significant inflation of diplomas (Zarycki 2020). It is worth remembering, however, that for the upper, elite part of the Polish intelligentsia, the post-1989 period was usually a return to the field of power or to its proximity. This happened after members of these circles had spent decades in often poorly paid academic jobs and, politically, in the opposition, where they were often brutally persecuted by the communist regime. I am referring, in particular, to the descendants of the "historic" families of the Polish intelligentsia, whose members are still well-represented in the Polish field of power. This fact has been confirmed as well by a study that I published recently with Andrzej Turkowski (Turkowski & Zarycki 2023) of a circle of Polish social scientists developing dependency theory. Most of the members of this group became involved in the political field and economic fields after 1989, which gave them considerable material privileges and influence on state institutions. At the same time, a significant proportion of these scholars remained at least formally present in the academic system. Being politicians, diplomats, or high-level managers, they continued to earn degrees and teach at universities. This may have affected their ability to be involved in international scientific activity and engage more broadly and seriously in research. In most cases, however, it increased their level of material wealth, so it would be difficult to sustain Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak's very general thesis about the pauperisation of the academic intelligentsia in Poland after 1989 with regard to this elite.

Finally, let me refer to Hubert Knoblauch's comment on the increasing transdisciplinarity in global science. It is certainly an important trend, but I think my study of the Polish social sciences shows that its national fields, especially on the periphery, are effectively resisting it. This phenomenon is related to the entanglement of these fields in nationally defined power relations, in particular, their relations with the field of power. At the same time, what matters are corporate privileges negotiated by generations of scholars, who are at the same time members of the Polish elite – the intelligentsia. This long-term process has produced a well-defined institutional framework (the system of state universities with its division into faculties, the system of the Polish Academy of Sciences with its division into disciplinary institutes, the system of central financing of science, the system of central control of scientific promotions, etc.). What also counts here is the ever-important functions that the social sciences and the humanities perform in relation to the field of power, in particular, their legitimising functions. Among these is the role of protectors of the symbolic edifices of Polish national culture (including national language and literature) and the canon of Polish national history, which are among the main symbolic resources of the dominant elite of the Polish intelligentsia. To regulate and strengthen them, specialised and well-legitimised academic elites and institutions of a scientific nature are needed: hence the resistance to excessive interdisciplinarity in many of these circles. Indeed, excessive blurring of boundaries violates the strength of disciplines as guardians of specific sectors of the canons of national culture (language, literature, history, etc.). Even the approach adopted in my book, which combines an analysis of linguistics and literary studies, treated as a single field, is unacceptable to many in Poland. Thus, the relatively limited transdisciplinary analysis presented in the book's pages is not an expression of the author's resistance to it but rather an attempt to reflect the dominant way of doing science in Poland, both in the past and at present.

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