

Poland in Central and Eastern Europe, Polish Sociology within the Central European Context

Introduction

JANUSZ MUCHA AGH University, Cracow, Poland

Poland, since the spring of 2004 a member of the European Union and since 1997 a member of NATO, is a Central European country lying east of the economic, political and cultural centre of Europe. This agricultural country was for one hundred and twenty three years up to 1918 partitioned by Germany, Austria and Russia; during the Second World War it was occupied by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia; and after the war it belonged to the Soviet political sphere. Poland is connected with Western Europe by its Latin Christianity, the Latin script of its Slavonic language and its cultural aspirations, while its internal social structure, economy and political arrangements has linked it for centuries with Eastern Europe. Classical authors of Polish sociology spoke Western languages very well, many of them spent years or even decades in Western Europe or the United States, and they were well acquainted with new trends in Western social thought (for example positivism, Marxism and the anti-positivistic currents of the philosophy of culture); however, the topics of their research were to a large extent of an Eastern European character. The latter can be best seen in the great emphasis placed upon ethnic and national questions, as well as on the peasant question. Let us focus for a moment on Central and Eastern Europe, for which these themes were very important.

In order to understand fully the history of sociology in Central and Eastern Europe, it is necessary to understand the general history of the region itself (for the history of Poland, see Davies, 1982; in the next five paragraphs, I will partly draw upon Keen and Mucha, 1994: 2–5). Of course, there is no space for a complete analysis here. However, it should be pointed out that the region consists of many different national collectives which belong to a variety of language groups and which adhere to several distinct religious traditions. The region developed under the influence of a number of political powers which

reigned over a myriad of ethnic groups. Several common features distinguish Central and Eastern Europe from its Western counterpart. Recognizing that some countries and some periods must be excepted, the most important of these features include the following: political dependency and a resulting delay in the development of indigenous political structures; economic underdevelopment and a long maintenance of an agrarian economy along with its peasant class; a late transition from feudalism to capitalism; a relative absence of indigenous upper and even upper-middle urban classes; a relatively tardy codification of national languages; a delayed sense of national identity among the lower classes; a persistent sense of religious identity and persisting religious tensions which have often accompanied it; and an emergence in the 19th century of a multifunctional group of 'intelligentsia'. After 1948, the dominance of the Communist economic, political and ideological system became another feature of distinction.

Four major powers have dominated the region at one time or another throughout its history. *Germany*, considered as distinct from both the medieval Holy Roman Empire and later Austria, arrived on the scene only in the 18th century. It affected mostly Poland (participating in its partitioning at the end of the century) and western parts of Bohemia. Germany also played a role in the political crises of the Balkan region starting from the beginning of the 19th century. *Russia* emerged as a significant power in the 18th century. It took over the Estonian and Latvian lands, and participated in the partitioning of the Polish–Lithuania Commonwealth at the end of the century. At the beginning of the 19th century, Russia moved into southeastern Europe, liberating many mostly Slavic and Orthodox nations from the Turks. *Austria*, formerly a small country, became very powerful at the end of the Middle Ages. In the 15th century, it took over Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech Kingdom), the Hungarian Kingdom and its dependants Croatia and Slovakia, and much of Romanian Transylvania. At the end of the 18th century, Austria participated in the partitioning of Poland, taking over its southern part, otherwise known as Galicia. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Austro–Hungarian Empire annexed Bosnia–Herzegovina, which had just been liberated from the Turks. The *Turkish* Ottoman Empire originated in Asia Minor in the 14th century. It conquered Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia–Herzegovina. Later it threatened Croatia, Hungary and even Austria. The decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire came after an unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683 in which the Polish King Jan III Sobieski led the anti-Turkish coalition. In the 19th century, Turkey lost several wars with Russia, resulting in the liberation of many nations of the region.

Viewed in terms of its religious structure, the region is a mosaic of five religious systems: *Roman Catholicism* (Croats, Slovaks, some Hungarians, Slovaks, Poles, Lithuanians and some Czechs), *Protestantism* (Estonians, Latvians, some Czechs and some Hungarians), *Orthodox* (Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians, and Romanians), *Islam* (Albanians, some Bulgarians and some Bosnians) and *Judaism* (historically, Jews lived in Central

and Eastern Europe throughout its medieval and modern history; in the 16th and 17th centuries, Polish Jews constituted about two-thirds of the world's Jewry; after the Holocaust they constitute only a very small minority).

Central and Eastern European sociologists at the end of the 19th century were primarily concerned with their largest social group, the peasants, along with the processes of transformation from a local to a national identity. The latter was the most important and crucial problem. Tradition, language and religion were the shrines of identity. Indigenous culture, as opposed to the culture of the occupiers, had been preserved primarily by 19th-century peasants. National society was represented by various groups of peasants, and by the intelligentsia (being an heir of the nobility), which had worked hard to preserve tradition, but never through the state. Therefore, any sociology of culture or rural sociology had to be at the same time a political sociology.

Social sciences in 19th-century Central and Eastern Europe were developed by the intelligentsia. This was a group of well-educated native intellectuals who in many cases were also members of the propertied classes. This social scientific scholarship served two functions. The first was to provide an analysis of social structures and processes. The second was to help towards an active participation in the transformation of the existing social and economic realities, as well as in the nation-building processes. The social sciences in this region only partly developed in the universities. By the end of the 19th century, many universities already existed, but for a variety of reasons they were not interested in this kind of scholarship. Social scientifically oriented intellectuals were basically 'private scholars' relying upon family resources; being employed in various other occupations and doing their research 'after hours'; or establishing their own private institutions. Many Slavic countries saw the emergence of *Maticas*, institutions consisting of a combination of folk culture museums, libraries, research centres, educational centres and publishing houses. Their role as vehicles in the researching, recording and dissemination of national cultures, and even in the encouraging of the nation-building processes, cannot be overestimated. This situation changed after the First World War and the collapse of the multinational European empires. In the newly emerging sovereign nation states, universities (mostly public) became the most important centres of research and education in the field of the social sciences and humanities.

As I already noted above, between the years 1795 and 1918 Poland did not exist on the political map of Europe. However, Polish culture was blooming at least to the extent that was possible under the conditions of partition, and with the lack of support from state research and higher level educational institutions. During this period in Poland, many interesting ideas arose which are related to the beginnings of European sociology, but which rarely became known in the West or in the East (i.e. Russia and countries under its cultural influence).

Historians of Polish social sciences are of the opinion that the first Polish sociological text is *General Thought on Universal Physiology*, written by Józef

Supiński and published in 1860 (see, for example, Szacki, 1995). Early Polish sociologists were developing positivism (including ‘national organicism’), some were members of the Durkheimian school, and some were Marxists. Some published short sociological contributions, while others (like Gumplowicz) presented grand sociological systems in Poland and abroad. In our volume, this early period is represented first and foremost by Ludwik Gumplowicz and Leon Petrażycki (the latter also belongs to the next period). Both were and continue to be known in the West (primarily Gumplowicz) and in the East (primarily Petrażycki). The next, interwar, period is represented in our volume by Petrażycki, Florian Znaniecki (known in the West first and foremost from the American period of his life) and Ludwik Krzywicki (hardly known in the West). The postwar period is represented here by Maria Ossowska (some of her works were published in the West) and her husband Stanisław Ossowski (likewise, two of his books were published in the West, namely in Britain, Germany and France). All these scholars are classics of Polish sociology in the sense that their ideas were and still are influential in Poland (and sometimes abroad) and they have all passed away.

These are not the only classics of Polish sociology. For the partition period, we should mention here at least Edward Abramowski (see Flis, 1984) and Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (see Ekiert, 1984), while Bronisław Malinowski (see Ellen et al., 1988) was active before 1918 (partly in Poland) and in particular during the interwar period (in fact only outside of Poland). In the postwar period, Julian Hochfeld (see Adamek, 1984) and Andrzej Malewski (see Szmatka, 1984) represented completely different attitudes to Marxism – both of which were influential in Poland.

Obviously, in the Polish language there is a rich literature on the history of Polish sociology. In many academic centres scholars do research in this field, publishing numerous books and articles. In an ample volume edited by Jerzy Szacki and his colleagues (1995), the work of fifty-seven Polish sociologists who were active between the second half of the 19th century and the 1970s is briefly presented and some of their texts are republished. A biographical dictionary of Polish sociology in its first volume, which deals only with scholars who have passed away and which provides basic information and bibliographies, includes two hundred and thirteen sociologists (Winławski, 2001).

Neither in this short introduction nor in the following articles can we represent at any length the history of Polish sociology. Those who can read Polish can attain a glimpse in the two works just quoted, while the reader who is not fluent in Polish can turn to the volume edited by Piotr Sztompka (1984). Finally, it should be pointed out that postwar Polish sociology between 1956 and 1990 has been analysed by Władysław Kwaśniewicz (1994) and the period between 1990 to 2000 by myself (Mucha, 2003), and myself with Paweł Załęcki (Mucha and Zalecki, 2002).

Let us return to the Central and Eastern European context of Polish sociology, which is hardly visible at first glance in our volume. While Leon

Petrażycki was educated and worked in Russia before Poland, all the other Polish scholars presented here were even more closely connected with Western than Eastern social science. However, the geopolitical, cultural and economic background of Polish social sciences was generally similar to that of other sociologies of the region. Moreover, and as an example, during the partition period, Polish scholars conducted ethnographic research in Siberia and in Macedonia. During the interwar period, they studied ethnic issues in regions belonging to the Polish state, but ethnographically Ukrainian or Byelorussian. Under Communism, where cultural and political freedom appears to have been greater in Poland than in other countries of the 'socialist camp', Western ideas were diffused to other countries through Poland. Czech, Slovak and Bulgarian students, among others, came to Warsaw or Cracow to obtain their MAs or PhDs in sociology. Some Czech, Slovak and Hungarian scholars learned Polish in order to read Polish translations of Western sociological publications and classical Polish sociological literature, including Polish periodicals. This movement of influences from the West to Poland to Eastern Europe seems to be now over and, after 1989, Polish sociologists, in order to be read in Eastern Europe, must first obtain recognition in the West.

References

- Adamek, Wojciech (1984) 'The Open Marxism of Julian Hochfeld', pp. 201–12 in Piotr Sztompka (ed.) *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Davies, Norman (1982) *God's Playground. A History of Poland* (2 vols). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ekiert, Grzegorz (1984) 'Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz: From Marxism to Sociology', pp. 67–84 in Piotr Sztompka (ed.) *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Ellen, Roy, Ernest Gellner, Grazyna Kubica and Janusz Mucha (eds) (1988) *Malinowski between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flis, Andrzej (1984) 'Edward Abramowski's Social and Political Thought', pp. 27–52 in Piotr Sztompka (ed.) *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Keen, Mike F. and Janusz Mucha (1994) 'Eastern Europe and its Sociology', pp. 1–10 in Mike F. Keen and Janusz Mucha (eds) *Eastern Europe in Transformation. The Impact on Sociology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Kwaśniewicz, Władysław (1994) 'Dialectics of Systemic Constraints and Academic Freedom: Polish Sociology under Socialist Regime', pp. 25–38 in Mike F. Keen and Janusz Mucha (eds) *Eastern Europe in Transformation: The Impact on Sociology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

- Mucha, Janusz (2003) 'Polish Sociology 1990–2000: Society after a Breakthrough, Sociology in Evolution', pp. 117–32 in Mike F. Keen and Janusz Mucha (eds) *Sociology in Central and Eastern Europe: Transformations at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Westport, CT and London: Praeger.
- Mucha, Janusz and Pawel Zalecki (2002) 'Sociology – Poland', pp. 484–501 in Max Kaase, Vera Sparschuh and Agnieszka Wenniger (eds) *Three Social Science Disciplines in Central and Eastern Europe: Handbook on Economics, Political Science and Sociology (1989–2001)*. Berlin and Budapest: GESIS and Collegium Budapest.
- Szacki, Jerzy (1995) 'Wstęp: Krótka historia socjologii polskiej', pp. 11–19 in Jerzy Szacki, Stanisław Burakowski, Henryka Holda-Roziewicz, Nina Krasko, Joanna Kurczewska, Piotr Kwiatkowski, Ewa Nowicka and Sławomir Olzacki (eds) *Sto lat socjologii polskiej: Od Supińskiego do Szczepańskiego*. Warsaw: PWN.
- Szacki, Jerzy, Stanisław Burakowski, Henryka Holda-Roziewicz, Nina Krasko, Joanna Kurczewska, Piotr Kwiatkowski, Ewa Nowicka and Sławomir Olzacki (eds) (1995) *Sto lat socjologii polskiej: Od Supińskiego do Szczepańskiego*. Warsaw: PWN.
- Szmatka, Jacek (1984) 'The Positivistic Sociology of Andrzej Malewski', pp. 213–25 in Piotr Sztompka (ed.) *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Sztompka, Piotr (ed.) (1984) *Masters of Polish Sociology*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
- Winclawski, Włodzimierz (2001) *Słownik biograficzny socjologii polskiej*, Vol. 1: *A–H*. Warsaw: PWN.
-

Janusz Mucha is Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the AGH University in Cracow, Poland. He has published in Poland, England and in the USA on sociological theory, sociology in Central and Eastern Europe past and present, social anthropology as well as on ethnicity. His latest book (co-edited with Mike F. Keen) is *Autobiographies of Transformation*, (Routledge 2006).

Address: Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, The AGH University, ul. Gramatyka 8A, 30-071 Krakow, Poland. [email: jmuch@post.pl]