

## **Discussion on Tomasz Zarycki's Book *The Polish Elite and Language Sciences***

In connection with the publication of Tomasz Zarycki's book *The Polish Elite and Language Sciences: A Perspective of Global Historical Sociology* (2022), a discussion on the subject "Scientific Knowledge Production and Relations of Power in Imperial Contexts" was organised on 25 November 2022 within the framework of the cyclical seminar "Perspectives of Relational Sociology" by the Center for Relational Analysis of Culture and Society at the Faculty of Sociology and the Robert Zajonc Institute for Social Studies at the University of Warsaw. The patron of the seminar was the Section of Science Sociology of the Polish Sociological Association. The commentaries by Hubert Knoblauch, Agnieszka Kolasa-Nowak, and Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, together with Tomasz Zarycki's response are published below.

# THE RE(CON)FIGURATION OF KNOWLEDGE

## **TOMASZ ZARYCKI, *THE POLISH ELITE AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES: A PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY***

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This book aroused my interest for several reasons. As a sociologist of knowledge, the transformation of historical sociology into what the author calls in the introduction a “global historical sociology of knowledge” seemed to me very promising. As a trained sociologist of language, I found it very attractive to read about linguistics in Poland, and as someone socialised in what used to be West Germany, I was eager to learn about Poland and Polish intellectual history. (My personal encounter with Polish sociology as a student had only concerned Włodzimierz Wesolowski in Konstanz, and Andrzej Miller, whose assistant I had been in Switzerland.)

Let me start with the general appraisal that my various interests were fully satisfied. The book certainly makes a number of important contributions. From my perspective, however, the theoretical model seemed the most intriguing part and I will focus on it here.

In fact, Zarycki starts his book on the development of the social sciences in Poland with a quite elaborate theoretical discussion. Here, Wallerstein’s centre, periphery, and semi-periphery model of the world constitutes an important reference. Yet, while this model stresses the political and economic sphere, Zarycki extends it to meaning systems and the symbolic sphere, which includes knowledge, and specifically scientific knowledge –

the very topic of the book. This integration is achieved by linking Wallerstein's model to Bourdieu's concept of a field, and particularly the field of power. The field of power is defined in the book as a meeting ground for dominant agents of economic, political, military, and other fields when they are struggling over the major principles of legitimation, hierarchisation, and the regulation of homologies between its two dimensions. Zarycki inserts into Bourdieu's already bipolar – but in a way, metaphorical – notion of a “field” the spatial binary order of centre and periphery. This binary order is a global model, which has nation states as its basic units. It allows him to identify Poland as what he calls, following Lipset and Rokkan (1967), an “interface periphery” between two poles of the world system. The two poles are the fields of power in the West and the field of power in Russia. In this context, it is key to the field thesis that “the basic structure of oppositions within a semi-peripheral field of power differs from the structure of the field in the core states of the world system.” That is to say that the structure of conflicts in a semi-peripheral field of power, such as Poland, can be seen as reflecting both the external poles in ways which take into account the country's situation within the global field of power. And this holds not only for the dominant field of power in Poland but also for the various subfields, such as the field of science and the social sciences, which are at issue here. Since the symbolic level exhibits homologies, we find similar conflicts and polarisations with respect to semantic oppositions and themes within the sciences. Obviously, the notion of homology here draws explicitly on Bourdieu and the idea that knowledge is correlated to social structure in ways that are guided by the dynamics in and between social fields.

This convincing but abstract model is substantiated in the second chapter: in his “Structural Reading of the Poland's Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History” the author challenges what he calls “dominant Polish-centric narratives and models” and he does so by claiming that Poland's dependence on the East and on the global situation is crucial to understanding the country's social processes. This claim is supported by findings such as that Poles held more professorial positions in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century than they did in the Prussian and Austrian partitions combined. The history recounted cuts across the three separate states of Poland produced by the critical junctures of the Uprisings in 1830–1831 and 1863–1864, the French Invasion of Russia (1812), in which part of the Polish elite participated, the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet State, the Second World War, the Cold War, the Thaw,

*perestroika*, and the post-1989 period. Poland was thus created by the various phases of the deterritorialisation of its population, so that confessional, family, language, and social-status aspects have contributed to its national identity. As in Germany, language plays an important role, and as in Germany in the nineteenth century, weakness of economic development combined with processes of modernisation led to a strong intellectual class in Poland. During the Cold War, Soviet domination was the major reason for Poland's semi-peripheral situation, while the "post-communist" era yielded another cleavage between the centre and periphery as a result of the dependence on the Western core in the classic world-systemic context. As a consequence, the situation can be characterised as an *inversion* of the Russian situation: in Russia, the political elite is dominant, and both the native economic elite and the cultural elite are subordinate to it. The main division in the field of power runs across specific camps of the state elite, for example, between the military and those institutions that control the country's finances. In Poland, the field of power is divided between those with more internationalised and/or cosmopolitan cultural capital, and those with more local and traditional cultural capital (e.g., strong ties to the Catholic Church).

This structural reading, then, provides the background for Chapter 3. In an enormously rich and dense 200 pages, Zarycki analyses the historical development of the field of linguistics and literary studies in Poland in minute detail. What struck me most was the role of linguists and language in the early construction of national identity, for instance, by Polishising names. We also learn a lot about Polish universities and – what is not the same – universities in Poland, about the role of structuralism, about new-speak, and the specific role of the Catholic Church and John Paul II.

The historical reconstruction is impressive, but I must admit that, faced with such a quantity of authors, texts, and institutions presented along the temporal line, and two disciplines, I lost track of their relation to the theoretical model. It was only in the book's "Conclusion," on the current situation, that I caught up again with the connection to the theoretical frame established at the beginning. Here, the author identifies today's field structure in semi-peripheral Poland. This field structure is defined according to the poles of pro- and anti-centre, as expressed in the opposition of populists and Eurosceptics, on the one hand, and those who idealise the West and are anti-populists on the other. Due to the extension of higher education, a new middle class (or what Fligstein [2008] calls the knowledge class) has taken the role formerly belonging to the intelligentsia. In the field of science, this development has been paralleled since 1989 by an

increasing autonomy. Interestingly, in Poland the autonomisation of the field of science is linked to a decoupling of the Polish field of science from world science. Thus, for instance, the number of Polish Web of Science references decreased after 1989. The polarised oppositions in the national field of power and the field of sciences are mirrored in the field of literary studies, for example, with respect to themes: on one side, religious and patriotic themes dominate, on the other, the topics are regional and national minorities, Jewish issues, and feminist and gender studies (as “academics are involved in the workings of homology by linking their debates to issues and cleavages defined by the field of power,” p. 470).

In summary, there is no doubt that the model is very promising when it comes to relating political and economic developments on a global level to the dynamics of science and, probably, knowledge in general. Nevertheless, the book leaves me with some questions (and it is certainly an advantage of the situation to have been able to pose them to the author).

My first question concerns a detail, that is, the implicit claim that the study concerns the *social sciences*. Although I personally do not have a problem with calling linguistics a social science, I have lived to see the demise of sociolinguistics and the renaissance of formal linguists who would contend that they are social scientists. The same holds true – aside from the very marginal sociology of literature – for most of the many scholars of literature with whom I have been working, who would ascribe themselves to the humanities or *Geisteswissenschaften* rather than the social sciences.

This detail leads me to the more encompassing question of whether we can consider *disciplines as fields*, that is, as “institutionalized sphere[s]” (p. 473), and whether we should assume that these are currently the relevant units when studying science. At least, based on my experience with social research in the US, UK, France, and Germany, we have witnessed a massive interdisciplinisation since the 1970s, and the explosion of transdisciplinarity has led to what some have, somewhat exaggeratedly, called “Mode 2 Science” (Gibbons et al. 1994). In the disciplines concerned, this may be seen in the role of digitalisation for linguistics or the massive extension of media studies in, and at the expense of, literary sciences.

The question as to the disciplines may even be extended to the basic category of the model, that is, the very concept of a “field.” As Bourdieu himself, as early as the 1980s, put forward the thesis that the field of religion (which had been at the origins of his field theory) was dissolving, I wonder if such processes of dissolution also concern other fields and the concept of a field in general. This may also hold for the basic unit of observation in

regard to the global field of power. Although it may seem quite pertinent to consider states relevant, particularly in the case of Poland, one wonders if this country can be viewed as categorically distinct from the West.

The question I want to raise is whether the book's perspective 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. If we want to avoid this one-sided perspective, should we not consider both aspects as being present at the same time, that is, as two simultaneous tendencies? On the one hand, there is the transgression of national boundaries – the assumed one-dimensional distinction between the centre, periphery, and semi-periphery (which has been shown in any case to be multidimensional) and the boundaries of the fields of science, social sciences, and the disciplines. On the other hand, there is their continuous reaffirmation. We could call the simultaneity of these two divergent, conflictual, and sometimes even polarising tendencies “movements in space,” and we could call the forms resulting from these tendencies a “refiguration” – a term quite close to the word “reconfiguration,” which the author uses throughout the book but leaves undefined (Knoblauch & Löw 2020).

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# LANGUAGES OF THE PERIPHERIES

## **TOMASZ ZARYCKI, *THE POLISH ELITE AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES: A PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY***

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Tomasz Zarycki's *The Polish Elite and Language Sciences: A Perspective of Global Historical Sociology* consists of three mini-monographs linked both by reference to historical facts and by the totemic approaches used to describe the fortunes of the Polish intelligentsia. The opening part focuses on how influential concepts – for instance, world-systems theory – which describe the global history of imperial power, the dominance of the metropolis over the province, and the sway of the centre over the peripheries, have positioned Poland. Part 2 is an account of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Poland, through a reconstruction of the structural conditions behind the intellectual elites, who are regarded as pawns on the map of Europe with regard to the composition of power at the time. Part 3 contains the intellectual biographies of Polish linguists whose careers played out on that map of power. These conditions continue to this day (the book covers the period up to the second decade of the twenty-first century) and invariably place Polish humanists and social scientists as peripheral players trailing in the wake of the distant vanguard of world science.

What binds the three sections – which could otherwise constitute separate publications – is their shared purpose and thesis. The aim is to reconstruct the structural determinants of the system of scientific knowledge



production within the humanities and social sciences in the peripheries of empires, that is, far from the *grandes écoles* or Oxbridge. The main thesis is the uniqueness of the Polish case, which is the justification for undertaking this particular topic. It asks why Poland? Why the intelligentsia? And why language sciences?

Poland is neither an exemplary representation of the global or European peripheries, nor is it just an illustration of how theoretical models that demonstrate the relationships between power and knowledge work in a simple imitative way outside their original context. Zarycki argues that the research value of the Polish case

lies in the challenges it poses for many of the commonly used social science models. This is because Poland, with its complex history and non-obvious status among European states, does not seem to fit well into any of the classical types of states or societies. In other words, Poland defies categorization. (Zarycki 2022: V)

Zarycki later adds that “for most of its history [...] Poland has been *sui generis*” (Zarycki 2022: VI). This is repeatedly put to the test in Zarycki’s study since the task he has undertaken is to write a chapter on Poland’s place in the global history of empires in order to provincialise – to paraphrase Dipesh Chakrabarty’s postulate (2000) in post-colonial theory – a Western analysis of the structural determinants behind the processes of redeveloping elites and scholarly knowledge production.

Zarycki has undertaken this task on a number of previous occasions. He has discussed the hegemony of the intelligentsia in Polish cultural discourse (Zarycki & Warczok 2014), the East–West axis, which is both central to the Polish public sphere and also its ideological make-up (Zarycki 2014), the uniquely Polish intellectual and post-nobility concept of cultural citizenship (Zarycki et al. 2022), the (semi-)peripheral standing of Polish political science (Zarycki & Warczok 2016), and historiography (Zarycki 2021). In his approach, the intelligentsia, in the sense of a cultural and symbolic class, constitutes both a local medium of imperial power and a relatively autonomous carrier and guarantor of collective identity. The Polish intelligentsia in particular, compared to analogous classes in other Central and Eastern European societies, is characterised by the considerable resources of cultural capital on which it bases its symbolic power.

Finally, Zarycki’s selection of the language sciences as a research topic is by no means accidental. As Anna Duszak (1998: 56), a linguist men-

tioned in the final pages of the book, once stated, “global textual patterns are motivated by knowledge of the world, yet are not a simple reflection of it.” In other words, culture, as well as social patterns of interpretation, matter. Theorising about language is also theorising about the cultural identity of its speakers and the generation of social meanings directly within the scientific discourse that legitimises these meanings.

Edward W. Said (1983: 226), an author who was a major point of reference in Zarycki’s earlier work, wrote that, “Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another.” In his latest book, Zarycki himself plays the role of a scholar who puts time and space in motion, thereby bringing the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Immanuel Wallerstein, Stein Rokkan, George Steinmetz, Bob Jessop, and Ngai-Ling Sum to a new realm – one that is strongly subordinated to the intelligentsia’s ethos and Poland’s fate. Being a guide to theories that journey across an uncharted territory is an ambitious task but is necessary for a supranational scientific dialogue to become feasible. However, there are challenges and doubts regarding the direction of this journey, and it is these implications that I will address in the second part of my commentary.

The first issue is the tension between the theory and practice of scientific dialogue. In the introduction to his book Zarycki stipulates that he will not employ an orthodox approach to theoretical models. Nonetheless, his dispute with globally influential scientific theories must be asymmetrical, that is, he is obliged to validate the uniqueness of the Polish case. This uniqueness is interpreted twofold – first, as an atypicality compared to the other regions and states that are classified as peripheries or semi-peripheries, and second, as a buffer component of the distribution of imperial power in Europe. Zarycki declares that he intends to base his study of the structure of the field of power not merely on analyses of the linguistic mechanisms behind the generation of meaning but also on a materialist analysis that centres on the historical and cultural process of the reproduction of class structure. Bourdieu’s concept of homology (1977) is an excellent tool for siting Poland in the semiotic structure of the global field of power. This serves – along with Steinmetz’s (2008) notion of the colonial field of power – as a foundation for the key category of the peripheral field of power, which stems from the “provincialisation” of theories by Bourdieu, Wallerstein, and Steinmetz.

The focus on justifying the uniqueness of the Polish case, and the need to provincialise theories, has its consequences. Namely, that the

linguistic aspects of the peripheral field of power become the layer that Zarycki explores and develops most profoundly, at the expense of attention paid to extralinguistic factors. This statement is by no means an accusation but rather a constatation. Paradoxically, language and names are not only the initial obstacle but also the very first bridge in the intellectual dialogue between the centre and peripheries – for which Zarycki's new book is the best testament. Nevertheless, more analytical effort is involved in trying to embed the case of the Polish intelligentsia in the conceptual matrix of a centre–periphery approach than in demonstrating a structural homology between the field of political power and the field of intellectual power by means of discursive and non-discursive relations between power and the academy.

The second issue is the role of the intelligentsia in the structure of the peripheral field of power. Zarycki summarises the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Poland through the prism of the fortunes of the intellectual elites, their aspirations, and their inferiority complex in connection with being peripheral figures. While cherishing its own cultural heritage, the Polish intelligentsia remains the dominant group within the peripheral field of power, controlling the process of producing and legitimising scientific knowledge. By contrast, in the imperial field of power, this same intelligentsia is not even a subservient group but an utterly marginal one – if Everett V. Stonequist's (1961) concept of the marginal man is referenced. The Polish intellectual was a marginal man as he was locked in limbo, trapped between two disparate and largely antagonistic groups of cultural elites – those of Western Europe and Russia/the Soviet Union. Both enticed him with offers of support and recognition, but expected ideological loyalty in return. Zarycki also emphasises the little-known role of the Russian partitioning power in the redevelopment of Polish elites, and the ambivalent yet productive role played by the communist regime in modernising post-war science.

Zarycki also points to the power elites' continuously growing pressure on the academic intelligentsia to serve the social or national interest. The more those wielding political power restricted the autonomy of academic institutions, the more scholars desired research autonomy, which – in the humanities and social sciences – leads to their self-reliant autonomy within the global field of science. To paraphrase Ewa Thompson (2000), those who resist this trajectory risk becoming, willingly or not, eulogists of one empire or another. This dilemma is clearly evident when Zarycki reconstructs the biographies of such linguists as (among others) Jan Baudouin

de Courtenay, Kazimierz Nitsch, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, Maria Maynowa, and Witold Doroszewski.

Zarycki questions the assumption of the greatness of the Polish intelligentsia on the European and global stage. He even poses a subversive thesis that the “privileged position of the intelligentsia elite in the field of power necessarily corrupts, restricts autonomy of the cultural field, and suppresses its creative forces” (Zarycki 2022: 457). Nevertheless, he perpetuates another assumption – that of the leading role of the intelligentsia in the field of social power in Poland. His picture of the elite is somewhat detached from the social history of Poland, since it does not include the ordinary person. The problem is not that Zarycki has failed to write yet another folk history of Poland but that his otherwise excellent analysis does not address the issue of the common people, who posed a growing challenge to the elites, both within the peripheral and imperial fields of power, and to the intelligentsia in particular. Even though present-day demands to democratise knowledge-production do not necessarily, or by default, predetermine the demise of the intelligentsia’s hegemony, they still challenge the autonomy of the field of knowledge when juxtaposed with the field of social expectations. More emphasis should also be placed on the economic conditions behind the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge in the peripheral field of power, including economic inequalities between the peripheral field and the centre, and the pauperisation of the academic intelligentsia under post-socialist capitalism in Poland.

My final doubt concerns the scientific discipline that is employed to demonstrate the ability to analyse the peripheral field of power. The language sciences certainly deserve this type of analytic approach, and hard though it is to name another discipline that would produce and accumulate intellectual cultural capital to an even greater extent, I would still like to make the case for sociology, of which Tomasz Zarycki is a distinguished representative. Sociology has always had homologous but also turbulent relationships with other fields, especially those of politics and economics, and has aspired to become both a particularistic Polish and transnational voice. Sociology should, therefore, look at itself through the critical lens of relational historical sociology, as this kind of an auto-critique would be an interesting verification of Zarycki’s approach. Tomasz Zarycki has made sociology the subject of a number his articles and publications. However, I still look forward to his compiling a comprehensive monograph on the subject.

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# **POLISH SOCIAL SCIENCES IN GLOBAL ACADEMIA**

## **TOMASZ ZARYCKI, *THE POLISH ELITE AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES: A PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY***

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In his new book, Tomasz Zarycki (2022) brings the global context of knowledge production to bear on the history of Poland's social sciences. *The Polish Elite and Language Sciences* is written from the perspective of historical sociology, which means that the past is used to help understand the contemporary state of the social sciences in Poland. Local historical determinants are placed in the broader model of relations between the centre and periphery. Thus, the book provides many new and interesting insights into the production of knowledge in the East European semi-periphery, and it also sheds light on the social sciences in the global core. It should be emphasised that the author's goal was to take part in global theoretical discussions and to make his own contribution to the sociology of science. In my opinion, this goal has been achieved. But there is another valuable effect of his analysis. Namely, it provides an inspiring conceptualisation of the main historical processes that have occurred in Polish society. Special place has been given to the role of elites. Zarycki's analysis starts from the end of the nineteenth century and covers all the main turning points of modern Polish history: the creation of an independent state in 1918 after a long period of subordination to three European empires, the post-war project of a socialist state



under Soviet control, the fall of the People's Republic and the constitution of a new social order in neoliberal circumstances. The contemporary stage has been marked by Poland's joining the global system and integrating with EU structures. Polish history has been reinterpreted as part of global history. The author has replaced the descriptive mode usually used in recounting Polish history with an explanatory tone. Both the historical aspect of the book and its theoretical dimension are very dense and rich, with inspiring threads. In my short commentary, I will limit myself to two remarks directly related to the social sciences.

Tomasz Zarycki views science as a social practice governed by power relations. For him, the case of Poland is a fascinating laboratory for studying the relations between the literary and language sciences and the field of power. He treats those disciplines as examples of practices of meaning production, and thus he recognises that their social functioning goes far beyond the purely cognitive dimension. Language sciences, as well as history, are linked to the formation of collective imaginations. As a result, they have limited autonomy from the field of power.

Translating Poland's specific East European historical experience into the concepts and models produced in the West is a hard task. Zarycki starts with theorising about the mechanisms of meaning production in the global peripheries, using the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Bob Jessop, Immanuel Wallerstein, Stein Rokkan, and George Steinmetz. He pays attention to the role of the state in these processes and elaborates on the notions of the field of power and homology to fit the semi-peripheral situation of Poland.

One of the important points of the book is the observation that "the dominance of the core over the peripheries and semi-peripheries is homologically reflected in the global field of social sciences, in which non-core theorising is usually marginalised with no chance of becoming universal" (Zarycki 2022: 81). The opportunity for Polish scholars to join global discussions and get a certain level of international recognition will increase only if they are able to provide substantial contributions of a kind that, being based on a universal theory, can be widely recognised. But, unfortunately, there have very rarely been favourable conditions for such contributions. In a detailed analysis of the history of Polish literary and language sciences the author traces the strong homology with the field of power. In the past there have only been a few moments of relative weakening of the homology, and these usually resulted in international recognition for Polish scholars. Most of the time, however, the Polish language sciences have been characterised by normative use of theories: for instance, with the

creation of the theory of newspeak in the 1970s, due to the public involvement of scholars in the growing conflict between the emerging opposition and the communist authorities.

To inscribe the Polish case in a theoretical frame, Zarycki reaches for Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsend's (2001) model of inverted hierarchies of three types of capital in post-communist countries. The novelty of this interpretation of the Bourdieu theory is its contextualisation, which is based on the assumption that in certain conditions a political or cultural elite may assume dominance over the economic one. This means that what is considered a compensatory type of capital can be different depending on the context (Zarycki 2022: 62). The Polish intelligentsia is a bearer of cultural capital, which has proven to be the dominant elite resource in the Polish historical context. Zarycki shows the dominant position of the cultural elite in the field of power. This structural fact greatly shapes the trajectories of Polish intellectuals, especially in disciplines such as language and literature. In coping with meaning production these scholars are supposed to play an important role in domestic intellectual debates and political disputes. They are involved in the process of creating collective imaginaries, which are directed at strengthening national identity. The humanities and literary sciences can also be seen as "tools for defending the autonomy of the national fields of power in a global context" (Zarycki 2022: 473). This situation results in social scientists having a particular dichotomy of orientation. There are two separate arenas in which they can receive recognition. One is international academia, but the other, which is equally or even more important, is the national field of power. In consequence, internationally recognised academic discoveries are not a priority for peripheral scholars. This multi-positioning is typical for intellectual elites in Poland. In their academic trajectories they have to combine the duties of a scholar with those of a public figure with moral obligations in regard to the national community. According to the author, this prevents them from taking fully autonomous and critical standpoints and can lead to poor and non-innovative scholarship.

This reconstruction of the main themes of the book inclines me to two observations: one in regard to the general level and one in regard to Poland. The first concerns the meta-reflection about scholarly production. Specific entanglements of the social sciences with the field of power probably occur everywhere, including at the very core of global academia. This is significant, because globally dominant discourses are being reproduced there. They set the universal standards for what is understood as true scholarly achievement. Thanks to Zarycki's book, the question of the limited au-

tonomy of disciplines so closely connected with the production of meaning and social imaginations can be addressed. While admitting the existence of profound differences between peripheries and centres, it is still interesting to investigate the dynamics of the homology between these academic fields and the global field of power.

My second observation concerns the Polish social sciences. I read Zarycki's book as an analysis of the structural constraints built into the historical development of the discipline. He concludes that social scientists in Poland always have to respond to dual challenges and thus fulfil the non-cognitive functions of their role as important players in the field of power. This is a local, negative factor that reduces our chances of academic recognition in an increasingly globalising science. This can lead to pessimistic conclusions about the internal limitations of the Polish social sciences in their pursuit of international recognition. Nevertheless, Zarycki himself shows 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. We are looking for ways to contribute to global discussions in the social sciences. Zarycki's book proves that the best way to achieve this goal is to contextualise and rewrite local history into universal theories. Therefore, for Polish readers, it is an excellent incentive to practise historical sociology. This perspective makes it possible to integrate the Polish experience into global processes and to make interesting conceptualisations of the peripheral societies of the Global East. This important book for Polish sociology was written in English. I am afraid that to some extent this may reduce its influence in the Polish scholarly field. However, if Polish scholars are actually trying to be included in the global circulation of knowledge, Zarycki's book may help to create a theoretical platform that will make this task easier.

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# **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***

Tomasz Zarycki  
University of Warsaw

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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