
Cultural Sociology in Poland

Elżbieta Hałas

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Zusammenfassung

The following outline of the history and achievements of Polish cultural sociology is merely a sketch of the developmental path of sociology in Poland, rather than a comprehensive picture. It shows that culturally oriented sociological research has a long tradition in Poland, upheld despite unfavorable factors that disrupted its continuity during World War II and the post-war period of communist rule, which ended in 1989. The article discusses the presence of the cultural approach in Polish sociology as a whole and the reasons for treating sociology of culture as a distinct subdiscipline from the 1960s onwards, as well as the complementary character and mutual influence of these two approaches.

Schlüsselwörter

Cultural Memory • Culture and Society • Polish Culturalistic Sociology • Socio-Cultural Changes

The heritage of Polish culturalistic sociology lies at the core of interdisciplinary Polish culturology (Godlewski et al. 2013). Naturally, this doesn't mean that sociology in Poland has always been overwhelmingly culturalistic. However, culturalism has given Polish sociology an original and distinctive character as compared with

E. Hałas (✉)

Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

E-Mail: ehalas@uw.edu.pl

sociology in other countries. The term “culturology” refers to a broad range of cultural sciences, whereas “culturalism” means a perspective in which the phenomena of social life are seen as meaningful and axiologically significant. In this article, the term “culturalism” refers mainly to Florian Znaniecki’s philosophy (1919) and to his sociological theory, which was based on the culturalistic ontology and epistemology of cultural reality.

The following outline of the history and achievements of Polish cultural sociology is merely a sketch of the developmental path of sociology in Poland, rather than a comprehensive picture. It shows that culturally oriented sociological research has a long tradition in Poland, upheld despite unfavorable factors that disrupted its continuity during World War II and the post-war period of communist rule, which ended in 1989. The article discusses the presence of the cultural approach in Polish sociology as a whole and the reasons for treating sociology of culture as a distinct subdiscipline from the 1960s onwards, as well as the complementary character and mutual influence of these two approaches.

1 Early Origins and Basic Principles of the Cultural Approach

Poland was one of the first countries in which sociology developed as an autonomous branch of the humanities, and the cultural perspective is deeply rooted in Polish sociology (Szacki 1995). In the second half of the nineteenth century, Ludwik Gumplowicz (1838–1909) included the “prism of culture” in his historically oriented sociological theory (Gumplowicz 1887: 436–437). After this scholar’s emigration to Graz, his works continued to influence the formation of sociological thought in Poland. Culture was also an integral part of the studied phenomena in the monographs on rural communities written by Franciszek Bujak (1875–1953), who conducted research on the territory of Galicia, then a part of the Habsburg monarchy. Monographic studies preceded the development of research on regional cultures, for which Kazimierz Dobrowolski (1894–1987) proposed an original methodology. Thus, the origins of culturally oriented Polish sociology are closely linked with the development of ethnography and subsequently anthropology, in which Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), the creator of the functional theory of culture, played a prominent role. Inspired by Malinowski’s anthropology and by Florian Znaniecki’s concept of the humanistic coefficient, Józef Obrębski (1905–1967) studied the culture of the Polesie region (Obrębski 2007), as well as local cultures in Macedonia.

After Poland regained independence in 1918, sociology, then a novel scientific discipline, acquired an institutional foundation with the establishment of Chairs of Sociology at the University of Warsaw in 1919 (for Leon Petrażycki) and at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in 1921 (for Florian Znaniecki). Petrażycki (1867–1931) extensively influenced reflections on the entirety of socio-cultural phenomena (Kojder 2006). Petrażycki’s thought was focused on culture, as shown also by the works of his eminent students from the Petersburg period: Nicholas S. Timasheff, Georges Gurvitch, and above all Pitirim A. Sorokin, who created the theory of cultural dynamics. Petrażycki’s studies on the functioning of legal and

moral norms in a socio-cultural context led to the development of the theory of axionormative models of interpersonal relations. Sorokin expounded upon the view that these relations constitute an universal component of every culture. He also developed the concept of cultural ideals and cultural crises. Petrażycki's ideas were later developed further in Poland in connection with theory of culture by Maria Ossowska (1896–1974) and Adam Podgórecki (1925–1998), among others. The work of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929) was also an important source of inspiration for the cultural sciences in Poland. This scholar studied the Polish language and writings from the past as monuments of national culture (Baudouin de Courtenay 1984). He voiced the opinion that pursuing sociology is an indispensable condition for the development of linguistics. This world-famous linguist's theory of language preceded and influenced the one developed by Ferdinand de Saussure; hence, de Courtenay also indirectly had an impact on the modern humanities and on theory of culture based on theory of language.

Another scholar who influenced the early development of the cultural approach in Polish sociology was Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941). Although his work includes elements of historical materialism, his multifaceted and evolutionistic approach to tribal societies included an insightful analysis of cultural dimensions. Of importance for theory of culture was his analysis of the active role of ideas (Krzywicki 1974) that mobilize collective activities; he contrasted these ideas with utopian visions. Krzywicki's thought inspired, in part, the trend of research on historical consciousness, cultural heritage and traditions of culture, which is still strongly present in Polish sociology, as shown e.g. by the works of Joanna Kurczewska and her team (Kurczewska 2000).

Stefan Czarnowski (1879–1937) also helped shape the cultural approach with his innovative contributions. His ideas were inspired by the French sociological school of Emile Durkheim and the intellectual milieu of the *Annales*. Czarnowski's concept of culture evolved out of historical sociology. He emphasized the uniqueness of cultures, but also searched for recurring sets of cultural elements. He formulated pioneering concepts of cultural time and cultural space, studying how the way of experiencing both of them depends on cultural factors. More recently, research on consciousness of time and on temporal orientation has been conducted by Elżbieta Tarkowska (1944–2016) (Tarkowska 1992).

Czarnowski's publication about Saint Patrick as an example of the hero cult was the fruit of this scholar's interest in Celtic culture and religious phenomena (Czarnowski 1956a). He introduced the issues of ethnosymbolism and the function of legends in the cultural process of forging a national tie. Like the Durkheimian school, Czarnowski focused his attention on the phenomenon of *sacrum* in the functioning of communities. He also explored the links between Catholicism and national identity. Cultural memory, collective beliefs, the mythical narrative, guiding ideas and – more broadly – the symbolic dimension of culture were all of central importance to Czarnowski. His original cultural approach, which focused on the issue of memory, deserves due recognition in world literature. In Poland, it defined an area of studies which since then have been conducted without interruption. Czarnowski presented a synthetic view of his concepts in the work *Kultura [Cul-*

ture], originally published in 1938 (Czarnowski 1956b: 11–168). In accordance with assumptions made by the Durkheimian school of thought, all cultural phenomena that perform some function in collective life were included within the scope of his sociological studies. Thus, he introduced the problem of the relationship between culture and society.

Czarnowski's student Nina Assorodobraj-Kula (1908–1999) also took up the issue of collective memory. Her studies on images of the past and inclusion of the past in social consciousness as factors that influence self-knowledge and identity strengthened this kind of research in Poland. Only at the turn of the twenty-first century did these topics firmly establish their presence on the global scale, in the form of research on social memory, collective memory and cultural memory, and also as an important component of the so-called strong program of cultural sociology (Alexander 2003).

Jan Stanisław Bystron (1892–1964) proposed a cultural approach that markedly differed from the one taken by Czarnowski and the Durkheimian school. He was a polymath and his work spans many of the cultural sciences, all pursued from a sociological point of view. He initiated reflection on many detailed problems which later came within the scope of sociology of culture, e.g. sociology of literature or sociology of comedy. Like Czarnowski, Bystron studied in Paris, attending lectures by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, among others. However, he distanced himself from the Durkheimian school, because he ascribed a key importance to those who create culture and who participate in it. He supported the concept of integrity and indivisibility of culture as historically formed complexes of cultural content which are not deterministically linked to social structure. According to Bystron, the selection, recognition and dissemination of cultural content are more fluid in character, and authorities – both personal and impersonal – play an essential role in this process. He studied Polish culture, old Polish customs and folk art, and noted the role of religion as a culture-producing factor (Bystron 1936).

Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) occupies a unique position among the creators of cultural sociology, both in Poland and abroad. He was essentially a transnational scholar. His theory of cultural systems, among which he distinguished emergent social systems with growing degrees of complexity, contains a sophisticated conceptualization of the relationships between social and cultural phenomena. It gives priority to the conceptual categories relating to culture, because social action and social values are one of the classes of cultural actions and values. Agency plays a key role in this theory. An echo of Henri Bergson's ideas presented in *L'Évolution créatrice* is apparent in Znaniecki's works. As a philosopher he moved close to broadly understood European and American pragmatism, while as a sociologist he examined the problem of interactions and social relations posed by Georg Simmel, discussing the nature of these processes. The work *Cultural Reality* (1919) was the crowning achievement of Znaniecki's philosophy of culture and also the starting point for his culturalistic sociology, which he developed in a sequence of works (Hałas 2006a) ending with the book *Cultural Sciences* (1952), which was translated into Polish in 1972.

Znaniński's cultural sociology involves studying individuals as cultural and relational subjects, but also researching the most complex civilizational phenomena and processes, understood as the social integration of culture. He also presented the concept of a pan-human civilization and a world culture society (Znaniński 2001). He was a precursor of studying globalization processes in the cultural dimension (Hałas 2010a). Znaniński was one of the first theoreticians of knowledge as a cultural phenomenon constitutive for social worlds. Reflecting upon the social roles of men of knowledge, he drew attention to the crucial significance of pursuing cultural sciences as the condition upon which the reflexivity of ongoing cultural processes depends. His principle that there is an inherent humanistic coefficient in all cultural data introduced a new potential for innovativeness in research. Znaniński formulated a theory of cultural systems with the humanistic coefficient, describing them as systems of actions and values, existing in the active experience of agents. His comprehensive theory of social systems is based on the ontology of social values as one of the classes of cultural values, which possess meaningfulness and axiological significance. His analytic concept of social systems in the cluster of other cultural systems, actions and values implied the necessity of a cross-disciplinary approach in the cultural sciences.

2 Breaking with Tradition; Reconstruction and Transformations of Cultural Sociology

During World War II, Poland was under occupation by Nazi and Soviet forces, and many Polish scholars lost their lives. After the war, efforts were immediately made to rebuild Polish sociology; however, the communist regime reacted with repressions in the early 1950s. When the Stalinist era ended, the institutional conditions for pursuing sociology gradually stabilized, at the cost of various concessions to the regime. This was a new chapter in the history of the humanities in Poland. During the communist period, it was impossible for Polish scholars to freely participate in the international exchange of ideas. The reconstruction of research traditions was slow and incomplete. Florian Znaniński, the creator of humanistic culturalistic sociology, had emigrated to the United States of America in 1939, and his works written in English did not find recognition in Poland until the 1970s. However, Znaniński's students and pre-war colleagues continued their research in Poland during the communist period, so this repression of culturalism could not be absolute.

Józef Chałasiński (1904–1979) made an especially significant contribution to the survival of Polish cultural sociology. He joined the faculty of the Chair of Sociology at the University of Warsaw in 1935, linking this research center with the inspirations of humanistic sociology and with Znaniński's culturalism. After the war, Chałasiński brought important elements of this tradition, which had originated at the University of Poznań, to the University of Łódź. In particular, he helped popularize culturologically oriented biographical studies which Znaniński had initiated. In 1966, the Chair of Sociology of Culture was created for Chałasiński at the University of Warsaw. Taking advantage of the "Polish October" in 1956 (also known as the

“Polish thaw”), which marked the end of the Stalinist era in Poland, Chałasiński founded the journal “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” (“Culture and Society”), which to this day remains the main journal of Polish cultural sociology. He had been Znaniecki’s student, but was not a continuator of his ideas in the full sense of the word, especially as regards theoretical sociology and the assumptions of culturalism, because he pursued sociology without consistent attempts at theoretical synthesis. He focused on describing and analyzing socio-cultural changes using the personal document method. He treated the cultural aspect and the social aspect as two sides of the phenomena of group life, viewed together as a whole. From this standpoint, he distinguished various types of cultures on the basis of cultural values and attitudes characteristic for the studied communities. Unlike Znaniecki’s culturalism, this was a holistic way to view culture in conjunction with social processes. Such an approach brought sociology closer to anthropology of culture (Kłoskowska 1974: 20). Chałasiński combined analyses of intellectual culture and peasant culture with studies on the formation of national culture (Chałasiński 1984). Like Znaniecki, Chałasiński examined human subjectivity and agency in culture, while simultaneously studying the cultural sources of subjectivity. This standpoint differed entirely from the structural-functional orientation which dominated in the 1960s, and which ascribed a controlling function to the cultural system, since Chałasiński emphasized human agency, which was to regain its central position in the theory of society and culture in the twenty-first century (Archer 1996).

After the “Polish October” in 1956, Marxist assimilation of sociology began, followed by assimilation of cultural studies in the 1960s. The first editor-in-chief of the new journal “Studia Socjologiczne” (“Sociological Studies”) was Zygmunt Bauman. He focused on issues associated with cultural *praxis*, drawing upon the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. These interests became reflected in a book on culture and society (Bauman 1966); its publication coincided with the revival of cultural Marxism in the West and the development of the Birmingham school’s program of cultural studies. After 1968, Zygmunt Bauman, then working in Great Britain, further developed the concept of cultural *praxis* (Bauman 1999) and performed an analysis of the transformation of liquid modernity, broadening the perspective of Frankfurt school critical theory. After the systemic transformation of 1989, the broad reception of Bauman’s works in Poland coincided with the postmodernist transformation of the humanities and social sciences, which blurred the boundaries between sociology and normatively oriented cultural studies.

In regard to the earlier period it should be emphasized that the ideological discourse of Marxism-Leninism clashed with the post-war activity of Stanisław Ossowski and Maria Ossowska at the University of Warsaw, whose theory of culture had shaped itself under the influence of philosophers and logicians from the pre-war Lvov-Warsaw school. Stanisław Ossowski (1897–1963), who began his career as a sociologist at the Chair of Sociology in Warsaw before World War II, had interdisciplinary interests. Elements of theory of culture can be found both in his philosophical works and in his works from other fields (sociology, anthropology, social psychology, history of culture). His original way of thinking cannot be firmly linked to one theory, much less to one school; however, his standpoint can generally be

described as a variant of humanistic sociology, comparable e.g. with the “meaningful sociology” of Robert M. MacIver from Columbia University (Hałas 2001a). Ossowski moved into the realm of social sciences when he was already a recognized philosopher, the author of a dissertation about the concept of the sign, as well as a study of aesthetic experiences; in other words, works that dealt with problems of semiotics, communication and axiology. He preferred not to adopt a general view of culture, but also avoided distinguishing its various components – material culture, social culture, spiritual culture – as opposed to e.g. Alfred L. Kroeber. He drew upon the works of Malinowski, with whom he had studied, while distancing himself from Malinowski’s functionalistic theory of culture. In Ossowski’s opinion, the basic category for culture research are values, among which he distinguished recognized values and felt values, ceremonial values and everyday values, instrumental values and autotelic values.

One of Ossowski’s students was Anna Pawełczyńska (1922–2014), a researcher of values who authored a sociological analysis of values and violence in Auschwitz, later translated into English and German (Pawełczyńska 1973). In Polish cultural sociology, many authors have discussed the issue of values with reference to Ossowski’s concepts, as exemplified by a joint publication which deals with values in Polish culture (Dyczewski 1993). This orientation differs from studies based on the concepts of Ronald Inglehart. In research on values, Piotr Sztompka represents yet another approach, derived from neofunctionalism and complementary to the “strong program” of cultural sociology (Sztompka 2007).

Ossowski’s wife Maria Ossowska also enriched the Polish social sciences with philosophical culture characteristic for the Lvov-Warsaw school. Her works in the field she created, namely science of morality, by far transcend the boundaries of sociology of morality, a subdiscipline which should (like the studied moral ideas) be perceived in a broader cultural context (Ossowska 1966). Her studies on bourgeois morality and chivalric ethos presented the results of research on lifestyle as an orientation of a certain culture and its hierarchy of values, its personal models and civilizational processes of changes in morals. In part, Ossowska’s concept of ethos resembles the concept of habitus and civilizational processes in the works of Norbert Elias (Ossowska 1986). Culturally oriented studies on values and lifestyles have been continued and developed by many Polish researchers, such as Andrzej Siciński (1924–2006), who emphasized the role of choice in shaping lifestyles (Siciński 2002), Aldona Jawłowska (1934–2010), who studied cultures of contestation (Jawłowska 1975), as well as such contemporary scholars as Hanna Palska, who studies new lifestyles (Palska 2002), or Małgorzata Jacyno, whose work deals with the problems of a culture of individualism (Jacyno 2007).

The works of Barbara Szacka and Jerzy Szacki have also contributed significantly to the development of the sociological theory of culture. Barbara Szacka, who prepared and defended her doctoral thesis under the guidance of Nina Assodobraj-Kula, continued and developed research on living history and collective memory in Poland at a time when this topic aroused much less interest among scholars around the world than it does at present (Szacka 2006). This work was subsequently continued by others and resulted in the development of various original concepts,

such as the concept of vehicles of memory, as opposed to Pierre Nora's places of memory, performative memory in the works of Andrzej Szpociński, regional memory and memory reconstruction in the works of Piotr Kwiatkowski (Szpociński and Kwiatkowski 2006), or Elżbieta Hałas's reflexive cultural memory (Hałas 2011). Memory studies performed from the perspective of cultural sociology retain their distinctive methodological character within the trend of memory studies, which currently has a broad scope (Kończal and Wawrzyniak 2011).

Jerzy Szacki (1929–2016), a sociologist and historian of ideas, continued the culturalistic tradition of Polish studies on the issue of the nation. He took up the problems of tradition and utopia, which are important for theory of culture (Szacki 2000). Szacki also helped make Znaniecki's legacy known to Polish sociologists in the 1970s (Szacki 1986). While recognition of Znaniecki's works in Poland has become more widespread in the subsequent decades (Dulczewski 1992; Hałas 1991, 2006a, 2010a; Goćkowski 2000), the broken tradition of research has not yet been fully restored.

A scholar who drew upon Znaniecki's legacy to some degree was Antonina Kłoskowska (1919–2001), the main creator of sociology of culture in Poland. She attached great importance to theoretical and methodological precision. Initially a faculty member at the University of Łódź, in 1977 she transferred to the University of Warsaw, where she took over the Chair of Sociology of Culture, which had lacked a leader ever since the departure of Chałasiński, under whom Kłoskowska had once studied in Łódź. She continued the tradition of Polish culturalism, formulating independent views in dialogue with various orientations of humanities, including semiotics of culture. On the backdrop of analysis of cultural phenomena as semiotic phenomena, she developed her own concept of symbolic culture in a narrow sense. Symbolic culture is an empirically more accessible equivalent of spiritual culture in the sense in which Alfred Weber, the creator of *Kultursoziologie*, used this term.

Kłoskowska viewed symbolic culture as a separate category of cultural phenomena alongside social culture and culture of existence. However, she acknowledged that culture in the broad sense should be understood as all human activities subject to common patterns developed in the course of interactions in social communities, along with everything that is created through those activities. Such a broad, essentially anthropological, notion of culture constituted a starting point for the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena in general. Thus, having defined symbolic culture as the proper subject area of sociology of culture, Kłoskowska simultaneously moved beyond the limits of scientific disciplines and subdisciplines, drawing upon semiology, linguistics, aesthetics, psychology, anthropology and history of culture. According to her theoretical standpoint, symbolic culture perceived as the sphere of human actions which do not possess an instrumental character is simultaneously a semiotic and axiological phenomenon, since it is a sphere of autotelic values (Kłoskowska 2007). She generalized Ossowski's concept of autotelism, which referred to the aesthetic experience of a wide range of symbolic acts realized as an end in themselves. In Kłoskowska's theory, symbolic culture in a narrower sense is shaped and shows itself in the processes of communication in social systems of interactions, institutions and media. She analyzed the processes of culturalization of

individuals, transmission and assimilation of culture, and social-cultural identification, all in the context of autotelic symbolic culture. Calling upon the works of such eminent researchers of culture as Kroeber, Margaret S. Archer or Pierre Bourdieu, and polemicizing with others (e.g. with Leslie White's pansemiotism), Kłoskowska developed her own standpoint. This is also true in regard to her culturalistic theory of the nation (Kłoskowska 2005), which presents a concept of the national symbolic community and its cultural canon in an analogy to the syntagma in linguistics, as well as a concept of the dynamics of national identification, including national conversions. In her later works, Kłoskowska expressed her interest in the problems of symbolism, which is apparent in the field of social culture as well, and transcended the boundaries of autotelic symbolic culture.

Kłoskowska turned sociology of culture into a prestigious subdiscipline in Poland at a time when this subdiscipline was still of marginal importance in other countries. Her circle of co-workers included other scholars whose interests centered on cultural sociology and/or sociology of culture. One of them, Zbigniew Bokszański, did not focus solely on investigating the transmission and reception of symbolic culture; rather, he studied a broad spectrum of the processes involved in the transformation of modernity, all of them revolving around the issues of individual and collective identity (Bokszański 2005). This research was conducted from a cultural perspective. Bokszański's works, rooted in the tradition of Polish culturology (including Znaniecki's culturalism), combined inspirations drawn from the works of Bourdieu, Chombart de Leuwe and Basil Bernstein, as well as from American symbolic interactionism. In his monograph on stereotypes (Bokszański 1997), as well as in other works, he analyzes the cultural patterns of perceiving the members of foreign ethnic and national groups, as well as the problem of identity and European identification. He initiated studies on the memory of wartime experiences, now continued by scholars such as Kaja Kaźmierska, who studies the biographical narratives of persons resettled from the Kresy area and the narratives of Holocaust survivors. Her research is based on Fritz Schütze's concept of biographical trajectories (Kaźmierska 1999, 2012). The problems of identity have been framed differently by researchers who focus on discourses in the context of transformations of the public sphere and the social division of knowledge – Marek Czyżewski and Andrzej Piotrowski (Czyżewski 1997; Piotrowski 1997).

Andrzej Tyszka, in turn, discussed axiological issues in his work (Tyszka 1993). He also helped develop research on individual participation in culture and on the cultural diversity of lifestyles (Tyszka 1971). The issue of cultural participation has been widely studied by many Polish sociologists and is currently the object of renewed interest in the context of new theories, such as network theory (Krajewski 2011). Finally, the problems of communication and cultural competences, including intercultural communication, have been researched by Leszek Korporowicz, who has also studied cultural transgression and the sense-creating dynamics of culture (Korporowicz 2011).

Znaniecki's culturalism is a point of reference for the research carried out by Elżbieta Hałas, the present Head of the Chair of Sociology of Culture at the University of Warsaw. She continues to study the heritage of Znaniecki's cultura-

lism, his theory of cultural knowledge, theory of cultural becoming and the world culture society (Hałas 2010a). She has shown the significance of Znaniecki's classical cultural sociology for present-day discussions and studies dealing with cultural crisis and cultural fluidity.

Having started out with symbolic interactionist analyses of the social context of meaning (Hałas 2006b) and identity, drawing on hermeneutics, social phenomenology, cultural semiotics, the theory of dramaturgism and the concept of symbolic power, Elżbieta Hałas examines the processes of symbolization, showing the relationships between cultural and social systems (Hałas 2001b, 2007). She treats symbolic conflicts in various areas of culture as an indicator of its contemporary transformation (Hałas 2015), emphasizing the role of reflexive cultural memory (Hałas 2015). She has studied the politics of memory and the symbolic politics of systemic transformation in Poland, as well as the symbolic construction of the "Solidarity" movement (Hałas 2005, 2010b). In her research on the cultural sources of subjectivity, the symbolic self, social interactions and social relations, she combines semiological issues with the axiological perspective of social values (Hałas 2016).

Lastly, it should be noted that Polish cultural sociology currently exhibits remarkable vitality in such research areas as time and memory, identity and culturalistically oriented biographical research, social symbolism and symbolic politics, as well as culture of public discourse.

The destructive processes set in motion by two world wars and two totalitarian regimes, along with the limitations imposed by real socialism, meant that theories which often constituted innovations on a global scale were not developed further. However, a complete break with the tradition of culturalism has never occurred in Poland. This enables us today to tackle the problems of sociological theory of culture, which are essential for understanding and explaining ongoing local and global transformations.

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