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Book Review

(Post-) Soviet Sociologies

Agata Zysiak
a.zysiak@uw.edu.pl

Bucholc, Marta. 2016. *Sociology in Poland: To Be Continued?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
102 pp.
ISBN 978-1-137-58186-0 (Hardcover)
Price: € 57,19

Skovajsa, Marek and Jan Balon. 2017. *Sociology in the Czech Republic: Between East and West*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
150 pp.
ISBN 978-1-137-45026-5 (Hardcover)
Price: € 51,99

Titarenko, Larissa and Elena Zdravomyslova. 2017. *Sociology in Russia: A Brief History*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
158 pp.
ISBN 978-3-319-58084-5 (Hardcover)
Price: € 57,19

Czech, Polish, and Russian sociologies are often considered together as a part of the so-called Second World, or semi-peripheries, and still have much in common. First of all, it is their political history, mainly the period of state socialism. According to the totalitarian paradigm—nowadays popular mostly in the region itself—Stalinization reforms, the capacity of universities, and the isolation of the Iron Curtain were shared experiences. Most scholars outside of Eastern European or Slavic Studies know little more about the region than those widespread clichés. Thanks to the "Sociology Transformed" series, international audiences can gain insights into the history of what might be called (post) Soviet sociologies and may establish their own opinions more easily.

All three books discussed in this review were published in the Palgrave Macmillan series edited by John Holmwood and Stephen Turner, along with 14 other volumes so far. Most of the publications represent Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden) or English-speaking academic circulations (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa), but also include a monograph on Israeli (definitely a part of the core of knowledge production) and Chinese sociology (the fastest growing academic field in the

world). The latter volume could be included as a part of academic systems operating under state socialism; however, the three selected cases have much more in common. Each volume in the series offers a quick read of a very reasonable number of pages (100 to 150) and a basic set of information about national sociologies. Readers may gain a lot when calculated per amount of pages, but not so much per euro spent, especially when considering the poor editing and proofreading as in the Russian volume.

Of course, how national sociologies are defined is highly problematic, and indeed the series' authors answer this question differently. For example, Polish sociology in general is much broader than sociology in Poland. However, all three cases focus on sociologies limited to the usage of national languages, scholars' origins, and institutional boundaries defined by the national state. More information is found on those who emigrated and became prominent scholars abroad than those who came from abroad to research local societies. Furthermore, all three volumes seem to be much closer to the history of sociology than the sociology of sociology. This might not be so much the choice of authors themselves, but rather the general objectives of lesser-known academic circulations. British, American, or German sociologies (however defined) not only are better known to the general reader, but are also far more discussed. Therefore, any new work simply enters an already vibrant debate, while in the case of less well-known national academic fields, authors play the role of gatekeepers who explain national peculiarities to the rest of the world. In the foreword for the Russian volume, G. Therborn stated the uncomfortable truth: "Sociology in the current era of globalization is very much part of this geopolitical divide of ignorance and knowledge, where Russian [and we can add Czech or Polish] sociologists read and cite western European and North American colleagues frequently, while few Westerners know about the former. And even fewer read them" (p. V). Obviously, most of the readers do not have enough insight to verify authors' judgments and interpretations. In consequence, the stances and notions, misjudgments, or bold pronouncements of the authors are difficult to verify. On the one hand, the authors bear more responsibility on their shoulders. On the other hand, they are pushed into the position of an "objective" witness giving an account of a foreign country, a position certified by their national authenticity.

It is worth keeping in mind that the narratives offered are also localized and struggle with how to tackle presenting one's own history. All the narratives inevitably bear traces of the authors' personal involvement: for example, Elena Zdravomyslova is the daughter of Andriei G. Zdravomyslov, a prominent figure of the 1960s generation of Russian sociologists; and Marta Bucholc, trained in Warsaw, tends to center her focus on the capital. Furthermore, these narratives are particular interpretations of the discipline and its history. The authors could offer many parallel narratives: some vary in details but, most interestingly, they vary in the general framework of how they define sociology, its aims, and its role, as well as academia in general. Whereas the account of Czech sociology by Marek Skovajsa and Jan Balon seems to be most revisionist[1] and critical while offering impressive data gathered by the au-

[1] In opposition to the totalitarian paradigm, an opposition introduced in the context of American historians researching Soviet Union.

thors themselves, the Russian narrative by Larissa Titarenko and Elena Zdravomyslova explicitly states a longing for an imagined "normal social sciences" or academic freedom "like in the West" and refers mainly to secondary sources.

All three volumes offer a chronological story of sociology's developments with periodization based in political events, and all the authors focus on generations (with continuation and rapture as main categories), institutions, and common areas of research. Academia is state-driven and state-dependent. However, a more general political, economic and social background is rarely present in these volumes; sociology seems to be an ivory tower negatively influenced by outside pressure, a peril for academic autonomy. Interestingly, despite the overarching Stalinization argument, political trajectories in the three cases differ profoundly and justify national divisions.[2] Actually, the development of sociology under state socialism seems to differ more than post-Soviet trajectories of its development, suggesting that the visible hand of state socialism was not as brutal as the invisible hand of capitalism.

I. Beginnings: Pre-1918 sociology was emerging mainly from philosophy, law, and history as early as the 1860s to the 1880s. It was often seen as competition to those already established disciplines. In discussing this period, all the authors focus on individuals and their biographies and later influence. Obviously, the definitions of who is a proto-sociologist are problematic. In the Polish case, the author focuses on scholars who self-identify as sociologists; the Czech authors narrow their focus to Czech-speaking intellectuals (mainly T. Masaryk); the Russian proto-sociology is impressive with its broad definition of who could be considered as the discipline's founding fathers (apparently, no founding mothers). In all three cases, sociologists are presented as mostly social reformers typically acting in opposition to the government (which in Czech and Poland is additionally seen as a foreign occupant).

II. Interwar: While in the Russian case, the 1917 revolution defined a new era, in the Polish and Czech cases, establishing new independent states in 1918 meant building national academic circulations almost from a scratch. Polish sociology had to cope with three separate post-partition territories. The Czech one dealt with the reminiscences of German intellectual traditions and its two main sociologists' strong engagement in politics. Sociology in the entire region was strongly politicized, thanks to a strong intelligentsia ethos; many sociologists were leftists, especially in Poland and Russia. The interwar years were also a time of sociology's institutionalization and rapid development, early research projects, and methodological and theoretical choices. The generation of the founding fathers became inevitable reference points for future scholars. At the same time, the first debates and conflicts fed the discipline's development, like the Prague-Brno competition between a theoretical and empirical approach (additionally inscribed into the generational shift). Despite the region's geographical closeness to German, French, and British universities, American universities had a strong influence from the beginning and maintained this influence in the decades to come.

[2] Profound differences in postwar academia between GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Poland were interestingly presented by John Connelly (2002), *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

III. Postwar: The late 1930s were already increasingly difficult for sociology, especially in Russia, where under communist rule it had been marginalized and seen as a bourgeoisie science since 1929. It had to wait for a revival as late as the 1960s. In the other two cases, rising authoritarianism, antisemitism, and governmental control over academia created problems. The Second World War was especially devastating for Polish scholars, but in both Poland and Czechoslovakia, continuity was stronger than wartime losses and emigration. In the early postwar years, sociology faced a spectacular revival supported by the initially modest interest of communist party officials: it was assigned a significant part in the Marxist transformation of societies. The so-called sovietization or Stalinization and higher education reforms in the late 1940s meant institutional abolition, similar to what Russian sociologists had experienced over a decade earlier. Enrollment was cancelled, departments renamed or closed, publications stopped, associations dissolved, and many scholars forced to early retirement. In Poland, because of strong interwar traditions and networks, the intelligentsia ethos, and a relatively short period of political pressure, the Stalinization period was not as harmful as in Czechoslovakia, not to mention Russia. Most of the sociologists simply changed research topics and stayed at universities, ready to return to a sociological focus in more conducive circumstances.

IV. After the Thaw: The political easing after Stalin's death had profound consequences for all three contexts. However, time seems to be a crucial factor in the ability for sociology to recover. In the Polish case, that meant people were educated in the late 1940s by interwar scholars who returned to sociology only after a few years break between 1949 and 1955. Czech sociologists were rehabilitated only in the late 1950s, and Russian sociologists in 1962 after almost 20 years. Continuity was the strongest in Poland and still present in the Czech case, but in Russia, the thaw was simply a new beginning. All the authors propose viewing this period as a time of regeneration; however, sociology reverted to an already established institutional frame divided into: 1) universities focused on teaching, 2) research academies of science, and 3) professional research institutes sponsored by government agendas.

In sociological theory, Marxism-Leninism still dominated (with some revisionist interpretations in Poland), and interest in empirical studies or methodology was a safer political choice. Sociologists started to travel, participated in ISA conventions, and gained better access to the international circulation of knowledge. Foreign organizations provided scholarships, funds, and possibilities to travel. At that time, the first wave of serious internal diversification also began, as many sub-disciplines emerged.

During the 1960s, sociology was essential to providing empirical data about society to reform it; the state introduced new founding schemes, public opinion surveys, and ordered reports to design new policies. The cultural dissemination policies needed animators, and the rapidly developing sociology of work meant hiring thousands of sociologists at large companies. This increasing need for expertise turned scholars into state socialist managers. All the authors underline the role of pragmatism, ritualistic references to Lenin, and the strong presence of mediators between the political establishment and the academic community. How-

ever, Skovajsa and Baron also point out that the stable funding sources and large investments in research provided by the state were crucial for sociology's revival—in all three countries.

V. 1970s and 1980s: After the thaw period, Poland entered stable decades of development marked by ritualized political concessions. Even the antisemitic campaign in 1968 had limited influence on sociology, in contrast to the Czech case, where the consequences of the Prague Spring marginalized most sociologists. In Russia, after an intensive revival called the "golden years" of sociology (1965–1972), political pressure rose. In both of the latter cases, what followed was further professionalization within strict ideological limits, or the "continuation of sociology without sociologists" as Skovajsa and Baron put it (p. 74). Continuity with the former milieu was broken, but institutional structures remained.

Sociology was still seen as useful. It remained closely related to industrialization, an increased focus on expert knowledge, and the "serving society" agenda, which actually allowed scholars to avoid political pressure under the umbrella of objective research and data-based scientific conclusions. The price was nepotism and corruption in enrollment as well as the violation of the intellectual rights of banned scholars and a facade of the peer-review process. At the same time, unofficial seminars, "oral" sociology,[3] and "suitcase" sociology[4] allowed the discipline to develop. Polish scholars, remaining in the best political situation, were active in the Solidarity movement, supported students' protests, and managed to keep international connections.

VI. Transitions: The perestroika in the USSR and the rapid transitional period are indisputable tipping points for sociologies in the region. In all three cases, those processes meant an unlimited opening for international cooperation, a publishing market boom, and the influx of foreign funds—almost a "Marshall Plan" for sociology (Titarenko and Zdravomyslova, p. 69). At the same time, financial difficulties limited the positions available for both new faculty and dissident sociologists, and state support and spending on higher education shrunk rapidly. Both the Czech and Russian authors note that cohesion in academia broke once again, this time because of economic reasons, resulting in a missing generation of scholars. In Poland, a sense of continuity remained.

The "opening" to the West was difficult and limited. A good example might be the case of the Central European University, whose departments were initially opened both in Warsaw and Prague but later moved to Budapest. The restocking of long-awaited literature easily fueled many careers and a publishing boom. The Czech authors remain especially critical towards this period, underscoring with disappointment that almost no profound research was conducted in the new political circumstances. Overall, despite the high hopes of many sociologists, the transition period was not so much a return to an imagined "normal social sciences." Nor did sociology become a central discipline during the transition; this position was quickly taken by economists.

[3] Based on oral accounts without publications or outcomes that can be traced by censors.

[4] A practice of smuggling back home copies of foreign literature from fellowships, usually in one's private luggage.

The 2000s were marked by an educational boom fueled by the private sector and growing fragmentation, but were also characterized by further internationalization. In the Czech and Polish cases, access to the European Union had a profound impact on the system of funding and higher educational reforms. The general tendency was to enforce internationalization and the productivity of scholars by introducing a scoring system for publications, grants, and cooperation. Bucholc as well as Skovajsa and Baron point out that the reforms were wrongly presented as politically neutral and technocratic. Commenting on the most recent developments seems to be the most challenging and difficult in all three cases.

It is worth underlining that three of the five authors are women; however, the narratives in the books refer mainly to male scholars and their achievements, especially in the Czech case. Female sociologists seem to be present and influential rather in Poland and Russia; whether this is either a national specificity or the authors' sensitivity is difficult to discern. Gender studies is mentioned as a growing field of research from the 1990s. Titarenko and Zdravomyslova even devote a whole chapter to this topic—unfortunately, without any meta-comment on gender relations in sociology as a profession. I would appreciate more information about the discipline's social structure, intelligentsia reproduction, and mechanisms of selection considering gender and class, as well as a wider perspective on the distribution of resources and power relations inside the discipline. Such an approach demands more research, which is provided mainly by Skovajsa and Baron. What is probably a main difference between the sociology of sociology in comparison to the history of sociology is that the latter lacks such a meta-analysis.

To sum up, all three books offer important insights into (post-)Soviet sociologies. On the one hand, they help to break the vicious cycle of Arjun Appadurai's "local informant," as mentioned by Bucholc—the indigenous scholars limited to sharing their knowledge of the local context with Western recipients. On the other hand, they reproduce it. As we learn from Titarenko and Zdravomyslowa, Russian sociology has faced a rise in methodological nationalism in recent years. Some Russian scholars claim that the adaptation of external approaches is useless because their social milieu needs separate localized theories to understand it properly (143–46). At the same time, Polish sociologist P. Sztompka represents the opposite strategy. He advocates for a global sociology insensitive to regional differences (and institutional power plays).[5] The tensions of globalization or internationalization are demonstrated not only in the books discussed, but also in the readership and its consequences.

[5] Piotr Sztompka and Michael Burawoy. (July 2011). "Another Sociological Utopia & Last Positivist," *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews,* 40(4), 388–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306111412512.