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War against poverty or war against the poor? How the public discourse in Poland shapes attitudes towards welfare

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Social Policy and the Global Crisis: Consequences and Responses

Stream: Post-Socialist Welfare Systems

Introduction: voices from the past

At Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA) in November 1969, a conference was held gathering a "group of people who not only write about how social science and public policy relate to each other; but more important, how social scientists working in public policy agencies perceive that relationship" (Horowitz 1971, 1).

Horowitz describes the situation in the end of sixties as pivotal. The status and recognition of social sciences was unquestionable. However, the role of social science and social scientists as cooperatives of policy-makers was still not precisely defined. He stated:

Many social scientists are concerned, both in their own work and in their evaluation of what is done by others in the field, with the problem of preserving autonomy of social science while at the same time performing socially constructive and useful work in the connection with the public policy issues that confront the nation (...) It can be stated that the demand for policy-related activity on the part of social scientists will increase sharply over the next decades – regardless of differences in political party "styles". In a sense, then, we are at a turning point: The question in an age of social science affluence is not the scientific status of the social sciences, but the social and political uses of these "soft" sciences (Horowitz 1971, 2).

Today, the book "The Use and Abuse of Social Sciences" containing essays written for the purpose of above mentioned conference is still an interesting reading. Plenty of things have changed since then, one of the striking examples being the language used for describing phenomena connected with racial issues (Lang 1971), but still, forty years later many themes and a lot of problems defined and diagnosed in the book seem to be to a large extent topical in the first decade of the 21st century, also in European context. For example, the rising demand for interdisciplinarity in social sciences which is currently a ritual topic in discussions about science policy, was precisely formulated by Horowitz (Horowitz 1971, p. 3). Thus, it seems that the book could be a good starting point for *ex-ante* analysis of state of affairs 40 years later. Having in mind some ideas and pessimistic assumptions pointed out by Herbert J. Gans (1971) when he was referring to the social scientists' expertise which could be used or misused while designing social policy measures, I would like to draw attention to some misuses of social sciences which could be observed in the past decades in the field of social policy formulation. I argue that public discourse is largely influenced by the academic circles as well as mass media. Or maybe it should be rather stated, how some assumptions made by academic scholars, became useful tools for stimulating certain attitudes among the public and/or legitimizing ideological or political actions. The objectivity and competence of those coming from academic world often have served as justification and excuse for policy-makers and even highly normative and value-laden statements have been presented as based on scientific, neutral premises. Having in mind some serious criticism formulated by distinguished scholars during past years, the need for this kind of reflexivity seems indispensable¹. Referring to some well recognized processes occurring in the United State in the 70s and 80s, I will point out some

¹ Immanuel Wallerstein in his article from 1997 introduces serious criticism of the social science's influence on the society: *The early hopes of social scientists that they could be modern philosopher-kings proved totally vain, and social scientists settled into being the handmaidens of governmental reformism. When they did this openly, they called it <applied social science.> But for the most part they did this abashedly, asserting that their role was merely to do the research, and that it was up to the others – the political persons – to draw from this research the conclusions that seemed to derive from this research. In short, the neutrality of the scholar became the fig leaf of their shame in having eaten the apple of knowledge* (Wallerstein 1997, p. 1250).

Even more definite evaluation of the state of affairs underlining the downfall of the trust in academic circles was formulated by Zugmunt Bauman (2004): *It was once known that politicians lie. Therefore people were seeking the truth from experts or scientists, thinkers, intellectuals. Today experts or scientists, thinkers, intellectuals lie as politicians do. Easily and without being punished for the lies.*

similarities with phenomena which took place in Poland during the systemic transformation.

I do not attempt to present in-depth analysis of discourse referring to specific elements of social policy. For the purpose of this paper I rather address social policy in a very broad meaning understood as multi-faceted and complex set of public obligations for realization different policies following the concept of *welfare culture*, introduced by Birgit Pfau-Effinger (2005, p. 4-10) and defined as *the relevant ideas in a given society surrounding the welfare state and the way it is embedded in society*. She has enumerated three levels of welfare culture: values and models as a basis for policy; cultural values and beliefs in the population at large; and public and political discourses that mediate between the attitudes of the public and political decisions. In the paper I refer to the latter one. Accordingly to Pfau-Effinger, ideas about the role of social policy vary substantially between countries. Meaning of such notions as *solidarity* or *integration* is conceptualized differently by representatives of different cultures. Beliefs about the personal responsibility for one's own fate, substantial for the national social policy are also connected with tradition and historical background of given state. The commonly accepted values constitute cultural foundations of policies towards work, poverty, state-market relationships and to some extent determine the concrete solutions in policy-making process for example level of redistribution of state interventionist. However, my attempt is not aimed at reconstruction of the whole cultural heritage which is related to the current shape of social policy in Poland, but rather tend to concentrate on some specific features present in the discourse during the transition from socialist state.

Addressing social problems, creating social attitudes

It seems obvious that the way of addressing and describing the topic of poverty, exclusion and inequality is a factor that constitutes the role and image of the poor in the public. In the age of tabloidization, the attributes attached to poverty in scientific debates become "filtered" by the media constituting useful and commonly accepted clichés used both by elites and general public. Consequently, social image of the poor is interrelated with the way of dealing with poverty via social

policy programmes, but also with their effectiveness. Wim van Oorschot who studied these interrelations and also the deservingness perceptions of various groups in society claims:

Already in 1908, George Simmel argued in his essay, 'Der Arme', that the generosity of poor relief generally depends on the degree to which the poor are blamed for their own misery (Simmel, 1908). And the American saying that 'programmes for the poor tend to be poor programmes' is based on the experience that the quality of services and benefits tends to be worse if their target groups have a negative image in society (van Oorschot 2007, p. 130, see also van Oorschot 2006, 2000).

The author shows how the image of the poor has changed since the middle ages under the influences of various ideologies which resulted in the shift of attitudes of the public to the charity and to the state's responsibility for the poor relief.

Generally positive image of the poor has changed overtime due to the capitalism development, increase of the meaning of Protestantism's ideas, as well as widespread of meritocratic way of thinking. Disability or disease became the only commonly accepted reasons of failure in the race to the wealth. These ideas were easily internalized in American context were the famous myth of "self-made man" was dominant in shaping cultural goals of the society, to use the words of Robert C. Merton. This kind of mythology provided obvious and coherent definitions of success which could be easily measured. Accordingly to Merton, ideas were so commonly internalized that they could be understood as basis of universal and uniform system of values. It relates to the signs and emblems of American traditional view described by auto-definitions like: "my place is on the top", "there is no such a word as failure". The real disaster is not to be defeated, but to retreat from the race or minimizing your ambitions (Merton 2002).

The role of social scientists in shaping attitudes should not be forgotten. For example famous article on functional theory of stratification by Davis and Moore published in 1945 in American Sociological Review provided justification for existence of large scale income inequalities and poverty in societies, as these were regarded as the most effective motivation for people (Davis, Moore 1945). Theses by Davis and

Moore are echoed in the words of George Gilder, one of the leading influential intellectuals who served as an advisor and speechwriter for republican politicians during the Reagan's era who wrote on his opponents in his *opus magnum* "Wealth and Poverty":

There is something, evidently, in the human mind, even when carefully honed at Oxford or the Sorbonne, that hesitates to believe in capitalism: in the enriching mysteries of inequality, the inexhaustible mines of the division of labor, the multiplying miracles of market economies, the compounding gains from trade and prosperity (Gilder 1981, p. 96-96)².

Above mentioned processes were not left without critical reception by social scientists. Their impact on the social policy and polarization of American society was elaborated among others by Herbert J. Gans (1995) and Michael N. Katz (1989) whose publications not without a reason have titles referring to the combat: "The War Against The Poor: The Underclass And Antipoverty Policy" and "The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare".

However, their books remained just voices in academic debates, possibly due to specific differences between the role of scientists in European and American public discourse. This is described by Loïc Wacquant on the base of his personal experiences:

For example, in Europe and Latin America, I have been interviewed dozens of times on the issue of imprisonment, on national radio and television, and in the major dailies, and I have consulted with high-level policy makers from Holland to Brazil. By contrast, in the United I have never given a single lecture on prisons outside of the academic perimeter, where the audience is composed nearly exclusively of students and professors, sociologists, criminologists or jurists. And that is not a personal failing: it is true of practically all the leading researchers, like my eminent Berkeley colleague, the legal scholar Franklin Zimring, who produced a

² The words of Gilder are typical example of metaphysics of neoliberals describing divine characteristics of the market economy. Michael Opielka recently pointed out that some social policy scholars openly admitted the religious basis of their attitudes taking into account works of Lawrence Mead, one of the fierce critics of the welfare state who is strongly involved in one of the Protestant's denominations, and those of Mary Jo Bane, who admits that Catholic system of values shaped her views (Opielka 2008, p. 94-98). Such an examples of explicitly expressed sources of beliefs regarding crucial issues in social policy studies: poverty, work ethics, solidarity, state's responsibility for individual lives, are not common among scholars.

ground-breaking study of "Three Strikes and You're Out" in California, showing the juridical and criminological absurdity of this law mandating life imprisonment for third-time offenders. Not a single political leader or state manager bothered to consult him on this subject. Meanwhile, California spends 8 billion dollars each year to lock up 170,000 convicts, three times the carceral stock of France with one-half the population... There is practically no place for civic discussion and no organizational vehicles for conveying scientific work into the public sphere and giving it weight in it (Wacquant 2009c, 126-127).

It is also Wacquant who provides analysis of the impact of American elites on beliefs and attitudes regarding poverty and penal policy in the American context. He shows how tremendous work has been done by think-tanks like Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute, Manhattan Institute and RAND Corporation to pave the way for neoliberal solutions in the spheres of social policy retrenchment, carceralization of poverty, changing penal policy. The cooperation with academic circles could be exemplified by the career of Charles Murray, who was employed by the Manhattan Institute to write a book: "Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980" (Murray, 1984). Afterwards, he took part in the huge promotional campaign organized by that foundation, promoting neoconservative and neoliberal solutions in the field of social policy in accordance with the "blame the victim" strategy of carceration of poverty. This and subsequent Murray's works were discredited by the academic community, which did not influence his status as international expert on social policy issues highly acclaimed by the media also in European context (Wacquant 2009a, p. 22-24, Frank 2004). Other important arguments for more restrictive penal policies were provided by "broken windows theory" drawn on the article by James Q. Wilson and George C. Kelling from 1982 and subsequent accounts. Even though "zero tolerance" policy much-admired by neoconservative media, being the consequence of adopting broken windows approach in practice did not stand confrontation with empirical data, the mythology of its success in reducing crime rates has been widespread. Wacquant continues:

By analyzing the implications of this reform, I realized that the organized atrophy of the social wing and the sudden hypertrophy of the penal wing of the US state were not only concomitant and complementary, but that they targeted the same stigmatized population at the margins of wage labor. It was becoming clear that the "invisible hand" of the deregulated market called for and necessitated the "iron fist" of criminal justice at the bottom of the class structure (Wacquant 2009c, p.112).

It resulted in 3.2 percent of adult population being on probation, imprisoned or on parole in year 2008, as American Bureau of Justice Statistics informs (2008)³.

Underclass under surveillance

In the title of above mentioned publication by H. J. Gans, one of the crucial expressions recognized as those substantially influencing the public debate on the issue of poverty and social policy, is used. The term "underclass" is sometimes understood as purely descriptive notion, supplementing existing vocabulary of stratification studies. However, as Zygmunt Bauman in his essay "Amazing career of underclass" and in the other books claims, there were various hidden meanings and indirect semantic strategies used by those who contributed to the worldwide recognition of that term. He also notices that discursive and ideological usage of this term was very far from what was meant by Gunnar Myrdal:

For Myrdal, appearance of 'underclass', people permanently unemployed is not the reason of their lack of motivational work ethics. It is because of the lack of social conditions indispensable for living accordingly to these norms. In the future 'underclass' will be composed, as Myrdal warns, of the victims of social exclusion. It is not the members of 'underclass' who ignore norms of the society; it is society that turns back at them (Bauman, 1998).

Bauman continues on the contemporary meaning of the term "underclass" which:

³ Probably the most significant impact of scientific work could be observed while taking into account worldwide popularity of some concepts developed by economists. Even though criticized, if not contested, in the academic world, they were often presented to the public as universal truths by those who could benefited from their practical application. This refers mainly to the concepts like 'Kuznets curve', 'Laffer curve' or 'trickle-down theory'.

belongs to the vision of the society which does not apply to all people who make claims to participation in it, vision of such a wholeness which is smaller than a sum of all its parts. 'Underclass' term occurs with a thought of a category that does not belong to any of the classes composing society- category which is placed not at the bottom, but outside of the social hierarchy; category of people who lack their role to play, people who do not have anything useful to offer to the society. And the society does not expect anything from them, so this category cannot make any claims coming from the advantages they bring to the society and this category does not have an access to any path that could lead it back to the society, and even if it had this access it would not have followed the path. Due to the behavioural deficits – serious disadvantages of disposition which make them unable to participate in a social life.

In this kind of meaning, belonging to underclass is the matter of individual choice: *purposeful and active, or indirect, via omission; it is the choice even when one found himself in the underclass, because he failed in his attempts to get out of the poverty (which he should - and implicitly – was capable to undertake* (Bauman, 1998). Both, Bauman and Gans draw attention to the crucial role of mass-media in popularizing new way of describing social problems and stigmatizing those at the bottom of the social ladder. They underline the special role of the cover story from the TIME magazine published on 29th of August, 1979 which seriously impacted the creation of the public image of the lowest strata of American society as alienated, defiant, dangerous minority⁴. All together: teens playing truants, pimps and prostitutes, lone mothers, beggars, drug addicts constituted the amorphous, group labelled with the term 'underclass'. This flexible notion became very useful tool for steering the fear and anger of social masses towards those who can become perfect scapegoats, blamed and punished for various social problems. The American Dreamers could easily believe in real threat for the social order and their own safety. The political consequences of the stigmatization process are well recognized by already

⁴ The cover of that edition of the Time is shocking also today, adding some verses to the story of manipulating and the public, stimulating growth of fear and anxiety. Moral panic against the "ugly, dirty and bad", not to mention "black" group which possess threat to moral societal values and interests could be stimulated also by its visual representations as the one reproduced in the Time.

Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19770829,00.html>, retrieved on 5 January, 2010.

mentioned authors. The most important characteristics of this stratum referred to pathological delinquency disposition, weak family ties, high frequency of divorces, lack of traditional values defining family roles and, above all, claiming attitude towards the state and lack of motivation to work. Bauman underlines the role of works by various scholars for paving the way for welfare state retrenchment, for changes in fiscal policy, for fighting the "myth" of the state's responsibility for the citizens. The arguments proving the universalistic nature of the individualistic responsibility for one's fate were very important in building capacity for general consensus over the reaganomics in the late seventies. Not without the media support.

East European way towards the capitalist state

Sketching the above well recognized story from another side of Atlantic seems important as a reference point for presenting the Polish case. Polish intellectual elite, including scholars from the social studies background, constituted once *intelligentsia*, a specific social group, possessing unique ethos and crucial role in reproducing the Polish patriotism and the national values during the years of partition. It was a repository of national consciousness under German occupation and Soviet dominance. This uniquely East-European group was also characterized by the high level of social liability for those at the bottom of social ladder, as well as for minorities. The unity of the society and the responsibility for the common good were among crucial features of its ethos (for more information on the tradition and current day of intelligentsia see: Gella 1989, Zarycki 2009, 2003).

The fall of the communism and the transition to the market economy become also the beginning of the end of this social group in its traditional form. As most of the social structure analysts have shown, Poland witnessed the birth of the new strata in post-socialist reality: middle class. As Hanna Palska states (2009) the ethos of intelligentsia is in fundamental conflict with the ethos of middle class. Profit-driven work and individualism replaced selfless engagement in public sphere and sense of belonging to the wider community. Also other elements of culture and autotelic set of common values have changed substantially. Members of academic circles were

among those who quickly became ones of the most determined success oriented representatives of the new class. The transformation offered an unprecedented opportunity for achievements, also in material terms. The huge sector of private tertiary education with more than three hundreds of schools has been established by those who did not go to work in business sector, policy-making or, in case of social scientists, polling and marketing industry. It was a real breakthrough after the years of lagging behind communist *nomenklatura* in financial terms, as well as when taking into account the real influence on the public sphere. During the last decade of Polish People's Republic, university graduates, even though scarce in numbers, were earning just 14 percent more than national average, while significant share of population with just primary education were just 10 percent below the mean income (Adamski 2002). The beginning of transformation witnessed the real success story of the academic world behind the walls of the public academia as proved by all statistical data showing enormous changes and differentiation of social structure in Poland (see for example Słomczyński 2007, 2002). As one of the Polish scholars claimed already in 1995:

The psychological costs of maladjustment (sense of hopelessness and symptoms of depression) (...), were linearly correlated with level of education in 1991 – 1994 (...). In the other words, less educated people suffer more than more educated people from both the material and sociological costs of adjustment. If we consider that life expectancy also increases with education, especially in males, then education may be viewed as a truly universal remedy for most of the negative effects of rapid social change. The more educated one is, the quicker and more efficiently one adjusts to the new rules of life (Czapiński, 1996, p. 299).

And when take into account the economic costs of transformation, the interrelation between educational attainment and the success is even more visible with level of education being the crucial factor differentiating life chances within the population. So, it is not without the reason that the economic transformation at the beginning of nineties was positively acclaimed by most of the academic spheres with some prominent figures becoming the real heralds of the new order. It is also

understandable that the only public figure enjoy unanimous respect in the Palska's study on the "winners of transformation" is Leszek Balcerowicz (Palska, 256-257), the founding father of the economic transformation undertaken with usage of most neoliberal tools in accordance with principles of Chicago Boys.

It is probably not without a reason that the most critical accounts of the outcomes of transformations for various strata of Polish society were provided by foreign authors. David Ost, Elizabeth Dunn and Jane Hardy, using various data described the unprecedented triumph of the winners and incredible social costs paid by losers of transformation (Ost 2005, Dunn 2004, Hardy 2009)⁵. Once in anti-communist opposition, members of intelligentsia were cooperating with workers while creating Solidarity movement and then surviving the oppressions of the martial law introduced to defeat the largest social movement at this side of iron curtain. There is also no doubt that neoliberal, radically pro-market pathway of economic transformation has been agreed jointly by representatives of those two social groups while they constituted the first Polish parliament elected in partially free elections in June 1989 (Kowalik 2009). How was it possible that this unity has not lasted longer? The obvious answer is that the costs of market reforms were not equally distributed in the society and rapid impoverishment of certain sectors of the society and rocketing unemployment level hastily exceeding 20 percent, was mainly possible due to the rapid deindustrialization of some sectors of Polish economy. Workers who constituted the biggest share of members of Solidarity movement quickly experienced the bitter taste of freedom.

⁵ It is also quite evocative that all these authors were not avoiding using the various applications of a Marxist approach to analysis of the social structure transformation in contemporary Poland. Marxist (or neo-Marxist, or post-Marxist) categories as the framework for social diagnosis were rarely used in Polish sociology during past two decades. The reluctance of Polish scholars towards this way of conceptualizing social reality dates back to the period of People's Republic of Poland. The intellectual atmosphere is interestingly noticed by Erik Olin Wright, one of the most influential American sociologists explicitly defining his paradigm as neo-Marxism. In his reminiscent essay "Falling to Marxism: Choosing to Stay", Wright recalls the lecture which he has delivered at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw in 1986. Speaking about new theory of class, exploitation in the post-capitalist society of the Soviet type, about contradictory class locations and new ways of controlling means of production Wright was using Marxist categories. After the lecture, one of the auditors has praised it, but then he started convincing the speaker that his work has nothing to do with real Marxism. Wright recapitulates:

What is the issue here is a dramatic difference in the contexts for pursuing radical intellectual work. In the Polish context of 1986, to declare that this was a reconstruction of Marxism meant something utterly different from what the same words mean when they are declared in the context of American sociology. In Poland, to reconstruct Marxism in the 1980s was to salvage an ideology of state repression. In the United States, to embed one's work in a rhetoric of reconstructing Marxism means, in contrast, to declare one's solidarity with struggles against capitalism, class inequality and oppression (Wright 2005, p. 335).

The fact that when the oppressive regime vanished Marxist accounts are still rare is quite meaningful. Possibly the "solidarity with struggles against capitalism" is not considered as valuable by Polish researchers.

The similar discursive processes that were supposed to justify rapidly growing inequalities during Reagan and Thatcher era, appeared soon also in Polish reality. The most interesting part of this process refers to the way in which elites, including academic circles, were addressing those who did not benefit from the process of transformation, who were not able to endanger privileged position nor high status of the elites, but could easily change political situation in the country via making use from recently regained voting rights. Former allies in a struggle towards the oppressive regime became soon a burden for the society. The way of justifying Polish transformation was similar to that described above in American reality took place. And it was not without the impact of works of Polish scholars that helped to create the specific public image of those who did not manage to the top, or even to the middle of the social ladder (for analysis referring to Polish press discourse concerning social problems see: Rek 2007, Rokicka, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2006, Chmielewska, Żukowski 2006, Szumlewicz 2006, Klebaniuk 2004).

Topic of social policy aims and objectives, debate which would address the issue of selection of particular mode or type of social policy regime has been completely absent or rather has been present just in narrow academic debate among scholars specializing in social policy. In the general public debate the idea of retrenchment from generous and paternalistic socialist welfare state has been hailed. It was to some extent parallel to similar debate in the capitalist states where the "golden age" of welfare state was also expected by many ideologists and academics. As Stein Kuhnle stated the idea of welfare state has been exposed to the analysis of some scholars who since the 1970s were trying to prove that the idea of generous welfare state is in crisis and could potentially bankrupt (2001, p. 103-105):

From the 1970s, various theorists have claimed a fiscal crisis (O'Connor 1973); a crisis of governmental overload (e.g. Rose and Peters 1978); a crisis of legitimacy (e.g. Habermas 1976); a crisis of liberal democracy (e.g. Crozier et al. 1975). If by crisis is meant breakdown or radical institutional change, none of the theories can be said to have <succeeded> empirically, so far.

Kuhnle follows with assumption that accordingly to many empirical investigations; the European welfare states were growing during 1980s and 1990s in terms of

number of employees, as well as the scale of public expenditures and number of beneficiaries. Another distinguished welfare state analyst proving in scientific manner invalidity of crisis predictions, described them as myths, based on sometimes real and serious presumptions, but used frequently by ideologically motivated critics of socially responsible welfare state (Castles 2004, p. 45-46). This kind of arguments were absent from the public debate in Poland dominated by the neoliberal way of thinking defining retrenchment of the welfare as an indispensable and inevitable in almost Hegelian sense, accordingly to the principle of commonly accepted commandment: There Is No Alternative.

The debate regarding the alternatives, about the choice of particular welfare regime has been missing in Polish discourse during the initial phase of transformation. It happened regardless of the fact that during the round table talks which ignited the process of peaceful transformation the socially responsible way of transforming economy has been agreed in accordance with the principles of social market economy. Tadeusz Kowalik the advisor of the Solidarity movement recalls also the report prepared in the beginning of the year 1989 by the prominent Polish economists which assessed positively possibilities of implementing in Poland Scandinavian model of economic and welfare arrangements (2009, p. 110-113). Yet, since advisors recruiting from the International Monetary Fund (famous "Marriott Brigades") arrived in Poland and the whole responsibility for the economic affairs has been delegated to Leszek Balcerowicz and his closes colleagues: Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton, the debate was over and the pathway of transformation has been chosen⁶.

Choosing the neoliberal mode economic reforms and imposing market rules on the devastated economy had various mainly drastic consequences also in a field of welfare system. Bob Deacon already in 1992 had tried to categorize CEE states accordingly to the Esping-Andersen's typology, but yet half decade later he admitted that these attempt proved to be failure as no empirical evidence supported his earlier

⁶ The 20th anniversary of the breakthrough and the first partially free elections was in the year 2009. Polish public has not witnessed nationwide debate in mainstream media about economic solutions imposed at the beginning of transformation and social policy measures which accompanied it (or not). Leszek Balcerowicz has been hailed and praised as the founding father of Polish success story. Those who present other views were able to formulate them quite rarely in the biggest media, but thanks to the recent global financial crisis their voices were treated as more legitimate. Those who could say a lot from their own experiences about the social consequences of the "shock therapy" remained speechless, at least in the mainstream discourse.

claims (Deacon 1992; cited from: Cerami 2005, p. 44]. Alfio Cerami in his work on the emergence of welfare systems in CEE after the collapse of the communisms provided with evidence that in none of the states simple adoption of the pre-existing welfare regime took place. The appearance of certain solutions in a sphere of social policy was a combination of intersecting influences of pre-existing institutional rules inherited after the communist era (and sometimes also from the institutional legacy from before communism), the choices and beliefs of the actors influenced by the earlier discourse on the welfare issues and the interests of powerful pressure groups. All these processes appeared in situation of rapid transformation of economic and political regimes and were also influenced by the specific historical and cultural tradition in each of the countries. As a result: *different national settings have produced a variety of welfare structures, which Esping-Andersen and numerous other authors have tried to summarize and to categorize, neglecting, however, to develop a logical social policy framework* (Cerami 2005, p. 45). Therefore descriptions of Polish welfare regime as hybrid seems to be most accurate.

It also has to be remembered that in course of transformation of economies of the CEE states, they all were exposed to the serious economic pressure from the global institutions like International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which conditioned their financial support for the CEE countries, encouraging the political circles to choose the path towards residual welfare policy of neo-liberal origins (Deacon 2000, p. 146-152). Polish prominent scholar approaching this issue concluded after analyzing the first decade of transformation in this field:

The state during the transition period had and still has difficulties with agreeing upon the complex social policy model. The model which would be congruent with the logic of the market economy in sustaining the economic development (which is conditional for catching up the distance to the Western Europe) on one hand and on the other would fulfil the principle of social justice (Golinowska 2000, p. 288).

This assumption seems accurate, hence the principle of social justice was almost absent from the political debate and media discourse in Poland shadowed by the overwhelming logic of market economy.

Homo Sovieticus. Underclass à la Polonaise

If 'underclass' was the term which helped in creating the image of certain social group among American public, *Homo Sovieticus* played a similar role in Polish circumstances. The term has been coined firstly by the Alexander Zinovyev, yet in Poland has been popularized and is nowadays associated usually with the name of Józef Tischner, Polish philosopher and catholic priest, an active figure in anti-communist opposition. His biographer Wojciech Bonowicz recalls the moment when the term has been introduced to the public debate. It was just after the first ballot of the first free presidential election in 1990, when Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist prime minister of Poland after the Second World War and the leader of intellectual post-solidarity movement lost in the first round to Stan Tyimiński (Bonowicz 2003, p. 422-427). The latter, despite being complete newcomer in Poland, unknown businessman from Canada making bold and populist promises, unable to speak decent Polish, managed to win with one of the legends and most respected intellectuals. Tischner was using term *Homo Sovieticus* in his press articles describing his regret and disappointment with the results of the election (see also Tischner 1992). This term became very popular during forthcoming years, both in academic articles, as well as in public debate.

The usage of this notion and it's most coherent conceptualization and contextualization has been provided by Piotr Sztompka, one of the most influential Polish scholars and internationally recognized sociologist. The crucial term describing specific features of *Homo Sovieticus* mindset in Sztompka's work is "civilizational incompetence" which covers a wide range of mental characteristics, which did not allow him/her to fully legitimize the state of affairs in Polish society, which resulted in their political choices. Sztompka lists:

The support of egalitarianism and 'disinterested envy' of the more affluent or successful, an acceptance of state paternalism, anti-elitism, anti-intellectualism; an example of the effect of the latter type is the opportunistic double standards, camouflage in mediocrity, and common or even institutionalized practice of evading rules imposed by the regime, with insubordination treated as a virtue (Sztompka 2001, 22).

As he underlined, Polish people:

were not equally affected by the syndrome of Homo Sovieticus. There were intellectual, academic, artistic or oppositional elites – cosmopolitan and West-oriented – who were able to insulate themselves against that syndrome, and already under communism embraced – in imaginations, dreams and aspirations – the standards and values of the 'free world'. Such elites became the carriers of the new mentality, spreading it to their followers and emulators (Sztompka 2008, p. 45).

The author acknowledges that there were structural factors unequally distributed among social groups, which influenced their coping strategies: *those who were fighting against the communist regime and safeguarded the victory of the revolution – and this means primarily the working class of huge industrial enterprises – feel cheated, as their lives have generally not improved, and for some have even become dramatically worse (Sztompka 2008, 46).* However again, their problems, are located inside their mentality and caused by excessive expectations: *People experience relative deprivation when they believe that they are justified in deserving more than they actually have. (Sztompka 2008, 46).*

The mythology of the “Polish Dream” that created the opportunities for all or almost for all who were active enough and deserved their chance, is based on the empirical observations: *we have observed a true outburst of entrepreneurial activities, with millions (yes, millions) of small new firms started and some of them soon developing into serious enterprises (Sztompka 2008, 48)* which are is not nuanced with the commonly accessible knowledge regarding the fact that mass increase in number of enterprises was and still is strictly related to the process of rapid deindustrialization occurring in Poland in the beginning of nineties which lead to the sky-rocketing unemployment. The actual collapse of industrial sector lasted for significantly shorter period of time than the deindustrialization which took place in the Western Europe in earlier decades. Due to the estimations by Henryk Domański between years 1991 and 1993 half of the newly established businesses were started up by former workers among which 44 percent by the unskilled labourers who were simply striving to avoid unemployment trap and pauperization. Only 7 percent of the

new entrepreneurs recruited from the intelligentsia (Domański 2007, p. 295-299). Another “outburst of entrepreneurial activities” has been noticed between year 2002 and 2004, when the number of enterprises has doubled. However this was not caused by the spirit of capitalism suddenly coming upon Polish population, but due to the liberalization of labour code which allowed employers to outsource employees from permanent contracts to the sector of self-employment, allowing companies to cut down expenditures for social and health insurances. The change of the status from the employee to the self-employed registered as the owner of the newly established company was strictly formal and applied to large number of low skilled workers, to those working in the sector of craft, to teachers working in private schools and other professions dominated by women. In subsequent years some policy makers were proudly announcing that Polish women most frequently in the whole European Union decide to become self-employed or in other words starting up a new company. Magdalena Środa, former vice-minister for equal rights when asked during some official meeting what was the remedy for activation of women in this field answered simply: “unemployment and poverty”. The truth about the “triumph of the entrepreneurial spirit” among Polish people is more complicated than simple appreciated embracement of the competitive and free market rules by the masses.

This kind of pro-market eudaimonia comes back in references to “wise shock therapy” of Leszek Balcerowicz” (p. 53) programme of neoliberal reforms implemented in the beginning of transition period. The “Balcerowicz’s plan” and it’s social consequences are nowadays criticized for neoliberal orthodoxy leaving aside the issues of poverty increase and significant growth of social inequalities. This critical assessment is provided not only by famous political activists and critics of neoliberalism like Naomi Klein (2007), distinguished Polish economists (Kowalik 2009, Kołodko 2009, 2007), but also by those who were once the closest political and ideological allies of Balcerowicz like Jeffrey Sachs, once the pillar of Chicago school of economics, who dares to admit that the shock therapy had its unexpected and definitely too dramatic consequences for a significant share of the society (Sachs 2009).

Interesting critique of the way of argumentation presented by Sztompka and others was provided by anthropologist Michał Buchowski. Drawing on the Edward Said's conceptual framework of "the Orient", "the Occident" and "the Other", Buchowski shows how the discursive strategies used by intellectuals supporting neoliberal transformation of society, created social image of "The Others", in this case- poor people, those suffering from the changes, burdened the civilized part of the society with the legacy of their soviet mentality. He points at phenomena which petrify symbolic and moral dominance of the "civilizationally competent" winners of transformation. This author pays special attention to the usage of such semantic strategies by intellectuals with high academic and public position. Buchowski also quotes some very definite public statements by Jan Winiecki, distinguished professor of economics:

The only group whose situation has worsen in absolute terms (and not in the relation to other groups) is constituted by employees of former state owned farms. They are doing bad, cause they never learned how to work and after the liquidation of these inefficient establishments, they are not able to steal any more (Buchowski 2006, p. 467).

This opinion refers to the situation of almost half a million of low qualified agricultural workers who lost their jobs overnight at the turn of the years 1991 and 1992 due to the political decision which treated in the same way all of the farms, regardless of their economic standing and prospects for the future. Since then, this social group leaves on the edge of society, in most deprived areas of Poland. Very low levels of social mobility lead to the situation of thousands of young Poles growing in the shadow of devastated farms, with unemployment levels exceeding 30 percent in those rural areas. Without any kind of structural support which has been offered at least to some extent to the workers from other sectors of economy which also undergone the rapid restructuring of industry. The only benefit they were provided with was possibility to buy out flats or houses belonging formerly to the farms. This act of charity caused even worse effects for the unemployed limiting their spatial mobility. They were unwilling to sell the only possession, they had and take the risk of starting the life again somewhere else, instead getting "chained" to their local,

more and more deprived communities. The common knowledge after almost two decades, frequently repeated in media and public debate refers to the collapse of the former state farms caused by the economic ineffectiveness, missing the real story behind the process (Kowalik 2009).

Buchowski also elaborates on Sztompka's concept of "civilizational competence" drawing the picture of the derogatory terms by which the victims of transformation not only agricultural, but also industrial workers are described. They are not only incompetent, lacking social skills. It is also their moral weakness that makes them a burden for the society. They represent specific combination of characteristics. Unproductive passivity is linked with insolent demanding attitude. Voluntarily learned helplessness is connected with immoral resourcefulness while using loopholes in the social assistance schemes to get advantage of the state. As Buchowski summarizes: "they are not people with problems but are themselves the problem" (p. 468). So the sufferings and deprivation of the significant share of Polish society were not caused by the structural factors, namely rapid deindustrialization which occurred in considerably shorter time than in the Western Europe. It is caused by the specific state of minds and souls.

This kind of diagnosis formulated by distinguished scholars in academic works, replicated thousands times in media, infiltrate general attitudes of the public which becomes saturated with certain clichés, useful and easy to handle, offering not only justifications for state of the affairs in the society, but also providing self-confidence and satisfaction for those belonging to the better off part of the society. Not only mass-media, but also academic handbooks, among them the most popular Polish sociology handbook (Sztompka 2003), contain these kinds of accounts, often hidden behind the façade of objective and axiologically neutral, scientific reflections. This also provides sufficient ground and consensus among those in power, legitimizing welfare retrenchment and further liberalization of economy in the name of minimizing state's expenditure for the undeserving strata of the society. The position of those at the top is well-deserved, as they are fulfilling most of the meritocratic criteria which are not met by undeserving *Homo Sovietici*.

Another fundamental critique comes from Zsuzsa Ferge. She points at strictly value-laden and highly normative premises of the *Homo Sovieticus* as a key-term in describing insufficient moral and civilizational competence of certain share of East-European societies. The authoress notices that primitive egalitarianism, demanding attitude towards the state or learned helplessness of those relying of the state support are typical arguments frequently used by the critics of welfare state in plenty countries. Even leaving aside the argument that these are commonly accepted and treated as ideologically indifferent universal truths in Eastern Europe and not just the voices in the pluralist and public debates; it must be noted that the basis for such assumptions have very weak empirical roots. Firm statements about the lack of self-reliance caused by communism ignore historical evidence, also the facts that socio-psychological characteristics of the large social groups result from the existence of historical heritage that is not limited just to the several decades of the Soviet dominance. Ferge claims that from the point of view of modern welfare state academic analysis, "the socialist paternalist state is a legend" and "even after several decades of state socialism, the 'communist' social protection system never approached Western standards" (Ferge 2008, p. 144). During the "golden age of welfare state" which lasted for several post-war decades the level and quality of social protection available to labour force in Western states, as well as in USA was incomparable to the situation in the East, regardless of the policy of full employment and official declarations regarding the eradication of poverty. The economy of permanent shortage to use concept of another distinguished Hungarian scholar János Kornai was not covering the needs of families and individuals in any way that could be compared to the standard of living accessible to workers in Western countries. The fact which is acknowledged by many economists while criticizing inefficiency of centrally planned economy is purposely omitted while pointing at generous and paternalistic socialist welfare state which made peoples helpless, passive and demanding. Thus, the main arguments regarding reasons for the development of specific East-European mentality under the socialism does not comply with well-known features of the every-day life during these period. Ferge notices:

Learned helplessness seems to be a convenient myth and prolonged infantilism a malevolent one. People had to have many skills to organize everyday life under conditions of a shortage economy, and to do it on a shoestring. Moreover, people had to cope with countless problems on their own because welfare system was defective and rigid. (...) They had to cope on their own without public help, social work, market solutions, or supportive civil organizations (Ferge 2008, 145).

As Ferge proves on the base of numerous comparative pan-European surveys, egalitarian attitudes and assumptions about the role of the state presented by Eastern Europeans do not vary substantially from those presented by Westerners, growing and leaving in the healthy environments of capitalist states⁷.

Plenty of statements legitimizing the growth of inequalities and pauperization of some segments of the society could be found in a book containing dialogue of two distinguished scholars, Piotr Sztompka and Andrzej K. Koźmiński, professor of management, founder and owner of the best private university in Poland. The book is titled: "Dialogue about the great transition". Koźmiński identifies the most important shortcomings of the mentality of Poles in a following way:

We would like to have the state which takes care of us, but also which could be tricked by us. Half of the disability benefits are wangled, for bribes. Only that nobody knows which half it is. The same was with sick-leaves, probably half of them was wangled. Today people do not take sick-leaves so easily, cause they are afraid or getting sacked. But cheating is still commonly accepted. (...) Is it so that only hard conditions of the free market and rigorous control can change this state of mind? It is no surprise that people are against them. The most grotesque are those protests and blockades of taxi drivers against the law forcing them to install cash registers in cars. They are simply defend they right to commit swindles. (Koźmiński, Sztompka 2003: 44).

⁶ One may say that taking Sztompka's perspective all European employees defending their labour and welfare rights present features of *Homo Sovieticus* syndrome. It could be even historically proved that the virus of communist ideology has something to do with that, when we take into account statements of such diverse thinkers as Samir Amin and Peter Sloterdijk. They both admitted that it was threat of diffusing communist ideas in Western Europe that motivated policy makers on the capitalist side of iron curtain to adopt generous Keynesian-style welfare policies during the post-war period (Amin 2004, Sloterdijk 2009).

These words are to large extent self-explanatory. It is hard to interpret the intention behind in other way then as a explanation of failures of Polish economy through the mental characteristics of individuals justifying the need of strong control over labour force. No empirical justification has been ever provided for that kind of accusations towards the benefit recipients, still this kind of argumentation frequently repeated is common in the public discourse in Poland. The issue of "grotesque" taxi drivers' protests is also left here without a contextualization. And they were protesting also against unequal treatment by the newly introduced legislation. They were made to install cash registers to prevent them from swindles concerning avoidance of paying Value Added Tax. Accordingly to the same regulation, services provided by the members of newly established middle class were exempted from this kind of regulation after the successful (and not "grotesque") lobbying in parliament. Private legal chambers or clinics do not have to fulfil that kind of obligations, which was considered by the protesters as being against the rule of equality before the law. On the other hand, it is in accordance with the presumption that civilizationally competent and well educated individuals are immune against the *Homo Sovieticus* syndrome which makes people act immorally.

This kind of assumptions bring to mind the famous statement of the Montagu Collet Norman, the director of the Bank of England during the interwar period recalled also by Buchowski in above mentioned article. Drawing on Polish competence in the economic affairs Norman stated: "it is the misfortune of Poland that she is populated by the Poles" (Buchowski 2006, p. 479; after: Pease 1986, p. 55). It seems that at least part of Polish intellectuals share that opinion. However, the misfortune refers here only to the certain strata of the society which is in consequence experiencing a kind of secondary victimization. People at the bottom of the social ladder are not labelled as the group which paid the highest price for the changes and the success of those at the top. They are rather stigmatized as those who caused deficits of Polish democracy and turbulences in economy. The current economic problems are their fault and the success was achieved in spite of them. And it would have been more impressive if not their destructive impact on the shape of transition.

The poor under attack – notes from the fieldwork

The reflection or result of this kind of discourse was observed by sociologists from the University of Łódź, who within the years 2004-2007 realized international comparative project called Policy Responses Overcoming Factors in the Intergenerational Transmission of Inequalities (PROFIT, for published results referring to this article's theme see: Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2006, 2007; Woźniak 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2010)⁸. The main research topic was the issue of intergenerational transmission of inequalities and potential policy impact on this process. Various groups of professionals who could contribute to the policy-making and policy-realization were approached by the researchers. The interviews have been conducted with members of the parliament working in the Committee for Social Affairs, representatives of local level of public administration, local councilors, managers from welfare services institutions, voluntary workers from NGOs, as well as so called frontliners – social workers, probation officers, teachers - those who in their every day job work with people affected by poverty, unemployment and various resulting social deficits.

It can be assumed that politicians, although representing different political orientations, are (especially those who operate just on the national level, not having connections to the debates in European parliament or without experience in supranational bodies) immersed in discourse which is dominant in given country and legitimized by specific values and norms, and tended to concentrate on the state level while talking about social policy. This concept with the slight modification moving the reference point from the poverty to the social inequalities could be applied to the inquiry over the political elites conducted in frame of the PROFIT project. This is not the substantial change in meaning, as from PROFIT empirical data it is evident that while speaking about social inequalities, most respondents tend to concentrate on people economically disadvantaged. However, in the short sketch of findings presented in the latter part of this paper only some brief conclusions coming from the research are presented.

⁸ PROFIT (*Policy Responses Overcoming Factors In the Intergenerational Inheritance of Inequalities, CIT2-CT-2004-506245*) was an international research financed under the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission realized in eight European countries and coordinated by the University of Lodz. More information at: <http://www.profit.uni.lodz.pl/>.

The semantic strategies mentioned above and phraseology which addresses poor people and their problems are reflected numerous times in the transcripts of interviews. The specific language code used when talking about welfare recipients is undoubtedly at least to some extent, outcome of the way these issues are addressed in public debate. The most of semantic constructs repeatedly found in the statements of respondents talking on the poor were: passivity, lack of productivity, lack of skills indispensable to accommodate in a new social conditions, demanding attitude, learned helplessness, welfare dependency, pathology and demoralization, anti-social behaviour, immoral resourcefulness. Many respondents perceived the reasons behind the economic situation of the welfare recipients as resulting from individual, psychological and moral characteristics and not in structural terms. It refers also to the employees of social services who themselves, due to the low wages, belong to the group of working poor. The issues referring to state's responsibility for their fate, structural conditions were rarely addressed and the "blame the victim" strategy was without doubt visible. And the arguments from public debate were easily recognizable. The children affected by poverty, as they could not be blamed for their fate constitute the only group of deserving poor, apart from disabled people. At the same time they were perceived as endangered by infection with the social diseases experienced by the parents which made them replicate all their negative features. In some cases even the determinist reasoning could be found referring to the inborn and unavoidable transmission of some type of *Homo Sovieticus* gene. Economic and cultural processes occurring in Poland in the past two decades were usually presented as the motivation factors enhancing activity and entrepreneurship of the "healthy" part of the society, creating opportunities and conditions for the prosperous life for all. Accordingly to this way of thinking, it was individual characteristics and deficits that did not allow to realize the "Polish Dream", regardless of structural circumstances. This kind of attitude towards the members of the lower strata is connected with the stigmatization processes occurring in media and – at least to some extent – justified and legitimized by social scientists. None of the respondents from nor from the central, neither local level of government ever mentioned the issue of civic rights which are guaranteed to all citizens by the constitution. All

expenditures for the purposes of supporting poor were treated rather as a form of charity.

If it comes to the discourse about children and Poland it must be also noted that very rarely child is treated in Poland as the separate subject in the society. For many reasons, among them dominance of the conservative ideology and influences of Roman-Catholic church, children are perceived in the public debate most frequently only within their families. And all potential actions for their purpose are seen as valuable and acceptable only when they are aimed at them via family. This is one of the example of the ambiguous role of the Polish Roman-Catholic church, which on one hand claim to be a biggest defender of the “innocent and defenceless” children, especially via strict objection towards abortion, in vitro and contraceptives, on the other hand criticizing any actions which could enhance subjectivity of the child.

The idea of realization of coherent cohesive social policy has been hampered also by strictly political reasons. Respondents from each part of the political scene acknowledged that children, young people and large families are among the groups mostly endangered by the poverty and inequality reproduction. However, as openly stated one of the MPs participating in the research:

And certainly children and youth are groups which are pushed out from the public discourse. When we speak about political criterions. The fact that half of the population below the age of 19 lives below the poverty line, could not get to the politicians' consciousness. They are not aware that this group, due to all studies and researches are mostly endangered by poverty and special actions aimed on equalizing their life opportunities shall be introduced. (...) All these factors are absent from political decision and I assume that it is so because of political reasons. Children and youth simply do not vote.

Not only children do not vote, but also their parents living in deprived areas of Poland rarely made it to the ballot-box contributing to the lowest voter turnout in European Union. On the other hand, the most disciplined group of voters is formed by the elder generations mainly pensioners. Hence, most of actions in a field of social

policy, as well as the messages during electoral campaign were aimed at this age cohort, even though as data from EU-SILC shows in 2006 the probability of falling below the line of relative poverty was more than three times lower for people aging 65 and more (8 percent) in comparison to the age cohort 0-17 years (26 percent). Accordingly to data from Eurostat in 2006 exactly 7 percent of retired population was at risk of poverty, compared to 45 percent of unemployed and 18 percent of those in employment.

Political swings, ideological chaos

What needs to be underlined is the fact that all political parties in Poland were quite unanimous in supporting the way of thinking about transformation and social policy as sketched above. However, substantial changes were seen when taking into account political declarations before the elections.

During the realizations of the PROFIT project researchers faced opinions varying from the strictly neoliberal declarations supported by the Civic Platform the party which is ruling in Poland since 2007 (the interviews were carried out in the mid-2005). MPs from this party shared the views that: *the state should just not disturb. The state should stand back, especially from the economic field. Only liberalization of economy and the labour code can lead to the economic growth, which is the only panacea for unemployment and poverty.*

One of the interviewees elaborated on the features of socialist times inherited by Polish economy and minds:

Socialist economy, or the propaganda practice from the times of real socialism was characterised by the fact that everyone believed that enterprises were for people to work there. Enterprises are for producing things that are useful and the fact that people work there is a sort of side-effect. I believe that the next generations, starting from the sense of competition at schools – for example external examinations serve this purpose and lots of other things – they will somehow understand that enterprises are not for them to work there, instead they are to produce something and they and people must adjust to this. Such is the

psychological difference between the market economy and this real socialism. And the whole generation which is still coming out of real socialism are not able to understand this.

He also claimed the inequalities are inevitable:

Disproportions are everywhere, I oppose the thesis that everybody's got equal stomach – one is rich, another one is poor, one is better educated, another one - worse and these people must have different conditions! But the citizen should be the subject, a consumer - subject.

The representatives of Democratic Left Alliance, the post-communist party ruling within the years 2001 and 2005 presented specific meaning of the role of labour unions as for the party self-defining with the "left": *(...) labour unions shall be thrown away from the private companies and from the public employers as well. They should not be operating in schools for instance. They shall not receive any kind of support from the state, nor from the entrepreneurs.*

Democratic Left Alliance while in office was continuing implementation of pro-market economy and fiscal policy during their term, contributing to the above mentioned liberalization of the labour code. During the electoral campaign they officially declared that their biggest success in home policy was introduction of flat rate taxation for companies reducing the rate from 28 to 19 percent (in foreign policy it was accession to the European Union). The former Prime Minister from this party claimed also that the biggest failure concerns the fact that his cabinet did not manage to introduce flat rate taxation on personal income (Personal Income Tax).

The most coherent visions in favour of the social justice were formulated by the members of Law and Justice, party ruled by Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, twin brothers. One of the other leaders of this party while asked about inequality reproduction and state's responsibility by the sociologist from Lodz University answered:

Inequality inheritance is like a vicious circle. It is a chain of impossibilities. To break free from it one must do it alone or with the help of somebody else. This may be the state, some external organization. There is a kind of outstanding individuals who are lucky, but it is a cultural phenomenon of

some sort, a social phenomenon, that the state must notice the problem, intervene, direct some (...), it must take pliers and cut that chain, it must help these people out.

He stated also that the dominance of neoliberal ideas supported also by the post-communist was to blame for the state of affairs:

(...) unfortunately the position of the labour unions is very weak in Poland, they aren't a strong partner among these three. Enterprisers are perfectly organized, they have confederations, they have money, they have opinions, they have something to show, logistic infrastructure, and unions are fading, which is dramatic. There is a state, a strong state, strange as it may seem, there are unions and there are employers, but the third element, the social one is weak, just on its 15th year anniversary, 25 years after the Solidarity. And such is the reality. (...) And the social policy goes through all sort of twists and turns and though we have a leftist government, the policy is ultra or definitely liberal, antisocial, anti-human, a real comedy.

The left-right axis of political conflict has been replaced in the year 2005 by the argument between "Solidarity Poland" represented by Law and Justice declaring themselves as the protectors of ordinary people and victims of transformation against "the liberal Poland" of Civic Platform whose leaders officially appealed to the better off part of population envisaging the need for further pro-market reforms. Law and Justice came to the rule winning the election in the late 2005. Their triumph was doubled with the win of Lech Kaczyński in presidential race. Kaczyński himself member of the Solidarity movement imprisoned by the communists in the 1980s was once the specialist on the labour law defining himself as a conservative politician with socialist views on the economy. Though, after winning the election the party of Kaczyński brothers nominated for the position of prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz who during his first interview in the office when inquired about the social model that inspires his most declared: *I was most impressed by London. And what was achieved in Great Britain thanks to Margaret Thatcher.* When journalist asked about the intellectuals whom are most respected by him, he mentioned two names: Francis Fukuyama and Milton Friedman. After this kind of declaration it was

not surprising that among the most important decisions of Law and Justice government in a field of economy were: abolishment of inheritance tax regardless of the assets of the deceased, decreasing of personal income taxation in favour of those at the top (two rates: 18% and 32% instead of three: 19%, 30% and 40%) and reduction of the social insurance contribution both for the employer and employees.

Summary

It can be stated that the winners of transformation, those who succeeded thanks to their educational attainment and professional status became very active in defending meritocratic way of stratifying society. Meritocracy is another example of the word which has changed its meaning overtime. Bitter assumptions of this kind could be found in the recent works of Michael Young who has coined this term half an age ago in his dystopian novel "Rise of Meritocracy" (1958). Maybe quite unanimous support for the chosen path of transition and acceptance for the growing inequalities could be to some extent explained via statements of Young:

In the new social environment, the rich and the powerful have been doing mighty well for themselves. They have been freed from the old kinds of criticism from people who had to be listened to. (...) If meritocrats believe, as more and more of them are encouraged to, that their advancement comes from their own merits, they can feel they deserve whatever they can get. They can be insufferably smug, much more so than the people who knew they had achieved advancement not on their own merit but because they were, as somebody's son or daughter, the beneficiaries of nepotism. The newcomers can actually believe they have morality on their side (Young 2001).

It seems that the topic of social policy has vanished from the public sphere in Poland at least partially, because new elites, policy-makers, media and intellectuals who sets up the agenda defined it as meaningless. Among the reasons of the state of affairs which has been descriptively presented above one can notice substantial weakness of public media which are involved in political conflict being treated as another

political institution dominated by the ruling party. Private media, on the other hand, mainly belonging to foreign corporations represent usually strictly pro-market way of thinking promoting and supporting solutions beneficial for business lobbies. The role of intellectual and academic circles in sustaining consensus over what is and what is not important topic on the agenda should not be forgotten as well. In all these respects the assumptions are close to those formulated by Gans in his book which title has been "borrowed" to use in the title of this paper (1995). It seems that the public debate in Poland has to large extent mimicked what has happened in the United States during the triumphant years of neoconservative. It could be observed also in other fields of public debate which are outside the frames of this study, like penal policy, foreign policy regarding war on terror, prioritizing spending on the military sector and others.

Michael Burawoy in one of his recent articles appeals to social scientists for the comprehensive, empirically based and partially introspective social critique:

Sociologists must come out of the shells, the shells into which they retreated when market euphoria was raging around them. They must fight for a countermovement that foregrounds society rather than installing a despotic state or appealing to a market utopia. There is no shortage of examples to inspire us. Sociologists have already been deeply involved in struggles over the privatization of land, e.g. the Special Economic Zones in India, over water privatization, e.g. in South Africa, or the destruction of squatter settlements, e.g. over the rural land expropriations in Brazil (Burawoy 2009: 198).

Burawoy's address is aimed mainly at the sociologists from transforming countries, those coming out from oppressive regimes. From the sketch I have been trying to drawn in this article, one can see that the social scientists in such a circumstances could "come out of the shells", or leave the academia's ivory towers also for other reasons than to critically evaluate the transforming reality. Or rather evaluating it with other tools and approach, and with different motives than those appreciated by American sociologist. Obviously there are scholars in Poland who are involved in researching social problems and generally social critique of the state of affairs and

course of transformation. However, some other prominent representatives of the academic circles seem to perceive the outcome of the transformation for those at the bottom of social ladder as the "somebody else's problem". Few years ago one of the Polish sociologists involved in studying social consequences of transition while presenting results of research on diaries documenting the dramatic situation and life strategies of poor and unemployed was accused of doing "lamenting sociology" by another distinguished professor of sociology (Rek 2007, 366). It seems that the choice whether to lament, or to enthusiastically praise the new order is still topical in Polish social science.

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