

Towards Comparative History of Eastern Europe and Latin America (20th Century).

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History is a science of critical comparisons. Comparisons are a constituent part of any measurements and consequently of description, analysis and synthesis. After all, any measurement is the outcome of comparing the value being measured to a unit of measurement, which is simply a criterion of measurement while any synthesis or analysis is only possible on the basis of the adoption of definite conceptual criteria. A comparison as such is of a critical nature. Without criteria there can be no measurement, no analysis, no synthesis and, consequently there can be no history.

As a science of comparisons, history is unchangeable. However, the criteria of comparisons are by no means constant. Criteria are discovered and set by man and so they change when man changes, when one generation replaces another. A book written by a historian does convey a picture of social life but it is as much a description of the period in question as a testimony of the times in which the criteria used by that historian for painting the picture of the given epoch were formulated. In other words, I may analyze a document produced a hundred years ago but my criteria are also a product of the current intellectual effort and current social conditions. For this reason, history cannot be construed as past juxtaposed to present. The present does not arouse any objections in grammar only. In history, the present in the popular sense is part of the past whose border is moving all the time. History is the past of the future, not of the present, while historical sciences are a form of collective memory, indispensable for the existence of every social group. Each generation rewrites history from scratch, adding its contribution to the state of knowledge it inherited and perfecting collective memory with help of increasingly refined criteria.

Therefore any involvement in historic studies amounts to measuring, not only in the case of using quantitative methods. Any measuring means comparing. Admittedly, a historian may be unaware that he is making comparisons but he is making them all the same. Undoubtedly, the taking up of a subject whose essence is comparison itself forces us to reflect on the sense and methodology of the intended comparison.

Let me begin by stating that the comparing of two regions has only the appearances of a direct comparison. Let us look at one example. The studies of parliament in Eastern Europe and Latin America of the 1950s must take into account the methodological directive to the effect that institutions of two countries may only be compared on the condition that the specific functions of these institutions inside the system in which each of them operates are taken into consideration. The more the countries differ, the more important this methodological directive becomes. In order to compare the Polish parliament with the parliament of Chile in the 1950s, it is absolutely necessary to take into account the specific role of the parliament in each country and only then compare the two institutions concerned.

When we then proceed to make a direct comparison between the two parliaments, then their specific functions will have to be compared to those of other parliaments known from history and this is when the problem of the relationship between domestic tradition and borrowed patterns will crop up. It will only be natural to examine at least the British, French and North American patterns.

And, as we have to take into account the systems in which the said parliaments operate and as we must move outside the regions of Eastern Europe and Latin America to compare them to external patterns, inevitably the question arises about the general point of reference of all comparisons, about the broadest possible set of criteria of the comparative technique. And this inevitably brings us to the notion of the international system, the notion of the set of systems and finally the notion of the world system.

The discussion over the world system has only been under way for a short time and nothing has been firmly accepted so far. As I am taking up that subject today, I do not feel bound by any conception of the world system although I can see interesting aspects in each of them. We will have to put in a lot more work before we arrive at a satisfactory conception of such a system.

At the present stage of our studies, we might do with a hypothetical but also schematic preliminary vision of that system as a structure encompassing information flow and physical flows, interconnected on a global scale, including special varieties of such flows (*e.g.*, migrations of people).

The structure of that system is a dynamic one and the situation of its individual elements depends on the differences in terms of innovative competence and economic growth. If the element of the world system we are watching happens to be a country, its situation in the world system will depend on the long-term innovative competence and economic growth that is characteristic of it. At the centre of the world system are those countries and supra-national institutions which display the highest degree of innovative competence and the fastest pace of economic growth measured in the long term. The centre is not perpetual with regard to its composition and, consequently,

its geographic range, and it also has its own internal hierarchy of the component states and supranational institutions, whereas the states themselves are characterized by a special type of social relations.

One important element of the world system are the ties between the centre and the remaining elements of the system, the ties between the centre and the peripheries (near and distant ones). The ties between the centre and the peripheries ensure the operation of the whole pattern of the aforementioned information and physical flows that constitute the world system. At the same time, those ties are responsible for the fact that these flows assume a specific shape. The relations shaped in this way put the centre in a dominant position *vis-à-vis* the peripheries and the peripheries in a position of dependence on the centre. However, the point is not just any domination and dependence but a domination and dependence of a structural nature, where the type of social development prevailing in the centre determines to some extent social development in the peripheries. In other words, while the development of a peripheral society is to some extent an outcome of endogenous processes, it is also affected by exogenous factors (the impulses coming from the centre are the most important here although they are not necessarily the only ones). In this sense, the society of a peripheral country is a dependent society. And I strongly emphasize the structural nature of this dependence and domination. I reject any vulgarization in the understanding of this domination and dependence. Obviously, this is not to say that the dependence shall not manifest itself in a direct way in, say, commercial relations. However, it seems especially important to me to identify the domination and dependence of a structural nature.

The domination of the centre and the dependence of the peripheries can also be manifested by the materialization of the exogenous factor inside the dependent society (a classical example is that of social groups in a peripheral country tied to foreign investment capital). The ratio of endogenous factors to exogenous ones makes it possible to determine the kind of dependence and in this way defines the identity of a given peripheral society, its state, culture, *etc.* However, this ratio is also tied to the position of a given peripheral society in the world system and is therefore a regulator of the aforementioned information and physical flows and, consequently, a factor determining innovative competence and economic growth.

If the domination-dependence junction functions as a regulator of flows within the system and a factor determining innovative competence and economic growth, then any striving to boost that competence and that growth must consist in the maximization of the position of the given country in the world system through efforts to obtain the most favourable shape of that junction of domination and dependence.

One thing that hinders discussions on the junction of domination and depend-

ence is the tendency to vulgarize the phenomena of domination and dependence, *e.g.*, by perceiving the problem solely in terms of exploitation by big capital, the Americanization of culture, *etc.* This vulgarization used to evoke an equally vulgar response on the part of the critics and has contributed to the fact that many students reject *a priori* any conceptualization in which the notions of peripheries and dependence occur. Such an attitude deserves to be criticized as strongly as those who vulgarize these phenomena in the first place. But if one looks at the question of structural dependence without prejudice, he may find a research tool in it rather than some propaganda instrument.

The maximization of the situation of a given country in the world system does not consist in— to put it in the simplest way possible— eliminating the exogenous factors wherever possible and boosting the presence of endogenous ones. Such an approach would be a sign of primitive nationalism rather than a development programme. As I have mentioned before, the maximization of one's position in the world system consists in forming the domination-dependence junction in such a way as to ensure that the level and nature of information and physical flows guarantees the desired innovative competence and economic growth. However, as the impulses flowing from the centre to the peripheral society are a derivative of the definite type of social relations in the centre and as the maximization of one's position inside the system consists in the striving to obtain a favourable pattern of relations between the peripheral country and the centre, it is obvious that this implies some degree of copying of the social relations prevailing in the centre in the peripheral country concerned. In other words, dependence and independence is not the dichotomy of good and evil, of advantage and disadvantage. Without a certain degree of dependence, it would not be possible to borrow the patterns which had evolved in the centre and that borrowing is inevitable if a peripheral country wants to create a kind of social relations that will guarantee higher innovative competence and faster economic, to a level closer to that characteristic of the centre.

This brings us to a problem which was the subject of a very heated debate at one time and which has not been satisfactorily resolved to this day. It is a problem which right from the start was not only of a cognitive but also an ideological nature and for this reason it offered so much resistance. I am referring to modernization. After all, it was the authors of the so-called modernization theory who had once advanced the problem of the ratio of endogenous factors to exogenous ones and had formulated it as the juxtaposition of a traditional society to a modern society. With inevitable oversimplification, I would say that the general theory of modernization maintains that social change transforms a traditional society into a modern one and

that, owing to evolution and social diffusion, this is the destiny of all mankind.

The so-called modernization theory met with criticism. I used to reject it myself on the grounds that it was ahistorical. There is no room for examining that criticism here. Nevertheless, it is hard not to notice that, for all the criticism, the conception of modernization has survived at the level of popular consciousness.

What is more, the conception of modernization has also survived as a methodological tool of many students. Modernized versions of modernization theory have also appeared. The most important attempt to remove theoretical difficulties consists in a departure from the totalising determinism of social change concept. The proponents of the conception of selective occurrence of social change, assuming a synthesis of the new and the old, weaken the ethnocentrism of that model and in this way open new horizons for cultural plurality and even question the linear nature of development along with its ideological implication (the derivatives of the borrowing of the pattern of highly industrialized countries).

I would, however, see the attractiveness of the conception of modernization first of all in the very origins of the word "modernization." The etymology of the term has induced me to search for a relationship between the notion of modernization and the notion of innovation. By the latter I understand—the way Rogers does—any idea perceived by an individual as a new one. The notion of innovation would be the connecting element between the conception of the world system in the understanding outlined at the outset and a redefined notion of modernization, defined in such a way as to please a historian, *i.e.*, in relation to historical processes.

Let modernization be a teleologically oriented social process of creating (also borrowing) and implementing innovative ideas. Given such a definition of the notion of modernization, the maximization of its position in the world system by a peripheral society will consist in modernization in conditions of economic growth. Naturally, the introduction of the notion of modernization did not at all improve the ease of using the aforementioned criterion of a country's position in the world system (innovative competence and economic growth), yet the adaptation of the term "modernization" may facilitate communication between researchers and politicians and the public, which is not irrelevant to the popularization of the results of scientific studies. What is more, provided one bears in mind the risks of eclecticism, this might make it easier to use a part of the findings accumulated in studies conceptualized with the help of the so-called modernization theory, especially studies dealing with Latin America.

Let us now consider the external environment of the world system from the point of view of Latin America and Eastern Europe. There are at least three

issues worth examining here: 1) the road to the world system or the integration of the said regions with the world system, 2) disintegration or exit from the world system, 3) reintegration with the system of the countries which at one time had stepped outside it. The point is to see whether the study of these aspects of the world system can facilitate the comparison between the two regions or make it at all feasible.

Let us first look at the process of joining the world system. We shall notice that Eastern Europe and Latin America (originally called Iberian America, but for the sake of uniformity of terminology I will use the 19th century term "Latin America") joined the world system as regions already tied to broader international systems. Eastern Europe formed final ties with Europe as a whole already between the 13th and 16th century; simultaneously, already in the 13th—15th century is gained the status of a region supplying Western Europe with raw materials, including metals while the West was the source of ready-made artisans' products (including luxury goods) and of capital as well as people who have mastered new skills. Regional specialization was born then and it only got stronger in the following centuries as a result of huge Western demand for East European grain, timber and hemp. Later still, in the 17th century, the nascent West European capitalism weakened and ultimately altered the peasant's feudal bondage, generating free hired labour for industry and services. Meanwhile, feudal relations continued to develop in Eastern Europe, leading to the formation of the grange with villeins. The development paths of the West and the East parted even more then but economic ties grew stronger and became a factor in the West's domination, a domination in the sense defined above, *i.e.*, consisting in the type of development in one region influencing the type of development in another region. By contrast, Latin America was first incorporated in the international colonial systems and only in the 19th century, already as a collection of states, formed economic ties with the big powers, especially with Great Britain but also with the western part of continental Europe. Latin America's ties with Western Europe and the United States in the beginning of the 20th century resembled the pattern of relations between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

A study of both approaches to the world system should enrich our knowledge of each of the two regions and could contribute to better understanding of the fate of the remaining great regions of the world. The questions that should be asked are self-evident and some have already been asked. I have no doubt that these problems will find their due place in future comparative studies.

Let us now stop for a while at the problem of the disintegration of the system. With Eastern Europe, the case looks fairly simple and embraces the period beginning in 1917 and gaining in intensity in the latter half of the

1940s. As we compare the fate of both regions and the behaviour of the states at the centre of the system in the 20th century, we may ask about the mechanism of stepping outside the world system when the external factors predominate (*e.g.*, Poland in the late 1940s) and when domestic ones gain the upper hand (*e.g.*, Chile in the early 1970s). The case of Cuba looks very interesting in the context of the impact of external factors; in the early phase, it is certainly closer to the Chilean than to the Polish experience. The comparison of Poland and Mexico and their relations to a domineering neighbouring big power also merits an in-depth study.

This brings us to the broad question whether the countries of state socialism have created an alternative system *vis-à-vis* the world system. In other words, the question is what requirements an international system must meet in order to be transformed into a world system. Is it possible for more than one world system to exist at the same time? Contrary to appearances, such questions are directly related to comparative studies into our regions because the aforementioned and extremely important problem of maximization of its position inside the world system by a peripheral country can be presented as the following dilemma: should a country improve its position in the world system in order to obtain a higher degree of innovative competence and faster economic growth or should it seek to improve both indicators outside the system by building an alternative system?

What is happening in Eastern Europe at present can be defined as the process of reintegration with the world system. First, however, it is necessary to establish the degree of separation of both system, *i.e.*, the world system and the state socialism countries. The case of Poland could suggest that this separation was of a relative nature. Obviously, there used to be huge differences in this respect between individual East European countries. So the question is what combination of factors tying one and the same country to the world system and ones that isolate it from that system is "responsible" for a definite level of innovative competence and the rate of economic growth? This problem is important not only for East European nations and the answer to this question should be of interest not only to researchers but to politicians as well.

In the context of the reintegration process, the question arises: what consequences the reintegration process is likely to have for the country concerned and for the system with which the country is reintegrating.

At this point, the problem of the so-called third road appears. In Eastern Europe, it is an especially topical problem even though it first appeared much earlier. The same problem also appeared in Latin America. In Eastern Europe, it is being discussed especially in East Germany, Bulgaria and Rumania. In Latin America, it appeared with the emergence of Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, the Socialist Republic of Chile of 1932, or the

Argentinian "Tercera Posición" of the late 1940s. It would also be interesting to compare these conceptions from the angle of the model of society they advocate and also their origin. The post-state socialism vision of the so-called third road and the conceptions of a "third road" formulated in peripheral countries outside Europe may be convergent in the cases when the "third road" outside Europe consists in the adoption of the so-called socialist orientation but it is not clear whether the differences will be smaller in this case than in the case of comparing the East European conceptions with the anti-Communist "*tercera posición*" from the early months of Peron's rule. A multidisciplinary approach might prove especially fruitful here.

I have only outlined several general problems. Naturally, there are very many questions. At this conference, we shall certainly come across proposals for other comparative methodologies and in fact the very idea of comparisons will be questioned in one of the papers. I propose a historical approach as the broadest platform for the integration of multidisciplinary studies into man and society and I propose the conception of the world system as the broadest platform integrating the existence of the societies we are comparing.

When I launched this research project four years ago, I hoped that the first conference would initiate cooperation between scholars from various fields of study and various methodological orientations from many countries. The point today is not so much to provide answers as to formulate questions. I hope to provide inspiration for various fragmentary studies and I have grounds to believe that our conference will be followed by other meetings of this kind, both in Poland and abroad.