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Specificity of Narration and Explanation in Polish Political Science

Abstract: The article presents the specificity of understanding and using the category of narration and explanation in Polish political science after 1989. At the beginning, the author briefly recalls the meaning of the concept of narrative, and then presents two dimensions of its presence in domestic political science. On the one hand he elaborates on its conceptualization within the methodology of political science, and on the other hand he discusses the two main political science narratives he has distinguished, which, in his opinion, were born in Poland after 1989. Both narratives (liberal and critical) offer their own interpretations of the political and social transformation of post-communist Poland. The author of the article also argues that the liberal narrative is supplanted by the critical one, which applying among other things, the concept of integral explanation seems to explain the troubled and crisis-ridden present times more suggestively.

Keywords: narration, liberalism, critical political science, integral explanation

In this article, I reflect on the meaning and role of two conceptual categories for Polish political scientists: narration and explanation. I primarily ask here: What is the nature of these on the ground of domestic political science? I divide my statement into four parts. In the first, I briefly – as a reminder – define the concepts of narration so that in the next two I can show its functioning in the works of Polish political scientists. In the fourth, I present the most interesting and perhaps most useful concept of integral explanation.

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Detotalisation of social sciences and the birth of narration

Over the past few decades, the narration approach has become popular among political scientists (more broadly: representatives of social sciences and humanities). This increase in popularity was a derivative of the numerous “turns”, re-evaluations and successive theoretical and methodological reorientations that, starting in the second half of the 20th century, have taken place (and are still taking place) on the ground of these sciences. Such discussions on meta-scientific issues, which Jan P. Hudzik generally refers to as “storms and tensions”, have led to the consolidation among social reality researchers of the belief that science is a social construct, and thus that “the purpose of scientific theories is not to discover the truth about reality, but to translate it into conventional language” (2011, p. 7). In other words, the Polish author goes on to say, “the twentieth-century theory of science has established that truth is only a discourse², a category of a certain kind of language, an intellectual set of instruments, used to describe the state of agreement of its users with the world of facts they discuss” (2011, p. 8). This kind of statement, clearly and somewhat surprisingly distancing the researcher from the truth – the key, as it might seem, category governing scientific cognition – turns out to be a direct consequence of the obvious observation that science is an ambiguous concept. Therefore, it is distinguished by a variety of research methodologies, theories and languages and conceptual vocabularies, and in the face of this kind of diversity, it appears naïve to still believe in the veracity of facts that can be discovered and presented to the world.

The implications of such findings for researchers of socio-political reality are fundamental. Also, scientific truth/theory turns out to be a product of a given time, place, historical and political circumstances. As such, it turns out to be inextricably coupled with social practice, which, itself the object of the theorist’s reflection, clearly influences his actions (Taylor, 1985a; 1985b) – both theory and social practice seem to be immersed in the *social imaginery* (Taylor, 2007; 2010, pp. 159–211).

Thus, if the fact that a scientific theory is entangled in socio-political contexts invalidates its claims to access the truth about the phenomena it describes, the scientific discussion turns out to be a discussion between narratives – different stories spun by different narrators linked by a common object (e.g., a set of facts, an event, a phenomenon, a social process, etc.). Although “a narrative” was originally a term from the dictionary of literary criticism, after the “narratological turn” that took place over the last few decades of the 20th century (Laska, 2020a, p. 31), it became “a general structure of knowledge or cognitive structure”, “a convenient formula for describing, for example, the processes of identity construction, the dynamics of social phenomena, the history of philosophical ideas

² On this topic of discourse categories see, e.g.: Foucault, 2010, p. 72; Barker, 2005, p. 511; Giddens, 2008, p. 720.

or history in general. Thus, it has become a maximally interdisciplinary concept” (Laska, 2020a, p. 32). The great attractiveness and usefulness of this conceptual category for researchers of the social world lies primarily in the fact that the specificity of narratives, especially their inevitable multiplicity, fits well with the complexity – multidimensionality, inherent pluralism, and dynamic character – of the modern depicted world. The narratives combine scattered data representing fragmented, piecemeal knowledge of reality into definite wholes – causal sequences, relatively rigid cognitive patterns (Laska, 2020a, p. 34).

Narration in Polish political science – A methodological perspective

The phenomenon of narration has not only been recognised by Polish political scientists, but also quite well developed theoretically/methodologically and applied in practice – the question “How much consciously in each case?” I am leaving open. In other words, the presence of narration in domestic political science is twofold. On the one hand, this category has been analysed based on the general methodology of sciences. On the other hand, in the literature on the subject (in the works of Polish political scientists), we also find examples of the construction of scientific statements that display the characteristics of narrative or are part of a particular narrative.

Let’s start with this first thread. The second issue will be described in the next section of this article. Although we find considerations of narration in domestic methodological reflection in political science, they are often (there are exceptions to this rule, of course) limited in nature. For example, in one of the more recent studies (*Metodologia*, 2016) devoted to the main issues in the methodology of political science, prepared by a large team of political theorists, the category of narration was explicitly assigned to press studies reflections; or seen – this is a slightly broader view – as a tool for analysing specific acts of political communication. Text, the basic conceptual category of the social sciences after the cultural turn, which many representatives of these sciences use to capture the specifics of the socio-political reality of the modern world, is here taken literally as a concrete, particular text: a documented utterance, a news item, an individual post on the internet – one media message or another. Thus, what we have here is an otherwise skilful attempt to apply the conceptual categories and research methods developed by literary theorists to the analysis of phenomena occurring in the sphere of political communication, but nothing more (*Metodologia*, 2016, pp. 185–202).

More complementarily, the category of political narration is treated by Olgierd Cetwiński, who rightly sees the need for a theory of political narration in the chronic inability to develop a “general explanatory theory of politics” (2002,

p. 5). The lack of such a theory, in turn, is due to the peculiarities of the social (political) sciences and their subject matter. Asserting this kind of problem, the Polish political scientist seeks a solution for it. Thus, he says, “political science can hardly be classified as a nomothetic science. Its mainly idiographic nature has led to the fact that it is in the narration that one can try to look for the basic method of explaining political phenomena” (Cetwiński, 2002, p. 7). This is because it is the narration that “is able to combine – in a truly peculiar way – descriptive elements of science with both explanatory and evaluative elements” (Cetwiński, 2002, p. 7). And yet it is impossible to imagine a scientific reflection on the political sphere that would, by some miracle, be free of value judgements. The need for narration is also related to the fact that political scientists operate more complex anthropological concepts, taking into account not only the ability of a person to take action, but also paying attention to their motivation – as well as the fact that political scientists (more broadly: representatives of the social sciences) use a whole range of imprecise concepts which simply cannot be avoided in political science (Cetwiński, 2002, pp. 7, 18, 20). The final argument for the theory of political science narration, which the Polish author constructs in the spirit of analytical philosophy, is – for Cetwiński – the fact of the political scientist’s language-mediated contact with the socio-political reality he studies.

Perhaps, the most complete interpretation of the political science narration that we find in the Polish literature on political science methodology is the proposal of Tadeusz Klementewicz, a Warsaw-based political theorist. Klementewicz is not alone in his efforts – his remarks are creatively complemented; first of all by Artur Laska, who, in several minor texts that point to the inevitable narrative nature of political science theories, argues in the spirit of the remarks we can find in Klementewicz’s texts (see: Laska, 2020a, 2020b).

Klementewicz exhaustively presents his methodological reflection on the specificity and status of political narratives – theoretical remarks are laced with numerous examples of specific narratives and their penetrating analysis-deconstruction – especially in the final chapter of *Rozumienie polityki* [Understanding Politics]. At the very beginning of the relevant passages of this work, the Polish author says that “among political science texts, we find all narration structures known to the humanities” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 296). Let us add that Klementewicz distinguishes four main types of political science narratives. These include: system studies, works on recent political history, works in the nature of empirical research reports, and analytical works on the history of political thought. He completes his typology with yet another category – these are “texts with significant social response, presenting a generalising critical reflection on the contemporary political scene” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 299). It is also no coincidence that the methodologist gives this category of political science narrative a slightly different status, rightly emphasising that, in this case, it is primarily about statements of an essayistic nature, which, precisely because of their literary

form and because they are “based on the colloquial observations and perceptions of readers, reveal to them the more profound mechanisms of power and indicate the tendencies for change” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 299). Let us comment right away that the most interesting narration structures in political science seem to be three of those listed by Klementewicz: narratives of recent political history, narratives devoted to the history of political thought (history of ideas), and the critical narratives mentioned at the end of the proposed typology, which aim to uncover hidden mechanisms of power. Additionally, as we shall see in the following section of this text, Klementewicz himself expertly crafts these very narratives, using them to expose the mechanisms of the capitalist market – invisible to the untrained and/or uncritical outsider observer – controlling both the domestic political landscape and global politics.

The structure of the political science narrative, as with the historical narrative, consists of three main layers: informational, rhetorical, and theoretical-ideological (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 300; Topolski, 1996, p. 346). And while it is evident that each of them is necessary for the existence of a particular narrative, it appears that the rhetorical layer best captures its distinctiveness because it serves as the container for the narrative’s intended function. Both the informational and the theoretical-ideological layers are “responsible” for the content of a given story. After all, the relevant data/facts (i.e., “what the author directly communicates to the reader” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 300)) must be given to the recipient in an appropriate manner (i.e., in accordance with logical-grammatical rules – the information layer). At the same time, their selection is not random – it is derived from the theoretical and/or ideological assumptions that the author of the statement makes. It is through the prism of these assumptions that he selects the presented content, choosing it so that it fits into what Mieke Bal refers to as a “plot”, that is, “content or material transformed into a story”, a “sequence of events” (2012, p. 5). The aforementioned selection includes not only the actual selection of particular content that is then presented in the narrative, but also the deliberate concealment and omission of those threads that do not fit into it or disrupt, weaken or distort the message it creates. This is done for theoretical and ideological reasons. This layer then, as Klementewicz emphasises, consists of “many elements that organise our thinking: patterns of thinking and the language of description it implies [...], foundational myths, general and specific knowledge [...] and finally – the researcher’s value system, his ideological perspective” (2010, p. 306).

Both of the aforementioned layers of narrative, therefore, play an important role in political science narratives. Why then does it seem that its most crucial component is the rhetorical layer? First of all, because every narrative aims to persuade the audience that its interpretations of the material it presents are accurate. The persuasive purpose of a given narrative is realised through appropriate logical argumentation, rhetorical argumentation, properly chosen text

composition, as well as references to rhetorical tropes (i.e., metaphors³) (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 302). Rhetorical devices are also intended to “make the text more accessible to the reader” – make the content conveyed in the text more comprehensible (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 303). We should also add that the rhetoric used in the narrative, in addition to persuasion itself, also plays a masking role; it hides the previously indicated author’s arbitrariness, demonstrated primarily in the selection of the narrative’s content (Bal, 2012, p. 46). All of this is aimed at convincing the recipient of the message of the validity of the interpretations contained in the narrative of a given event, historical process, or assessment of a given politician’s achievements and actions (Klementewicz, 2020, p. 15). This mainly persuasive nature of the narrative, which aims to “build a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward a political actor”, is also pointed out by Laska (2020a, p. 36).

Klementewicz’s strong stance in the debate over the cognitive status of political science narratives is a highly intriguing and significant thread in the concerns mentioned above. For if narration is a child of the crisis of cognitive realism – and this is how Klementewicz puts it – which entails that the conscious goal of the narrative creator is not to discover the truth about reality, then it is worth asking here about the elementary sense of its creation. What, then, is the cognitive value of a scientific statement that, by definition, is not aimed at telling it how it is? Is it not also the case that narratives constructed arbitrarily (and frivolously), following Paul Feyerabend’s motto of anything goes, can do more intellectual (political, social) harm than good?

Klementewicz speaks on the matter with great concern and anxiety. He writes: “the position represented by narrativism, textualism, postmodernism brings evolution to the limit of cognition (Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty). It is cognitive nihilism” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 318). He says that the crisis of cognitive realism is the reason why the research perspectives mentioned here are so popular in the humanities and social sciences. In doing so, he says that, as he puts it, a “moderate defence” of cognitive realism is not only possible, but also needed (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 319). The Polish political scientist, similarly to cited by him Hilary Putnam, does not want to forgo, if only conventionally, the objective nature of his findings. The valence of a given interpretation depends, he believes, on the adoption and application of rules of conduct recognised in a given community of researchers. In a passage in his book, Klementewicz writes explicitly: “Interpretations can become more and more credible. They become the more credible the more we refer to the criteria used in the scientific practice of a given research community” (2010, p. 321). It is, therefore, about the quality of factual knowledge used by the

³ On metaphors of politics, see texts included in the series of publications entitled *Metafory polityki* [Metaphors of Politics], ed. B. Kaczmarek.

researcher, the appropriate use of specific (research-appropriate) methods, respecting the professional ethics of scientific inquiry and the researcher's participation in the scientific discussion around the findings he has made. Thus, the research process, organised and carried out according to the conditions mentioned above, leads to findings that, although they constitute a specific story about reality, have significant cognitive value. As Klementewicz puts it, "The researcher of the phenomena of political life while essentially recognising the plurality of interpretations, believes that he has captured them in a grid of concepts and adds them to the collection of specimens from this earth" (2010, s. 321–322). As Piotr Łukomski rightly notes in this context, the "moderate naturalism" advocated by Klementewicz allows him to avoid the two extremes. When we talk about the natural world, which does not depend on us, we do not make any assumptions about how it looks, and we do not rule out the possibility of different descriptions of it – such as those based on other sciences or theories (Łukomski, 2021, p. 64). Klementewicz's approach, then, is not to unveil a true picture of the socio-political world, but to try to talk about it in such a way that (1) its specifics are captured as fully as possible⁴ and (2) the description of that world is suggestive enough to make a difference. This is what Klementewicz's proposed "integral explanation" aims at, which, it is worth noting, includes "utopian impulses" (Hudzik, 2021b), in other words, peculiar aspirations to level the injustices occurring in the social world. These concepts are key elements in the critical political science developed by several Polish political theorists as well as the critical narrative (see: Karwat, Mikołajczyk, 2017) developed within this paradigm.

The narrative of a time of transition: from court to critical political science

Reflecting on the role and importance of diagnoses made by theorists of social life, Marcin Król, a political philosopher, says that the voice of the researcher of the world of interpersonal affairs resounds loudly – it is not only heard, but above all, listened to – especially at the time of various crises, turbulence and rapid changes occurring within the world to which he refers. Moreover, it is at such moments that the public does not only listen attentively to the theorist's words, but even expects them to explain and clarify what is happening. Their primary task, therefore, is to seek answers to questions about where we are, where we are going and what we can expect along the way. In a time that once again proves to be out of joint, it is the theorist or philosopher of politics and

⁴ Such concerns are neither new nor particularly surprising – they are, in fact, a natural consequence of the postmodern detotalisation of the concept of truth. See more about it: Bulira, 2007; Heller, 2012, p. 119.

society who is supposed to provide direction to the members of their own community (Król, 2008, pp. 309–310). It is for them to act as Zygmunt Bauman’s “interpreters” of the world in a time of uncertainty (1998).

Looking at the very content of the statements of Polish political scientists and the ways in which they are presented, it is possible to identify two main (paradigmatic) narratives, the authors of which are trying to capture the peculiarities of Polish society and the state of the last few decades. On the one hand, it would be a liberal narrative; on the other, a critical (post-Marxist, anti-capitalist) one. The starting point of both narratives is the diagnosis of the turning point in Poland’s recent history, which was the year 1989. This is when our country began a period of systemic transformation and, consequently, also fundamental social and economic changes. I will give an overview of both these narratives.

The liberal narrative present in the sphere of scholarly and journalistic reflection on Polish politics is peculiar in the sense that it manifests a great fascination of many of its creators/participants (mainly, interestingly, domestic political philosophers and sociologists⁵) with American liberalism. They look to it not just for justifications for the shift but also – and probably more importantly – for the model of the adjustments that should be made to Poland’s socio-political landscape following communism. Thus, for example, John Rawls’ considerations on how to determine the content of the rules organising the functioning of a just society (political liberalism), as well as the theoretical achievements of the founders of libertarian thought headed by Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard (economic liberalism), were treated as if they were revealed truth.⁶

The starting point of both versions of the liberal narrative was the otherwise correct conviction that Poland needed to modernise, which, after nearly half a century of Marxist socio-political experimentation, required thoroughgoing reforms. The diagnosed shortcomings were present in virtually every sphere of the functioning of Polish society and the state. Economic liberals believed that

⁵ It seems that “mainstream” political scientists participated in the construction of this narrative indirectly, in the sense that they focused in their research and publications mainly on capturing the mechanisms of the functioning of the democratic-liberal system, as well as the political institutions existing in it – including the European Union ones. This can be clearly seen when we consider the dynamic development after 1989 of such sub-disciplines of political science as e.g., international relations. According to the authors of the report on the state of Polish political science, the most popular research specialities of Polish political scientists during the period of systemic change were: (1) international relations; (2) political systems; (3) European studies (Krauz-Mozer et al., 2011, pp. 224–226). These changes in the research interests of academics were, of course, followed by significant revisions to the curricula of political science majors. These facts can be interpreted in such a way that such a selection of these specialities, rather than others, was primarily due to the need to understand and bring Polish society closer to this reality, of which – ultimately – it was to become a part. However, only those communities that reformed in this spirit were admitted to the family of democratic-liberal communities.

⁶ See e.g., the discussion on these issues in Bulira, Gogłoz, 2010.

the transformation phase should consist above all in reconstructing the market economy. Because of its intrinsic potential for self-regulation, the market economy was seen as a universal and everlasting remedy for all societal evils. It was the mechanisms of free competition and the maximum possible freedom of economic activity of potentially as many entities as possible that were supposed to guarantee not only the rapid repair of this social sphere, but above all, the improvement in the quality of life and prosperity of Poles.⁷ Over time, the demands of classical liberalism have also been somewhat tempered by social arguments, as is well demonstrated, for example, in the publications of Wojciech Sadurski (1992).

In turn, the absence of the institutions of a neutral state, public sphere and civil society crucial for the efficient operation of the democratic-liberal community, as well as the requirement to pluralise public life, led to the necessity for political and constitutional change. In this case, the liberal narrative operated mainly in the space of axiology: the fundamental values upon which, in the common belief, a just society should be based were the subject of the conflict between its proponents and its opponents. Consequently, it was a philosophical debate. Moreover, both sides in this dispute – liberal and communitarian (I use this term for lack of a better one) – built their positions not only in the conviction that they were absolutely right, but also in the belief that they had to defend themselves heroically against the attacks of their adversaries. This is extremely interesting because very quickly, over the course of a decade, liberals began to redefine their identity by locating themselves – often not unreasonably – in the position of victims of indiscriminate assaults by their ideological opponents. For example, at the turn of the century, Andrzej Szahaj, asking rhetorically, “Is liberalism a sin?” writes as follows: “We, unfortunately, encounter the fundamentalist position signalled earlier also in today’s Poland. It is very clearly associated with attacks on liberalism and sometimes directly on liberal democracy” (2000, p. 225). As a result of these attacks, its structures would be deprived of the impartiality postulated by Rawls (Szahaj speaks, in this context, of “cool liberalism”, of a community that should remain “cold”), which in itself could result in the destruction of its internal pluralism, so necessary for the proper functioning of a democratic-liberal society. For “attacks on liberalism are sometimes simply veiled attacks on democracy” (Szahaj, 2000, p. 317). And we would not have democracy without liberalism, especially this kind that is not “fundamentalist”, that does not believe in an unchanging, ahistorical human nature, does not have an extreme, dogmatic view of individualism and does not try to be a universalist in its diagnoses, but instead has broadened its vocabulary to include ideas like the common good, a more (though not exclusively!) substantively conceived justice and equality, and displays some constructivist inclinations in its description and understanding of socio-political reality.

⁷ See polemical voice from an advocate of a different version of liberalism (Szahaj, 2006).

From the perspective of this constructed liberal narrative, it was also easy to diagnose the pathologies of domestic socio-political life. As one might guess, they resulted from deviations from the principles of procedural liberal democracy or – these voices were probably heard more often – were the inevitable costs of the reforms being carried out (Stępień, 2006). In addition, those liberal narrators who did not hide their sympathies for the catalogue of conservative values – among the significant shortcomings of the systemic transformation, which were said to be the cause of many negative phenomena of socio-political life in Poland during the transition period – also pointed to the lack of decommunisation, proper vetting and settling accounts with the People’s Republic of Poland. This peculiar sin of omission turned out to be the original sin of the new regime – the cause of the alienation of the political elite, the society’s turning away from politics, and the subsequent “wars within the ruling camp.”⁸ These wars, interestingly enough, were instigated by liberals themselves, who, after 1989, no longer saw post-communists but right-wing forces as the main obstacle to the realisation of the idea of an open society (Śpiewak, 2002, p. 56). As a result of the interaction of all these factors, as one political scientist commented in 2006, after years of transformation in Poland, one of its primary goals had still not been achieved – a civil society had not been born (Michałowski, 2006, p. 404). One of the basic demands of the liberal narrative had not been met.

The second narrative, within which domestic political scientists have tried to capture and explain the post-1989 changes in Poland, is more critical in nature. Besides, it is constructed from the perspective of two or even three decades after the transformation, thanks to which its creators are richer not only in the knowledge of the transformation itself, but also in the experience of functioning in the realities of a new version of Polish society and state beset by crises – both global and local.

As with any narrative of socio-political reality, this story also organises individual events, phenomena, and processes into “larger narration wholes” (Klementewicz, 2020, p. 18) by using appropriately chosen theoretical concepts to do so. In addition to the concepts traditionally used by political scientists, such as the nation-state, political system, public sphere and national identity, newer ones are now coming to the fore that seem to organise contemporary political science narratives more than those previously mentioned. The first of these concepts is general (global, universal) human civilisation; the second is “eco-development, sustainable development, prosperity without growth” (Klementewicz, 2020,

⁸ In one of her recent texts, Ágnes Heller accused Hungarians of committing a similar sin of omission. This failure to settle accounts with its own uncomfortable past was one of the reasons why Hungary’s liberal left lost power to Viktor Orbán. See: Heller, 2019. It is interesting that in the Polish translation of this Heller’s text, carried out by me, this very thread was removed by the editors of the (liberal) magazine that decided to publish this article (see: Heller, 2020).

pp. 19–20). Both of these categories make it possible to grasp the networks of connections and dependencies that entwine human communities worldwide, making their multidimensional coexistence a *sine qua non* of their existence as such. The realisation of this kind of interdependence between communities/societies/cultures simultaneously generates a sense of responsibility for individual actions, following the principle that everything local has a global dimension.

The critical narrative in contemporary Polish political science, like its liberal stepsister, seems somewhat secondary to similar narratives functioning among representatives of the global left. The main problematic threads that are organised (explained) into a coherent story within these narratives are related to the post-colonial status of Poland, the domination of global corporations in the sphere of the global (and domestic) neoliberal economy, US imperialism (e.g., Klementewicz, Janusz Golinowski and Filip Ilkowski write about this), as well as – this is a strictly Polish specificity – the clericalism, nationalism and conservatism of our society.⁹ At the same time, this kind of narrative, unlike the liberal narrative, does not aim to legitimise a given socio-political order, but, as critical political science itself, is “a discourse that does not serve, a discourse that does not legitimise the established (presented as timeless, universal, even the only possible) normative systems, political and economic institutions” (Karwat, Mikołajczyk, 2017, p. 5). Therefore, this type of political science is an attempt to adapt the theoretical and methodological assumptions made at the turn of the past century (among others) by members of the renowned Frankfurt School to the ground of scientific reflection on politics.

The contemporary critical narrative on the condition of Poland and Polish society is part of the signalled research-ideological paradigm. Its creators raise questions about the rightness of such a path of political transformation – especially in the economic sphere – while showing the numerous pathologies and shortcomings of the domestic socio-political reality, which turns out to be managed by the logic of the capitalist market. Thus, it locates its main object of interest exactly in the place that, as one author puts it, “mainstream political science” tries to “give a wide berth”. It is precisely about “the relationship between politics and business, property and power, the consequences for the model and practical mechanism of political life of the fact that the prevailing order is capitalist in nature” (Karwat, 2021, p. 191). As another participant in this discourse, previously mentioned Jan Hudzik states, “According to neoliberal economics, the market is the universal mechanism that regulates society – the state is therefore left with the sole purpose of creating opportunities for business to accumulate capital” (Hudzik, 2021b, p. 208). Additionally, the authors of the critical narrative do not stop at a simple diagnostic; they also raise the issue of what to do when practically every facet and dimension of Polish socio-political life has been shaped

⁹ See Sławomir Czapnik’s publications on the subject: Czapnik, 2010; Czapnik, Omelan, 2015.

according to market norms. The very posing of such questions is evidence, firstly, that utopian impulses drive this narrative, and secondly that the purpose of these impulses is to level injustice (Hudzik, 2021b, p. 210).

Therefore, the critical nature of the narrative in question is manifested in the fact that it forms its identity in opposition to the mainstream of Polish political science, which is sometimes identified with the (neo)liberal narrative. Filip Pierzchalski, for example, says that “the contemporary attitude of the political scientist-intellectual in the neoliberal narrative is to boil down to legitimising, or at worst not challenging, the established and ever-improving free market rules and strategies for shaping university enterprises” (2021, p. 236). This is a very important strand of this narrative, for its participants perceive the progressive colonisation of the academic world by capitalist instrumental rationality as a huge threat. This phenomenon is intensifying, regardless of which political formations are in power in Poland. As a result of these actions, we have a decline in the ethos of the scientist, who, as Mirosław Karwat says in this context, ceases to be sceptical of the obviousness of the reality under research. Karwat also adds that:

[...] essential – especially for a humanist, a researcher of social phenomena (economist, political scientist, lawyer) – is also a criticism of ideological and propagandistic forms of presenting and interpreting these phenomena [...] and – last but not least – of reality itself. A scholar who simply considers a given state of affairs, a type of social relations as “given”, obvious, natural, doubly non-alternative (in genesis – as if it is inevitable, in perspective – impossible to replace with another) commits at the same time the sin of colloquial thinking and conformism. One of the incarnations of the critical scholar is, therefore, an exposé of ideological and propaganda mystifications, political straitjackets of correctness and pseudo-scientific ornamentation for governance and management (2021, p. 185).

Another result of successive – deadly effective – attempts to transform the university into a modern, bureaucratic corporation is the emergence of many pathological phenomena that pacify not only the aforementioned criticism of academics, but even their ability to do creative work. All this is expected to foster the adoption of axiologically and ideologically neutral and distanced attitudes among Polish political scientists, which, by the way, in light of the conditions presented, “can be interpreted as a gradual approval and acquiescence to the free-market type of narrative and commercial strategy of the forced transformation of Polish universities into university enterprises” (Pierzchalski, 2021, p. 237). Among other reasons, this is why such phenomena as “creditis”, “grantosis” and “bibliometrics” are so thoroughly analysed and negatively evaluated by participants in critical narrative.¹⁰

¹⁰ See e.g., the following texts: Klementewicz, 2019; Karwat, 2019; Bielen, 2021; Hudzik, 2021a.

Integral explanation

The critical narrative in Polish political science, as created by its creators, as a rule, uses the concept of integral explanation proposed by Klementewicz. In Polish literature on the subject, the problem of explanation and its specificity, such as a turn toward interpretivism, as well as the challenges and problems it brings, has been well recognised (see: Blok, 2017). Thus, one speaks of genetic, functional, goal-oriented, logical explanations and “combinations of these, such as genetic-functional, genetic-objective, goal-oriented-functional explanations” (Czajowski, 2020, p. 51). These are not methodological proposals that should be regarded as revolutionary or novel solutions – after all, they are well-recognised in the general methodology of sciences. For this reason alone, the integral explanation mentioned by Klementewicz stands out against their background. This research procedure involves using not only the conceptual apparatus, research strategies, and theoretical and empirical knowledge used and developed in the political sciences, but also all other social sciences. Klementewicz writes:

[...] since the global results of political action are the resultant of a tangle of many regularities, their explanation requires recourse to more laws of science, not always unambiguous at the same time. Here again, humanistic erudition, knowledge of the theoretical achievements of related disciplines comes in handy. With their help, we can more broadly grasp the complex causes of the phenomenon of interest (2010, pp. 112–113).

At the same time, integral explanation in political science is not only about using additional knowledge developed by representatives of other disciplines, but also about skilfully “fusing”/uniting – integrating precisely – such distinctly separate research traditions as the positivist and humanist approaches. As Andrzej Czajowski notes, the literature, in the most simplistic terms, distinguishes primarily between empirical and interpretive explanations. This clear and historically grounded division is somehow abolished in the domestic literature on political science methodology by Klementewicz, who introduces the idea of integral explanation, which is a form of synthesis of the two prior approaches (Czajowski, 2020, p. 45). Thus, it is a type of explanation that is a synthesis of the other approaches, primarily “naturalistic and understanding”, “positivistic and humanistic”, so that it becomes possible to sketch a potentially most accurate picture of the phenomenon under research. This is because the idea of integral explanation suggests that the researcher must focus on both the intents and reasons for human activities as well as the results of those actions. One can plainly hear echoes of Max Weber’s remarks here. Since a final and comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under investigation is, perhaps, an unreachable objective, the practice of integral explanation yields the most comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon (activity and/or political process) conceivable.

Thus, integral explanation takes, as its most important theoretical premise, the constation of the “dual structure of reality” (Klementewicz, 2010, p. 114) and is, therefore, precisely the type of explanation that is as complete as possible. The importance, popularity and recognition of this concept among Polish political scientists – which testifies, among other things, to the necessarily intersubjective nature of reflection on politics and, consequently, even to its community-forming potential – is confirmed by numerous researchers (see: Blok, Kołodziejczak, 2020). In doing so, attention is frequently drawn to a fundamental issue: integral, and thus de facto multithreaded and multidimensional analysis of reality, which requires the political scientist to use knowledge and findings from other sciences, not only allows the political scientist to “penetrate” deeper into the studied phenomenon, to look, as it were, beneath the surface, but also demonstrates that the political scientist remains faithful to the sceptical approach advocated by the critical narrative participants. This sceptical approach is demonstrated in willingness to challenge the authorities and to identify the novel issues worthy of attention. This is because the practical implementation of the postulate of integral explanation involves an attempt to construct a concrete explanatory model, which, in itself, indicates the researcher’s disagreement with the “declarative” dimension of reality. By undertaking such a task, the researcher-political scientist confirms that what Karwat described as the “personal model of the critical scholar” (2021) is not a meaningless rhetorical figure.

Both narration and explanation are conceptual categories that are present in Polish political science. In this text, I have attempted to capture the specifics of both Polish theorists’ understanding of these categories and examples of their application in practice. Their character is conditioned, to a large extent, by the peculiarities of the systemic transformation that took place in Poland after 1989 – this remark applies especially to political science narratives that talk about this period (and the socio-political consequences of these transformations). It also seems that the liberal narrative is currently in retreat, being displaced by, among other things, a critical narrative that more evocatively explains the crisis and unrest we live in.

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