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MODERNIZATION PROCESSES AND EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLISH TERRITORIES IN THE 19th C.

The concepts of “modernization” and “emancipation of women” are closely interlinked. Emancipation has come to be regarded as one of the symptoms of modernization of society — this opinion is already strongly rooted in social consciousness. However, if these two terms are to be used precisely, it is worthwhile drawing attention to the factors that make the problem of interdependence between modernization and emancipation lose its apparent unequivocality.

In the first place the very concept of modernization cannot be easily considered unequivocal. It became widespread after the Second World War, it is derived, however, from 19th c. sociology with its tendency to analyze society by means of the then numerous dichotomical models: aristocracy and democracy, militarism and industrialism, status and contract, precapitalist formations and capitalism, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, traditionalism and rationalism. These dichotomies, although competing with one another, can be reduced to a common denominator: they were all based on the sharp opposition of society from before and after the essential transformation¹. They all aimed to grasp conceptually the transformations taking place within the orbit of European civilization since the turn of the 18th c.

In the middle of our century a similar stimulus was provided above all by the developments in the so-called “third world”. It was precisely then that scholars, basing themselves on the achievements of functionalism, started to elaborate the theory of modernization. If we take a close look at the then ways of defining this concept, we can easily notice the influence of a dichotomical approach to social reality. Thus modernization would be a transition from traditional to modern society. Tradition and modernity have come to be regarded as strongly interlinked, however mutually exclusive

¹ J. Szacki, *Słowo wstępne (Foreword)*, in: *Tradycja i nowoczesność (Tradition and Modernity)*, ed. by J. Kurczewska and J. Szacki, Warszawa 1984, p. 9; H.-U. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte*, Göttingen 1975, p. 14.

sets of characteristics. Traditional society would accordingly be marked by a weak structural differentiation and a lack of strongly delineated division of labour: it would be static and mostly rustic. Modern society, on the other hand, would achieve a high level of differentiation and specialization, would be dynamic and urbanized. In the sphere of politics modernization would signify an intensification of democratic tendencies; in the sphere of collective mentality — a limitation of cultural perspectives characteristic of traditional society would give way to sympathy with changes and innovatory attitude². Emancipation of women is also regarded as one of the characteristics of modern society³.

The dichotomy of tradition and modernity created the foundations of a *sui generis* investigative paradigm — this, however, was so simple that it had to lead to certain simplifications. The authors who used it had to grapple in their work with large problems, and soon the problems encountered in studies of modernization led to the criticism of the established scheme. At the end of the 1860s it was ever more frequently said that the rigorous opposition of tradition and modernity was a fallacy. Traditional societies are not static at all or structurally undifferentiated. The progress of modernity does not have to lead to the undermining of tradition — sometimes modernization is based on earlier contents. The relation between tradition and modernity is not a conflict, but continual mutual interaction, with complex structures produced as a result⁴.

This new way of looking at modernization gradually started to oust the dichotomical approach⁵. Although the earlier stereotype retained considerable vitality, the conviction about the essential contradiction between tradition and modernity has been seriously undermined⁶. Ever more numerous

² S. N. Eisenstadt, *Studies of Modernization and Social Theory*, "History and Theory", vol. XIII, 1974, № 3, pp. 226–227; see *idem*, *Modernization: Protest and Change*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1966, pp. 1–18; C. E. Black, *The Dynamic of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History*, New York 1966, pp. 5–34; D. Lerner, J. S. Coleman, R. P. Dorc, *Modernization*, in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. IX, ed. D. L. Sills, New York 1968, pp. 386–409.

³ B. Greven-Aschoff, *Sozialer Wandel und Frauenbewegungen*, „Geschichte und Gesellschaft", vol. VII, 1981, fasc. 3–4 (*Frauen in der Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*), pp. 328–346; H.–U. Wehler, *Vorbemerkung*, *ibid.*, pp. 325–326.

⁴ J. R. Gusfield, *Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change*, "The American Journal of Sociology", vol. LXXII, 1967, № 4, pp. 351–355; L. J. Rudolph, S. Rudolph Hoerber, *The Modernity of Tradition. Political Development in India*, Chicago 1967, pp. 3–14; J. C. Heesterman, *India and the Inner Conflict of Tradition*, "Daedalus", vol. CII, 1973, № 1 (*Post-Traditional Societies*), p. 111.

⁵ S. R. Graubard, *Preface*, *ibid.*, pp. V–VII; J. Szacki, *Stowo wstępne*, pp. 5–13.

⁶ One of the first attempts at a generalization of the criticism of hitherto investigations was presented in 1967 by Reinhard Bendix, *Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered*, in: *idem*, *Embattled Reason. Essays on Social Knowledge*, New York 1970, pp. 250–314.

representatives of social sciences were prone to agree with the physicist and philosopher Friedrich von Weizsäcker that "progress is possible at all only on the basis of the existing tradition, this tradition, however, must be susceptible of change, and conversely, tradition has always arisen due to progress which seems to us so distant in the past that we often no longer realize it. Tradition is progress preserved, progress — a continued tradition"⁷.

Ultimately criticism reached the very foundations of the concept of modernization. Voices were heard that the meaning of modernization has become blurred almost completely, so that it has become a collective definition of phenomena that cannot be reduced to a common denominator⁸. Of essential impact were here heated discussions on functionalism, the latter forming a large part of the theoretical background of studies of modernization⁹. A significant influence was also exerted by the changes in overall mental climate — in recent years it became clear that the world outlook underlying many earlier declared views has undergone serious changes¹⁰. Much food for thought was also provided by spectacular political events — if only to mention the Islamic "conservative revolution" in Iran¹¹.

The attempts at creating a coherent theory of modernization could not withstand such a polemic fire. Despite all the critical voices, however, the interest in the problem does not seem to flag. The adversaries of the concept of modernization underline that a sense of link between the contemporary changes, derived from common experience, is something quite different from an ambition to elucidate those changes by means of one generalizing concept¹². Although this kind of generalization may seem disappointing, a

⁷ C. F. von Weizsäcker, *O tradycji w filozofii (On Tradition in Philosophy)*, in: *idem, Jedność przyrody (The Unity of Nature)*, Warszawa 1978, p. 437, quoted after: J. Szacki, *Słowo wstępne*, p. 8.

⁸ D. C. Tipps, *Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective*, "Comparative Studies in Society and History", vol. XV, 1973, № 2, pp. 199–226; see H.-U. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie*, pp. 18–33, 71–77; R. Siempiowski, *Modernizacja — teoria czy doktryna? (Modernization — Theory or Doctrine?)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", vol. LXXXVI, 1979, № 3, pp. 741–749.

⁹ In the Polish literature see: A.K. Paluch, *Konflikt, modernizacja i zmiana społeczna. Analiza i krytyka teorii funkcjonalnej (Conflict, Modernization and Social Change. Analysis and Criticism of Functional Theory)*, Warszawa 1976; J. Szatkowska, *Idea modernizacji w interpretacjach procesu rozwoju społecznego — spojrzenie z zewnątrz (The Idea of Modernization in Interpretations of the Process of Social Development — A View from Outside)*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", vol. XXIX, 1985, № 4, pp. 67–83.

¹⁰ Let us only pay attention to his opinions of Polish historians: J. Kieniewicz, *Jedność stanowczo niepożądana (A Definitely Undesirable Unity)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", vol. XIII, 1981, № 4, pp. 139–142; J. Jedlicki, *Idea postępu z perspektywy naszego czasu (The Idea of Progress from the Perspective of Our Times)*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", vol. XXIX, 1985, № 4, pp. 15–26.

¹¹ M. Kula, *Konserwatywna i postępową (Conservative and Progressive)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", vol. LXXX, 1983, № 1, pp. 127–139.

¹² D. C. Tipps, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

consciousness prevails of the mutual interaction of transformations in various spheres of life. Even if the nature of these interactions is not easy to establish, the problem seems all the more intriguing. And it is precisely as a problem — not an established theory — that modernization is generally presented in scholarly investigations today¹³.

The range of definitions of this concept, often quite capacious ones, is expanding¹⁴. In his, by now classical, study Reinhard Bendix explained that by “modernization” he understood “a type of social change which originated in the industrial revolution of England, 1760–1830, and in the political revolution in France, 1789–1794”¹⁵. In my opinion if the essence of modernization changes is still unclear to us, we should rely on the most tangible factor — technology. Thus, I would conceive modernization as a set of processes connected with the development of technical civilization that started to arise in Western Europe at the turn of the 18th c.

The emancipation of women should be treated as one of such processes. The changes that recently occurred in the way of understanding the concept of modernization had to leave their imprint on the meaning of emancipation. In the initial stages of studies of modernization emancipation seemed to be an obvious component of the established vision of modernity — side by side with industry, great city life, democracy and education. Together with the obliteration of clear boundaries between modernity and tradition the obviousness of the meaning of the concept of emancipation started to weaken. Just as the whole set of modernization processes it became a problem¹⁶.

Here, however, promising perspectives loom before historical studies. Studies of modernization were initiated above all by sociologists and political scientists; at present the historical dimension of the phenomena under discussion seems to deserve a more profound treatment and acquires increasingly greater importance. This becomes an indispensable condition of reasonable continuation of studies of modernization¹⁷.

¹³ See J. Appleby, *Modernization Theory and the Formation of Modern Social Theories in England and America*, “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, vol. XX, 1978, N° 2, pp. 260–261.

¹⁴ S. N. Eisenstadt, *Studies of Modernization*, *passim*, *idem*, *Tradition, Change and Modernity*, New York 1973, *passim*; L. E. Shiner, *Tradition/Modernity: An Ideal Type Gone Astray*, “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, vol. XVII, 1975, N° 2, pp. 245–252; D. Smith, *Domination and Containment: An Approach to Modernization*, “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, vol. 1978, N° 2, pp. 177.

¹⁵ R. Bendix, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 295; see *idem*, *Kings or People. Power and the Mandate to Rule*, Berkeley 1978, pp. 5, 10–14; *idem*, *Force, Fate and Freedom. On Historical Sociology*, Berkeley 1984, pp. 45, 56, 67.

¹⁶ See J. Szacki, *Słowo wstępne*, p. 7.

¹⁷ H. U. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie*, pp. 58–63.

In the case of 19th c. Poland modernization processes encountered serious obstacles. One cannot, of course, speak of stagnation, however an increasing distance of Poland from the countries of civilization centre was certainly the case. This was, as Witold Kula wrote, "development under conditions of increasing backwardness"¹⁸. Over ten years ago Jerzy Jedlicki, when asked "Did Poland lose the 19th c. in respect of modern civilization?" answered: "If eloquent milestones are necessary, this century (with some chronological tolerance), started with *Przestrogi dla Polski (Warnings to Poland)*, and finished with *Nędza Galicji w cyfrach (Galician Misery in Figures)*"¹⁹, i.e. it started at the end of the 18th century and finished by World War I. The impact of the loss of statehood and the division of the Polish territory among neighbouring powers was obvious, but neither the importance of the conservative impulses of the traditional agrarian, squire-peasant society can be ignored. These impulses could take simple or refined forms; side by side with homespun traditionalism there arose a fear of losing the identity of native culture, typical of countries with backward civilization, in Poland, however, kindled up by the undermining of a sense of national values as the result of partitions²⁰.

The factors that impeded the progress of modernization influenced also the pace of emancipation processes, although I should like to underline again, it is hard to find a simple dependence between the rate of economic growth, structural transformations in economy or democratization on the one hand and changes in the social situation of women on the other. It is true that essential concurrences can be detected without difficulty, they seem, however, to be illusory if treated as regularities. Here I should only like to indicate the most characteristic, in my opinion, features of particular stages of modernization of 19th c. Poland, by trying to establish how civilizational development was linked with women's emancipation.

The first stage, reaching back to the 18th c., with its culmination in the Napoleonic Era, embraces changes in the sphere of politics and culture, constitutional systems and customs. The sphere of economy was for a long time virtually unaffected. "Consciousness was in advance of the changes in existence: thus in Poland reflections of mind were more contemporary with

¹⁸ W. Kula, *Wprowadzenie (Introduction)*, in: *Przemiany społeczne w Królestwie Polskim 1815–1864 (Social Changes in the Polish Kingdom)*, collective work under the direction of W. Kula and J. Leskiewiczowa, Wrocław 1979, p. 23.

¹⁹ J. Jedlicki (a voice in the discussion), *Czy Polska straciła wiek XIX pod względem nowoczesnej cywilizacji? (Did Poland Lose the 19th c. in Respect of Modern Civilization?)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", vol. LXXXVI, 1979, N° 1, p. 95.

²⁰ J. Jedlicki, *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują? Studia z dziejów idei i wyobraźni XIX wieku (What Civilization Do the Poles Need? Studies in the History of Ideas and Imagination of the 19th c.)*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 37–76.

the West than the state of industry”²¹. Such modernization by its very nature could influence significantly only the life of upper strata, and even there its effect was not very profound either, as new items of literature and legal norms were opposed by age-long habits and traditionally formed communities²². In such conditions the emancipation of women had to be limited in scope to few milieus, it did not encroach on the established family structures and seldom undermined moral standards, although sometimes it did so in a spectacular way. Except for individual cases it did not signify a change in the way of life, being a kind of an intellectual-moral vogue; a more profound conception of emancipation can be encountered among the radical intelligentsia in the middle of the century, in the circle of “women-enthusiasts”. The latter example indicates the importance of political, patriotic and democratic motivation as a factor that stimulated women’s activity. In Polish conditions especially patriotic reasons played the role of a stimulus to active involvement in public affairs, beyond the limits of traditionally established competences.

A breakthrough in the sphere of emancipation could however occur only in the next stage of modernization transformations — after agrarian reforms were carried out and industrialization effectively started. Both these processes, extended over several score years, undermined the existing social structures, also changing the situation of women. The economic pressure became a powerful stimulating factor. The crisis of squire-economy, changes occurring in the countryside, the gradual opening of new opportunities of earnings — all this made the ranks of women seek employment outside their family, while professional activeness undermined the stability of the female social status established before ages. The acceleration of modernization processes caused by industrialization created chances of authentic emancipation, however, difficult to take advantage of. At the same time modernization encountered worse political conditions, as the conflict between advocates of progress and defenders of tradition was exacerbated.

There were many attempts to interpret the phenomena that took place at that time precisely in the terms of a clash between “the new” and “the old”. This scheme seems to be too simple: let us remember that in the second half of the last century the development of nuns’ congregations was one of the forms of emancipation of women. Modernity and tradition intermingled in a peculiar way not only in this case.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²² J. Jedlicki, *Klejnot i bariery społeczne. Przeobrażenia szlachectwa polskiego w schyłkowym okresie feudalizmu* (*The Crest and Social Barriers. Transformations of Polish Nobility in the Declining Period of Feudalism*), Warszawa 1968, p. 246.