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Poland as a periphery in Immanuel Wallerstein's theory

Zarys treści: Artykuł przedstawia problematykę peryferii i jej odniesienie do miejsca Polski w koncepcji systemu światowego wg. Immanuela Wallersteina. W artykule omówiono problemy związane z bezpieczeństwem międzynarodowym Polski. Przedstawia także postrzeganie Polski jako kraju peryferyjnego i na podstawie teoretycznych rozważań przekonuje do możliwości postrzegania Polski jako kraju półperyferyjnego. Publikacja finansowana w ramach projektu realizowanego w Programie Grant Badawczy Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej.

Content outline: The article presents the issue of peripheries and its reference to Poland's position in the world-system concept of Immanuel Wallerstein. The article discusses problems related to international security of Poland. It also presents the perception of Poland as a peripheral country and, on the basis of theoretical considerations, argues for the possibility of viewing Poland as a semi-peripheral country. Publication financed under the project implemented in the Research Grant Program of the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland.

Słowa kluczowe: peryferie, Polska jako peryferia, Polska w nowym porządku świata, geopolityka, bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe Polski

Keywords: periphery, Poland as a periphery, Poland in new world order, geopolitics, international security of Poland

Introduction

The article outlines a vision of Poland in the system of theoretical and methodological deliberations on the structure of contemporary international relations presented by Immanuel Wallerstein. His concept, called the world-system, refers to contemporary phenomena interpreted in the categories of dependency, imperialism and networking of states. The aim of the article is to present Poland in the categories of a periphery as a place in the hierarchical structure of capitalist international relations. The article shows the context of systemic transformations together with

an analysis of contemporary centre-periphery relations in Wallerstein's world-system concept. Particular emphasis is put on geopolitical considerations of the aspect of state security and sovereignty. The article also deals with the issues of the social and cultural perception of changes and acceptance of international subordination of Poland in the structure of international dependence of an indefinite hierarchy.

Methodology

The paper has an epistemological character and therefore adopts interpretative text analysis based on factual verification of the theoretical model as its main method. The model in question is the world-system concept proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, which is then verified by the purposeful selection of socio-political, cultural, and economic phenomena referring to individual theoretical assumptions. Poland as a state categorised as a periphery in the world-system theory is taken as a point of departure for further discussion. This allows for the application of the structural approach to the studies, using a model order of international political relations characterised by superiority and inferiority of states displaying definite attributiveness. This attributiveness of the peripheries is analysed in relation to the Polish state by isolating Wallerstein's theoretical model.

Literature

The theory of peripheries, semi-peripheries and the world-system concept is verified on the basis of an analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein's works published in the Polish language, namely: *Analiza systemów światów. Wprowadzenie* [World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction]; *Europejski uniwersalizm. Retoryka władzy* [European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power]; *Koniec świata jaki znamy* [The End of the World as We Know It]. On the basis of those works a model of the world-system and features of peripheral states have been isolated. Other literature includes mainly secondary sources providing criticism of Wallerstein's theory and academic works citing data needed to make conceptual/theoretical connections between the features of peripheries and social, political, economic or cultural phenomena.

Results and discussion

Poland in the world-system concept

The world-system concept derives from the current of the theory of dependency in international relations. Its principles focus primarily on indicating the role of capitalism in consolidating the position of states. The theory asserts that the

place of a state in the international hierarchy determines the possibilities of its activity.¹ The world-system concept refers most strongly to the centre-peripheries relation and underlines the need to analyse global phenomena in relation to the zero sum game.²

In Immanuel Wallerstein's theory, peripherality is not a precisely defined phenomenon. The author himself treats it as a feature in what may be called the network of dependencies and cooperation between states, the essence of which is not geographical scope but integrity of connections between centres and peripheral economic processes as well as dependency of geographical/political areas.³ For Wallerstein, peripherality is a unilateral collection of profits, where peripheral states are converted into production sites and sources of cheap labour with the use of globalisation processes. The world-system effects peripheralisation since it has worked out its own logic and need for geographical expansion, and in addition is equipped with military and technological power.

Peripherality is attained in many ways. One of them is the process of introducing competitiveness, where indigenous manufacturing facilities have a much poorer standing than quasi-monopolistic enterprises entering the newly opened state market. As a result of this process, profits and values flow out of the peripheries in which products are made or resources are found, and into the centres, where accumulation of capital takes place.⁴ With respect to state policy and its position, peripherality means weakness of a state, its marginalisation in international relations.⁵

To some degree, Wallerstein's concept of the centre and the peripheries is based on geopolitical geographical possibilism.⁶ Wallerstein's world is again seen as bipolar, but the dimension he discusses has a different feature than geography, although it is closely correlated with it, not only in the *centre and periphery* metaphor. "They are geographically and culturally distinct; one focuses on the intensification of labour while the other on capital-intensive production. The centre-peripheries relations are structural. States in semi-peripheries act as a buffer zone between the centre and the periphery, they have a mixture of activities and

¹ A. Aleksy, "Teoria systemu światowego Immanuela Wallersteina oraz jej znaczenie dla teorii stosunków międzynarodowych," in: *Porządek międzynarodowy u progu XXI wieku*, ed. R. Kuźniar, Warszawa, 2005, pp. 589–591.

² A. Ciesielska, "Teoria centrum – peryferii Immanuela Wallersteina i jej recepcja w archeologii," *Folia Praehistorica Posnaniensia*, 21 (2016), p. 56. Wallerstein defines the contemporary world-system as "different from all previous world-systems – it is a capitalist economy-world." I. Wallerstein, *Europejski uniwersalizm. Retoryka władzy*, Warszawa, 2007, p. 63.

³ M. Starnawski, P. Wielgosz, "Kapitalizm nad przepaścią, społeczeństwa wobec wyboru. O krytycznych perspektywach analizy systemów-światów Immanuela Wallersteina," in: I. Wallerstein, *Analiza systemów światów. Wprowadzenie*, Warszawa, 2007, p. VI.

⁴ Wallerstein, *Analiza*, p. 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

⁶ J. Mikołajec, *Spór o determinizm geograficzny*, Gliwice, 2013, pp. 142–147.

institutions which operate there.⁷ This structural division links areas of key importance for economic production and generation of wealth (centre) and subsidiary areas, which constitute a reservoir of cheap labour and abound in desired natural resources (peripheries).⁸ Centres are responsible for the homogenisation of peripheral states, although they do not do it directly and do not restrict their sovereignty.⁹ The formation of the centre-periphery relation takes place through economic relations with capitalist subjects of central states, whose profits are translated into the accumulation of the capital of states. As regards sovereignty of peripheral states, the states of the centre are keen to maintain it since it allows to relieve their capital of infrastructural costs. There is also the possibility of persuasion here, instilling in the peripheral states the belief that large absorption of foreign capital is in their interest in order to improve economic effectiveness and participate in global profits.

However, this bipolar system does not seem to fully reflect the structure of Wallerstein's world-system. His concept admits the existence of an intermediate link in the form of semi-peripherality, which is characterised by greatest pressure on the part of central states. Semi-peripheral states have the possibilities and opportunities for improving their position; however, they enter into competition with other semi-peripheral states rather than the states of the centre. One of such countries is Poland, whose economic potential is not commensurate with semi-peripheral countries, which according to Wallerstein include South Korea, Brazil, or India.¹⁰

The concept of semi-peripheries is of great importance for the world-system approach. It shows that categories within the system are not assigned to states permanently. Wallerstein underlines this repeatedly. However, coming out of the periphery is extremely difficult, not due to external environment but to the internal structure and features of political elites.¹¹ Semi-peripheries are states which are exploited by the centres and also capable of building their own hegemonic relationships. Both peripheries and semi-peripheries can change their status by assuming appropriate action strategies.

Semi-peripheries play significant roles in the world-system concept. Firstly, they perform the function of stabilisers of international security. The existence of intermediate categories does not cause any disruptions and large polarisation among international actors. Neither does it produce any specific segregation or stigmatisation of states.¹² Secondly, those states function as catalysts by intermediating in the capitalist processes of domination and exploitation.¹³

⁷ Ciesielska, op. cit., p. 58.

⁸ Starnawski, Wielgosz, op. cit., p. V.

⁹ Regarding sovereignty, Wallerstein cites the words of Bernard Kouchner: "sovereignty of a state should be respected insofar as it is supported by the people." Wallerstein, *Europejski*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁰ Wallerstein, *Analiza*, p. 49.

¹¹ Starnawski, Wielgosz, op. cit., p. XXX.

¹² Aleksy, op. cit., p. 594.

¹³ P. Buhler, *O potędze w XXI wieku*, Warszawa, 2014, p. 102.

World centres are states which dominate and should be perceived in the category of hegemony. In the mid-20th century, a change of the paradigm took place in imperial states, which despite the ongoing arms race initiated sharp competition in amassing capital so that nowadays “they are no longer centres of production but of financial accumulation.”¹⁴ They are keen on maintaining the *status quo*. These are the states which in the past were either colonial empires or were culturally and geographically sufficiently close to these so as to adopt the models and mechanisms of neo-colonial behaviour.¹⁵

For some analysts, there is no doubt that Poland is a peripheral country.¹⁶ After the period of privatisation, which Wallerstein did not hesitate to call a robbery, the Polish economy has been characterised by dependency on Western states, particularly Germany, whose interest is to maintain economic underdevelopment of the peripheries¹⁷ so as to obtain cheap as well as nationally and internationally unconscious workforce.¹⁸

However, it is worth taking a closer look at the theory of peripheries and semi-peripheries. For Wallerstein, peripheries are states without a strong state apparatus. In turn, semi-peripheries are states with mature governing bodies, capable of controlling and protecting their borders, collecting taxes, ensuring persistence of legitimate authorities, “whose state apparatus is sufficiently strong to contain exploitation at the core but not to project its power outwards.”¹⁹ In such an understanding of these categories, Poland may be recognised as a semi-peripheral state. However, it is safer to recognise Poland as a country which is in the course of returning to the semi-peripheral position.²⁰

Poland as a neo-colonial periphery

The fact that Poland is a peripheral country is evidenced by the actions of Western states, which – given their past and colonial experience – were able to accordingly position themselves in relation to newly formed Central European states undergoing the process of gaining independence. Due to these circumstances, as Witold Kieżun points out, “Poland’s economic structure is similar to the structure of African post-colonial countries, which are in a large measure controlled by the

¹⁴ J. Hryniewicz, “Teoria centrum-peryferie w epoce globalizacji,” *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne* (2010), no. 2, p. 9.

¹⁵ S. Babones, “Pozycja i mobilność we współczesnej gospodarce-świecie: perspektywa strukturalistyczna,” in: *Polska jako peryferie*, ed. T. Zarycki, Warszawa, 2016, p. 16.

¹⁶ Starnawski, Wielgosz, op. cit., p. XXV.

¹⁷ Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁸ A. Pawełczyńska, *Głowy hydry, O przewrotności współczesnego zła*, Łomianki, 2014, p. 157.

¹⁹ Babones, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁰ J. Klimczak, “Transformacja gospodarcza jako marginalizacja. Gospodarcze i społeczne skutki polskiego czasu przemian,” *Progress. Journal of Young Researchers* (2017), no. 1, p. 23.

global capital: banking, trade, large industry. Those sectors of the economy have been very cheaply appropriated.”²¹ In accordance with the world-system approach, Witold Kieżun notes that privatisation of the Polish public sector and implementation of capitalistic economy is in fact “a specific form of re-colonisation under the neo-liberal model.”²² The perception of Poland as a colony seems to be absurd, especially given the fact that in Wallerstein’s world-system, such countries have the lowest rank in the hierarchy of international relations.

That is why the approach adopted by the countries of the West should be seen as neo-colonialism. It is a phenomenon which may be described in terms of imperialist capitalism, utilising the categories of sovereignty (mostly shared) and statehood and presenting them as the fundamental value, while simultaneously manipulating states and casting them in the role of an administrator of a given peripheral, production territory. Mirosław Jodko defines neo-colonialism as “making a given country economically and politically dependent on external subjects, resulting in restricted possibilities of development and pursuit of the national interest.”²³ A neo-colonial state is a peripheral state dominated by external subjects. According to Kwame Nkrumah, neo-colonialism consists in sovereign states being externally ruled through foreign investments and increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. Neo-colonialism is in fact colonialism, though employing new methods and techniques of operation (exercise of domination and control).²⁴

Comparing the history of Polish capitalism to the above described phenomena, one can observe, on numerous examples, the mechanism of peripheralisation of Poland as a geopolitical phenomenon. This concerns mainly geoeconomic domination over the entire area of Central Europe rather than only over several selected states. In the case of Poland, given its economic potential, those actions had to be exceptionally destructive.

Poland has been deprived of many branches of economy in the spirit of liberal competitiveness. It is worth giving a few examples to illustrate the phenomenon of peripheralisation:

The number of closed down industrial facilities in Poland exceeded the extent of reduction of industry in any other European country (except the UK and the GDR) – nowhere was the decrease of employment in the industry so great. In 1980, 5.24 million people were employed in the Polish industry, while in 2011 – 2.93 million. Interestingly, not more than

²¹ W. Kieżun, “Postkolonialna Polska nie wykorzystuje swoich zasobów,” *Nowe Państwo* (2014), no. 4, pp. 16–21.

²² W. Kieżun, *Patologia transformacji*, Warszawa, 2013, p. 99.

²³ M. Jodko, *Neokolonializm współczesny – mit czy rzeczywistość (doświadczenia Polski – wybrane aspekty)*, *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach* (2015), no. 2014, p. 145.

²⁴ M.F. Gawrycki, A. Szeptycki, *Podporządkowanie – niedorozwój – wyobcowanie. Poskolonializm a stosunki międzynarodowe*, Warszawa, 2011, p. 37.

100-500 facilities had to be liquidated due to technological obsolescence. The rest were closed as a result the market play.²⁵

The greatest devastation (in term of lost production assets) was suffered by five branches: coalmining, metallurgy, electronics, foodstuffs, and machine building industries. The arms industry lost an enormous potential. In the mid-1980s, it had 120 facilities employing 250,000 people and was the world's 7th-8th largest exporter of armaments. At present, it employs 25,000–30,000 people and ranks 17th–18th among global exporters of this type of equipment. Practically eliminated – poorly faring in the times of People's Poland anyway – was the high-tech industry, which is practically the most important branch in the modern economy. Out of 142 facilities built in People's Poland, 77 were wound down, that is over one half – 54%. Out of the existing 93 electronic plants, 81 (!) were dissolved, which resulted in 111,000 redundancies. Although they were replaced by small plants employing a dozen or so workers, these have neither strength nor competitive position. Neither the consumer industries were spared: they lost 20.3% of their production assets and 28.7% of the value of market production.²⁶

[...] if the liquidated facilities lose 50–60% of their production assets, it is tantamount to the liquidation of the entire branch. If we apply this criterion, **Poland has lost the following industries: electronic and IT industry, sulphur and iron ore mining, aluminium metallurgy, footwear industry, cotton, silk, wool and linen industry, research equipment, power generating equipment, metallurgical machinery, agricultural machinery, rolling stock, and shipbuilding industries.**²⁷

Similar examples revealing the collapse of Polish enterprises may be quoted on end (e.g. sale of Polish steelworks²⁸ or sugar refineries). However, it is worth discussing two other sectors: pensions and banks, which also have a structure of neo-colonial states.²⁹ The above analyses derived from the studies of Polish enterprises also point to “the change of the ownership structure – the majority of our enterprises have foreign owners who expatriate from PLN 40 to 80 billion of profits from Poland.”³⁰ The liberal doctrine adopted by Poland at the beginning of the 1990s was, however, totally devoid of any strategic thinking oriented at economic development of the country, whose initial situation was evaluated as good.

²⁵ W. Żółtkowski, *Industrializacja i deindustrializacja*, <http://warszawaweuropie.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Odkrywany-wizerunek.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The privatisation of that sector aroused many emotions. As assessed by professors Ryszard Kozłowski and Jacek Zimny, “the economic and social losses from the EU-forced liquidation of the steel industry in Poland will amount to at least PLN 10 billion per year.” R. Kozłowski, J. Zimny, *Dramatyczna wyprzedaż Polskich Hut Stali*, <http://riad.usk.pk.edu.pl/~rhk/odrodzenie/odrodzenie/odrodz5.html>.

²⁹ D. Grabowski, “Pytanie o Polskę,” in: *Racja stanu – Janowi Olszewskiemu*, ed. B. Jusiak, Poznań, 2011, p. 103.

³⁰ A. Leszkowska, “Co się stało z polskim przemysłem?,” *Sprawy Nauki. Miesięcznik publicystyczno-informacyjny* (3 February 2013), <http://www.sprawynauki.edu.pl/archiwum/dzialy-wyd-elektron/303-informacje-el/2446-co-si-stao-z-polskim-przemyslem>.

The strategy of communist colonisation of states, including Poland, involved maintaining elites with an exceptionally low degree of political culture, especially as regards strategic autonomy of those states and thinking in sovereign categories. From this point of view, the party responsible for the implementation of fast processes placing Poland in the periphery of the capitalist world-system are the Polish elites, not accustomed to thinking in the categories of the national interest of a sovereign country.³¹ They adopted the assumption that “only foreign capital has necessary means and know-how [...] to effect takeovers even for a symbolic one zloty, since it is beneficial for the Polish economy,”³² which has proved to be wrong. The present condition of the Polish high-tech sector is poorer than before 1989.³³ In terms of the growing significance of the technology sector, economy, banking, and the energy sector, Poland is a peripheral country.

Poland's peripherality is also evidenced by its GDP per hour worked indicators, which are twice as low as in the Eurozone.³⁴ This bears consequences on growing the country's competitiveness in the future, as it will require implementing a strategy of economic development of the country, which is additionally threatened by the middle income trap.³⁵ The essence of the world-system approach is cheap labour in peripheral states, which for the centres is a resource exploited in the same way as mineral raw materials. In this context, it is worth noting that “even though the average salary in Poland is systematically growing, Europe seems to move forward even faster. 6.3 euro – that is 27 Polish zlotys – such is the average hourly rate in Poland. Meanwhile, the average pay in the EU amounts to slightly over 23 euro – 97 Polish zlotys. Worse paid than the Poles are only citizens of the countries on the peripheries of the European Union – Bulgaria and Romania.”³⁶ The problem of peripherality is in fact a problem of the attitude of Western states to newly accessed Member States, which are used for the accumulation of capital.

As regards work and hourly rate, it is worth noting that Poles work almost 2,000 hours per year on average, thus ranking seventh among the longest working nations in the world. West of the Oder, however, people work the least in the world since “the Germans spend the least time at work among the OECD countries –

³¹ Ibid.

³² Grabowski, op. cit., p. 104.

³³ Leszkowska, op. cit. Cf. A. Świdurska, “Kształtowanie się przemysłu wysokiej techniki w Polsce,” *Prace Komisji Geografii i Przemysłu* (2009), no. 13, pp. 56–67.

³⁴ K. Muszyński, T. Janyst, *Kapitał w Polsce w XXI w. Regulacje w służbie najsilniejszych: praca i kapitał*, Warszawa, 2015, p. 9. Here also on the highest taxation of Polish wages in Europe.

³⁵ R. Śliwa, P. Waląg, “Industrializacja i deindustrializacja gospodarki. Przyczynek do dyskusji nad reindustrializacją gospodarki Polski,” *Nierówności Społeczne a Wzrost Gospodarczy* (2017), no. 52, pp. 132–133.

³⁶ M. Janik, “Żałosne zarobki w Polsce. Eurostat policzył stawki w całej Europie,” *INNPoland* (27 March 2018), <https://innpoland.pl/142225,dane-eurostatu-zarobki-w-polsce-na-tle-euroopy-srednie-wynagrodzenie>.

merely 1,363 hours.”³⁷ Those differences are explained by cultural reasons. Indeed, certain cultures have grown accustomed to living off the work of others, since “for many years, the peoples of Eastern Europe were forced to accept Marxist theory as the only correct one and participate in the activities resulting from its successive interpretations,”³⁸ whereas today the same attitude is imposed on them by the world-system and neo-liberalism through a system of rewards and penalties.³⁹

However, this is not the gist of the problem. The above described data, results of studies and analyses clearly show that Poland is a state economically dominated by foreign capital. Apart from theoretical issues relating to a state's sovereignty, the most important issue for an average citizen in terms of the national interest in the situation of peripherality is the fact that as a result of wrong decision making and the policy of open doors to foreign capital, it is “[foreign capital] that is entitled to generate and realise profits in Poland with our hands, and then transfer them abroad. We, in turn, have been left with an enormous burden of debts which are constantly growing and we shall repay them not with our profits but with ever more highly taxed work.”⁴⁰ That work, done under low pay and long hours, will be additionally encumbered with debt which in Wallerstein's understanding is incurred by the state in order to build infrastructure for multinational corporations to encourage them to make further investments.

The Polish society and the society of Central and Eastern Europe in general exhibited enormous workforce capital, all the more so that it had been raised in the cult of hard work. The imposition of individualistic values and exponentiation of income differences between the West and the East resulted in the emergence of the phenomenon of “earning extra money,” which actually boils down to the model of holding several jobs and multiplying sources of income.⁴¹ This is because one poorly paid job is not able to guarantee the fulfilment of the fundamental premise of liberal economy, in which, according to Adam Smith, a man should support a family and educate at least one son.

Wallerstein believes that failure to fulfil the above goal is purposeful. World capital continuously moves around places of production, looking for groups and communities that are ready to work for ever lower rates. In this manner, the world becomes “de-ruralised” and traditional cultures are degraded through the universalisation of values.⁴² However, these values have not been worked out in concord

³⁷ “Polacy wśród najbardziej zapracowanych narodów. Meksykanie na czele rankingu,” *TVN24Bis.pl* (4 February 2018), <https://tvn24bis.pl/z-kraju,74/polacy-wsrod-najdluzej-pracujacych-narodow,812080.html>.

³⁸ Pawełczyńska, op. cit., p. 82

³⁹ Wallerstein, *Europejski*, p. 68.

⁴⁰ K. Kowalczyk, *Polacy o gospodarce wolnorynkowej*, Warszawa, 2014, p. 4.

⁴¹ K. Jasiński, J. Pietrzak, “Bogactwo w Polsce i Unii Europejskiej,” in: *Polacy we wspólnej Europie. Dysproporcje materialne i społeczne*, ed. M. Jarosz, Warszawa, 2011, p. 187.

⁴² Wallerstein, *Europejski*, p. 71.

by all parties, because the peripheries are characterised by “cultural mimetics” understood as “futile imitation of a foreign culture.”⁴³

Enrichment of a small group and impoverishment or stagnation of the rest of the society is another characteristic of a state’s peripheral status in the world-system.⁴⁴ Invoking public opinion polls, which are not objective data, it is worth noting that the Polish society is aware of the quality of its capitalist system. In the 1992 survey, 88% of interviewees responded that as a result of the economic changes in Poland, “average people become poorer while a small group of the rich becomes richer.” In an analogous survey carried out in 2014, the same answer was given to the same question by 79% of respondents.⁴⁵ The survey results seem to be confirmed by research. Economic elites in semi-peripheral countries endeavour to attain the level of living typical for the centres, which contributes to a growing gap in people’s incomes: “in 2000, 20% of the wealthiest Poles earned 4.7 times more than 20% of those with the lowest income. This ratio increased to 6.6 in 2006.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, it led to an alarming phenomenon whereby “Poland is in the group of countries distinguished by largest income inequalities in the European Union.”⁴⁷ It happened because Polish economic elites originate from former political (post-communist) elites and have been able to utilise the potential of small and medium companies well-prepared for free-market conditions.⁴⁸

This is, however, a worldwide trend. From 1988 to 2005, 25% richest inhabitants of the globe increased the wealth gap separating them from 25% of the poorest to such a degree that analysts do not hesitate to speak of “a growing rate of income inequalities in the entire population of the globe and unfair economic policies of the largest and wealthiest states so far unprecedented in the history of the world.”⁴⁹

Wallerstein does not provide any methodological or theoretical indicators of peripherality. Nevertheless, indices such as funds allocated to science, number of Nobel Prize winners, universities included in global rankings, number of patents, etc. could be added to the above cited data. However, such information does

⁴³ J. Matusiak, *Peryferyjny kapitalizm zależny*, [s.l.], 2015, p. 15.

⁴⁴ K. Kalus, “Polska: kraj, w którym dobrze jest mieć bogatych rodziców. Zaskakujące wyniki badań,” *Money.pl* (14 January 2020), <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/polska-kraj-w-ktorym-dobrze-jest-miec-bogatych-rodzicow-zaskakujace-wyniki-badan-6467526166357633a.html?fbclid=IwAR2hClZhvnrnCAGz-CTh7uM2BbCSTVQr-MvIYbUBx2fzjEQWo3ZROGYqCM8w>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Klimczak, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Jasiołki, Pietrzak, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁴⁸ Prof. Anna Pawełczyńska describes Polish elites as “lumpen-elites,” see Pawełczyńska, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–135.

⁴⁹ B. Bartz, “Ekonomiczna nierówność w skali światowej i drogi jej przezwyciężenia,” *Drohiczyński Przegląd Naukowy* (2017), no. 9, p. 24. The author goes on to ask: “Is it possible to justify the present situation whereby less than 20% of the population (the so-called global elite) of the globe consumes 85% of all extracted and manufactured goods and services? Still in 1950, the share of this global elite in the world’s population amounted to 30%”; p. 25.

not bring us closer to answering the question of whether Poland is a peripheral or semi-peripheral country, since the multitude of data sources and various ways of their interpretation will always add a degree of subjectivity to the argument.

The world-system concept proposed by Wallerstein is too narrow to unequivocally classify Poland in the suggested categories. His approach should be expanded to include geoeconomic regions, which in the structure of the world-system would constitute its regional reflection. This means that apart from the general division of the entire world into centres, semi-peripheries, and peripheries, the same division could be applied to particular regions, and Poland should be analysed in the global structure precisely from this regional viewpoint. This perspective is consistent with Wallerstein's concept of the triad, which divides the world into three zones of influence: USA – the Americas, Japan – East and South Asia, Western Europe – Central and Eastern Europe and the area of the former USSR.⁵⁰

From this viewpoint, Poland can be seen as a semi-periphery, similarly to other states of Central and Eastern Europe, where “their contemporary central area has a fundamental innovative and competitive advantage in the German economy as the largest world exporter of medium and highly processed final industrial products.”⁵¹ The dependency on Germany is visible in the Polish export sector, with even small fluctuations of the German economy strongly felt by Polish companies. This is because the German market accounts for one-fourth of the Polish foreign trade (export and import).⁵² For Germany, Poland is a semi-periphery, whereas for the world, Poland is a periphery of meagre political and economic importance, “thus becoming factories–assembly plants [...] for Western corporations, acquiring the status of peripheries or semi-peripheries within the world-system structure.”⁵³

Social and cultural consequences of peripherality

The events whose consequences are still felt nowadays were initiated still in the 1980s. However, processes of peripheralisation of Poland first started to take shape at the beginning of the 1990s, upon Poland's regaining of sovereignty. Wallerstein believes that only sovereignty guarantees proper networking linkages. As a matter of fact, sovereignty is a paradox in which freedom is achieved through enslavement in the hierarchical world-system. The category of enslavement used by Wallerstein is closer to the contemporary concept of dependency.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ I. Wallerstein, *Koniec świata jaki znamy*, Warszawa, 2004, p. 77.

⁵¹ W. Błasiek, *Pomiędzy centrum a peryferiami na progu XXI wieku. Geopolityka i ekonomika Polski i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w warunkach integracji europejskiej i światowej depresji gospodarczej*, Kielce, 2013, p. 399.

⁵² *Mapa rynków eksportowych*, <http://www.mapa.kuke.com.pl/niemcy.html>.

⁵³ Gawrycki, Szeptycki, op. cit., p. 233.

⁵⁴ Wallerstein, *Koniec*, pp. 90, 106.

However, it is worth remembering that their rank notwithstanding, semi-peripheries are seen as stable states capable of protecting their borders and citizens. They are also capable of protecting their interests, acting in compliance with their national interest, but in doing so they encounter various obstacles. The first one is national self-identification. It turns out that “the citizens of semi-peripheral states consider their states as weak.”⁵⁵ This happens because they have been influenced by what could be described as cultural/geopolitical communication codes. With these, the citizens of a given state define their place in the international hierarchy through imposed clichés of cultural codes coming from the media and non-domestic news, shaping the public opinion in terms of the determination and identification of friends or enemies (though not exclusively).⁵⁶

Another obstacle is the low self-esteem of the semi-peripheral society. In socio-cultural policy, it is important to model ideas and values properly. At present, under the globalisation processes, Poland has become a follower of Western values. Most importantly, the country lacks enough programmes, strategies or even reforms which would be able to make a considerable part of the society come together in order to establish a national community. Poles are very proud people who are capable of putting in great efforts in order to attain planned goals. The Polish-language media has identified patriotism with nationalism, while Polishness as such has been degraded and debased.⁵⁷

The third clearly noticeable obstacle is the use of cultural/geopolitical communication codes by the states of the centre vis-à-vis Poland. Analysing and shaping the vision of national identity is not difficult, especially nowadays, in the era of free media and mediatisation of political and social life. That is why the problem of Poles concerning Polishness “is also well known by our neighbours. And they make use of this knowledge, time and again attempting to influence the attitudes of Polish voters. Contemptuous foreign commentaries about Polish parochialism always appear right before the elections [...] German journalists have reminded us of the wrongs done to the German and Jewish people [...] by Poles, and thus have revived our complexes and uncertainty.”⁵⁸ It is obvious that the politics of memory is used in political games played on the international arena and against Poland by both Germany and Russia, and recently also by Israel. The goal behind such activities is to discredit one of the states (Poland) ranking as a semi-periphery and gain a superior position in the hierarchy of values.

Due to the above, the shame and complexes experienced by the Polish people create the need “to catch up” with Europe politically and economically. However, this need originates from the general national mythology shaped by cultural/

⁵⁵ Babones, op. cit., p. 17.

⁵⁶ T. Smura, *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwo zewnętrzne Polski – badania opinii publicznej*, Warszawa, 2018, p. 21.

⁵⁷ B. Fedyszak-Radziejowska, “Ile PRL w III RP?,” in: *Racja stanu*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

geopolitical communication codes. Catching up fits into the context of Wallerstein's world-system, earlier described neo-colonial concepts, and peripherality of Poland. Alexander Kiossev discussed socio-cultural background in the same vein when defining the conditions of self-colonisation, which in the communication/cultural contexts (Wallerstein's geoculture) takes place "in the interactions of 'narcissist' (central) and 'traumatic' (peripheral) cultures, which are connected by the time of origin, co-existence and interaction but are divided by all that is associated with the way of experiencing the world."⁵⁹ Peripheries, semi-peripheries and centres are worlds that communicate at different levels of abstraction. This communication boils down to imagination, simulacra and promises coming from the centres to peripheries and semi-peripheries, whose societies in turn become open to divesting themselves of both personal and state sovereignty.

"The models and demanding attitudes promoted by lumpen-elites gradually disorganise the entire society."⁶⁰ The elites and societies of semi-peripheries strive at attaining the status that they observe in the media. The elites have a chance of attaining this status through absorption of capital, while the rest of the society – through work or migration. With respect to Poland, it witnessed a world-scale phenomenon with the record-breaking migration of two million citizens from a country not involved in an armed conflict. Elites also migrate, but with their capital, which they deposit in tax havens. By doing so, they use the code of centre states, which dissociate themselves "from peripheral social hierarchies, especially those defined in the categories of social and cultural capital."⁶¹ This is because such states are unaware of the problems bothering the peripheries.

"Catching up" is perceived by the peripheries as striving for modernity and modernisation, though also relevant here are the problems of hegemonisation by Bourdieu's field of cultural production and the very habitus of the inhabitants of the peripheries. The struggle for success, understood as an improvement of the international position of the state and one's own material status, may prove to be "an effective remedy for low self-esteem."⁶² However, low self-esteem does not even allow the society to map out such goals, as it remains under the influence of symbolic hegemonic violence wielded through cultural/geopolitical communication codes. It is because of these codes that the centre states use the notion of "catching up" to designate their own cultural values as universal, recognising "their transmission to the peripheries as a beneficial 'modernising' activity."⁶³ That is why the centre has worked out a proper strategy in the course of

⁵⁹ G. Szwat-Gylybowa, "Aleksandra Kiosewa koncepcja samokolonizacji i efekt symmorfozy," *Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne* (2017), no. 13, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Pawelczyńska, op. cit., p. 159

⁶¹ T. Zarycki, "Interdyscyplinarny model stosunków centro-peryferijnych. Propozycje teoretyczne," *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne* (2007), no. 1, p. 18.

⁶² Fedyszak-Radziejowska, op. cit., p. 92.

⁶³ Zarycki, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

mediatisation efforts. Not without reason have the media in Poland been dominated by German capital⁶⁴ so as to create linguistic images of the world desirable for the centre. They were developed still before the collapse of the USSR and employed as they would be towards colonial countries, whereby Western Europe presented its activities as an act of carrying the torch of the centre's civilisational standards towards backward and barbaric peripheries,⁶⁵ both those outside of Europe and those situated on the edges of the continent, among others in its Eastern part.⁶⁶

In order to influence the Polish society through cultural/geopolitical communication codes associated with the notion of "catching up," national political myths about Poland's parochialism, backwardness of the East, and modernity of the West are being perpetuated. Such beliefs are seemingly harmless, but as Tadeusz Zarycki points out, these codes and myths underlie the emergence of "anti-centre" and "pro-centre" political parties. "Pro-centre" parties advocate for succumbing to the social logic of the centre and recognising its hegemony, while "centre" parties aim at appreciating, defending the interest,⁶⁷ and taking actions benefitting the national interest in terms of the improvement of the state's international status.⁶⁸ Through the activities of political parties and elites, those codes and myths are translated into international security. In the case of Poland, after 1989 they manifested in the form of strong pressure to join Western structures (Central European Initiative, Council of Europe, WTO, OECD, NATO, EU), and at present – the pressure to either accept or reject Western standards.

In the quest for a solution and remedy to this state of affairs, Poland has found itself abandoning the goal of building a sovereign state and accepting the logic of "shared sovereignty" in which states remain sovereign in the domain of internal affairs but subordinate themselves to great powers in foreign policy. This quasi-Finlandisation does not correspond with the present realities of Poland, which in a way may be seen as optimistic, as it indicates its semi-peripheral position in the world-system structure at the political level. However, noticeable here is the Western code relating to the sovereignty of EU Member States, including Poland. Anthony Giddens argues that "pooled sovereignty is sovereignty acquired," whereas in this context the European Union should be built under the principle

⁶⁴ "Do kogo należą media w Polsce? 75 proc. właściciele prasy to Niemcy," *Dorzczy.pl* (30 November 2016), <https://dorzczy.pl/kraj/15774/Do-kogo-naleza-media-w-Polsce-75-proc-wlasciciele-prasy-to-Niemcy.html>.

⁶⁵ I. Wallerstein points out that the colonial idea of fighting barbarity has been replaced by the idea of disseminating democracy. Wallerstein, *Europejski*, p. 34. Jan Zielonka speaks about a civilisational mission aimed at building an empire with the use of financial instruments. J. Zielonka, *Europa jako imperium. Nowe spojrzenie na Unię Europejską*, Warszawa, 2007.

⁶⁶ T.G. Grosse, "Tragedia państw peryferyjnych, czyli o geopolitycznych dylematach Polski w Unii Europejskiej," in: *Polska jako peryferie*, pp. 28–29.

⁶⁷ Zarycki, op. cit., p. 17.

⁶⁸ J. Kaczyński, "Polska racja stanu," in: *Racja stanu*, p. 32.

that “thanks to the cooperation and pooling of resources, Member States receive more (real as opposed to formal) sovereignty than they would have otherwise.”⁶⁹

The above theoretical framework is at odds with the results of research on the integration of Central Europe with the European Union. It turns out that “integration of this area with the EU has not narrowed the gap between the western and central part of Europe. To a certain degree, it has even perpetuated the old model of subordinated development of Central Europe, where structural features, identical to those prevailing in the past, become visible in a new setting.”⁷⁰ In the end, Poland has been internationalised, which became a compensation of sorts to its citizens, giving them a sense of stability as well as national and international security in the political, military, economic or cultural dimension.

During the time of political transition, the society in Poland was subject to exceptional burdens for which it found itself unprepared. This was because the period of systemic transformations triggered the phenomenon of socio-cultural trauma. This, in turn, was translated into instilling in the Polish society the need to “catch up” by ingraining in it a collective sense of shame and felling of culturally lagging behind other states.⁷¹ However, when we look at the characteristic features of cultural trauma, we may come to the conclusion that the Polish society is continuously culturally traumatised by media corporations and outlets through cultural/geopolitical communication codes. One may even venture a thesis that the contemporary Polish society is a stranger in its own country, i.e. the number of globalisation changes is not commensurate with the rate of modernisation of the society.

The factors that give credence to the claim that the Polish society is permanently being traumatised include: interpreting facts as being at odds with the fundamental premises of culture, where Polish national martyrology, heroism and international successes are presented as sequences of defeats and reasons for being ashamed.⁷² At present, the indigenous culture also faces a threat from Western trends which – contrary to the centuries-long tradition of Poles defying the attempts to impose on them foreign values and models (Russification and Germanisation, German and Soviet occupation) – are accepted by the society and mindlessly absorbed into the indigenous culture, thus resulting in the hybridisation of cultural forms.⁷³ The Polish society has also found itself in the phase of the second wave of individualisation, which is associated with the need to tear oneself off the traditional cultural patterns in order to link one's identity with universal trends.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ A. Giddens, *Europa w epoce globalnej*, Warszawa, 2009, p. 246–247.

⁷⁰ Grosse, op. cit., pp. 46–47.

⁷¹ P. Sztompka, *Trauma wielkiej zmiany. Społeczne koszty transformacji*, Warszawa, 2000, p. 31.

⁷² M. Jarosz, “Wstęp,” in: *Polacy we wspólnej Europie. Dysproporcje materialne i społeczne*, ed. M. Jarosz, Warszawa, 2011, pp. 8–16.

⁷³ J. Czaja, *Kulturowe czynniki bezpieczeństwa*, Kraków, 2008, p. 53.

⁷⁴ U. Beck, *Społeczeństwo ryzyka. W drodze do innej rzeczywistości*, Warszawa, 2002, pp. 193–195.

It should be stressed that this individualisation “has become a structural fact forced on people by the system, whether they want it or not.”⁷⁵ According to Sztompka, the last phenomenon indicative of cultural trauma is social mobilization. In this aspect, two characteristic features are evident in Poland: the apathy and poor development of civic society in Poland, as well as its mobilization in the defence of hedonistic ways of living.

The conditions of socio-cultural trauma are indispensable to introduce new and arduous social reforms which demand extraordinary sacrifice. The above reflections show, however, that the entirety of the Polish society’s sacrifice has been exploited by the economic-political elites and foreign capital. This happened in line with the “shock doctrine,” which is a well-known concept of colonial states and developing countries in traumatic situations. Poland is a textbook example of the application of shock therapy and the international idea of democratisation and liberalisation in order to bring down a medium-rank state of the hitherto Second World⁷⁶ to globalised peripheral forms. “In Poland, shock therapy [...] actually constituted a parody of the democratic process [...] in Poland, democratisation was used as a weapon against the ‘free market,’ both in the streets and in the elections.”⁷⁷ This type of disillusionment springs up more and more often in criticism of the democratic and liberal system, which since the 1960s has been treated as the third wave of totalitarianism in Europe.

Conclusions

Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory presents contemporary international relations and relationships in the categories of networking relations through transnational connections of capitalist, liberal nature. They involve the need of states to adapt to democratic and neo-liberal standards dominated by international production capital.

With respect to Poland, Wallerstein’s world-system should be understood on two planes. In the global context, Poland is treated as a periphery due to its economic structure and colonial past. Poland is a country of marginal political influence and meagre economic importance for the system as a whole. It does not have any dominating industries or a strategic position which would give it the possibility of influencing the structure of the world-system.

However, there is also a regional context mentioned by Wallerstein, where in the European region Poland attains the status of a semi-periphery concentrated

⁷⁵ M. Olcoń-Kubicka, *Indywidualizacja a nowe formy wspólnotowości*, Warszawa, 2009, p. 26.

⁷⁶ A. Nowak, “Tajemnicze zniknięcie Drugiego Świata. O trudnym losie półperiferii,” in: *Polska jako peryferie*, pp. 86–104.

⁷⁷ N. Klein, *Doktryna szoku. Jak współczesny kapitalizm wykorzystuje klęski żywiołowe i kryzysy społeczne*, Warszawa, 2017, pp. 227–229.

around the centre country: Germany. In this framework, Poland is able to exercise fundamental prerogatives of sovereignty, which in fact do not serve the society (banking, labour protection system, social system, old-age and disability pensioning system) but are used to stimulate it – treated as a resource – to work for the centre states, which invest their capital and exploit this resource.

There is also an additional dimension, the existence of which requires to see Wallerstein's world-system concept as three-dimensional. The first dimension is the international system not relating to states but to subjects of international law or even those holding a position above that law (institutions, transnational corporations whose capital exceeds the possibilities of medium states). The second dimension would be the system of centres, semi-peripheries and peripheries, where sovereign states constitute the major links in the domain of security (securitisation of their national interest, economy, culture, politics). The third dimension would be the regional system with a dominant centre and orbiting semi-peripheries and peripheries. In this dimension, the strength of the peripheral and semi-peripheral states is geographical determinism and their proximity to the centre.

The world-system concept and Poland's position therein makes one draw many conclusions for the future, especially as regards the condition of the Polish elites and the protection of economic and socio-cultural security. It seems impossible for the state to change its status due to the loss of several of its economic sectors, which effectively deprived Poland of economic innovativeness and doomed it to peripherality. Polish elites are facing a challenge of coming to terms with the impossibility of attaining the status of a centre and instead acquiring traits which would help to realise the state's regional semi-peripherality to the fullest (through the concept of Intermarium or the Three Seas Initiative).

Abstract

The methodological assumptions of the article and its aim are presented by defining the process of peripheralisation of countries. The text analyses Poland in the context of the theoretical approach proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, which consists in the division of the world into centres, semi-peripheries, and peripheries. The article first presents the concept of the world-system and discusses the position of Poland in this international system based on its political, geopolitical, economic and socio-cultural characteristics. The state is analysed through the theoretical lens of neo-colonial peripherality. The article diagnoses the social and cultural consequences of the processes of peripherality. It discusses of the current international order and argues for perceiving Poland as a semi-peripheral state within the world-system.

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