

Semi-peripheries 2.0

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1. The outline

Criticism of the science reforms carried out by the previous government is commonplace within the Polish scientific community. Given this, the ambitious plan of the new minister of science needs to dissociate itself from the previous government, which he was a member of. As it turned out, however, these intentions overwhelmed the political possibilities of the minister and the competences of his team of collaborators. The declared substantive goals of the new Act on Higher Education and Science prepared by this team, which was to be the internationalisation of Polish science, turned out to be inconsistent with the government's political goal to change the elites – who are generally unfriendly to the new right-wing government. In order to give seriousness to the bill, it was called, for propaganda reasons, *the Constitution for science* or *2.0 Act*, which – as it soon turned out – demonstrated a misunderstanding by the designers of the conceptual categories they used.

The government propaganda, represented both by the official enunciations of the Ministry and the pro-government media, announced the act as a 'law different than all', which – regardless of the intentions of project promoters – was true in the context of other laws adopted by this political team, which the entire legislative process was able to shorten to several hours. The law discussed here was different in that it was preceded – at least formally – by broad discussion, and the legislative process lasted two years. At the beginning, three independent teams of experts were selected, although all representing similar neo-liberal views. Generally, these teams proposed organisational solutions for Polish science, which either did not work in the West, or had not dared be used anywhere.

It turned out, however, that the experts' recommendations were of little importance, because the Ministry ignored them, proposing their own ideas. They demonstrated considerable resistance to substantive counterarguments and the arrogance of the minister and his incompetent deputy showed the same disregard to the critics, with the latter described as undertaking a monologue with the scientific community (Rzewska-Skłodowska 2018). Subsequent versions of the bill were being prepared in a great hurry to make it possible to introduce the new law for the next academic year. It resulted in huge disorganisation. In the Sejm, the bill was adopted without discussion within two and a half hours, while about 200 amendments were introduced to the carelessly written and constantly changed project. The scientific community was expected to consult the bill within two weeks in the middle of the summer holidays. One result of this disorganisation was terminological unconcern and the only acceptable ideological option accepted. Interestingly, the implementing provisions for the law in force since October 2018 were not yet ready in January 2019, although the obligations imposed on scientists were already in force (*lex retro agit!*). The present author was informed about the funds allocated for his research for 2018 only in October that year, while the results was expected in November, which – with a high degree of good will or sense of humour – could be interpreted as motivation to intensify his scientific work.

The lawmakers, attached to – apparently for themselves a new – concept of the *2.0 Act*, did not notice that modern industry already works in version 4.0, based on artificial intelligence, so they did not distinguish their vision of science from its analogue version. Critics of the ministerial ideas have ironically named their product the *0.0 Act*. Criticising their assumptions the *scoriosis*¹ of the act introduced by the previous political team, the project promoters of the new law designed a much further-reaching *scoriosis 2.0*. It is difficult not to get the impression that the assumptions of the new law designed the ideal scientific community according to the Chinese experiment of civic *scoriosis*, in which citizens (and in the law, scientists) are allocated

¹ It is a neologism being a contamination of scoring and sclerosis. '*Scoriosis* is [...] an unpleasant affliction of the ministerial administration. It results from the parameterisation of the assessment of the scientific achievements of scholars and the academic units they are employed in. [...] Individuals afflicted [are] ready [...] to reduce the assessment of scientific achievements [...] to understood numbers of scores gained [...]. Scholarly status is a function of points allocated according to arbitrary administrative criteria' (Rykiel 2014: 77-78).

scores for behaviour consistent with the expectations of the authorities. On the basis of this law, persons, journals and publishing houses were assigned to individual scientific disciplines, also normalised in accordance with the 'innovatory' ideas of ministerial officials (the inclusion of astronomy in physics and the transformation of sociology into 'sociological sciences' being examples of this innovation), thus the declared interdisciplinary was de facto destroyed. It was decided to grant ranks to publishers administratively, i.e. not for their quality, but for their names, history or their ideological correctness. One result of this regulation was a high rank awarded to a long-standing scientific publishing house, which, for economic reasons, has not been employing proofreaders for two decades, which consequently produces books with spelling mistakes. Even more interestingly, a high rank was awarded to a peripheral publishing house that publishes hardly any scientific books but is ideologically close to the ministerial preferences.

Such solutions have nothing to do with the projectors' assertions that the goal of the new act was to stimulate competitiveness. The latter was to be made without money, because the ministerial announcements of the growth in the embarrassingly low expenditure on science were quickly dismissed by the Ministry of Finance.

The declared internationalisation of Polish science is to be made, under the new law, through dependent development, which is incidentally a permanent practice of semi-peripheral neo-liberalism. The tools of this 'development' are to be the publication of the results of scientific research in the journals of the leading international corporations in English, which is obviously not reprehensible in itself, provided, however, that it does not lead to the marginalisation of research relevant to Polish culture and of national publishers.

The aforementioned assumptions of the Act and its implementing regulations inevitably lead to an increase in bureaucracy in Polish science, even though the bureaucracy was supposed to be reduced by the Act. This reduction was to be achieved by the brevity of the Act, which, however, actually attempts to regulate even the smallest details of scientific life. The result is that the Act is – in its published version – 120 pages long, and the implementing regulations – an additional 107 pages.

The criticism of detailed proposals for the new law and its political methodology, widely represented in the literature, is intended to be developed elsewhere. Below three important elements of the current 'reform' of science in Poland are presented: (1) the contradictions of this 'reform', (2) its systemic conditioning in the globalised world capitalist system, and (3) its political aspect.

2. Contradictions of the reform

Roman Czapliński identifies four main contradictions of the modern university, which the 'reform' in question introduces or strengthens (Konarzewska-Michalak 2019). The first contradiction is that between the what is commonly observed in contemporary science and what has also been declared by the Ministry, interdisciplinarity, and strict disciplinarity. The latter may be interpreted both as a necessity to assign the scientist to a discipline and to discipline the individual by subordinating him/her to external bureaucratic rigours. This means, in fact, a limitation of freedom for self-development if not for freedom of research.

The second contradiction is that between the declared innovativeness of university research and teaching, on the one hand, and the conventionality of the disciplined (in both senses) teaching at earlier stages of education, on the other, which wildly enters universities. Students educated according to increasingly normalising rules are less prepared at both substantial and personal levels for unconventional thinking (Konarzewska-Michalak 2019), and even for thinking for themselves in general. So far, it has been increasingly difficult to adapt the GCE graduates to the norms of university debates, and after the present 'reform' it will be even more difficult, if possible, at all.

The third contradiction is that between the university's declared elitism as the forger of the intellectual elite, on the one hand, and the 'economisation' of universities managed and assessed in a corporate manner. This contradiction stems from implementing regulations introducing the current 'reform', where the significant, though poorly verbalised fact, is the rule of inheritance of prestige, and therefore of accumulated capital (cf. Konarzewska-Michalak 2019), not simply cultural but also economic. The reason is that the Ministry assesses scientific institutions and

teams higher the more generously it has financed them, which is of particular importance for the generally embarrassingly low level of financing science in Poland. In this context, scientific institutions with a medium or low position will not have chances to break out of their backwardness, which means blocking not only progress but also opportunities. This leads to the structuring of administrative rather than intellectual elites, selected not on the basis of substantive rivalry (Konarzewska-Michalak 2019), but the favours of political power. This will atrophy the university's ability to shape the intellectual elite. It is difficult not to interpret this as a social engineering process of building a new social hierarchy (ibidem) or status inheritance as described by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). The top positions of the hierarchy will be occupied by the elite educated by the academics at the universities recognised as elitist because they are financed in an elitist way rather than elitist in their research results. At the lower levels, the middle class will be disappearing by the precarisation of those employed in universities other than 'flagship' institutions, according to the terminology and ideology of the previous government.

The fourth contradiction is that between the declared autonomy of the university, on the one hand, and – as exemplified by the Ministry – neo-colonial assessment criteria (Konarzewska-Michalak 2019) of scientists and scientific institutions, on the other. The declarative autonomy of the university refers in this context to the xenophobia of the current ruling party, while the criteria for the evaluation to the Shanghai ranking of universities.

According to Roman Czapliński, the four contradictions will lead to alienation resulting from the inconsistency between substantive achievements and partisan merits (Konarzewska-Michalak 2019), which will result in growing economic disparities between profitable sciences and 'unproductive' humanities, and the university will transform into permanent disorder where the economically stronger will win (ibidem).

A fifth contradiction can be added. It is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the deregulatory ideology and phraseology of the Ministry, which underlies the *2.0 Act* and is manifested in the neo-liberal spirit of the accepted projects of the bill, and, on the other hand, the over-regulatory practice of the final version of

the act and its implementing regulations. This contradiction may result from the conservative-centralist ideology of the ruling party, which is often strongly resistant to the Minister's projects. The Minister's weak political position within the ruling camp stands behind this contradiction, but there are lessons here for every other politician who has thought about a real regulatory power within his/her own ministry.

3. The systemic conditionality of the globalised world capitalist system

According to Mateusz Werner, Polish higher education is currently in the final phase of the processes resulting from the political transformation which began in the early 1990s. This resulted in a sevenfold increase in the number of formal students, which radically altered the proportion of students to the number of research and teaching staff. As a result, relations between formal students and – increasingly also formal – lecturers transformed into transactions (Pyda 2018). The completion of this process was the introduction of a two-stage Bologna study system, which had very negative results for the humanities' (ibidem), because it forced the confused student to the preparation of his/her B.A. thesis in the first semesters of his/her studies (ibidem). The culmination of this process is the current *Constitution for science*, the aim of which seems to be a 'full adaptation of the Polish higher education system to the pattern' (ibidem) currently operating in Europe, critically evaluated by many observers and participants of science in Poland and beyond (Rykiel 2014).

It is worth noting that Western European universities commonly criticise this pattern, including the working conditions of scientists, the bureaucratic burdens, the constant measurements of the 'effectiveness of teaching and research', the need to raise external funds for research, and constantly profiling the didactic offer for labour market preferences (Pyda 2018). Despite such criticisms, in Poland these solutions are still considered to be a model worth imitating. This is due to the complex of parochialism – which is less likely to manifest in Polish universities, and more likely to be found amongst politicians who think that they are familiar with the functioning of science. It is worth repeating here that higher education in Poland was until recently a 'reserve of old academic' norms (Pyda 2018) of not only communist, but – paradox-

ically – also pre-war patterns of the Humboldt-type university. The latter was based on combining, within one institution, science and its popularisation among students, and thus was predicated upon common access to the latest research results. The Humboldt-type university was one of culture (Readings 1997), and thus of creating the ‘fabric of modern cultural identity’ (ibidem), i.e. ‘the most important institution shaping civic society whose political representation was the nation state’ (Pyda 2018).

Cut off from the mainstream of European civilisational and cultural experiments, Poland opened up to ‘the impact of mechanisms relevant to the modern scientific and academic world in the West European sense’ (Pyda 2018) after 1989, adopting ‘with a child’s trust’ (ibidem), a model of dependent development together with the conviction that everything that comes from the West must be good (ibidem). Discussion on the modernisation of higher education was subordinated to ‘short-sighted current policy’ (ibidem), regardless of changing governments and their political options, because all of them actually implemented the same project of dependent development.

However, discussion about the reform of higher education disregarded the most important context, i.e. ongoing civilisation processes (Pyda 2018), including the impact of globalisation processes on the state of universities (Reading 1997). This is especially true for the relation of the existence of ‘the university as an institution with the notion of a nation state for which national culture is the basic tool of social communication, a means of building collective self-awareness and the identity of a political community’ (Pyda 2018), and therefore also of nation creation processes (Reading 1997). The fact is that when the nation state loses its importance in the clash with transnational economic organisations and disappears from the global political scene, ‘it becomes only a local regulator of global economic processes’ (Pyda 2018). The result is not only the loss of economic sovereignty for international financial and commercial organisations, but also the disintegration of the university as an institution of the nation state (Reading 2017). When the state ceases to be a subject of the political game, so does the university as an institution co-creating collective identity (ibidem) and the ‘competitiveness of the nation state in relation to other nation states also increases’ (Pyda 2018). Because, from the economic point of view, science is

'a means of raising the competitiveness of a given community that organises itself politically and institutionally' (ibidem), when international organisations start to play a decisive role, no one is interested in raising the competitiveness of units pursuing group interests.

Thus, globalisation not only affects the functioning of enterprises, it also affects universities. Part of this global transformation is the delocalisation of universities, as a result of which the most important Anglo-Saxon universities function now as international corporations. Delocalisation breaks the links of the university with a specific cultural community, and the university becomes an international service provider offering knowledge transfer (Reading 1997), which is a contradiction of Humboldt's idea of the university. One symptom of this is the disappearance of the importance of literary studies of national literatures for 'cultural studies' (Pyda 2018).

The paradox of Polish science lies in the fact that, accepting the *Constitution for science*, we deprive ourselves of 'the colossal advantage' (Pyda 2018) which gave us the backwardness caused by fifty years of isolation from mainstream European civilisation, along with the commercialisation and corporatisation processes, while retaining the Humboldt model of universities. The current 'reforms' try to destroy this advantage, not noticing that 'the American and Canadian elites have already become aware of the deadly threat that the university collapse involves and try to counteract, creating [...] elitist, and also very expensive institutions of a niche profile' (Pyda 2018). 'It is in them that the idea of the Humboldt-type university is trying to be rebuilt' (ibidem) while 'in Poland, we still have traces of such a model in our higher education' (ibidem). Therefore, the *2.0 Act* is the culmination of a quarter of century 'process of adapting Polish universities to Western patterns, and even [...] a nail to the Polish university coffin' (ibidem).

4. The political aspect

In reflecting upon the current 'reform' of science in Poland, one cannot omit its political aspect. The result of the applied 'political methodology', although deeply disappointing, should not be surprising, for it confirmed the long-established principle that politicians treat science as a drunkard treats a lantern, which serves not to be

enlightened, but rather to – at best – support, and – at worse – to empty the contents of his innards.

The *2.0 Act* in its current form is an unavoidable product of the xenophobic political milieu that issued it. Interestingly, however, the complexes of this environment towards the core of the global capitalist system are greater than their xenophobia. The frightening feature of this environment is the bold pursuit of the future with heads turned to the past, which sooner or later must end with a spectacular crisis – and not only of this milieu.

5. The traditional organisational culture

The result of the attitude indicated above is the cult of tradition along with its anti-developmental, if not pathological, aspects, which also applies to traditional organisational culture. Below is an updated version of the manifestations of this culture (Rykiel 2005), it represents those who did not emigrate, remaining – also mentally – in sociable, and above all familiar, semi-peripheries.

Consequence – successive prime ministers, consistently cutting out expenditures on science, invariably promise that the expenditures will increase in the year following their resignation.

Responsibilities – scientists should understand that their duties are to perform only what the ministry expects them to, and thus to smoothly serve the successive reporting systems; misunderstanding this simple principle results in a painful confrontation with the consequences of insubordination against the administration's regulations. Insisting on the values of science, the ethos of scientists and dreams of building strong scientific communities at home rather than the heroic strengthening of the hegemony of foreign milieus is highly inappropriate.

Worldliness – rather than decent financing, a much simpler way to achieve world level national science is by introducing foreign-language terminology, preferably pointless; instead of dealing with the publication of valuable scientific works, scientists should fill in the slots made in science by successive ministerial regulations, no more, however, than four publications per one slot per person annually, otherwise the slots could become clogged.

The whole steam in the whistle – young and talented researchers are inclined to write various senseless, unnecessary reports, written in flawed Polish. To get rid of their extraordinary research work, it is rightly assumed that if you let them into the modes of formalism, they will quickly internalise the clerical patois as their own.

Powers – the condition for a state official to acquire the right to confer the title of full professor in his/her M.A., or even GCE, even if uncompleted.

Prosthesis – the full professorship is a prosthesis of prestige, which explains the huge demand on it; four letters before the name are prestigious enough in themselves.

Patent – the full professorship is a patent for lifelong wisdom and official permission for a lack of scientific activity.

Prize – any manifestation of scientific activity, despite having a full professorship, is distinguished by a ministerial award.

Achievements – in order to ensure a conflict-free professorial qualification procedure the candidate should have no more publications than an average capable doctor, i.e. 60, of which at most six abroad, preferably the nearest country; receding from the scientific development since the habilitation increases the chances of success.

Social justice – HR policy consistently applies the principle: *from everyone according to his/her abilities, to each according to his/her needs*; two professorial books, promoted post-graduate students and reviews of dissertations are required from recalcitrant candidates to full professorship while the principle is applied to friends that it is difficult for them to find candidates for post-graduate students, and that the lack of a published book is forever recognised as a professorial book; this is a guarantee of the docility of candidates after their promotion.

Doctorates – an effective way to become a full professor is to write two PhD's: one's own and one's post-graduate students.

Nobel Prize – to the minister who declared the uselessness of science in his parish, and yet did not receive either the Nobel or Darwin Prize, a full professorship is immediately given for consolation.

Norm – a full professorship for discredited politicians becomes the norm; they have to be compensated somehow.

Guarantees – the durability of scientific institutes is built on the cult of mediocrity, for the point is that no employee would outperform the director, which would not be easy without institutional guarantees.

Univoduality – an academic career at one university is preferred – from student to an honorary doctorate; then one is a known person in at least one university.

Honour – to obtain an honorary doctorate, neither a completed M.A. nor B.A. is required.

Sinecure – Latin: *sine cura* – without care (for something); the same individuals are promoted in many editorial offices and boards of journals in order to strengthen their prestige; that of the individuals, of course.

Body – every scientific, and especial *scientifous*, journal must be the body of an institute and propagate the right views, and then it will be adequately scored, and even subsidised, by the Ministry.

Comradeship – in order to ensure the proper distribution of public funds for research, an agency was established under the working name of Comrades Will Have Fair...; it was a great idea to raise funds, especially if you have a friend there, and even better two; to confuse enemies, the name of this agency should be changed from time to time.

Intercourse – when one candidate for the post of full professor had two publications, but thirty colleagues in the faculty council, and another candidate vice versa, the former invariably wins – in accordance with the rules of social coexistence; the irresistible desire to become a professor is an irresistible argument.

Substitute member – the condition of becoming the chairman of the scientific council as the crowning achievement of one's career requires the loss of contact with the discipline, and even better with reality; death during the term of office is not a sufficient reason for the expiration of this function.

Member with no index – the Hirsch index $H \leq 2$ is an effective way to become a candidate for a member of the academy of science.

Boring and 'booring' – it concerns the advancement of too capable subordinates; it is very effective.

Holding in contempt – the assistant has traditionally been held in contempt; immediately after graduation (s)he should have demonstrated the ability to conduct exercises in subjects (s)he had never studied, as well as proficiency in translating his/her boss's texts into congress languages that the boss does not know; readiness to carry the suitcases during the boss's private holiday trips is also welcomed; due to the liquidation of assistants as a class, their functions were taken over by post-graduate students who now serve as a free labour force.

Class struggle – the process of liquidating the assistants as a class was too slow. It created a tendency to socialise the assistant when (s)he fell on a dozen or so professors; this resulted in the assistant's balking and his/her tendency to wriggle, which indicated his/her maturity and opened the way to his/her further public career.

Social scandal – when the assistant dared sit down at the professors' table at a conference.

Critique – in the interest of ensuring an adequate level of scientific critique, preventive censorship has been introduced; unlike totalitarian regimes, this is not state censorship.

Criticism – substantive criticism and indication of factual errors are considered to be reprehensible; people who are still able to conduct substantive criticism must reckon with ostracism and will be written off as troublemakers – rightly so because they undermine the foundations of the existing social order.

Social indiscretion – the biggest one is calling the ignoramus an ignoramus.

Reviews – reviewing works on the degree, and especially publishing reviews, is usually entrusted to incompetent people, which guarantees a lack of critical remarks, although it does not guarantee the lack of financial claims of the reviewer against the reviewed; in addition to the fee, of course.

Specialisation – as part of the social division of labour, the principle has been implemented that some read books and others write them.

Self-service – the principle has been introduced that writing, editing, reviewing, evaluating, awarding, rewarding and reading is done within the same team, which greatly improves management, and besides everything happens in the group of people who are able to understand the merits of the work.

Textbook – the most effective way to become the author of a textbook is poor mastery of the mother tongue and the monopoly of access to foreign-language sources; however, it is preferable to write textbooks for the needs of readers who have no need to learn anything new, but rather wish to consolidate their previous beliefs, and especially their superstitions.

Coverage – introduced instead of editing; from the latter it differed in the lack of editing texts submitted in the volume, which had a common cover with the name of the coverer, misidentified with the editor.

Pidginisation – publications in pidgin-English will get higher ministerial scores.

Conferences – always called scientific, otherwise one could overlook this fact.

Conference papers – usually stammered from a page, while the listeners turn pages together with the presenter; even worse, often read in a foreign language (pidgin-English), but with an ethnic accent.

Invocation – every scientific article, regardless of the subject, should start with reference to the boss's light thoughts; a remnant of unforgettable times, when every scientific article was started with the reference to the light thoughts of Joseph Visarionovich Stalin.

Ode to joy – on the occasion of the successive jubilees of the boss, spontaneous joy is expressed, and sometimes glorification, often with a bound word (limericks, sonnets, songs, poems, and less frequently epics).

Quoting – one should quote one's own thoughts after the boss who published them earlier to have any publications, even though – as a full professor – he did not have to, but he wanted to give young people a good example.

Plagiarism – the inability of a professor to rewrite dozens of pages of the M.A. thesis in his own words does not arouse anyone's surprise, and therefore the will to check whether the plagiarist has a completed GCE is superfluous.

Personal data protection – concerns relatives of local VIPs who had not been admitted to the university on general principles, but were nevertheless accepted on the basis of the Rector's decision.

Definition – there is a belief that violations of ethical principles concern – by definition – only others.

Stability of ethical principles – he was stable and only they changed.

Punctuality – is the courtesy of kings, so it does not apply in the republic.

Decency – feudal values have been successfully eradicated.

Truth – for obvious reasons the instrumental definition of truth applies: a statement is true that is useful at a given stage.

Electronic document flow – is dulled because it exceeds the technical capabilities of scientific institutions and prevents the submission of documents in the position of a deep bow.

'Respondence' – in connection with entering into the era of the information society, correspondence was liquidated, replacing it with 'respondence' by institutionalising the traditional habit of not responding to letters, because answering requires the ability to write and significantly hindered the manifestation of contempt for the petitioner.

I have the right – a crowned argument of frustrated bosses, oblivious of *non omne licitum honestum*.

It works – *lex retro non agit* (Latin: law does not work back)? But *agit*; all you need to do is look around.

Family business – welcome conversion of the institute into a family business by employing mothers, wives and lovers or husbands, brothers and sons, preferably for an indefinite period.

Traditional values – of course Christian-national, according to which women deserve special recognition for fulfilling the social roles assigned to them; forced retirement of women ten years earlier than men, therefore, maintains the social order, although in foreign-language terms it is called misogyny.

Generally therefore science ends, and *sighence* gets better (Rykiel 2015). In connection with boldly entering – on the basis of the *2.0 Act* – modernity, however, it will be *sighence 2.0*.

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