

*Values and Radical Social Change*  
*Comparing Polish and South-African Experience*  
(Warsaw: Institute of Political Studies, 1998)

**Edited by Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński**

Comparing Polish and South African experience in social matters seems to be -- at the first glance -- quite an exotic venture. What can eventually be common for two, so different and remote (even in geographical sense) societies and countries? Does it make any sense to juxtapose South Africa, overcoming the legacy of apartheid, and Poland, that is struggling with the remnants of the communist system? Communism and apartheid were two quite different oppressive systems. And what about cultural differences and totally different historical paths and local traditions? Such doubts are naturally legitimate, but on the other hand -- all sociological grand theories take for granted that social life of various human communities cannot be reduced only to unique, local phenomena and that there is certain universality in basic mechanisms which enable the communities to function. Let us take as an example the social functions of family, structural consequences of labor division or -- last but not least -- the existence of a widely shared value system. The latter is -- on the one hand -- a normative basis of social order, and in fact -- turns the society into a somehow integrated whole. It is culture which shapes a substantial part of normative basis for social order and determines a set of fundamental beliefs that keep the society integrated and distinguishes it from other societies. Truly, the differences in starting point for radical change as well as differences in their cultural load are huge, whereas similarities can hardly be traced. It does not mean that tracing hypothetical similarities and displaying the differences is not an academically legitimate task.

The comparison of these two societies is not direct, i.e., there is no common methodological option, nor is there a common set of hypotheses to be tested in a joint research. On the contrary: all texts were written independently and only later compared and discussed by the team of authors. Due to a limited budget it could not be done in any other way. But such an approach has also its specific cognitive value that enlarges our knowledge about the processes of radical change of a social order. In spite of clearly visible differences, the conclusions undoubtedly indicate the existence of a certain quite universal regularity or perhaps even a sociological law. Roughly speaking such a conviction underlined -- first of all -- an academic collaboration of Polish and South African social scientists, and secondly -- legitimized a joint publication of both the analytical reflections and the research findings focused on nominally the same social phenomenon (or phenomena).

The first joint publication<sup>1</sup>, edited by Ursula van Beek, was published in South Africa in 1995. That was an initial stage of our cooperation. At that time South Africa was quite an exotic country for Polish scholars and Poland was equally remote for South African scholars. No wonder that the first publication covered rather general issues and was not only analytical but also informative for the academic readers in both countries. We had to know our societies better in order to think about more in-depth analysis of selected

---

<sup>1</sup> V, van Beek (ed.): *South Africa and Poland in Transition. A Comparative Perspective*. HSRC Publishers, Pretoria 1995.

issues significant for the pace and shape of radical social change, experienced by these two societies.

Poland and South Africa entered an intriguing path of systemic transformation, although the starting points were profoundly different. Nonetheless, on a couple of occasions a *deja vu* accompanied my first visit to South Africa. Almost intuitively, it seemed that in spite of enormous differences in historic roots and cultural background of present social phenomena, there may be common denominator of the ongoing change: namely the similarity between certain more universal mechanisms and social processes launched by the initiation of the systemic transformation. Searching for such features of transformation undoubtedly needs a carefully designed research project that -- on the one hand -- would reduce culturally different meaning of nominally similar social phenomena to a set of directly comparable analytical categories and -- on the other hand -- would systematically investigate the phenomena according to a unified methodological framework. Such venture -- as I said earlier -- appeared to be far too ambitious, and not only due to the lack of sufficient financial back-up, but also because of the necessity of large-scale theoretical and methodological studies that should precede such comparative research.

Our aim was much more modest. We decided to discuss only one very significant issue which shapes the general transformation. At the same time, it is also a subject of deep change. After many discussions we agreed that it is one of the key issues for better understanding of cross-cultural mechanism of systemic change and locally specific, culturally conditioned, social response to a radical social change. That issue is the axiological dimension of transformation and it will be the main focus of our otherwise independent studies.

The volume is the aftermath of the Polish-South African conference: "Values and Social Transformation," held in Poland in October 1996. It begins with the essay that is an attempt to develop a preliminary theoretical model for three analytical categories that are interplaying during transformation. It is true that the analysis refers to post-communist systemic change but some elements of the model may also -- as it seems -- be a useful tool for describing other types of systemic change.

The second text, written by Marek Ziólkowski, deals with changes in values and interests under the condition of radical social change. In this case, Polish society again is the main point of reference but the discussed analytical categories seem to have more universal character. In the beginning Ziólkowski distinguishes four systems of normative order. The first one is specific for "transformation honeymoon," the second one -- that usually soon follows, is characterized as "a relative salience of those values which focus on the desirable political order and the construction of new political and legal institutions." The third system of normative order is marked by "materialist" values and interests, whereas the fourth one is marked by the increasing significance of the post-materialist values. Ziólkowski explores the interplay between these systems and finally concludes that "the newly emerging polarization of the Polish political scene is principally a polarization along the cultural, i.e., the value dimension. The domination of materialists concerns and interests in everyday life is accompanied therefore by the decisive role of non-economic values as regulators of political behavior.

In the next chapter Hennie Kotzé describes the changing values systems in the South African society. The analysis has clearly defined time limits (1990-1995) and refers to those stages of transformation that, in Ziolkowski's terms, forms the first two systems of normative order. And the conclusion of Kotzé's analysis only partly coincides with Ziolkowski's observations of the Polish society, as Kotzé writes: "At first glance it seems as though the political and economic macro-context has had an influence on the observed shifts in value orientations. Instead of moving in the direction of more post-materialist orientations, there are, in fact, indications that value orientations have become more materialist, under the threat of increased economic hardship and political violence."

Bernard Lategan argues that steady development and consolidation of democratic order, particularly in such a deeply divided society as the South African, cannot go on in an ideological vacuum. On the contrary, it has to be based on solid normative foundations, i.e., on common values. However, as Lategan puts it, "the process of discovering common values and their satisfiers is future oriented, making it possible to negotiate a situation of social transformation while ensuring continuity and operational stability."

Ursula van Bok offers a deep insight into the influence of ruling ideologies in former authoritarian regimes (communism in Poland and apartheid in South Africa) on everyday behavior of respective populations, their beliefs and also their response to transformation. She writes: "Unlike the Polish communist rulers who sought to convert an entire society to the values contained in the ideology they had espoused. the upholders of apartheid focused on a small minority, displaying an arrogant indifference with regard to the majority of the society from whom they demanded compliance with -- not faith in -- the ideology they championed."

The apartheid ideology has most certainly left some unwanted legacy, that still shapes the attitudes of population after the collapse of the former oppressive regime. Social soil was considerably contaminated -- on the side of black majority -- by frustration, blocked aspirations and by a deep sense of social injustice. While on the side of white minority -- there is a fear of vengeance. However, as Johann Mouton points out, "...tolerance is a necessary condition for stable democracies. Research on democratizing societies suggests that such consensus becomes established through a process of social learning, enhanced by current global processes of democratization and modernization." Analyzing empirical data he concludes that "majorities of black and white South Africans share certain values [...] and some beliefs about what counts as morally justifiable behavior." The process of learning tolerance, he argues, is rather in its initial than final stage, for "...tolerance of the other is not merely recognizing differences, but respecting and accepting difference and diversity."

Krzysztof Zagórski's paper deals with a question of extent to which neo-corporatist attitudes are spread within Polish society. He also wonders about the factors that shape this particular syndrome of attitude--, under the conditions of radical social change. It is a comparative analysis, because the data on Polish society are analyzed in the context of similar data collected for Finland and Australia. As he writes: "Attitudes to neo-corporatist and free market industrial relations are much better explained by other economic attitudes than by personal characteristics of the respondents." Only the level of education seems to be an exception, for "educated people in Poland and Finland seem to reject neo-corporatism and accept free market industrial relations, while the opposite

stands for Australia, where the leftist attitudes are known to be positively (or curvilinearly at least) related to education.”

Sample Terreblanche reconstructs the South African debate on building consent in the economy. Here, as well as In Zagórski’ paper, one of important “independent variables” that explains -- at least partly -- economic attitudes of the populations is of axiological nature. Terreblanche, contrary to Mouton’s arguments, claims that “the South African population does not presently constitute a society. We do not have the shared values, the cross cutting interest groups and the common history necessary to cement the population into some kind of community.” He argues, that building consent in the economy has to be based on a common normative ground, but it is a long-term social process. “It may take at least another 10 years before a stable social and economic framework and a common value system will be in place. Only then will it be proper to regard the transformation as complete.”

It is my hope that the brief indication of issues addressed by the authors will encourage the reader to get acquainted with the book.