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Between Biology and Culture. Polish Reflections on the Concept of Race in the Nineteenth Century

Abstract

In the nineteenth century, the Polish reflection on race and derivative terms was strongly influenced by the Western thought. New achievements and terminology in the field of natural sciences were adopted. Gradually, there was a change of look at a peoples, their origin and diversity. In the Enlightenment, while hierarchizing humankind, its biological variety was emphasized. The Romanticism focused on human culture and spirituality. The Positivism, in turn, based on the achievements of natural

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sciences, saw the basis for evaluation of human groups in biological criteria. The state of contemporary ideas and knowledge favoured the formulation of various racial theories, which also had their own political context. The analysis of Polish sources allows for showing the specificity of the domestic view in this field. It was often critical, but also approving the division of humankind into lower and higher races. This resulted from the adoption of a Eurocentric point of view. Historiosophy, seeking factors determining a historical role of a given race, also contributed to the search for differences between the white nations of Europe.

Keywords: *Polish science of the nineteenth century, anthropology, popularization of knowledge, race, racial theories, tribe, nation, ethnicity*

Między biologią a kulturą. Pojęcie rasy w polskiej refleksji XIX wieku

Abstrakt

W XIX wieku polska refleksja na temat rasy i pojęć pochodnych podlegała silnym wpływom myśli zachodniej. Przystojono sobie nowe osiągnięcia i terminologię z zakresu nauk przyrodniczych. Stopniowo doszło do przemiany spojrzenia na człowieka, jego pochodzenie i zróżnicowanie. W epoce oświecenia, hierarchizując gatunek ludzki, kładziono nacisk na jego biologiczną różnorodność. Romantyzm zwrócił się ku kulturze i duchowości człowieka. Pozytywizm natomiast, opierając się na osiągnięciach nauk przyrodniczych, w kryteriach biologicznych widział podstawę wartościowania grup ludzkich. Stan ówczesnych wyobrażeń i wiedzy sprzyjał formułowaniu rozmaitych teorii rasowych, które miały także swój kontekst polityczny. Analiza polskich źródeł umożliwiła ukazanie specyfiki rodzimego spojrzenia w tej dziedzinie. Często było ono krytyczne, ale jednocześnie aprobujące podział ludzkości na rasy niższe i wyższe. Wynikało to z przyjęcia europocentrycznego punktu widzenia. Historiozofia, upatrująca w danej rasie czynnik determinujący jej rolę w dziejach, przyczyniła się także do poszukiwania różnic między białymi narodami Europy.

Słowa kluczowe: *nauka polska XIX w., antropologia, popularyzacja wiedzy, rasa, teorie rasowe, plemię, naród, etniczność*

1. Introduction

Racism, which in the twentieth century left its mark on the history of European and world societies, did not come from nowhere. Its emergence resulted from earlier trends and ideas that had initiated a certain way of thinking – segregating and judging people according to various criteria. The aim of the article is to analyse the nineteenth-century Polish-language scientific and popular science sources. It will help follow through the development of the ideology, which, by hierarchizing human groups, justified discrimination, colonialism and genocide. It is a synthetic study on the history of ideas. Concepts and clues under analyses are explained within the context of the epoch, such as past images, state of knowledge and a general political and social situation, in which the categories and notions, especially text and interpretation codes of racial differences, were shaped.

The Polish reflection was specific when compared to the Western thought. Poles lost their statehood in 1795 and were deprived of the possibility of a free development. Their all activities revolved around the idea of independence. This affected not only political issues, but also those related to culture and science. Our analysis of Polish deliberations on the issues of race during the period of partition is based on several assumptions. So, since the end of the eighteenth century, this reflection was inspired by French Enlightenment ideas. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was influenced by the German thought, especially the Romantic one,¹ in which the concepts of physical differences among human race were popular and uncontroversial. The loss of Polish statehood resulted in the focus on preserving the national community of spirit, which became a superior category in hierarchy of notions. However, the Positivist literature was of another character. Unlike the Romantic one, focused on ideas, it brought up also the practical side of racial issues. Thanks to the intensive development of the press in the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars, who had previously remained in their own circles, began to popularize knowledge. They drew readers into a world which was both interesting – exotic distant

¹ Isaiah Berlin even called Eastern Europe a “de facto German intellectual province” in the context of the reception, see Berlin 2003, p. 143; English edition Berlin 1978.

lands and people living there – and dangerous – it was full of violence. The idea of race got mixed with the practice of social life, and as a result science was used as a tool for political purposes.

The present paper is a part of contemporary academic discourse, in which race is defined as an imagined thought construct, as well as an important social category determining human identity since the late 18th century². Due to methodological reasons, it was necessary to apply the approach of racial and postcolonial criticism. The criteria of sources selection involved a few crucial points. The aim was to select a complex body of source materials, which would lead to a coherent analysis, and was representative for the early anthropology in the Polish lands. Thus, scholars' views (zoologists, physicians, historians, anthropologist, especially), as well as authors active outside of the world of science, who dealt with the popularization of knowledge about racial differences and their categories, were taken into account. In the period, from which the sources under consideration originate, no formal divisions of studies on man existed, or they were in their initial origination process. In effect, till mid-19th century, authors were not always distinguished due to their “vocational” expertise. Their roles overlapped – the role of a scientist overlapped with a mission of an ideologist or a journalist. Our source material was also selected in order to demonstrate differences in the views found within various intellectual formations, i.e., Enlightenment, Romantic, and Positivist perspectives. The criteria of material selection included territorial specifics, namely we selected texts written in all the Polish lands and by the Polish diaspora. The analysis covers books on natural history, handbooks of zoology, geography, history, works that popularize science, as well as a variety of periodicals.

2. Enlightenment image of human races

In the Polish reflection of the end at the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, the interest in categorizing humankind according to external features was slight, if compared to the achievements of Western European countries.³ A small circle of researchers dealing with physical anthropology was particularly gathered in the Vilnius

² Lopez 1999, p. 165; Ahearn 2013, p. 213; Eriksen 2013, chapter 1.

³ Nowak 2021b.

centre. They tried to develop and popularize knowledge about diversity of humankind in rare scientific papers, articles, occasional lectures or exhibitions. Lacking in financial resources for research and travel, they were significantly limited in originality of their approaches, thus condemning the Polish thought to imitativeness.⁴

The first Polish definition of anthropology, by Józef Jasiński, doctor of philosophy and medicine in Vilnius, following a Dutch anthropologist Petrus Camper, assumed that it was a “science of physical and moral properties of a human, showing their dignity raised above all physical beings”.⁵ However, Jasiński was not as enthusiastic as Camper about the division and evaluation of populations on the basis of physiological features (*angulus facialis* theory). He believed that it was incorrect to assess mental abilities of a person by a skull and brain size, as they depend on a “soul”, and a brain is only the place where “soul” is located. He thought that it was necessary to combine physicality with spirituality, body with soul, physiology with psychology.⁶

For him, the starting point for contemporary considerations on the origin and nature of humans was the conviction about the unity of the human race. Monogenism and deep conviction about human equality before God prevailed. However, the question about reasons for the diversity of people in both physical and cultural terms remained open:

Since a man is different from a woman, young from old, strong from weak, healthy from sick, white from black or other colour, quick from sluggish, learned from unskilful, rich from poor; but such differences which depend on fate do not eliminate inherent equality.⁷

In the eighteenth century, creationist concepts, based on the biblical tradition, dominated. It was commonly believed that God “is the inventor of all nature”, the world and the people. Thus, humankind comes from one source – the biblical paradise, from its first inhabitants, Adam and Eve. The phenomenon of scattering people and forming nations in various parts of the world was also explained by God’s intention

⁴ Bielicki, Tadeusz; Krupiński, Tadeusz; Strzałko Jan 1987, pp. 3–6.

⁵ Jasiński 1818, p. 3; see Meijer 1999.

⁶ Jasiński 1818, p. 100; see. Jasiewicz 2010, pp. 36–51.

⁷ Jasiński 1818, p. 31.

to “confuse languages” while building the Tower of Babel, and by the migration of Noah’s descendants.⁸

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a new approach appeared, which, on the basis of natural, philosophical, philological and anthropological research, tried to explain the questions of people origin and their physical and mental diversity. Johann T. Blumenbach’s five races typology was used most frequently, and Georges Cuvier’s three race system was less frequently adopted.⁹ On the other hand, Julius Klaproth’s linguistic research was the basis for inquiries about the origin of primitive tribes, especially in Asia.¹⁰ The authorities for early Polish anthropology were also: researcher-traveller Aleksander Humboldt, geographer Victor A. Malte-Brun, naturalist Julien-Joseph Virey, and, also naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon. Interestingly, the most eminent Polish researchers and popularisers of knowledge rarely used the term “race”. Instead, they used various terms already popular in the Polish literature: “tribe”, “great tribe”, “generation”, “species”, “variety”, and “family”.¹¹

At the beginning of the period, it was believed that climate was the overriding factor responsible for the diversity of humankind, which was inspired by Charles Montesquieu’s and Immanuel Kant’s views.¹² With time, the omnipotence of climate was doubted, as in new interpretation it was only one of the factors differentiating humankind. Therefore, other answers were sought. It was assumed that at the dawn of history there had to be one “primeval generation”. According to Stanisław Jundzill, a naturalist from the Imperial University of Vilnius, it was a white “Caucasian tribe”. Its skin colour changed because of climate, lifestyle and, as the scientist stressed, other yet unknown reasons. He substantiated the superiority of the Caucasian race with the differences in the structure of skulls of different racial types, making their evaluation:

⁸ Wyrwicz 1787, pp. 21–22; 1770, p. 669; Marczyński 1817, p. 3.

⁹ Blumenbach 1776; Cuvier 1817.

¹⁰ Klaproth 1823.

¹¹ Wyrwicz 1770; Śniadecki 1811; Jundzill 1807; Jasiński 1818; Majewski 1827–1828; Surowiecki 1824; zob. Nowak 2021a.

¹² Chmielowski 1746, p. 498; Wyrwicz 1770, p. 40, pp. 567–568; see Bernasconi 2002, pp. 145–166.

The more the facial angle is open, the more noble and magnificent (...) the face is; (...). The sharper this angle is, the longer the face and similar to animal. It is noteworthy that the degrees of moral perfection are sometimes perceived in line with these dimensions.¹³

Following Albrecht Haller, the creator of experimental physiology, Jundzill assumed that the “place of black paint” of the Black people, and copper or chestnut paints of other “generations” is located in the so-called mucous tissue (Latin: *textus mucosus*) under the surface of the skin. He added, however, that “the cause of this blackness, despite numerous speculations, is unknown”.¹⁴ It was assumed that apart from the influence of air temperature and type of food, differences in skin colour could also result from morbidity. Among many diseases, “why cannot there be one that infects people with black or white colour?”¹⁵

Sometimes heredity was intuitively indicated as the reason for human diversity.¹⁶ It was explained that the physical features of different races are passed on to offspring, and the parents of two different “generations” with different skin colours pass on the medium colour to their children. For instance, Wawrzyniec Surowiecki, historian and anthropologist, argued that separate physical properties in particular races are permanent and inborn:

If today people wanted to claim that warmth, cold or any other external cause affects human innate qualities, one could show a lot of clear evidence against it, which raises no doubt, because it results from the experience of long centuries.¹⁷

Our profound analysis does not allow for regarding Jędrzej Śniadecki, a chemist, physician and philosopher, as a precursor of the theory of evolution. In his synthesis *Teoria jestestw organicznych*, he emphasized the constant movement in the organic world, the continuous, repetitive

¹³ Jundzill 1807, pp. 23–25.

¹⁴ *Id.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Kollątaj 1842b, p. 314. Kollątaj’s manuscripts come from 1803, and were published in three volumes only after the author’s death.

¹⁶ Śniadecki 1811; Jundzill 1807.

¹⁷ Surowiecki 1824, p. 70.

transformations of one organism into another – higher beings are created at the expense of lower ones, as a result of their annihilation. He considered the entirety of these phenomena only from the perspective of chemical transformations. Śniadecki thought that the “whole physical constitution of a place” (e.g. latitude, climate, population, wildlife, terrain) had a significant, yet not the only, influence on the development of “beings”.¹⁸ He adopted one of the aspects of Kant’s concept of the decisive influence of external conditions on the psychological traits of human, seeing in them a factor responsible for the different way of thinking and behaviour of communities, their character and customs.¹⁹ However, he disagreed with the view (P. Camper, E. de Saint-Hilaire, J. B. de Lamarck) about the critical influence of climate on the physical transformations of human, e.g. skin colour. For such changes are achieved only through heredity, but only within one species. Thus, following Carl Linnaeus’s old view about the constancy of species, he argued that their form is permanent and unchangeable. If two species with separate “organic powers” responsible for reproduction were to cross, a creature incapable of reproduction would appear.²⁰ “Race”, in Śniadecki’s terminology “tribe” or “variety” of the human species, is a set of differences in human structure. The skin colour of *homo sapiens*, indicated for example by Cuvier as the basic characteristic of human races, was insufficient for him.²¹ Śniadecki preferred Blumenbach’s division based on many factors, including the skull shape. Comparing a “Negro” to a European, he assessed that

a Negro has a completely different composition of head and face: his jaw is elongated, his forehead receding, the volume of the skull and the brain far smaller, thick and protruding lips, black, fat and woolly skin.²²

Attempts to reconcile religion and science were a characteristic feature of contemporary ideas. According to Hugo Kollařaj, historian and philosopher, the history of humankind began with the biblical

¹⁸ Śniadecki 1811, pp. 356–357.

¹⁹ *Id.*, pp. 358–363.

²⁰ *Id.*, p. 366.

²¹ Cuvier 1817, pp. 94–100.

²² Śniadecki 1811, p. 366; see Zubek et al. 2018, p.174.

flood. However, he did not see the explanation of this phenomenon in a supernatural factor, but in geological transformations. He was convinced of the primordial unity of humankind, its origin from a single community that was connected with Noah. He saw the confirmation of this thesis in the similarity of languages, behaviours, legends, rites. On the other hand, he explained the clear differentiation within the species by the gradual separation of individual human groups from the original one. Having gone separate ways, people, living in different conditions, developed different features, both physical and moral. The principle was clear: the earlier a population left the original community, the fewer similarities it retained. To some extent we can see here an analogy to the concepts of reknown monogenists (Blumenbach, Buffon) about originating subsequent races from the white race, as a result of its degeneration due to environmental factors. However, in Kollątaj's approach, physical differences between populations were less important. Cultural affinities proved the unity of human and nature:

For us it is enough when we find similarities between the whites and blacks in language, tales, marks of the first enlightenment, customs, rites and opinions. Everyone can be convinced by this evidence that these people must have come from one first community, and therefore their savage state today is caused by the reasons listed above.²³

Importantly, Kollątaj criticized approaches that valued people according to physical characteristics. He believed that similar speculations, with no reliable knowledge on this subject, could only bring moral damage. "Let us not be like those theologians who doubted whether the Negroes are even people", he warned.²⁴

3. Romantic turn towards culture

Against the background of the European thought, the specificity of the Polish Romantic reflection on the categorization of humankind resulted from several reasons. The most important of them, as already mentioned, was the poor development of anthropological sciences

²³ Kollątaj 1842b, p. 315.

²⁴ *Id.*, p. 316.

in the annexed Polish lands, and further the influx of new ideas, mainly German, with their historicism and fascination for the intangible side of existence. Moreover, the concept of nation as the organization of human world prevailed in the Polish reflection from the late 1820s to the early 1860s. In terms of the contemporary terminology, a nation was imagined as a historico-political, multicultural, multiethnic community. Biological kinship was therefore of little importance, as the most important was a spiritual bond based on the Polish tradition of the centuries-old coexistence of different ethnic elements in one community of thoughts, feelings and purpose.²⁵ Also, an important feature of the Polish Romanticism was strong emphasis on the sense of tribal community, belonging to supranational community of Slavs. Similar to understanding a nation, cultural similarity was important here – common ideas, thoughts, language, customs – created a higher level of union than the original biological relationship. A bond based on the idea of common blood is definitely not enough. According to Adam Mickiewicz, people cannot be taken back to their “physical beginning”; a spiritual bond is necessary – “some common idea, a big idea”, which will unite the Slavic peoples.²⁶

Polish thinking about the divisions of humankind was distinguished by a hierarchy of values, which a nation was the supreme, excellent, concept. In contrast, “tribalism” was often identified with a race and combined with more primitive relationships and primitive history of humankind. In the patriarchal times, communities focused on the idea of common blood. It was a period of fighting, violence, and exclusion, because according to Cyprian K. Norwid, “a race or tribe (morally speaking) is a contradiction, a separation, it is a negation – it exists because it is different”.²⁷ A race was thus understood as a form of primary social organization of related elements. The division of the human race according to physical factors was, in the Polish Romantics’ opinion, a reactionary, primitive and destructive thinking. If it was based only on the difference in blood only, it did not build anything. It was believed that uniting races/tribes with one purpose led to the creation of a nation as the highest form of community unified by moral

²⁵ Walicki 2009; Nowak 2008; Bilenky 2012.

²⁶ Mickiewicz [1842] 1997, pp. 110–111.

²⁷ Norwid [1849] 1957, pp. 39–40.

force, more perfect than biological bond. The unity of spirit counted, and not physical, arbitrary divisions leading to prejudice and hatred.

In this outlook, the word “race” itself appeared more often than in the Enlightenment thought, but the terms “tribe”, “strain”, “big family”, “generation” still dominated. The term “race” seemed foreign and incomprehensible also in scientific studies, so it was replaced with synonymous terms. Thus, Andrzej Kucharski, ethnographer and Slavist, deliberately replaced the term “race”, commonly used in the works of Western researchers, with the term “tribe”, which he considered more appropriate for Polish readers.²⁸ Also, Stanisław Rzewuski, philosopher, historian and philologist, in his pioneering thesis in Polish science, which promoted the need to start research on the physical types of human groups, does not mention the following concepts: “race”, “racial features”, “racial types”. The author consistently replaces them with the words “tribe”, “tribalism”, and “physiological features”.²⁹ We can give here more examples. In the zoology book by Norbert Kumelski and Stanisław Górski, “five strains or generations of the human race” were adopted according to the “superficial composition and body paint”.³⁰ In the work of historian Franciszek Duchiniński the term “race” is synonymous with “tribe”, “kind”, and “family”.³¹ In *Historia Naturalna* by Antoni Waga, ornithologist and entomologist who strongly preferred the term “generation” to refer to separate physical types, the term “race” appears few times.³² We can see that in the then press and literature, there was also a conceptual confusion, and the word “race” could mean the social layer of a nation,³³ but also a community united by the law of blood,³⁴ and thus we could find sometimes a nation mentioned in this context, e.g. Russian, Japanese, German race, etc.³⁵

The influence of geographical and climatic factors on the formation of different types of races/tribes, considered to be superior in the

²⁸ Kucharski 1854, p. 550.

²⁹ Rzewuski S. 1830.

³⁰ Kumelski, Górski, 1836, p. 53.

³¹ Duchiniński [1858] 1901, pp. 89–90.

³² Waga 1859, pp. 194–195.

³³ Rzewuski H. 1851, pp. 76–79.

³⁴ Kilka słów..., 1839, p. 3.

³⁵ Krasieński 1999, p. 116; L. J. 1852, p. 317.

Enlightenment thought, was less significant in the Romantic tradition.³⁶ In the philosophical reflection of Romantics, the spiritual sphere was the most important, therefore classifications based on permanent physical types could not be accepted. These types were perceived as something arbitrary, unchanging, ignoring a voluntary factor and historical change. It was criticized that from this perspective the “Black” would always be condemned to oppression with the “White”, and “wild” tribes would be subjected to more civilized communities. But everything was changing: “a race, language, customs and tradition, character and temperament, inclinations and abilities are becoming individual”.³⁷ Racial theories were presented as inherently erroneous and, moreover, infected with a false ideology, recognizing the superiority of some over others. These theories, popular especially in Germany, reinforced the belief about the superiority of the Germanic race and the German nation as a “chosen tribe”.³⁸ A critical attitude towards judgments on the mental and moral predispositions of humans, based on their physical features, appeared as negative opinions about Franz Gall’s and Johann Spurzheim’s concepts.³⁹ Here, S. Rzewuski, in his treatise on the need for research on the set of physical characteristics of human groups, states, having presented the division of humankind into five conventional “great families” according to the colour of the skin, that there are no pure races. In his opinion, after centuries of migrations and crossbreeding:

(...) it would be too bold to claim that any of them survived in their original separateness. Mixing tribes often meant their improvement; and the new ones stemming from the old ones often became far more beautiful.⁴⁰

Therefore, according to Rzewuski, the process of crossbreeding human tribes/races was a positive phenomenon. He thought that in the studies on the origin of individual communities, it was not enough to make just observations about physiognomy, but it was necessary to combine

³⁶ Adamowicz 1839, pp. 661–662.

³⁷ Libelt 1869, p. 3.

³⁸ F. Z. 1843, p. 188.

³⁹ Libelt 1844, pp. 4– 5; Wiszniewski [1837] 1988, p. 54; Dziekoński 1841, pp. 659–660.

⁴⁰ Rzewuski S. 1830, p. 16.

them with historical, ethnographic and philological research.⁴¹ Joachim Lelewel, a historian, expressed a similar opinion: he was convinced that the constant mixing of tribes had changed the language, customs, and also physical features, which effectively erased the marks of primordial origin.⁴²

In the then dominant discourse, apart from circles representing sciences of nature and medicine, biology and the biology-derived division of the humankind into permanent physical types were replaced by culture, with which one can identify freely. The significance of cultural characteristics and the influence of peoples' psychological inclinations for developing differences, which grew out of feelings, imagination and reason, were emphasized. Following Claude Blanckaert, we refer to the above described tendency of combining biology and culture as the cultural approach to naturalistic observation of humans.⁴³ This spiritual affinity was the most important, closely related to the development of humans and their enlightenment. Polish Romantics "made up for" the lack of interest in physical anthropology and reflected upon the diversity of humankind according to the so-called state of civilization. Although they refrained from valuing human groups according to biology, they did not avoid it when describing the cultural and civilizational shaping of communities.

The evolutionary character of a process of "maturation" of humankind in history was assumed – from primitive tribes/races to self-aware communities, contemporary of Romantics, based on voluntary integration. The process of uneven development – simultaneous existence of civilized nations and wild primitive peoples – was explained by formation of individual populations in different geographical, climatic, demographic, and historical conditions; as well as, most importantly, by remoteness from Europe – the centre of civilization. Although Asia was the cradle of humankind, as it was stressed, the development of local communities was hindered and Asia has remained stagnant for centuries. Since the ancient Greek and Roman era, Europe has taken over the role of civilizational leader, and it was Europe that set the course for the human progress. Therefore, the Eurocentric attitude,

⁴¹ *Id.*, p. 5.

⁴² Lelewel 1814, pp. 4–5.

⁴³ Blanckaert 2007, pp. 140–141, 155.

apart from some exceptions, completely dominated thinking about the world at the time. According to the romantic idea, humankind is “a large family whose patriarch is a European tribe and others are children in need of a protective leader, which would guide them in their uncertain steps and show them the way they have to go”. All the other “tribes”, even those “half-wild”, gradually adopting European patterns, with time will join the “refined” members of the human family.⁴⁴ This attitude towards non-European communities and cultures had little in common with a racist attitude in the sense of recognizing inequalities between people caused by physical differences, and promoted the only progressive model of thinking and lifestyle accepted at that time. By contrast, those who shattered the myth of a magnificent, morally and civilizational leading Europe criticized the colonial system introduced “in the middle of terrible murders and conflagration, tainted by bloodshed of the innocent, under the banner of devilish desire for greed”. The aspect of the barbaric harassment by European white colonizers towards “the poor tribes of America who were only interested in their lands” was raised.⁴⁵ The contemporary “skin superstitions” undoubtedly affected the treatment of conquered populations.⁴⁶

4. The Positivist popularization of knowledge about human races

For Polish intellectual elites, an important element of work on the improvement of Polish society was popularization of achievements of foreign science. Despite the independent development of Polish anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century (first cathedral of anthropology, after Paris, at the Jagiellonian University, 1873; field research by anthropologists Józef Majer and Izydor Kopernicki⁴⁷) the Polish thought concerning knowledge about human races should be largely considered as reconstructive.⁴⁸ The journals published discussions or summaries of texts mainly from French (*Revue de deux Mondes*, *Tour*

⁴⁴ W. P. 1852, pp. 21–22.

⁴⁵ Południowa Ameryka..., 1851, p. 258.

⁴⁶ *Nowe książki...*, 1864, p. 72.

⁴⁷ Lorkiewicz et al. 2011, pp. 331–332; see Majer, Kopernicki 1874–1886.

⁴⁸ Barth, Gingrich, Parkin, Silverman 2007. Jasiewicz 2011; Wrześcińska 2021b, pp. 31–59.

de Monde, Revue d'Anthropologie, Revue philosophique, Revue scientifique, Bulletin de la Société de Géographie), English (*Nature, Science*), German (*Archiv für Anthropologie, Allgemeine Ethnographie*) and American periodicals (*Cosmopolitan Review, Popular Science Monthly*). However, there was also some critical reflection. Especially, a sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki distinguished in this field; he popularized knowledge and wrote works on anthropology.⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that in the period under consideration anthropology, as a science, was defined in various ways. Its scope and aims were still discussed. Its wider scope (not only as a science on physical construction of man) was demonstrated by past debates and instructions issued by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.⁵⁰

Exploring knowledge about human nature, analysed using popularization of natural sciences, nowadays gives the impression of chaotic search. Initially, it was important to provide curious and exotic information only. While analysing, we encounter a variety of theories and hypotheses, some of them contradicted the others. Having adopted the existence of races, following the world science, the classifications of races were discussed and theories presented to explain physical and spiritual differences between people. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of intense search for the truth about humans: their origin, differentiation, relations between the spirit and the body, and finally the role that humankind was supposed to play in the work of progress. The latter issue was of considerable importance. The question was whether all races were equally talented at it. The evolutionism assumed a continuous development: only those nations and races that were leaders at improving civilization were important. There were opportunities for those, who were able to adjust to the European pattern, to keep up with the progress. The development of natural sciences also shaped human consciousness itself, their approach to different peoples and cultures, and their distance to strangeness. Although evolutionists attributed the ability to progress to all the peoples, they described them as existing at different stages of civilizational development, and thus they hierarchized them.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Krzywicki [1893] 1969a; [1897] 1969b; [1902] 1969c; Holda-Róźiewicz 1969; see also: Daniłowicz-Strzelbicki 1897; Kopernicki, 1885; Lutostański 1881; Radliński 1882, 1900; Stefanowska 1891; Talko-Hryniewicz 1888; Olechnowicz 1902; Szyszlo 1872.

⁵⁰ Majer 1874, p. LXVII; Wrzesińska 2021b.

⁵¹ Szacki 1981, pp. 303–304; Lubock 1873; Formy... 1881, pp. 210–211.

Such approach justified not only military and economic, but also cultural conquest. The white man had a duty to civilize wild peoples, even if they were dying out, encountering European civilization.⁵²

The alleged racial inferiority became an excuse for conquests aimed at spreading civilization also towards white people, as they were believed to be degenerated by living conditions. This was the case of the Boers, descendants of Dutch settlers in South Africa. Basing on Anthony Trollope's novel, *South Africa*,⁵³ the Boers were described as "reluctant to any progress, leading a sloppy and crude life", "never washing themselves, day and night wearing the same clothes".⁵⁴ The disgusting expressions allowed readers for understanding the processes aimed at exterminating peoples civilizational different from Europeans. The language of description accustomed readers to contempt and cruelty towards another person, who not only differed in skin colour, had tattoos and adornments incompatible with civilized taste, but also towards an imperfect, poor person, helpless in the face of exploitation, culturally or physically different – to a white person. In the past descriptions, people living outside Europe were typically compared to animals, both in terms of physical look and the way of life.⁵⁵ This dehumanizing language affected relations, both between social classes within one nation and among nations.⁵⁶

The eurocentrism left its imprint on the racial classifications. They were elaborated by white people who placed their own physicality and culture at the highest level. Even Linnaeus, dividing humankind according to a geographical criterion, ascribed not only a specific appearance to its varieties (Latin: *varietas*), but also a lifestyle and character traits. *Homo europaeus* was therefore noble, talented and law-abiding, while *Homo africanus* was lazy, dissolute, reckless and capricious.⁵⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the terminology used to describe particular populations was influenced by natural sciences,

⁵² Wyprawa... 1880, pp. 378–379.

⁵³ English edition Trollope 1878.

⁵⁴ J. W. 1881, p. 237.

⁵⁵ Plemiona ludzkie 1863b, p. 382; Z Peru do Brazylji... 1866, p. 51; Niemojowski 1872, pp. 369–370.

⁵⁶ See Budrewicz 2018.

⁵⁷ Krzywicki 1907, p. 428.

biology and medicine. The majority of Polish anthropologists were also educated in the fields mentioned above. They stopped focusing on the community of spirit and culture. They sought bond in biological factors: heredity, origin, blood, external appearance.⁵⁸ By borrowing terms from natural sciences, “humankind” was replaced by the term “species”; “race” displaced the term “generation” and “racial types” – “strains” and “branches”. In the Polish case, all of these terms were not used consistently, they were often used interchangeably. There were several reasons for this phenomenon. First, in the transition period between the Romanticism and Positivism, the old system of values and concepts was passing and the new one was coming. Second, there was a lack of precision in the field of natural knowledge – the terms “race” and “variety” were treated as synonyms.⁵⁹ Third, it is not possible to state at today’s stage of research to what extent the authors of Polish translations were consistent as regards terminology. Finally, none of these terms were clearly defined. Following the world scientific literature and popular writing, the existence of human races like the animal ones was accepted. As more and more “types” were discovered, the need for their classification grew, which actually was nothing new. In ancient times already, although geographical horizons at that time reached only the Mediterranean Sea, divisions based on geographical and morphological criteria were created, distinguishing separate groups of people.⁶⁰

Another characteristic adopted by anthropology was the genealogical criterion. Accepting that external features were not sufficient to distinguish a species – Blumenbach and Cuvier based their theories on it⁶¹ – the assumption was that the offspring, having inherited the traits of similar parents, formed a species.⁶²

However, races were still something unknown in Polish land, despite developing research on human communities, about which the Polish periodicals wrote, and despite publishing market that provided translations of works by e.g. Charles Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, Thomas

⁵⁸ See Gawin 2003, pp.39– 52

⁵⁹ Wrzesińska 2021a.

⁶⁰ Tyrała 2005, pp. 13– 15; Krzywicki 1907, pp. 373–375.

⁶¹ Peschel 1876, p. 8; German edition Peschel 1874.

⁶² Quatrefages 1873, pp.182–186. French edition Quatrefages 1870; see Klecki 1924, p.17.

Huxley, Oscar Peschel, John Lubbock, Lewis H. Morgan, Edward B. Tylor, Paul Topinard. It was taken for granted that races really existed in nature, though today we know that they were the product of human mind.⁶³ Krzywicki, being aware of the great variety of races and the lack of uniformity of traits within each of them, preferred to use the term “racial-anthropological types”.⁶⁴ However, this did not contribute anything new. In the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars confirmed the earlier romantic conviction that there were no pure races in the anthropological sense.⁶⁵ What was considered as pure races, was a mixture of different races – “anthropological types”, which in turn were created by crossing even earlier, primeval forms. These conclusions, however, did not mean that the term “race” was abandoned in various contexts. Moreover, racial theories became politically valuable. The colonized peoples were believed not to have mental qualities useful in the work of civilization. “Some kind of inability to progress” was often regarded as a common feature of “lower races”.⁶⁶

5. Biology as a determinant of culture

Scientists, while making racial systematics – although looking for patterns related to the external appearance and anatomical structure – linked physicality with culture. They also attributed cultural features to certain types determined by biological criteria. As the columnist Feliks Bogacki wrote,

each race develops in its proper way, faithfully preserving its peculiarities. (...). The dependence of psychological and physical traits (...) is striking and firm.⁶⁷

The second half of the nineteenth century, together with faith in the power of knowledge, brought a desire to study human diversity scientifically. The differences in appearance and culture were to be justified not only by external determinants such as climate, geographical

⁶³ Strzalko 2009.

⁶⁴ Krzywicki [1893] 1969a, p. 19; see Makuch 2018.

⁶⁵ Nalkowski 1890, p. 305; Krzywicki 1907, p. 440.

⁶⁶ Colon... 1876, p. 309.

⁶⁷ Bogacki 1881, p. 125.

conditions, and food, but also by biological factors, which were considered to be innate features of a given race.⁶⁸ The popularisers of knowledge published texts that were to present authentic images of the life of peoples inhabiting exotic lands.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, from today's point of view, it should be stated that the criteria of this authenticity were different at the time, the authors of accounts were casual and unprepared for research challenges, and they often were academic scholars using unreliable information.

It should be emphasized that valuing people according to their appearance and culture was not a novelty in the Polish Positivism science and journalism. The previous era – Romanticism – despite the declared respect for diversity and spirituality of peoples and nations as important values, brought patterns which hierarchized races and were ready for repeating. The language of their description could also deepen the sense of disgust at wild peoples, as well as the superiority of civilized societies in Europe. Only the European pattern, the introduction of Christianity and constant progress could “save” the wild.⁷⁰ Comparisons between wild and civilized people often appeared in the Polish press. An anonymous author wrote:

What (...) a huge difference is between a scientist who is a true pride of humankind and a wild man, for example an inhabitant of Australia who lives in a tree trunk burned out with fire. He eats reptiles and grass, is covered with dirt and vermin, his entire skill is making a hook from a piece of shell and tying it on a string, twisted of fibres, his thought does not reach any further than meeting the basic needs.⁷¹

From the Europeans' point of view, it seemed that all other peoples were lower as regards civilizational development. The look of the white man was also seen as the ideal of beauty. According to zoological patterns concerning the desirable appearance of breeds of farm animals, attempts were made to demonstrate that the external features were strongly associated with culture. The relationship between skin colour

⁶⁸ O rasach... 1871, p. 158; see Łukasiewicz 2012; Malczyński, Mincer 2014.

⁶⁹ F. S. 1869a, pp. 47–48.

⁷⁰ Domeyko 1860, pp. 121–122, 173.

⁷¹ Plemiona... 1863a, p. 357.

and mental abilities was found – the whiter the skin was, the more developed these abilities were supposed to be.⁷² This view proved to be long-lasting: we can still find a discussion on this subject by Julius Lippert⁷³ in the press at the end of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Polish travellers regarded the white skin not only as a determinant of beauty in the physical sense, but also as a feature that influenced the shaping of the human psyche. The degree of whiteness of the skin, for example among the population of French Guyana – “mulattoes, Negroes, Indians and coolies”, was supposed to positively show moral qualities.⁷⁴ The white race was described as the one which “reached the perfect form of body”, thus “(...) is close to the original beauty”.⁷⁵ Also, the more different the lifestyle from the European patterns, the more negatively it was assessed. This particularly concerned the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, who were doubted to be human. By nature, they were shapeless, did not wear clothes, deformed their bodies, did not build permanent residences, and consumed raw food.⁷⁶ Although there was a view that all peoples were able to develop, at the same time it was believed that only the white race could create a “true” civilization and that it was the creator of history.⁷⁷

The focus was also on the socio-cultural aspect of life of the described races. The following races were distinguished: nomadic and settled, active and passive,⁷⁸ slave and free.⁷⁹ The criterion for the division was also the attitude towards women (quoted following Charles Letourneau) – more or less civilized⁸⁰ and the type of buildings: round buildings were common in a “still wild generation”, while quadrangular ones “in all civilized races”.⁸¹ Such classifications were of a more sociological nature. Due to the development of linguistics (in the press, among others, F. Bopp, J. Grimm, A. Kuhn, A. Schleicher, M. Müller were

⁷² Plemiona... 1863b, p. 381.

⁷³ Ichnatowicz 1887, p. 200.

⁷⁴ Jelski 1898, pp. 41–44.

⁷⁵ Zapalowicz 1899, p. 128.

⁷⁶ Siemiradzki 1896, p. 134.

⁷⁷ O rasach... 1871, p. 160.

⁷⁸ Gumplowicz 1906, pp. 297–298.

⁷⁹ O geograficznych... 1881, p. 53.

⁸⁰ O położeniu... 1885, pp. 350–351.

⁸¹ Mozambik... 1877, p. 242.

cited) peoples were classified, as in the Enlightenment, also according to languages.⁸² The source material from the Polish periodicals shows that the division of the white population in Europe was made by shifting the language criterion to the biological one.⁸³ Despite the protests,⁸⁴ terms such as Germanic, Romance and Slavic races permanently entered the language of the description of the European peoples, though the language community was not synonymous with the physical one. Combining biology with culture, Gustave Le Bon divided the European population according to moral and intellectual properties: “Every race or nation has constant and permanent spiritual characteristics as well as physical properties”. Thus, various “spiritual races”, antagonistic to each other, developed, which, as Krzywicki repeated after Le Bon, should be considered as permanent beings, not subject to the influence of time.⁸⁵ Georges V. de Lapouge elaborated different divisions: in each nation he saw a “race of initiators and troublemakers” and a “obsequious and servile race”. The former, more valuable, was always the long-headed population, the latter – the short-headed people.⁸⁶ The Polish press reported on such research findings as skull measurement, skull classification according to shape⁸⁷ and comparative juxtapositions of brain capacity or weight, leading to the hierarchy of races.⁸⁸

All the mentioned divisions had an evaluative overtone. They shown, however, that attempts were still made to grasp the causes of human diversity. The mentality of that time allowed for the hierarchy of races, for such practices were not perceived as reprehensible. In the case of wild peoples, the conviction of their lower value gave European colonization the character of a civilization mission.⁸⁹ Without justifying this expansion, it cannot be denied that then people believed in existence of lower races incapable of progress. It is true that scientists such as Samuel G. Morton, Josiah C. Nott, George R. Gliddon and Louis Agassiz supported slavery and European colonization with their racial

⁸² Zawiliński 1885, p. 521.

⁸³ Baudouin de Courtenay 1881, pp. 198–199.

⁸⁴ Krzywicki [1893] 1969a, p. 19; Krakowski 1904, p. 376.

⁸⁵ L. 1894, p. 232.

⁸⁶ K. 1896a, p. 175.

⁸⁷ a. l. 1887, pp. 166–168; Krzywicki 1888b, pp. 186–187.

⁸⁸ Dunin 1882, p. 162; W. Sz. 1902, p. 316.

⁸⁹ Pomian 2005, p. 397–398.

theories.⁹⁰ Readers could find a critical look at this issue in the Polish translation of Oscar Peschel's work. This author pointed out that faith in polygenism allowed people to justify "humiliation of a human" and "condemning him to a deputy of a pack animal".⁹¹ Similarly, Edward B. Tylor, when describing the diversity of human types, showed that racial differences were often used for political purposes.⁹² Krzywicki, one of Polish scholars, pointed out this fact.⁹³

In the context of reflections on human races, the creative approach by Polish sociologist Ludwik Gumplowicz (1838–1909) deserves attention. He presented the history of humankind from an angle of a theory of conflict – the constant struggle of races. Hence, he was accused of promoting racism. But these were superficial assessments, because the term "race" in Gumplowicz's approach had a sociological character. For him, it meant a social group with a common culture. For Gumplowicz considered the unity of origin as a phenomenon secondary to cultural unity – so he did not distinguished races in the anthropological sense and did not value them.⁹⁴

6. Critical reflection on racial concepts of the second half of the nineteenth century

The Polish literature almost fully reported on the achievements of the world anthropology. We encounter there some doubts expressed about the scientific nature of the theories discussed. Thus, Izydor Kopernicki wrote on digressions about human physiognomy that this field:

(...) is, at least today, an idle field for our science, an enticing field for doctrinaires and scientific liars, but nothing promising to meticulous researchers. (...). There is so much rubbish and absurdity there as in famous craniology and phrenology of Gall and Spurzheim.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Krzywicki 1888b, p. 186; 1907, pp. 396–403.

⁹¹ Peschel 1876, p. 8.

⁹² Tylor 1902, p. 3. English edition Tylor 1881. The first Polish edition of Tylor's *Anthropology* was published in 1889, the third in 1910.

⁹³ Krzywicki 1888b, p. 186.

⁹⁴ Gumplowicz 1883; Szacki 1983, pp. 409–411.

⁹⁵ Karłowicz 1892, p. 16.

Then anthropologists, trying to prove that the volume or weight of a brain determined the mental abilities of a human, went astray in science. According to Kopernicki, the brain of Gauss, the mathematician, was in no way different from “the most handicapped Black or Australian”, and the brain of Russian writer, Turgenev, who was not a genius, was more impressive than Cuvier’s. The Polish anthropologist asked:

With such knowledge, will anyone dare to soberly weigh the intelligence of outstanding people, or search for their innate talent for brilliant creativeness in some field?⁹⁶

In Polish magazines, we also encounter criticism of the violence that Europeans committed as colonizers.⁹⁷ The commentary on the people of Tasmania may be an example:

They did not yield to civilization, as presented by a certain modern theory, but to the barbarity of the white man. They were shot like wild animals, hunts were organized. (...). They were driven to a small corner of the island and were actually exterminated (...). There are no possible justification for the Whites.⁹⁸

Similar critical comments can be found about the case of the Englishmen and the Boers⁹⁹, as well as about Germans’ actions in their African colonies.¹⁰⁰

In the era of creating national states in Europe, and then competition for the superpower position, the concepts of hierarchizing the peoples, who had previously been considered a biological and cultural community of white people, began to become popular. Here, Polish critics of such theories also pointed out the political reasons for their elaboration. The most common charge faced by propagators of scientific racism and the German race superiority (Otto Ammon, Ludwig Woltmann, Lapouge, Houston Stewart Chamberlain) was the groundlessness of their concepts. They treated a physical race as determinant of all

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ F. S. 1869b, p. 63.

⁹⁸ Sulimirski 1883, p. 772.

⁹⁹ Plain Truth 1901, p. 996.

¹⁰⁰ Teczka... 1901, p. 1017

social, economic, cultural and political phenomena.¹⁰¹ Both Krzywicki and Gumpłowicz considered it a pure fantasy to attribute an exceptional role in history to long-headed blonde humans – Aryans.¹⁰² Note, that such views emerged already in the 1870s.¹⁰³

At the same time, in the Polish science there was a fascination for the above mentioned racial theories. When discussing Penka's and Lapouge's concepts, Krzywicki claimed that they opened new intellectual horizons – they helped to seek explanations about history of nations in their respective racial, mental and physical properties.¹⁰⁴ He presented changeable beliefs in this matter. A zoologist, Józef Nusbaum, approved Ammon's view linking a long head with higher mental abilities.¹⁰⁵ At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite the fact that such theories were not accepted unreservedly, an ideology was born, driven by an irrational sense of superiority, seeing biology as the determinant of culture and, in the case of "higher races", defining their leading role in history. It should be noted that also in the Polish thought of the nineteenth century we encounter theories, according to which the Polish nation was purely Aryan, and thus predisposed to perform a historical mission.¹⁰⁶

For example, Krzywicki disseminated theses (close to Le Bon's theories about the "soul of the race" and Lapouge's opinions about superiority of the Aryan race), which we would consider groundless today. Although he considered morphological and histological features of races to be indifferent to social development, he did not deny the influence of "racial factors" on history.¹⁰⁷ Only, Krzywicki was against considering the "racial factors" out of a combination of social, economic, political and cultural context. He did not see human biology as the factor determining history. Historiosophy, built on the notion of Aryan superiority (including Arthur de Gobineau's reflections), was defined by him as a theory which:

¹⁰¹ K. 1896a, p. 174.

¹⁰² Krzywicki 1888b, pp. 185–186; K. 1986b, pp. 186–187; Gumpłowicz 1906, pp. 291–305.

¹⁰³ Peschel 1876, p. 319.

¹⁰⁴ Krzywicki 1888a, p. 447.

¹⁰⁵ Nusbaum 1893, p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ Wrześcińska 2013; Taperek 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Krzywicki [1902] 1969c, s. 578.

(...) understands the relationship between race, on the one hand, and the events and symptoms of social life, on the other hand, in a causative manner: according to it, if there were not a particular race, appropriate civilizations would not exist. In this case, a race is not only a custodian of symptoms, but also their source, the power shaping institutions by itself.¹⁰⁸

Anyone who created racial historiosophy, considering races as unconnected beings, was suspected by Krzywicki either of deliberately hiding own interest under the mask of science, or of the superficiality of analysis resulting from the lack of a scientific method.¹⁰⁹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, when some of the Polish lands were part of the German state, theories about inequality of human races had obvious political dimension. These theories helped German politicians to justify the liquidation of the Polish statehood by proving that the Slavs, including Poles, were a lower race, unable to develop independently. From the Polish point of view, international relations as early as in the 1890s transformed

(...) into supercilious, blind chauvinism, and finally into wild racial cannibalism, propagating the extermination of foreign races with the tongues of (...) philosophers and publicists.¹¹⁰

Searching for an answer to the question about relationship between race and nation had therefore a practical dimension. If there existed races, which was assumed, and they formed nations, there should be a correlation between the strength (weakness) of a nation and its racial composition. Such approach also had an explanatory significance, if we would like to find the sources of racism in the European and American reflections on the diversity of humankind and its reception in Poland.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*, p. 588.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*, p. 587; 1907, pp. 459–462.

¹¹⁰ J. L. P. 1888, p. 165.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the Polish literature on the subject of race enables us to follow formation of the thought about the human world and its visible diversity, both biological and cultural, and to see the directions, in which it was developing. In the whole of the nineteenth century reflection, motifs that hierarchized particular populations were constantly present. Gradually, more theories appeared, which pointed out physical factors as determining the spirituality, culture and civilizational development of peoples. On the one hand, scientific theories and opinions, often bearing gross value judgements, contributed to emergence of racism and its consequences, but, on the other hand, they constituted just another stage in the development of the human sciences. Contemporary genetics, comparative anatomy, and embryology verified these earlier and often controversial hypotheses.

The series of various circumstances of ideological and political nature determined the direction of transformations that led to the twentieth-century racism. The developing mass culture and, simultaneously, the progress of natural sciences, i. e. sociology and anthropology, conduced to the emergence of nationalism, and chauvinism and racism as well. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the Polish thought has led to the new era – modernism, which maintained the authority of science and combined it with the irrational ideology based on community of origin, blood and primordial racial bonds. For instance, Grażyna Kubica discusses this fundamental problem of the early 20th century anthropology, when biological distinction between humans was seen in the racial scope only. The notion “race” became discredited as late as after WWII, when socio-cultural anthropology became independent, and scholars began to apply distributive understanding of culture¹¹¹. Differences among humans – real or imagined – can always lead to discrimination. According to Magdalena Tendera,

(...) the existence of racial differences does not justify racism, just like the existence of different sexes does not justify sexism¹¹².

¹¹¹ Kubica 2015, ss. 108–109.

¹¹² Tendera 2015, p. 162.

Both phenomena should be seen as secondary despite the fact that they are crucial in the context of different approaches to man in political terms.

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Abbreviations

Ateneum – *Ateneum*. *Pismo naukowe i literackie*

Biblioteka Warszawska – *Biblioteka Warszawska*. *Pismo poświęcone naukom, sztukom i przemysłowi*

Głos – *Głos*. *Tygodnik literacko-społeczno-polityczny*

Pravda – *Pravda*. *Tygodnik polityczny, społeczny i literacki*

Wędrowiec – *Wędrowiec*. *Pismo obejmujące podróże i wyprawy połączone z opisem zwyczajów i obyczajów ludów cudzoziemskich; życiorysy sławnych cudzoziemców; powiastki i przekłady z literatury zagranicznej, wiadomości z dziedziny nauk przyrodzonych, przemysłu i technologii, rozmaitości*

Wista – *Wista*. *Miesięcznik geograficzno-etnograficzny*

Wszelchświat – *Wszelchświat*. *Tygodnik popularny poświęcony naukom przyrodniczym*

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