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Critical Labour Studies in Hungary, Poland and the UK: Between crisis and revitalisation

Introduction

Despite the historical traditions of critical sociology of work in many European countries, its presence in the academic field has been limited in recent decades principally for two reasons. First, the marketisation of higher education with its consequent banalisation and related orientation to more emollient and market-facing research has to be crucial to a significant degree to our understanding. A related consequence of this has been the abandonment of work studies in favour of managerial sciences by mainstream sociologies. The second, and not unrelated reason has been the diminishing links between sociologists and labour movements. Simultaneously, and contrary to what can be taken to be a general crisis, we can observe some indicators of the renewal of critical traditions beyond the boundaries of institutionalised sociology and the formation of new, interdisciplinary research fields (and teams) in many European countries. This also involves new ways of critical engagement between researchers and, significantly, new categories of precarious workers, including for instance migrant workers, and a related search for new research agenda and methodologies. It seems clear that the advances in the field of critical labour studies need to take into account both the changing nature of employment under neoliberal conditions and the political consequences of the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe. Specifically, what does it mean to be a critical researcher of work and labour movements after the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe?

This article explores both the crisis and revitalisation of critical labour studies in three countries: Hungary, Poland and the UK, which differ from each other in their political past and the traditions of critical sociology of work. In the body of the paper, the developments of a CLS in the UK, Hungary and Poland will be presented with an emphasis on the instances of cooperation between sociologists and trade unions and workers' movements, as well as the development of new theoretical agendas which could potentially give new impetus and meaning to a critical sociology of work. Even though this article presents a preliminary and by necessity very selective analysis, in the final part of the paper some tentative comparative conclusions will follow addressing the question of what is meant by critical labour studies in Europe today.

The meanings of critical labour studies: Perspectives East and West

Regardless of different historical trajectories and political contexts, British, Hungarian and Polish critical labour studies were affected by similar challenges in the last two decades. They can be characterised as (1) the marginalisation of the sociology of work in the academy; (2) the marginalisation of the sociology of work in teaching programmes in social sciences faculties; (3) the loosening of vital links between sociologists of work and workers' movements (Stewart and Martinez Lucio 2011; Halford and Strangleman 2009). The universal causes of this trend are many, including a concern over the neglect of certain areas of work; shifts in the academic division of labour; and the transformation of the world economy along with the challenges to trade union power both in the UK and the two post-socialist societies considered here, Poland and Hungary.

Simultaneously, the relationships between labour and sociologists have been shaped by different historical experiences in the countries concerned. The UK is an example of an old, capitalist country in which the traditions of sociologists' engagement in workers' struggles are long-established and often institutionalised (Beynon 2011), though the level of institutionalisation is crucial here as it refers both to the links between full time union officials but also shop floor workers. These links are clear in the statement of intent of the Critical Labour Studies Symposium which aims at bringing "together researchers and activists to discuss key features of work and employment from a radical and labour-focused perspective" (CLS website 2014). The approach of the CLS was identified with the "organic public sociology of work in which the researcher is overtly partisan and active on the side of the marginalized and labour" and seeks to develop research which is "rigorous, valid and representative through being reflexive, accountable to agents and relevant to their struggles" (Brook and Darlington 2013, 233). Historically, the impetus for the development of a critical agenda came

directly from plant-level struggle which “requires a direct and more interactive form of working with those we are studying who, unlike management and employers, do not have the resources to have their views and positions represented” (Stewart and Martinez Lucio 2011, 338).

While the traditions of critical involvement of sociologists with the problems of those excluded are also present in Poland and Hungary, the “potential” field of critical labour studies is differently framed in these countries in contrast to the UK. We talk about the “potential” field as the very notion of critical labour studies is not routinely used in either of the countries concerned in public or academic discourses. Indeed, it has only recently gained some prominence in the UK. On the one hand, the historical relationships between workers and critical sociologists in Hungary and Poland were defined by the authoritarian variety of socialist Fordism and radical market reforms, trade union marginalisation in the 1990s and 2000s and the “de-marxisation” of sociology (Mucha and Keen 2010, 132) which challenged the very meaning of critical labour studies in these countries. On the other hand, the key difference between Hungary and Poland is the presence of strong, worker-based, anti-communist movements before 1989 in the latter case and their absence in the former. Broadly, by critical labour studies we are referring to a research and teaching agenda in the sociology of work and the social sciences more widely as committed to those excluded, whether socially, economically or culturally, from access to variant forms of power in contemporary capitalism. In this regard CLS represents an explicit socio-political collaborative, participatory research agenda where advocates argue for the engagement of social scientists with their research participants in ways familiar to a number of critical researchers including Paolo Freire (1970). CLS is an unequivocal expression, habit of mind, linking back to other domain arguing for a less naive perception of a relationship between social science and political economy. In this respect, like practitioners of heterodox economics, CLS exponents perceive the importance of hegemony in social science practice, arguing that the so-called conventional research practice is not without its own problems and compromises and especially in relation to powerful voices in society.

The pre-history of CLS is important to note. The term CLS is used quite deliberately to flag up links between contemporary critical, anti-system, research agenda and pre-existing approaches to understanding the relationships between labour and capital, researcher commitment and the sociology of work. However, in delving into previous forms of critical engagement between critical academic researchers and labour and the labour movement, the point is made that the context, ambiance and possibility for radical research are different today, whether in the “East” or the “West”, than during the supposed golden era in the West where mass labour movement and social democratic spaces for radical research proliferated.

Critical labour studies in the UK: Continuity in change in the field of CLS

In the UK, prior to 1945, considerations of work and labour were marginal to sociology which, in the area of “work” and “labour” still reflected the concerns of classical economics. In so far as social scientists were interested in work, this largely reflected agenda of state and employers. Before the Second World War, sociology of work, or labour, followed the route of what C.W. Mills would have described as “cow sociology”. We can interpret this as social science “speaking truths for the powerful”. While an oversimplification, this recognition is nevertheless vital since it does, in some respects, allow us to articulate one of the key motifs of sociology today which, by contrast, envisages what Burawoy (2005) describes as a “public sociology”, a sociology that famously “speaks truth onto power” (Edward Said).

Immediately after the Second World War the government and the academy became concerned with issues of productivity and the impact of “shop floor culture”. While obviously driven by the concerns of a “cow sociology” connections with a broader social radicalisation saw sociology beginning to exhibit a more critical agenda. This was linked to broader issues concerning class culture, the state and political power. This was the period that witnessed a new wave of studies of work and employment undergirded by sociology (cf. Savage 2000). The late 1960s and 1970s marked a determined shift from the agenda inscribed in an institutionalised sociology of work characteristic of the post-war period. However, during the 1980s and 1990s the sociology of work in the UK has arguably become more marginal to the wider discipline of sociology. A significant debate about the character and future of the sociology of work in the UK was initiated in the sterling work of Tim Strangleman and Susan Halford (2009). Though not alone in recognising the problems of marginalisation of work, or labour sociology, the significance of their work is that it is located in the mainstream of the discipline which has too often ignored the fate of labour sociology. Such a marginalisation can be witnessed in the decline of the import of the sociology of work in undergraduate education, in the textbooks available for such courses and a more general sense in which it is perceived. It is in this context that the notion of critical labour studies emerged to cover a broader, more interdisciplinary and politically-oriented, area of research interests.

In the UK, the sociology of work today is as much to be understood as concerning both an institutionalist and a “public sociology”; the latter is potentially interconnected with the field of critical labour studies. However, it is important not to forget that the idea of “public sociology” is itself contested. By institutionalist we are referring to the process of incorporation expressed in a wide range of disciplinary practices including HRM and often including the ideological role inscribed in HRM university faculties. But really, institutionalist practices comprise the research agenda of the activities of the “little helper” who is concerned

with productivity norms and the means by which productivity is achieved, not because of the problems it poses for workers but because of the difficulties workers problems pose for productivity. By contrast, the critical labour studies perspective is concerned with the purpose of work, what problems it creates for workers (increasingly also “people” outside employment, see Durand (2007) for his conception of *Flux tendu*). Moreover this, of course, raises wider concerns about the changing character of what might be termed political economy. Instead of a neo-liberal focus on “why workers don’t work harder”, a critical sociology of work, like Burawoy (1979), sees the problem differently — “why do workers work as hard as they do”.

One important feature we might take from this overview is to see how the sociology of work and the practice of critical labour studies is, just as in the post-war period, understandable in terms of what is happening in the wider society: in the contemporary period — the dominance of neoliberal ideology. This also involves new ways of critical engagement of research and it also includes the need to understand new categories of precarious workers, including for instance migrant workers. For sure, some interesting forms of Public Sociology have been emerging. Yet, it is clear that as an agenda for research, something more is being argued than just the fact that critical research today has common bonds with earlier work engaging workers. Salient early critical, labour centred, research from the 1960 and 1970s can be found in the work of the Liverpool University labour sociologists such as Huw Beynon (1973) *Working for Ford*, Theo Nichols and Huw Beynon (1977) *Living with Capitalism*. Then there was the (more) radical development of socialist feminist labour sociology epitomised in the path-breaking work of, for example Pollert (1981) *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, Westwood (1984) *All Day Everyday* and Cockburn’s *Brothers* (1983). The latter group achieved something startling at the time. Whereas Beynon and Nichols’ work, amongst others, brought Marxist critique of political economy and the labour process into the Anglo-Saxon sociology of work, the socialist feminists did something which had not been achieved previously. In linking gendered relationships at work to gendered relationships within the working class that were central to capital formation, it became possible to begin to understand capital-labour relationships at work and beyond the employment relationship in a more socially critical way.

Sociologists and labour in Poland: The re-emergence of the field of CLS

The major difference between the development of critical labour studies in the UK and Poland is obviously related to differences in political economy. Under authoritarian, state socialism in Poland (1945–1989), sociology retained its “very long and rich, non-Marxist institutional tradition” (Mucha and Keen 2010, 130). However, the censorship of research and publications, the institutional

embeddedness of some influential sociologists in the communist party and the straightjacket of official, non-critical Marxist ideology, made it difficult for the Polish sociology to develop and engage in a critical discussion with the authorities. The idea of political involvement by sociologists, at least until the 1980s, was considered to be dangerous for their belief in a “pure” science as an antidote to ideological pressure on sociology exercised by the authoritarian state (Kuczyński 1994). In addition, free labour movements, as the audience for sociological research, were non-existent at least until the Solidarity revolt in 1980–1981.

The institutionalisation of the sociology of work in the 1960s and 1970s in Poland was marked by the creative adaptation and development of systems approaches (e.g. Matejko 1961) that resembled Western managerialist strands. The activity of academic sociologists of work was closely connected with the movement of “plant sociologists” (Jędrzycki 1971) employed in large state-owned socialist enterprises. It was inspired, among other things, by US human relations school of thought. Despite the Marxist rhetoric of much research, the analysis of labour processes were limited and the problems of the relationships between conflicts at work and conflicts in the wider society were taboo for many, aside from a number of frequently censored studies (e.g. Ciarkowski et al. 1981). If workplace tensions were analysed, this was achieved mainly by humanistic approaches focused on values rather than structural features of work organisation and the division of power within state-socialist society.

The situation began to change in the 1980s with the emergence of the first independent trade union in state socialist Eastern European countries, NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity). Research conducted by the state-directed Institute of Research on the Working Class (e.g. Wójcik 1988) and studies by Malanowski (1981) began to document the discrepancy between the ideology of the workers’ state and the poor living and working conditions of labourers; other research began to focus more critically on labour processes (Kulpińska 1985). Another important feature of the “critical sociologies of socialism” was their anticipatory character with regard to expected social change. Since the mid-1980s, most of sociological research on workers was focused on the question of workers’ support for, and resistance to, market reforms (e.g. Czarzasty et al. 1987). Despite the involvement of many sociologists in Solidarity, they tended to perform the role of traditional intellectuals and experts, external to the movement. This was manifested very clearly in the experience of Polish members of Alain Touraine, Francois Dubet, Michel Wieviorka and Jan Strzelecki’s team studying Solidarity utilising the methodology of sociological intervention (cf. Touraine et al. 1983). As noted by Kuczyński (1994, 112), the Polish members of the team, all of whom were also involved in Solidarity, kept on doubting whether their involvement in action research could still be considered “science”.

The transformation in 1989 brought about a real decline in the extent of research analysing workers’ positions, social consciousness, and attitudes. Since

then for the most part, research has been dominated by macro-sociology of post-socialist transformation shaped in and by the modernisation paradigm. As noted by Ost (2005, 17), “for most social scientists the only way workers seemed to ‘matter’ was as a potential obstacle to democratization”. In the context of other East European countries, Ukraine and Romania, Varga (2011, 43) accounted for the declining interest in labour studies by the fact that “the current generation of sociologists might have more in common with the countries’ ruling elites than with workers and other subaltern groups”. Despite a noteworthy shift in sociologists’ interests towards the analysis of the middle class, we avoid this generalisation for the Polish case. Rather, we would like to present some signs of revival of the sociology of work in general and critical labour studies in particular, under difficult, neoliberal conditions.

The discussion concerning divisions between the managerial-practical sociology of work and critical labour studies is also valid in contemporary Poland. What CLS and the practical sociology of work have in common is an increasing interdisciplinarity (see Halford and Strangleman 2009). Managerial studies of work are usually exercised under non-sociological banners, including management studies and economics, even though many of them draw from the sociology of work classics. New critical labour studies, in turn, reflect very diverse theoretical agendas, including neo-Marxism, post-structuralism and feminism. The interesting features of the new CLS in Poland are connected with three issues: (1) generational change; (2) the precarisation of young cohorts of sociologists; (3) the emergent debates with Western scholars who did research in Poland in the 1990s. The old schools of industrial relations, represented among others by J. Gardawski (2009) and W. Kozek (2012), are in many ways involved in cooperation with the largest trade unions (such as NSZZ Solidarność and OPZZ). However, the field of CLS is increasingly dominated by new researchers. They include left-wing PhD students, whose research on labour-related issues is connected to grassroots intellectual initiatives (e.g. Feminist Think Tank; the critical student journals, such as *Praktyka Teoretyczna/Theoretical Practice*; anarcho-syndicalist trade union Workers’ Initiative). They also include organic intellectuals developing reflection on labour outside academia, in close relationship with radical social movements and trade unions (Urbański 2014)¹.

¹ Due to space constraints, we cannot present all of research in Poland coming under the banner of critical labour studies. We can mention here just a couple of studies including the research on women activists in trade unions (Kubisa 2014), trade union renewal (e.g. Czarzasty and Mrozowicki 2014), neoliberal public sector reforms (Kozek 2012), precarious work (Urbański 2014), special economic zones (Maciejewska 2012), employment in cultural sector (Gorgoń et al. 2013). From a theoretical perspective, an important contribution is made by young philosophers working on the concept of non-material work within the *Praktyka Teoretyczna* journal. There is also important research on working conditions of Poles by Gardawski team (2009) which cannot be unambiguously situated within the CLS stream, but it clearly connects with some aspects of Marxist tradition.

This new generation of labour students finds limited support from academia for the simple reason that they take their PhDs in spaces where academic sociology of labour is weak or non-existent. Moreover, they are often precarious workers themselves, being employed on low-paid, “junk contracts” in various commercial and academic projects. Due to neoliberal university reforms, they often seem to have more in common with the excluded and precarious workers they study than with their older university colleagues. Finally, although the initial impetus for many young sociologists of work seemed to derive from Western critical research in Poland in the 1990s (e.g. Dunn 2004; Ost 2005; Hardy 2009), with the passing of time the need to develop a more distinct, intellectual and political identity has become more visible. The promise of the organic public sociology, “in which the sociologist works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public” (Burawoy 2005, 7) can be an important dimension of this “maturation” process.

CLS traditions and post-socialist currents in Hungary

Similarly to Poland, sociology and critical social science in Hungary was seriously constrained up until the 1980s or in some places to the very last years of the state socialist or communist regimes. The post-World War II take-off of sociology interestingly was tied to a tangible interest in labour studies. The independent Research Group for sociology created in 1963 was directed by András Hegedüs, a scholar with former establishment engagement. Hegedüs, stemming from a Marxist conviction, revealed that alienation in work was widespread in socialism as well. Accordingly, the idea of humanisation of work remained an unfulfilled goal. The bargaining power of workers in the socialist industrial firms, the differentiation within the industrial working class, and the divide between management and workers merged as major topics for inquiry in the 1970s. Csaba Makó and Lajos Héthy conducted pioneering studies in the early 1970s on the informal bargaining power of groups of skilled workers with key positions in production (Héthy and Makó 1969). Istvan Kemeny investigated worker stratification by observing family background, education, position in the division of labour and living and working conditions (Kemény 1971).

Few of the contemporary empirical investigations became known to the wider public in the Cold-War divide. A notable exception is Miklos Haraszti's sociography titled *Unit Wage: A Worker in the Workers' State*, written in 1972 but published only in Germany in 1975 with the foreword of Heinrich Böll. The philosopher-writer Haraszti became a factory worker through being expelled from the university and was put on trial for the book, barely escaping imprisonment. He later acted as a leading figure of the Hungarian democratic opposition movement. Haraszti's book revealed the refined technology of exploitation of the blue

collar workers and of workers' practices of resistance in a typical socialist industrial firm. One may argue that without any documented connections to Western scholarship at the time, these researchers and writers resonated well with a critical British labour sociology agenda capturing the labour process through micro-practices of job controls, wage-effort bargaining, individual and informal, collective and organised action, and the dialectic of control and resistance (Thompson and Smith 2009). Interestingly, this kind of analysis was not really developed in Poland.

In the subsequent decade, micro-practices of labour, hidden forms of exploitation, and inequalities sharply contradicting the official ideological tenets, received remarkable attention from critical intellectuals, many of them affiliated with the oppositional movement in Hungary and Central Europe. The critical-empirical genre of *sociography* started to embrace urban and industrial topics in Hungary from the 1980s. The genre was built on an explicit interest in inequalities, injustices, and marginalities and among the subjects of these sensitivities blue collar workers (miners, railway operators, steel factory workers, etc.) in difficult labour conditions also received attention in addition to women and Roma at the bottom of the labour market, groups entrapped in backward areas, and the poor.

It is also pertinent to the formation of labour studies history in Hungary how *economic sociology*, as an important field of studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s; the development paralleled to some extent that in Poland. Akos Róna-Tas (2002) argues that the intellectual liaison between economics and sociology was further facilitated by that Hungarian economists cultivated institutionalism and empiricism. They ventured to explore most importantly the institutional arrangements of state socialism. The most well-known economist of the socialist era, János Kornai, used economic modelling to examine the shortage-based operation of socialist institutions, yet he also showed interest in holistic inquiries of political economy with sociological sensitivities to institutions.

Róna-Tas also argues that the relative softness of the Hungarian regime allowed formative encounters between Western and Hungarian scholars in the 1970s and 1980s: Hungary was posited as "prisms through which state socialism became refracted" through the work of Szelenyi, Stark, and Burawoy (Róna-Tas 2002, 33). British sociology and anthropology also ushered to shape the Hungarian Anglo-Saxon academic link through the work of Nigel Swain and Chris Hann. Róna-Tas proposes that these links exerted "disproportionate influence of this small and peculiar country's experience in the English speaking world on interpreting the post-communist economic transformation..." (2002, 33). Although published after 1989, still neatly embedded in scholarship produced during state socialism, a co-authored book deserves attention in this review. *The Radiant Past*, embodied a series of essays written by a tandem of American and Hungarian sociologists between 1983 and 1990 (Burawoy and Lukács 1992). The comparative effort to prove the efficiency of the socialist enterprises over the US ones have not created high endorsement in critical reviews. In the same place, the observations on

the innovative capacities and bargaining power of the shop floor workers in the context of shortage economy seemed to contribute to the acknowledged empirical research on the socialist firm and its labour processes.

Any outstanding topic of post-socialist economy and society, early endeavours in the 1990s to research labour relations were influenced directly or indirectly by comprehensive theories of transition or transformations. In Hungary, still in the established tradition of economic sociology, the process and consequences of privatisation intimately tied to the treatment of post-1989 crisis management have received major critical attention right from the very start. Besides the interest in the formation of a new economic elite, propertied and managerial class, economic sociology in Hungary turned to outstanding issues of labour market transformation, with special emphasis on unemployment.

Embedded in a European scene of critical labour studies cultivated by political economy scholars and sociologists, a group of researchers emerged — many of them linked to the Central European University, Budapest — to study the various models of capitalism and labour relations in post-Cold War CEE (Bohle and Greskovits 2006). It was documented how newly instituted tripartite bodies have been deployed to legitimise top-down policy choices (Avdagic 2005) and that the recovery from the economic downturn in the 1990s did not produce a recovery of negotiated industrial relations. From the first decade of the 2000s, research results have started to challenge the view of CEE labour as a uniformly weak and uncover how unions can play an active role in a policy reform process (Bernaciak, Duman and Scepanovic 2011). The mainstream image of passivity, disempowerment, and invisibility of CEE labour organisations is also questioned by explorations into transnational union cooperation in the enlarged Europe. In the Hungarian scholarship, studies introducing an actor-oriented approach attempt to explain the possibilities of employment representation practices at a company-level (Galgóczi 2003; Meardi and Toth 2006). These studies apply a bottom-up approach which pays more attention to the agency of MNCs' local managers and to the capacity of host-country employee representatives in shaping industrial relations.

Another distinctive chapter in the literature, led by historians and sociologists, is shaping up based on the conviction that much of what is happening in contemporary labour relations should be understood through the renewed concept of class. One of the master ideas in this circle of scholars is that industrial workers are the major losers or victims of post-socialist transition, or in a more refined scheme, these workers tend to feel so. Research within this tradition explores the fragmentation of the workers' identity, subjectivity, and class formations. In Hungary, a left-wing monthly called *Eszmélet* serves as the intellectual home of these inquiries. The leading figures of this circle (Bartha, Halmai, Szalai) are closely connected to international fora of anthropologists and historians who conceive of the concept of class as a relational term which marks

intersecting social divisions in modes of production and of social reproduction shaped in interdependent systems of global capitalism and domestic economic regimes (Carrier and Kalb 2015). It is also to be explored how the rich scholarship in Hungary on the coping practices of rural and agricultural workers after privatisation and transformation of state farms and the arrival of massive FDI in food industry is connected or disconnected from the study of urban and industrial explorations (e.g. by scholars such as Kovacs and Varadi, Kuczi, Lampland, Hann).

Finally, to posit CLS in the wider tradition of the critical study of economic transformations, one has to acknowledge fields of studies that have direct relevance to industrial relations and attract often more pronounced attention by scholars in Hungary. There is a distinguished group of economists engaged in the study of labour economics with high social sensitivity and particularly alert to structural processes of social exclusion (on gender, Roma, disability grounds). More intensively from the 2000s, sociologists have also turned to the topic of labour migration and globalisation. Industrial workers and blue collar employees remain relevant categories in the wider subject of social stratification and inequality but mostly in relation to other social groups rather than to capital or managers. It is also to be noted that management studies, mostly pursued by applied economics departments and business schools, have entered the field of industrial relations similarly to many other post-socialist and old Western democracies. Yet, this does not seem to create a zero sum game in the related field or to exert major influence on critical labour studies. The reasons for strength and weaknesses in CLS can be found elsewhere. In terms of significant publications, doctoral studies, and academic degree programs, “related” inquiries are more developed than CLS in Hungary.

Conclusions

A strong CLS seems to have been supported in Europe by either a strong labour movement, or strong Marxist intellectual traditions, or some specific conjunctures in critical social sciences (e.g. disciplinary encounters, cross-border intellectual effects, etc.) and arguably by some combination of all these. In post-socialist Hungary the first two conditions are barely present, whereas critical social science moves in directions other than CLS. In Poland, there is the legacy of the strong workers’ movements in 1980–81 (Solidarity) which were next crushed by the military coup (Martial Law), but similarly to Hungary there are rather weak Marxist traditions due to de-marxisation of sociology after 1989. In the UK, there is a legacy of a strong labour movement from the pre-Thatcher era together with Marxist scholarship despite the weakening of both in the 1980s and 1990s. Arguably, the rise of Human Resource Management can be seen as a disciplinary response to broader labour and working class subordination. In Ramsay’s “cycles of control” thesis, the

inability of labour to fashion a response to capital is entirely commensurate with its declining ability to control, if not harness, the capital-labour relationship both within work and, by extension, outside work to the polity more widely. While in the previous period of post-war capital expansion the ability of capital to subordinate strongly organised workers was more limited at work, personnel management was left to deal with implementing negotiated terms and conditions of work, the function of HRM, increasingly since its development in the 1980s, is inherently linked to the subordination of labour. This subordination includes the colonisation of spaces within and without the specificity of production proper and while the trajectory of HRM is not our concern here, suffice it to say that it has further excluded radical, never mind critical, voices raised in the context of work. The advent of CLS in the UK is thus seen as a quite specifically political project concerned with mobilising shop floor knowledge of labour processes such that the worker, him or herself, is centrally part of the critical knowledge process of research. This did not occur to the same degree previously because the spaces for the production of knowledge and research, in the work place, were more open to those linked institutionally to labour in the sense understood by Beynon (1973).

The article also demonstrated the important differences between the development of critical labour studies in Poland and Hungary, two formerly state socialist countries. We are not the first to consider these two cases. Anna Seleny argued that the two countries demonstrated opposing models of political economy and internal transformations in state socialism. The former was burdened by state-labour conflict, upheaval and hardship, martial law and a weak party-state regime with strong political opposition. The latter experimented with economic reforms, accommodation and stability through paternalism and pragmatism (Seleny 2006, 15). This divergence later had major consequences for the status, voice, and power of the industrial labourers and the inspirations of economic actors to relate to labour and capital. Other authors reveal that the networks and cooperation in the Hungarian second economy² and the dual individual/household strategies mobilised frames of actions and strategies that have induced little if any appreciation or working class solidarity, collective representation, antagonistic relations with capital.

Based on preliminary observations, we suggest that in Hungary working class mobilisation was very modest in support of political changes around 1989 and the connection between the labour movement and the democratic opposition was limited in comparison to Poland. Furthermore, it is possible to discern a salient ideological cleavage between the Marxist and non-Marxist critical social

² Second economy is a concept which emerged in the scholarship on economic systems of state socialism, in particular on Hungary. A growing domain of family based, small scale, either barter or commodity exchange based rural production or urban service delivery, often saturated with practices of informal economy, was captured by this term (Gábor 1979). The second economy played an increasing role in generating household assets and revenues and also enhancing the output in national economies. Some scholars emphasised the dichotomy of the second and the (first) state economy, others pronounced the intimate relations between the two spheres in real existing socialism.

science both in Hungary and Poland after 1989. Marxism, not only its vulgar state socialist version, became fundamentally discredited in Hungarian and Polish social science in the 1990s. This could in part be accounted for by internal developments in social science and more closely in sociology, and partly by the influence of transnational encounters within economic sociology, predominantly with Anglo-Saxon and non-Marxist scholars. Interestingly enough, the neo-Marxist scholarship has seen some re-emergence in the writings of a new generation of Polish scholars, among others in the work and discussion on autonomous, Italian Marxist tradition within circles related to the journal *Theoretical Praxis*, in addition to the scholarship of the Feminist Think Tank.

As already suggested, in Hungary the gravitation of economic sociology in which scholars examine a range of political economy issues, including privatisation, globalisation and Europeanisation, models of capitalism, has been critical in defining the direction of research on labour related issues. The political and intellectual appeal of other critical topics of post-socialist capitalist transformations, such as unemployment, social exclusion, retirement, ethnic and regional differences etc., seem to be equally relevant in both countries. Finally, there are imminent relations between the subject of scholarly inquiries and the status of this subject in society: as the Polish working class remained, or at least is believed to have remained, a significant societal and political actor, it has also become perpetuated subject of interest for local and international scholarship. Tangible international interest and inspiration for local scholars active in CLS cannot be so readily observed yet in the case of Hungary.

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Critical Labour Studies in Hungary, Poland and the UK: Between crisis and revitalisation

Abstract

This article explores the developments of critical labour studies in three countries, Hungary, Poland and the UK. Regardless of different historical trajectories and political contexts, the British,

Hungarian and Polish critical labour studies were affected by similar challenges, such as (1) the marginalisation of the sociology of work in the academia; (2) loosening of the vital links between sociologists of work and workers' movements; (3) relatedly, the relationship between these and the role of neo-liberal ideologies more broadly. Simultaneously, albeit with different intensity, we can observe some indicators of the renewal of critical traditions beyond the boundaries of institutionalised sociology and the formation of a new, interdisciplinary research fields in all three countries studied. The article concludes that the development of a CLS in Poland, the UK and Hungary can be linked to national trajectories of the respective labour movements, their relations with academic and other milieus, the legitimacy of critical (neo-Marxist, socialist feminist and other) intellectual traditions and specific conjunctures in critical social sciences.

Krytyczne studia nad światem pracy na Węgrzech, w Polsce i w Wielkiej Brytanii: między kryzysem a rewitalizacją

Abstrakt

W niniejszym artykule analizujemy rozwój krytycznych studiów nad światem pracy (CLS) w trzech krajach, na Węgrzech, w Polsce i w Wielkiej Brytanii. Pomimo odmiennych losów historycznych i kontekstów politycznych brytyjskie, węgierskie i polskie krytyczne studia nad światem pracy stanęły przed podobnymi wyzwaniami, takimi jak (1) marginalizacja socjologii pracy w świecie akademickim; (2) utrata żywotnych powiązań między socjologami pracy i ruchami pracowniczymi; (3) problemy powiązania między dwoma pierwszymi a znaczeniem ideologii neoliberalnych. Zarazem, choć z różnym natężeniem, obserwować możemy symptomy odnowy krytycznych tradycji badawczych poza granicami socjologii instytucjonalnej, a także formowanie się nowych, międzydyscyplinarnych pól badawczych we wszystkich trzech badanych krajach. We wnioskach twierdzimy, że rozwój krytycznych studiów nad światem pracy w Polsce, Wielkiej Brytanii i na Węgrzech może być powiązany ze zróżnicowanymi ścieżkami rozwoju ruchów pracowniczych w analizowanych krajach, ich związkami ze środowiskiem akademickim (i innymi środowiskami), prawomocnością krytycznych (neomarksistowskich, socjalistyczno-feministycznych i innych) tradycji intelektualnych oraz pewną dozą przypadku w rozwoju nauk społecznych.