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## The ambivalence of social change: Triumph or trauma?

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P 00 - 001

The Ambivalence of Social Change  
Triumph or Trauma?

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## Abstract

Sociological approaches to social change have evolved in three typical forms: the discourse of progress in the period of classical sociology, the discourse of crisis characteristic for the middle of the XXth century, and the discourse of trauma, which seems to emerge at the end of the XXth century. The concept of trauma, borrowed from medicine, suggests that change per se, irrespective of its content, but provided that it is sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected, may produce painful shock for the social and particularly cultural tissue of a society. Paradoxically, this applies also to changes which are otherwise progressive, welcome, and intended by the people. Cultural trauma begins with disorganization of cultural rules and accompanying personal disorientation, culminating even in the loss of identity. This condition is made more grave by the traumatizing events or situations which occur as the effect of major change in areas other than culture, and affect the whole "lifeworld" of the people. The traumatic mood which spreads in a society is countered by various coping strategies. If they are successful trauma turns out into mobilizing force for human agency, and stimulates creative social becoming.

Such theoretical model is applied and tested with data referring to the radical political, economic and cultural transformations in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. The analysis of the Polish case suggests that the model of trauma and slow re-consolidation of culture may be an adequate interpretative tool for this unique historical process.

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## 1. The study of change at the core of sociology

Change is an universal and pervasive factor of social life. There is no society without change. Seemingly stable, unchanging phenomena are just cognitively frozen phases in the constant flow of social events, snapshots of the world which as such never stops in its tracks. Ontologically, society is nothing else but change, movement and transformation, action and interaction, construction and reconstruction, constant *becoming* rather than stable *being*. The very metaphor of social life carries this message quite cogently. Life is there as long as it is lived. Society is there as long as it is changing. The dynamic perspective is the only ontologically warranted approach in sociology.

This has been recognized from the beginning of the discipline. In fact classical sociology was born as a science of social change at the macro level, an epochal, massive change from traditional to modern society. Its proper domain was a "first great transition" (Polanyi 1944) epitomized by industrialization, urbanization, mass education and mass culture. Later it focused on the "second great transition" brought about by automatization, robotization, computerization, spreading of leisure and travel. Presently it is concerned with the "third great transition", primarily the revolution in communication and information, leading toward the "global age" (Albrow 1996) and the "knowledge society". Thus at its core sociology has always remained, to our days, the study of rising, developing, maturing and decaying modernity.

The all-embracing change has not omitted the reflexive awareness of change, expressed both by the common people, and by the social sciences. The perspectives on social change have themselves been undergoing remarkable change. The classical epoch of sociology, the XIXth century, was pervaded with the idea of *progress*. The mood was triumphalist and optimistic: change was taken to be synonymous with betterment, improvement, amelioration of human condition. It was grasped by the concepts of evolution, growth and development: inevitable and irreversible unravelling of inherent potentialities of society. Change was raised to the level of autotelic value, it was seen as always good, sought and cherished for its own sake.

But already in the XIXth century first doubts appear, and they become even more pronounced in the XXth century (Alexander and Sztompka 1990). The discourse of progress is slowly undermined by another perspective: the discourse of *crisis*. Several authors notice that major social change, developmental or progressive in some respects,

may yet incur grave social costs. First, it is observed that otherwise progressive processes do not run in a smooth, linear fashion, but rather - to put it metaphorically - through "blood, sweat and tears", temporary breakdowns, backlashes, even lasting reversals. Hegelian and Marxian dialectics is the prime example of this view. Second, as the changes expand and deepen, it is seen ever more clearly that progress does not realize itself in a uniform manner in all domains, areas, spheres of social life. Processes which can be judged as progressive in some domains are found to produce various adverse side effects, unintended consequences, "spill-offs" in other domains.

This selective focus on crisis in some fields as a price for the triumphs of modernity, can be illustrated by seven well known themes initiated in the XIX century but pervading sociological thought to our time. There is the theme of *lost community* or destroyed *Gemeinschaft* raised by Ferdinand Tonnies. There is the theme of *anomie* or moral chaos, emphasised by Emile Durkheim. There is the theme of iron cage of bureaucracy or extreme instrumental, manipulative rationality dwelled upon by Max Weber. There is the theme of decaying *mass culture* and the dangers of massification raised by Ortega Y Gasset. Or more recently, there is the theme of *ecological destruction*, degradation of nature, the depletion of resources and "limits to growth". Finally the critical focus embraces the industrialization of war, *genocide*, spreading of terrorism and violence.

The third line of criticism undermining the idealization of progress and fetishization of change, shows that progress is not uniformly and unequivocally good for all members of society: what is good for some, may be bad for others. The question "progress for whom?", or "who pays for progress?" is put on the agenda by Karl Marx with the theme of *alienation* and class oppression, and is taken up - not necessarily from Marxist perspective - by numerous later authors focusing on injustice, inequality and exploitation.

In the second half of the XIX century this selective critique of change as producing crisis in specific domains, or crisis for some groups, takes interesting turn: crisis is no longer treated as temporary, at least potentially to be healed, but as a chronic, permanent and endemic feature of modern society, putting a question mark under a whole project of modernity (Holton 1990). The very notion of progress is considered as obsolete, and the optimistic progressivists as utterly naive. The extreme manifestation of the discourse of crisis is the mood of catastrophism. From the pole of triumph to the pole of catastrophe, the pendulum swings all the way.

This opens the way to the emergence of the third, more balanced, perspective, the third type of discourse about social change, which recognizes the perennial *ambivalence* of its effects. This new discourse first manifests itself at the level of common thinking, then the media, literature, and only recently enters the sociological debate. I label it the discourse of *trauma*, as it revolves around this central notion, borrowed as a metaphor from medicine and psychiatry and slowly acquiring new social and cultural meaning.

The career of the concept of trauma as applied to society begins with the realization that change itself, irrespective of the domain it touches, the groups it affects, and even irrespective of its content, may have adverse effects, bring shocks and wounds to the social and cultural tissue. The focus shifts from the critique of particular types of change, to the disturbing, destructive, shocking effects of *change per se*. The classical assumption that change is an autotelic value is finally lifted, the fetish of change is undermined. It is countered with the hypothesis that people put value on security, predictability, continuity, routines and rituals of their "life-world". The most paradoxical and challenging observation is that even the changes which are truly beneficial, welcome by the people, dreamed about and fought for - may turn out to be painful. The forerunner of this idea was Emile Durkheim with his famous notion of "anomie of success".

## 2. Traumatogenic social change

Saying simply that social change produces trauma is a gross simplification. We took as a starting point of the argument the assumption that social life is synonymous with incessant change. If any change were to produce trauma, it would mean that all societies were permanently and irreparably traumatized. The theory of trauma would lose any empirical meaning and would become purely tautological. It would also carry too pessimistic message running counter to our intuitions which indicate that traumas occur only in *some* societies, at *some* moments, that they are weaker or stronger, and that they are not eternal; they appear and go. The sensible approach is to propose that only some types of changes bring about traumas, and therefore that only some societies in some periods of their history become traumatized. The notion of trauma turns into a *variable* and acquires empirical usefulness. The crucial question is: which types of change are traumatogenic?



The traumatogenic change seems to exhibit four traits. First, it is characterized by specific speed. The obvious case is the change which is *sudden, rapid*, occurs within a span of time relatively short for a given kind of processes. For example: revolution is rapid relative to historical time (even when it takes weeks or months), collapse of the market is sudden relative to long-range economic waves, death in the accident is sudden relative to biographical time. The less obvious case, which nevertheless also falls under the same rubric of sudden and rapid change is the process which is prolonged, cumulative, but eventually reaches a *threshold of saturation* beyond which it turns out to be fundamentally, qualitatively new. It suddenly appears to be unbearable, produces a shock of realization about something which was ignored before. Such rapid awaking to the threats is typical for the processes of ecological decay, depletion of resources, pollution, traffic congestion, cultural imperialism, growing poverty, just to take some examples from the social domain; or progressing illness, ageing, alcoholism, drug addiction or advancing incapacity, if we look at the personal level. In the first case, there is a shock of *sudden events*, in the second case there is a shock of *sudden awareness* of otherwise prolonged processes. Suddenness, rapidness is a common denominator in both cases.

The second trait of traumatogenic change has to do with its scope. It is usually *wide, comprehensive*. Either in the sense that it touches many aspects of life - be it social life or personal life - or that it affects many actors, and many actions. Revolution is a good example of traumatogenic social change because it usually embraces not only political domain, but also law, economy, morality, culture, art, sometimes even language, and it also affects the fate of many groups, if not all the population. Retirement is a good example of traumatogenic personal change because it transforms most life patterns, time budgets, routines of leisure, networks of social relations, membership of groups, life standards and reflects itself in the everyday conduct of the retired individual.

Third, traumatogenic change is marked by specific content, particular substance. Either in the sense that it is *radical, deep*, fundamental, i.e. touches the core aspects of social life or personal fate, or that it affects universal experiences, whether public or private. For example the shift in dominant values, transfer of power, or overturning of prestige hierarchies change the very constitution of society, whereas the rise of crime, corruption, pollution degrade the context of everyday life, threaten the immediate "life world" of every societal member.

The fourth feature of traumatogenic change has to do with the specific mental frame with which it is encountered by the people. It is faced with *unbelieving mood*, it is at least to some extent unexpected, surprising; precisely "shocking" in the literal sense of this term. The devaluation of currency (at the societal level), or the diagnosis of cancer (at the personal level) provide good examples.

To summarize: we define as potentially traumatogenic only such changes which are sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected. It narrows down our focus but not yet sufficiently. The changes meeting this description still make up very wide and heterogeneous category. For example they would include such cases as:

- death in the family
- divorce
- loss of property in natural disaster
- car accident
- bankruptcy of the firm
- restructuring of the enterprise
- fight among friends
- collapse of the stock-exchange
- terrorist attack
- foreign conquest
- breakdown of the political and economic regime
- revolution.

Some order is needed in this mixed bag of events, and our next step must be an attempt at classification. One criterion has already been implicitly suggested when we separated societal and personal changes. At the individual level of biography we experience such events as marriage, childbirth, divorce, death in the family, purchase of a new house, losing job, retirement etc. The traumas they bring about are *personal*, mostly psychological. They fall beyond the purview of sociology. We come a bit closer, but not yet entirely to sociological perspective if we consider mass events, occurring to a number of people simultaneously. Take some examples: a hurricane leaving thousands homeless, an epidemics of a grave disease affecting large segments of a population, an economic crisis resulting in massive unemployment. When such disasters hit, the victims are at first facing them alone, experience them individually, as a multitude of private disasters.

The trauma is their own and not yet shared, suffered *side by side*, but not yet *together* with others.

Truly *collective* traumas, as distinct from massive traumas, appear only when people start to be aware of the common plight, perceive the similarity of their situation with that of others, define it as shared. They start to talk about it, exchange observations and experiences, gossips and rumours, formulate diagnoses and myths, identify causes or villains, seek for conspiracies, decide to do something about it, envisage coping methods. They debate, even quarrel and fight among themselves about all this. Those debates reach the public arena, are taken by the media, expressed in literature, art, movies. The whole "meaning industry" full of rich narratives focuses on giving sense to the common and shared occurrences. Then the expression of trauma may go beyond the subjective, symbolic or ideal level and acquire more tangible social forms: intense interaction, outbursts of protest, forming of groups, collective mobilization, creating social movements, associations, organizations, political parties. Only when we observe such phenomena we are in the proper domain of sociology. Traumatogenic changes become "*societal facts sui generis*" in the sense given to this term by Emile Durkheim. For the sake of sociological analysis we can leave out individual traumas, as well as massive traumas, and devote the remaining discussion exclusively to the level of collective traumas.

Another way to approach classificatory task is to distinguish domains touched by traumatogenic changes. One is the biological substratum of a society, the *population*. The extreme consequence of a traumatogenic change may be the extermination of societal members. The wars, famines, epidemics provide numerous tragic examples. A bit less extreme is the decay of biological fitness of the population, marked by such indicators as the level of childbirth death, life expectancy, suicide rates, frequency of diseases, mental disorders etc. A forerunner of such a perspective on trauma was Pitirim Sorokin who in the famous "Sociology of Revolution" (1928) have analysed in details the disastrous impact of the Bolshevik revolution on the biological capacity of Russian people. A contemporary example of parallel focus is to be found in the studies of suicide rates in Estonia, Hungary or Poland, after the collapse of communist system and major systemic changes known as post-communist transformation. Looking for traumatic effects at biological level is close to medical, or epidemiological perspective. However important, it falls beyond the scope of sociological analysis proper.

We reach truly sociological level of analysis when we turn to structural traumas, affecting *social organization*: the social networks, matrixes of groups, associations, formal organizations, the hierarchies of stratification, class divisions etc. A forerunner of such a perspective was Ferdinand Tonnies with his studies of decaying "Gemeinschaft" (1877), followed by rich research on the collapse of communities under the impact of industrialization and urbanization. Another line of research was focusing on atomization and individualization of social life, exemplified best by David Riesman's "Lonely Crowd" (1961). There is a rich tradition of studies which show the impact of technological inventions on the organization of labor. Recently much attention was paid to the destructive effects of autocratic regimes on the organization of civil society. These are only few examples from a wide domain of sociological concerns.

But there is one more domain which can be affected by traumatogenic changes. This is *culture*: axio-normative and symbolic belief systems of a society. The shocks of change may reverberate in the area of affirmed values and norms, patterns and rules, expectations and roles, accepted ideas and beliefs, narrative forms and symbolic meanings, definitions of situations and frames of discourse. One forerunner of this perspective on trauma was Emile Durkheim with his influential notion of "anomie", or normative chaos, rephrased so fruitfully by Robert Merton (1938) and the whole research tradition in the sociology of deviance. Another early formulations come from William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki who in their monumental "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America" (1927) documented the plight of emigrants, finding themselves in the cultural environment entirely at odds with their earlier "life world", the deeply ingrained accustomed habits of thinking and doing.

The rest of our discussion will focus on this cultural level of trauma. The phenomenon of *cultural trauma* is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, the cultural tissue is most sensitive to the impact of traumatogenic changes, precisely because culture is a depository of continuity, heritage, tradition, identity of human communities. Change, by definition, undermines or destroys all these. Second, wounds inflicted to culture are most difficult to heal. Culture obtains of particular inertia, and once the cultural equilibrium is broken, it is most difficult to restore it. Cultural traumas are most enduring, lingering; they may last over several generations.

### 3. Cultural traumas in the "age of change"

The XXth century is sometimes described as the "age of change". The speed, scope, depth and wonder of changes, driven by scientific and technological innovations, challenge of competition, emancipatory aspirations of the masses, progressivism ideologies, universal education etc. - are perhaps unparalleled in any period of earlier history. Therefore particularly large pool of changes become potentially traumatogenic i.e. sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected. Their impact on cultural fabric of societies is strong and varied.

One source of cultural traumas is the intensifying *inter-cultural contact*, confrontation of diverse cultures often resulting in tension, clash and conflict. The most traumatizing situations occur when the imposition and domination of one culture is secured by force. Imperial conquest, colonialism or religious proselytising provide prime examples. But even when the spreading of alien culture is more peaceful, by virtue of economic strength, technological superiority or psychological attractiveness of cultural products flowing from the core toward the periphery, the result is often the break of cultural stability, continuity and identity of indigenous groups, a milder and yet resented form of cultural trauma. Even the labels given in the literature to such processes of cultural *globalization* - cultural imperialism, cultural aggression, McDonaldization, Americanization - indicate typical resentment and defensive mood.

Another source of cultural traumas is the intensifying *spatial mobility* of people, who as emigrants, refugees, but also business travellers and tourists find themselves in the milieu of the alien culture. Whereas in the earlier case it was the culture which was spreading out to embrace unprepared people, here it is the people who voluntarily put themselves under the jurisdiction of cultures other than their own. The relative easiness of such movement is another aspect of the process of globalization.

The third source of cultural traumas is the *change of fundamental institutions* or regimes, e.g. basic political and economic reforms carried out in societies lacking the requisite cultural background, the ingrained competence to deal with new institutions, or even more gravely when new cultural imperatives fitting the reformed institutions run counter to established cultural habits and traditions. Similar effect may be produced by new technological inventions, which require specific skills, care, discipline from its users, and all these are missing. Another case is the transformation of the accustomed life

milieu from rural to urban, and lack of preparedness for the new lifeworld. In all these cases cultural traumas result from the processes of modernization, or its components: industrialization, democratization, technological progress, urbanization etc. The traumatizing effect is strongest when modernisation is imposed, rather than originating from within, as an indigenous development. The true laboratory for observing the dramatic traumas of *forced modernisation* is Sub-Saharan Africa. But even when change of regime is originating from below, realising aspirations of the people, it inevitably engenders some forms of cultural trauma, as it clashes with deeply embedded, throughly internalized earlier "habits of the heart" (Tocqueville 1945 [1835], Bellah et al. 1985), which create, at least temporarily, the "learned incapacity" to follow cultural imperatives of the new system. This is clearly visible in most post-communist societies, which finding themselves in the orbit of democracy, free market and open culture, have for some time remained trapped in the "civilizational incompetence" (Sztompka 1993b) inherited from the system of real socialism.

The fourth source of traumatogenic change is located at the level of beliefs, creeds, doctrines, ideologies. The *changes of ideas* may take various forms. One is the acquisition of new knowledge which may shatter established convictions and stereotypes. For example the news about the Holocaust unravelled at the end of World War II, have produced a traumatic shock accompanied by guilt-feelings among the anti-Semitic groups in the US or France (Alexander et al. 2000, forthcoming). Another case is the revision of established historical accounts destroying cherished myths about the past. For example, new perspectives on the Great French Revolution (Furet 1981), show it to be much less heroic, and much more bloody; the discovery of America is seen as simultaneous tragedy for the Indians; the whole history of the USSR is rewritten showing terror and extermination rather than workers' paradise. Still another case is the appearance of new ideas which may raise sensitiveness, modify perceptions of otherwise well known facts. For example the birth of ecological awareness, feminist consciousness, or the concept of universal human rights, makes everybody to see the conquest of nature, gender oppression, and other inequalities and injustices in a completely new light. In all these cases the clash of old and new beliefs produces at the cultural level the phenomenon akin to well known psychological effect of "cognitive dissonance".

#### 4. Precipitating factors: traumatizing conditions and situations

The cultural disorganization and accompanying disorientation are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a full-fledged trauma to emerge. At most they create a rape soil, facilitating "climate" of anxiety and uncertainty. Against this background there must appear a set of conditions or situations, perceived as pernicious, dangerous, or threatening. It is only these that serve as *triggering, precipitating factors* for the emergence of trauma. Most often these conditions or situations are brought about by the same major change, which caused cultural disorganization. They may be a direct result of certain policies, or reforms undertaken by the government in the aftermath of revolutionary upheaval. Or they may derive from some more general, global tendencies in the wider environment of a society. But they are not directly related to culture, rather they affect actual social life of the members of the changing society, or the social structure of their society. Traumatizing events or situations may produce dislocations in the routine, accustomed ways of acting or thinking, change the life-world of the people in often dramatic ways, reshape their patterns of acting and thinking. What is potentially traumatizing differs among various societies. For example, in the case of post-communist transformation the list of such triggering factors would include: unemployment, inflation, wave of crime, poverty, stretched economic distances, overturned hierarchies of prestige, inefficiency of political elites etc.

Some of those are more universal, affecting everybody (e.g. inflation or crime), others are more particular, affecting only some segments of the population (unemployment, status degradation). Falling against the background of cultural disorientation, a condition that makes the people more sensitive and anxious, events or situations like this may engender the traumatic syndrome. But before they do, there is a stage of *cultural labelling*, framing and redefining.

Trauma, like many other social conditions is at the same time *objective and subjective*: it is usually based in some actual occurrences or phenomena, but it does not exist as long as those do not become visible and defined in a particular way. The defining, framing, interpretative efforts do not occur in the vacuum. There is always a pre-existing pool of available meanings encoded in the shared culture of a given community or society. Individual people do not invent meanings, but rather draw selectively from their surrounding culture and apply to the potentially traumatizing

events. Hence, the traumatizing conditions or situations are always *cultural constructions*. A limiting case, always possible in the human world is grasped by the famous Thomas Theorem: "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Merton 1996). There may be traumas which are not rooted in any real traumatizing conditions or situations, but only in the widespread imaginations of such events. For instance, if enough people believe in the imminent collapse of the bank (otherwise entirely healthy), the widespread panic will result. If enough people are convinced that the charismatic leader has committed treason (even if he is in fact innocent), the legitimation crisis will ensue. But the opposite is also possible: the events or situations with objectively strong traumatizing potential may not lead to actual trauma, because they are explained away, rationalized, reinterpreted in ways which make them invisible, innocuous or even benign or beneficial.

A paradoxical fact is that the cultural templates applied in defining and interpreting new, disturbing conditions or situations, are most often drawn from the established, traditional cultural pool, representing the obsolete culture, already being replaced in effect of major change by a new cultural syndrome. Therefore conditions or situations which would be fully congruent with new culture, are defined as unacceptable. For example: the privatization of health services, or the reform of pensions, or demanding tuition at the universities - three new policies of the post-communist governments, are interpreted in terms of old socialist cultural expectations, as violating the paternalistic obligations of the state, and are experienced as highly traumatic. The same reforms are clearly meeting the expectations of the new, capitalist, market culture.

The cultural traumas generated by major social changes, and triggered by traumatizing conditions and situations interpreted as threatening, unjust, improper - are expressed as complex *social moods*, characterized by a number of collective emotions, orientations, attitudes. First, there is a general climate of anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty (Wilkinson 1999), which sometimes manifests itself in the phenomenon of "moral panics" (Thompson 1988). Second, there is a prevailing syndrome of distrust, both toward the people and institutions (Sztompka 1999). Third, there is a disorientation concerning collective identity. Fourth, there is widespread apathy, passivism and helplessness. Fifth, there is pessimism concerning the future, matched with nostalgic images of the past. Of course not all these symptoms accompany every case of trauma, and not all these symptoms are equally manifested by various groups or subgroups within a society.



## 5. Sensitiveness to cultural traumas

Perhaps for each traumatogenic change there are some *core groups* which experience and perceive it strongly, and *peripheral groups* for whom it is irrelevant or marginal. Some groups, due to their structural and cultural location are more insulated and some are more susceptible to the impact of traumatogenic change. The question "*trauma for whom?*" opens an important area of contingency.

We may indulge in some speculation about the factors responsible for the differences among various groups in their susceptibility to trauma. It seems that the crucial variable may be the access to various resources, to the cultural, social, but also economic and political capital, helpful in perceiving, defining, and actively facing traumas. On cultural side, the central factor seems to be education. On the one hand, the higher their level of *education*, the more perceptive and more sensitive to cultural traumas people become. But at the same time, they are better equipped to express and fight trauma. No wonder that some more subtle and hidden traumas have been first perceived, diagnosed and opposed by intellectuals, philosophers, and social scientists, who have provided ready-made definitions and symbolic frames for other people to pick up. Usually more educated groups also have better skills for actively coping with cultural traumas. Maybe a general, diversified, wide education is more important here than narrow specialization, because cultural traumas often demand re-learning, re-skilling, and re-socializing. And such flexibility is much better served by a multi-directional, rounded, broad education. But other kinds of cultural capital, apart from education, may also play a part. For those kinds of trauma that originate in a cultural clash, or multiculturalism, tolerant, relativistic, cosmopolitan orientation - as opposed to ethnocentrism or dogmatism - will allow people to cope with trauma better.

In the realm of social capital one may indicate a factor known as "*social rootedness*", or wide personal contacts. For example, in studies of post-communist societies it was observed that those who have rich social networks of acquaintances, numerous friends and strong family support will be much better prepared to cope with the traumatic reorientation to capitalist entrepreneurship, free markets and individualistic responsibility.

And finally, for many kinds of trauma the capital in the literal sense - economic or political, i.e. *wealth or power*, may provide important cushioning resources, insulating against trauma or providing efficient means to deal with trauma.

## 6. Coping with cultural trauma

Cultural traumas evoke various reactions from the affected society. People respond in various ways attempting to cope with cultural trauma. To sort out the strategies they apply, I will use a typology developed with reference to kindred phenomenon that clearly falls, as an exemplification, under the rubric of cultural trauma. I have in mind the classical treatment of *anomie*, and social adaptations to anomic conditions proposed by Robert K. Merton in a seminal article of 1938.

Merton describes four typical adaptations to anomie: innovation, rebellion, ritualism, and retreatism. The first pair are active, constructive adaptations, the second pair are passive adaptations. Let us generalize this typology and apply it, *mutatis mutandis*, to cultural traumas. Innovation may take various forms. It may target culture directly and through socialization, indoctrination or educational measures make an effort either to redefine a cultural dissonance as less grave, or only temporary, or by the opposite strategy - articulate the cultural dualism as radical and irreconcilable, idealizing new cultural ways and totally denouncing the old. Such "*cultural propaganda*", which may be spontaneous or purposefully directed, aims toward alleviating the incongruence within a culture brought about by traumatogenic change. Another form of innovation targets the resources needed to insulate the people against cultural trauma. The efforts toward enriching cultural capital, for example by obtaining education; or social capital, by entering the network of voluntary associations; or financial capital by entrepreneurial activities - allow to locate oneself more securely in a new cultural reality. *Rebellion* would indicate a more radical effort aimed at the total transformation of culture in order to replace the traumatic condition with a completely new cultural setup. The counter-cultural movements, anarchic political groups or some religious sects provide the best illustrations of this adaptation. A passive, ritualistic reaction would mean turning (or rather returning) to established traditions and routines, and cultivating them as safe

hideouts to deflect cultural trauma. And finally, *retreatism* in this connection would mean ignoring trauma, repressing it, striving to forget, and acting as if trauma did not exist. This can provide a kind of subjective insulation against the traumatic condition.

## 7. Traumatic sequence

When the concept of trauma is borrowed from medicine and psychiatry, one must notice certain duality of meaning which occurs in these fields. Sometimes the term 'trauma' is referring to an event producing damage, e.g. being hit by a car. If this usage were retained for our purposes, trauma would be synonymous with the traumatogenic change. But on other occasions trauma means a shock to the organism resulting from damaging event, e.g. a broken spine. In our context it would mean the traumatic condition of a society, resulting from the traumatogenic change.

I propose to combine both usages. Trauma for me is neither a cause, nor a result, but a process, dynamic sequence going through a number of typical stages, having its beginning, but also - at least potentially - its resolution. Let us call it a *traumatic sequence*. The logic of the process resembles one identified by Neil Smelser in the emergence of social movements, and called "the value-added dynamics" (Smelser 1963). I will apply it *mutatis mutandis*, with some modifications, for the description of a traumatic sequence. And thus, in my reconstruction the sequence can be analytically dissected into six stages:

- (a) initiating traumatogenic change (sudden, comprehensive, deep and unexpected),
- (b) disorganization of culture and accompanying cultural disorientation of actors ("structural conduciveness" is the term Smelser uses in his theory for analogous phenomena),
- (c) traumatizing situations or events, appearing as a result of traumatogenic change in areas other than culture and affecting the "lifeworld" of the people ("structural strain" and "precipitating events" in Smelser's terminology),
- (d) traumatic condition expressed by a set of traumatic symptoms, mental or behavioral (new shared ways of conduct or "generalized beliefs" in Smelser's language),

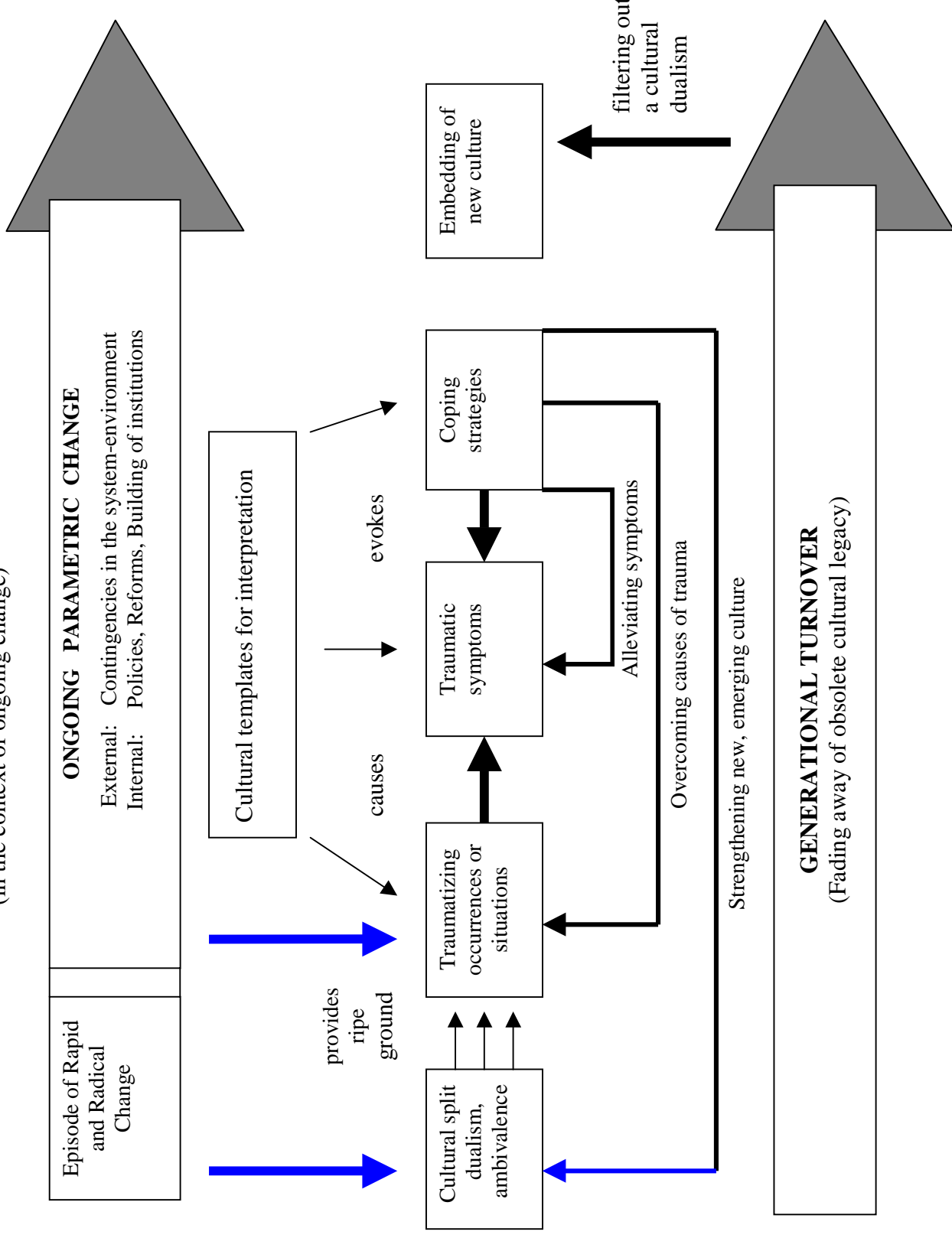
- (e) post-traumatic adaptations employing various strategies of coping with trauma ("social control" in Smelser's theory),
- (f) overcoming trauma, by consolidation of a new cultural complex (the closing phase of the sequence).

The traumatic sequence does not hang in a vacuum, but runs in the wider context of other processes which occur at the same time, but have nothing to do with trauma. From the perspective of the traumatic sequence they may be treated as *parametric*. One set of parametric processes consists of everything of importance which happens in the wider world, outside of a given society, but in the global era has repercussions within a society. Example: market fluctuations, military conflicts, policies of superpowers etc. Sometimes they facilitate traumas, but sometimes they may help to alleviate traumas. Another set of parametric changes is intra-societal and initiated by the traumatogenic change in the law, politics, economics, and the everyday life of the society. For example: if we take revolution as a traumatogenic change, it is usually followed by the turnover of political elites, major reforms, building of new institutions, creating new infrastructure of everyday life. Again, some of these processes may aggravate trauma, while others may have a healing effect. The third kind of a parametric process has completely different nature. It is the universal and inevitable process of *generational turnover*. The carriers of cultural legacies and traditions which clash with new cultural imperatives imposed by traumatogenic change, are generations, which were socialized, indoctrinated, or habituated in an earlier cultural milieu. This means that the powerful impact of a culture derived from earlier history, and internalized by the generations whose life was spent during its prevailing grip, may become much weaker as the new generations emerge, raised under different conditions, in the changed, reformed society. This process running parallel to the traumatic sequence becomes very helpful at the stage of overcoming trauma and achieving final re-consolidation of a culture.

The traumatic sequence may be represented by the following diagram.

# TRAUMATIC SEQUENCE

(in the context of ongoing change)



## 8. Post-communist "trauma of victory": an illustration

Let us now follow in more detail the stages in the sequence, using for the purpose of illustration the case of the "Revolution of 1989" i.e. the collapse of the communist system in East-Central Europe. I will refer mostly to evidence from Poland, but the general observations seem relevant for other countries of the region.

### 8.1 Traumatogenic change

There cannot be any doubt that the collapse of communism was a traumatogenic change par excellence. First, it was sudden and rapid. Of course it was prepared by a long and complex historical process, but in that "miraculous autumn" acquired tremendous acceleration. Second, the change was truly systemic, multidimensional, embracing politics, economics, culture, everyday life. It was also experienced by the whole population of former communist societies; nobody was exempt from its impact. Third, it was hitting the foundations of the earlier system. It signified a complete reversal of *deep premises* of social life: from autocracy to democracy in the domain of politics, from central planning to the market in the domain of economics, from censorship to open, pluralistic thought in the domain of culture, and from the "society of shortages" (Kornai 1992) to the society of rampant consumerism. Fourth, the revolution was certainly unexpected - at least at this scale and at this time - not only by the common people but also by professional Sovietologists. What makes the collapse of communism a particularly interesting example of traumatogenic change is also that it was a "*trauma of victory*" (to paraphrase Durkheim's "anomie of success"). The change was almost universally judged as beneficial, progressive, often welcome with enthusiasm, and yet it has turned out to produce trauma, at least for some segments of post-communist societies. Finally, the traumatic sequence is in this case still uncompleted, the transformation with all that it implies is still in the making, the revolution is unfinished, providing fully actual laboratory for the theory of cultural trauma.

## 8.2 Cultural disorganization and disorientation

As a first, rough approximation, we may say that the cultural landscape in the period immediately following the break looked somewhat like this. On one side, there was a pervasive, historically inherited repertoire of cultural rules, shaped under the influence of the old communist regime and its characteristic "habitus". This was created either as an effect of prolonged indoctrination, or through defensive reactions against indoctrination and autocratic control. An example of an effect of the former type is the support of egalitarianism and "disinterested envy" (Marody 1987) of the more affluent or successful, an acceptance of state paternalism, anti-elitism, anti-intellectualism; an example of the effect of the latter type is the opportunistic double standards, camouflage in mediocrity, and common or even institutionalized practice of evading rules imposed by the regime, with insubordination treated as a virtue. The combined effects of those two mechanisms were embodied in a particular mental constellation described by some authors as "Homo Sovieticus" (Zaslavsky 1994, Tischner 1991).

On the other side there were the seeds of a completely different culture, functionally demanded by the new democratic and capitalist institutions, with relatively few people already culturally prepared for and fully capable of operating in the new organizational context (possessing "*civilizational competence*" [Sztompka 1993b] required by Western civilization). The clash of those two incompatible cultures meant for most people that their internalized, trained ways of life lost effectiveness and even became counterproductive or negatively sanctioned in the new system, while the new cultural rules appeared to them as alien, imposed, and coercive. And those few who were ready to embrace the cultural rules of the new system and were rewarded by the effectiveness and success of their actions in the new environment (i.e., who commanded "*civilizational competence*"), paid the price of constant frustrations in encounters with obsolete but yet binding bureaucratic principles and pervasive red tape, as well as suspicion, envy, or outright rejection by others persisting in their old, accustomed mental habits.

To paraphrase a concept introduced by Jeffrey Alexander (Alexander 1992, Alexander and Smith 1993) one may say that the cultural "discourse of real socialism" is radically opposed to the "discourse of emerging capitalism". There are several dimensions along which both discourses differ; they constitute the "binary opposites" (to use Alexander's language): (a) collectivism vs. individualism, (b) solidarity in poverty vs.

competition, (c) egalitarianism vs. meritocratic justice, (d) camouflage in mediocrity vs. conspicuous success, (e) security vs. risk, (f) reliance on fate vs. emphasis on agency, (g) counting on social support vs. self-reliance, (h) blaming failures on a system vs. personal responsibility and self-blame, (i) passivism and escape to the private sphere vs. participation and activism in public sphere, (j) dwelling on the remembrances of the glorious past vs. actively anticipating and constructing the future.

The incompatibility of those inherited cultural rules of "bloc culture", typical for the autocratic, centrally planned societies of real socialism, and the opposite principles of Western culture, functionally demanded by the new socio-political system of capitalism and democracy, engendered a true *cultural shock*. Disorganization at the level of cultural precepts, and the *disorientation* at the level of internalized personal habits was the first result of traumatogenic change. But it was only a phase in the traumatic sequence; it was not yet a trauma in the full sense, it merely established a background of conducive conditions for the emergence of post-communist trauma.

The polarized image presented above is a simplified first approximation, common to all post-communist societies. But in fact long before the break of 1989, in varying degrees and to varying extent, in each of those societies there also existed alternative cultural complexes: both national cultural traditions and the inroads of the globalized Western culture. The differing strengths of those alternative cultural influences were responsible for great variety among the countries politically enclosed within the same communist bloc, with the common, imposed "bloc culture"; Poland was not the same as GDR, Hungary not the same as Rumania, Czechoslovakia not the same as Russia.

Some of the local cultures were better prepared for democracy, more congruent with democratic and market institutions (e.g., the Czechs), some were fundamentally at odds with democratic institutions (e.g., Russia). Some countries cultivated a strong nationalist spirit, attempting to keep a certain, even if limited, measure of national sovereignty and autonomy (e.g. Poland) while others were more reconciled with imperial Soviet domination (e.g. Bulgaria). Some countries were able to preserve strong religious commitments and find in the Church an alternative centre of authority and a powerful ally in the resistance against the autocratic regime (e.g. Polish Catholicism), whereas others were highly secularized (e.g. DDR and Czechoslovakia).

There were also pronounced differences among the societies of the region in the impact of so-called *Western culture*, originating in the most developed, industrialized, urbanized mass societies of Western Europe and America. To some degree that culture



was smuggled in unwittingly with the institutions of modernity: industrial production, urban settlements, mass education. Of course "socialist" modernity was strangely incomplete, missing some of its crucial political and economic components (it was a "fake modernity" [Sztompka 1991b]), and yet it had important culture-generating impact: "changes sometimes dubbed as 'modernization' produce fundamental shifts in people's values and behaviours. (...) Industrialization of the economy, collectivization of agriculture, the resulting migration to the cities, as well as increased literacy and access to higher education all changed Soviet societies, making them more 'modern' and therefore more open to democratic and market reforms" (Reisinger et al. 1994: 200-201). This may be labelled as a "*convergence theory*" *mechanism* of building the third alternative cultural complex - a kind of Trojan horse - while still in the period of communist rule.

Apart from that, some components of Western culture penetrated directly from the West into various societies of the region (through family links with a diaspora of emigrants in Western societies, and through mass media, personal exchanges, tourism, etc.), though with various intensity depending on the rigidity of cultural gates raised by local authorities (again Poland differed favourably from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia from DDR, etc.). This may be labelled as a "*globalization theory*" *mechanism*, through which Western, democratic and capitalist culture penetrated communist societies long before the breakdown of the system.

To the extent that those two alternative cultural complexes were developed alongside the bloc culture, they exerted a salutary, mitigating influence against the cultural shock brought about by the collapse of communism and the resulting obsolescence of its accustomed meanings, symbols and rules.

### 8.3 Traumatizing conditions and situations

Parallel with this impact on culture, the collapse of communism started a rapid process of structural and organizational reforms of political and economic sort, building of new infrastructure of institutions, reshaping the environment of everyday life. Reforms of that scale could not be faultless and smooth. Some were outright mistaken, others, even when successful incurred various social costs. There were also some parametric processes in the external, international environment and particularly in the economic domain, which added to the burdens of change, e.g. the breakdown of the Russian market and necessity

to reorient exports toward the West, or the rise of gasoline prices on world markets contributing to inflation.

As a result of all these influences a number of adverse conditions and situations emerged soon after the revolution. They may be listed in four categories. The first category includes new forms of risks and threats. Perhaps most painful of these was growing unemployment, or pervasive threat of unemployment. Then comes inflation threatening household budgets and savings. There was a sudden crime wave, including new forms of organized crime, and widespread perception of inefficient law enforcement. The flow of immigrants from the poorer countries of the disintegrating bloc produced encounter with aliens and their idiosyncratic cultural patterns. And there appeared the pervasive theme of competition necessitating efforts, decisions, choices, experienced as a burden by unprepared people. The second category includes the deterioration of life standards. There appeared relatively large and visible enclaves of poverty. The established status hierarchies were overturned, and social distances stretched. The more pressing needs of reform, as well as the state budget shortages, led to the further decay of already obsolete infrastructure of roads, train lines, public transportation, adding to the discomforts of everyday life. The fourth category includes more acute perceptions of old, inherited problems. This refers to the switch in social awareness, with new ideas, concepts, doctrines instilled by the systemic change. People pay much more attention to ecological destruction, complain about low health and fitness standards, demand full restitution of private property nationalized under communist regime, see more clearly factionalism, nepotism and corruption, despair about inefficiency and amorality of politicians and administrators. All these issues were present before, but sometimes they become more acute, and in all cases are perceived as more acute. Finally, the fourth category includes dilemmas and discontents born by the necessity to account for the past. The very controversial public debates concerning the "decommunization" and "lustration" of the earlier collaborators with the communist regime, the unravelling of crimes and oppression committed by former regime, raising doubts about the compromise of the "round table talks" preceding the abdication of communists from power - all this adds to the climate of uncertainty and suspicion.

## 8.4 Variety of cultural interpretations

All events, occurrences or situations described above - unemployment, inflation, crime etc. - become traumatizing only if they are defined as such by considerable groups of people, if those definitions are mutually reinforced through communication, expressed in generalized form through public debates, or crystallized in the ideologies of parties or movements. Whether traumatizing events are defined as such or not depends on the assumed *frame of reference*. An event or situation acquires a quality of full fledged trauma, i.e. something disruptive, shocking, painful only relative to some standard of normal, orderly expectations. The bare facts are filtered through the symbolic, collectively shared - i.e. cultural - lenses.

Polish culture provided rich resources allowing to interpret the aftermath of the collapse of communism in positive light, and to explain away, rationalize, diminish the importance of adverse, potentially traumatizing events or situations, as inevitable but temporary "pains of transition", a necessary price for major victory. The strong legacy of nationalism provided a ready made frame of "regained sovereignty", and the interpretation of change in such terms, as expressed in the slogan: "we are now in our own house", which allowed to ignore or de-emphasize all inconveniences and discomforts encountered in its walls. Another traditional Polish orientation - the strong pro-Western attitude and even fetishization of the West as the domain of political freedom and economic abundance, as expressed in the notion of "joining" or "returning to Europe", allowed to forget about obstacles encountered on this road. The third core element of Polish cultural heritage - Roman Catholicism - allowed to emphasize the return to the core of Western Christendom, and again to discount other cultural and ideological losses related to the influx of consumerism or hedonism. The elation linked with the realization of these three aspirations, deeply embedded in the Polish tradition, provided a kind of insulation against the "pains of transition". These three strong cultural themes provided the resources needed to interpret the post-revolutionary changes within "*the progressivist narrative*" - to use the concept introduced by Jeffrey Alexander (Alexander et al. 2000, forthcoming).

But, as we said, in spite of the relative insulation of some groups, the majority of the society was still in the grip of inherited "*bloc culture*". As long as the old bloc culture prevailed, the potentially traumatizing events and situations (unemployment, insecurity, rise of crime etc.) were easily defined as traumatic, as they violated the learned cultural

expectations of the bloc culture. The bloc culture was also devoid of any relevant receipts for effectively dealing with them. No wonder that those still immersed in a bloc culture showed considerable frustration and helplessness. One particularly pernicious component of the bloc culture aggravating the perception of changes as painful or even unbearable, was the set of taken-for-granted expectations and claims concerning various provisions: job security, minimum social services (health, education, leisure), child care, retirement pensions. At the same time there was the belief that those provisions should be distributed equally. People were indoctrinated and practically habituated to believe that they have a justified claim to them, independent of the contributions they provide themselves to the wider society, that they make up their unconditional rights. When the new capitalist, market regime introduced competitive, individualistic principle, and huge differences of achievement, and when the new democratic, liberal state withdrew from various domains of life, leaving them to private efforts - wide groups perceived it as a breach of obvious obligations by the state. They looked at unemployment, lowering of life standards, inflation, weak protection against rising crime, as an unforgiven breach of a social contract. The tradition of egalitarian paternalism and social security provided the symbolic cultural resources for framing the post-revolutionary change as "*the tragic narrative*", to refer again to Alexander's concept (Alexander et al. 2000. forthcoming).

Only as the culture itself is transformed, the other definitions of the same events - as the inevitable costs or sacrifices on the progressive road towards democratic and capitalist society of the Western type - have a chance to emerge, and with it a new repertoire of coping strategies as well as the willingness to resort to them.

It is interesting to note that the more groups, or social categories are objectively affected by the "pains of transition" and the more they are immersed in the vestiges of bloc culture (e.g., the workers in the state owned enterprises), they emphasize three symbolic and ethically infused cultural themes: security, equality and justice; whereas those groups which are more successful, adapt better to new conditions and are already embraced by the new democratic and capitalist culture (e.g. new entrepreneurial class), refer rather to the idea of individual freedom and the pragmatic themes of efficiency and prosperity (Marody 1996: 15). These differences were crucial for the diversification of meaning attached to the very process of post-communist transition. Several authors indicate a clear polarization: those who succeed in the new conditions, who are ready and able to use the new opportunities construe the process as "modernization", or "joining Europe", or "civilizational advancement", whereas those who lose, whose status

deteriorates and for whom opportunities seem inaccessible, give to the process a completely different meaning - it is a "sellout of the country" to foreign corporations, it is the "conspiracy of former communists", it is the "cultural imperialism of the US", the dilution of national and Catholic values in cosmopolitan, globalized culture. This spectrum of meaning becomes spontaneously transferred to the domain of political programs and ideologies, or is skilfully tapped by party organizers and political entrepreneurs, resulting in the emergence of excessive amount of political parties, from the extreme right to the extreme left.

Thus the attitude toward transition determines new paramount social divisions. In the research carried out in 1991 in the industrial city of Łódź, Anita Miszalska found the following distribution: 12,4% of the respondents express the "syndrom of anxiety in face of social degradation", and they are nostalgically craving for the return of communist regime, 11,5% express the "syndrom of frustrated hopes", 12,1% represent the "syndrom of disorientation and threat", 20% seem "undecided and waiting", 33% demand "acceleration of reforms and complete break with the communist past", and only 7,9% are "fully satisfied with change and expect only continuation of policies" (Miszalska 1996: 93-106). We could say that only the last group does not experience the post-communist trauma, either because it is insulated from the "pains of transition" e.g. by economic power, or because it has access to the new cultural definitions of the pains as temporary and healable.

## 8.5 Traumatic condition: the symptoms of trauma

The various factors of existential uncertainty, operating against the background of cultural dislocation and ambivalence, and interpreted and defined with the help of inherited symbolic frames of reference, result in variously distributed cultural trauma. One may spot five symptoms of trauma in the years immediately following the break of 1989, pervading large segments of Polish society.

*Distrust syndrome.* After the elation and enthusiasm of the anti-communist revolution, the post-revolutionary malaise, or "the morning-after syndrome", sets in, and with it comes a profound collapse of trust. As I extensively discuss it in other places (Sztompka 1999), I wish to point out only some main dimensions of the phenomenon.

From the peaks of trust enjoyed by the first democratic government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, trust in governmental institutions is consistently falling. The case of Lech Walesa is particularly telling, as we observe the dramatic fall of his popularity once he took presidential office. Evaluating their earlier charismatic and heroic leader, 24% of the people declared that he brought shame on Poland by the way he handled his presidential job (Source: *Polityka*, June 25, 1994). Other politicians were also treated with great suspicion; 87% of a nation-wide sample claimed that politicians take care only of their own interests and careers and neglect the public good (Source: *GW*, July, 11, 1994), 77% believed that they use their offices for private profit (Source: *CBOS Bulletin*, October 1995:1), and 87% that they take care of their own careers exclusively (Source: *GW*, No.159/1994). If anything goes wrong in society, 93% of the people declared: "the politicians and bureaucrats are guilty" (Source: Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990: 62). The veracity of people in high office is also doubted; 49% of citizens did not believe information given by the ministers (Source: *GW*, March 25, 1994), 60% were convinced that even the innocuous data on levels of inflation or GNP growth, released by the state statistical office, were entirely false (Source: *CBOS Bulletin*, January 1994). Not much trust was attached to fiduciary responsibility of the government or the administration; 70% believed that the public bureaucracy is completely insensitive to human suffering and grievances (Source: Giza-Poleszczuk 1991: 76). The institutions of public accountability did not fare any better: 52% disapproved of the verdicts of the courts (Source: *CBOS Bulletin* 7/94, :72), and 79% claimed that verdicts will not be the same for persons of different social status (Source: Giza-Poleszczuk 1991: 88), the tax collecting offices are believed to be helpless against tax fraud by 62% of the respondents, and only 14% considered them effective in their job (Source: *CBOS Bulletin* No.8/93, p/26), 72% disapproved of the operations of the police (Source: *CBOS Bulletin* 7/94:72). The only exception is the army, which consistently preserves its relatively high level of trustworthiness (with 75-80 % expressing consistent approval, a striking Polish phenomenon, accounted for only by some historically rooted sentiments going back to the time of heroic fights against foreign invaders).

The mass media, even though much more independent and not linked directly to the state, do not fare much better. Apparently they have not yet regained trust, devastated by their instrumental role under real-socialism. Three years after the break, 48% of the people still did not believe the TV, and 40% distrusted the newspapers (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993).

Even the Catholic Church, traditionally one of the most trusted institutions (with declared trust of 82.7% of nationwide sample in 1990. See Marody 1996: 252) seems to be affected by the climate of distrust, especially when it usurps a more political role; 54% disapproved of such an extension of the Church's functions, and 70% would like the Church to limit its activities to the religious sphere (Source: GW, May 10, 1994).

Finally, if we look at interpersonal trust in everyday life, people also perceive its decay. In one of the surveys 56% estimated that mutual sympathy and help have markedly deteriorated (Source: OBOP Bulletin No.10/1996:2). According to the Polish General Social Survey, the tendency of falling interpersonal trust persisted up to 1994. The belief that "most people can be trusted" was expressed by 10.1% of the nationwide sample in 1992, 8.9% in 1993, and 8.3% in 1994. And the opposite view that "one is never careful enough in dealing with other people" was supported by 87.8% in 1992, 89.5% in 1993 and 90.3% in 1994 (Marody 1996: 224).

*Bleak picture of the future.* The second symptom of cultural trauma is a pessimistic view of the future. In 1991 only 13.6% of the respondents in the working class city of Lodz considered the direction of changes to be right and proper (Miszalska 1997: 50). In the same year nationwide polls showed that 59% of the people predicted the worsening of their personal economic situation (CBOS Bulletin No. 1/92: 9). Two years later, in another poll 58% of the respondents appraised the current political and economic situation as deteriorating (Source: GW, February 22, 1994). Only 29% believed that privatization brings "changes for the better" (Source: GW, April 17, 1994). When asked about the fate of their society in the future, only 20% trusted that the situation will improve, 32% expected a turn for the worse, and 36% hoped that it will at least remain stable (Source: GW, April 17, 1994). Another poll showed as many as 64% pessimists, against just 20% optimists (CBOS Bulletin No.1/1994: 5). More concretely, referring to the overall economic situation, 62% believed that it will not improve (Source: Eurobarometer, February 1993) and 55% expected costs of living to rise (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1994). A confirmation of the dismaying picture is found in the list of problems that people worry about: 73% indicate a lack of opportunity for their children as something that worries them most (Source: CBOS Bulletin, January 1993).

*Nostalgic image of the past.* Another indicator of trauma is the comparison of the present socio-economic situation with the past. Asked about their own, personal condition, 53% felt that they were living worse than before (Source: GW, June 17, 1994). In the industrial city of Lodz the percentage was even higher - 75% (Miszalska 1996:68).

During the whole year 1993, only around 12-13% defined their living conditions as good (CBOS Bulletin 1/1994: 7). Appraising the situation of others three years after the break, around half of the respondents believed that people were generally more satisfied under real socialism. This surprising result was confirmed by three independent polls, estimating the percentages at 52%, 48%, and 54% (Source: GW, June 28, 1994).

*Political apathy.* In spite of the more open political opportunities, the use of them by common people is very limited. Electoral absenteeism is high. In the first democratic presidential elections in Poland, almost 50% of citizens chose to abstain, and in later municipal elections overall participation was around 34%, falling down to 20% in the cities. In the parliamentary elections of 1991 only 43% participated, and 57% abstained (Miszalska 1996: 172-188). Enrolment in the rich spectrum of newly formed political parties is very low. Most of them remain political clubs frequented only by professional politicians, with the idiom "sofa parties" devised to ridicule their overblown aspirations. Citizens' initiatives at the grassroots level are still very rare, and local self-government is still undeveloped and preempted by bureaucratic administration.

*Post-communist hangovers: traumas of collective memory.* The final symptom of trauma is the re-evaluation of the communist past and the role played in that period by the people variously implicated in its support. The magnanimity of the victors allowed the first democratic government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki to declare a policy of a "broad line" cutting off the past and evaluating people only on the merit of their contributions to the new, free, democratic order. But soon the issue of responsibility, retribution or revenge was raised, especially by the groups negatively affected by the changes. The slogans of "decommunization" and "lustration" were raised by the populist-oriented parties of the right. "Militant de-communizers would have spread the nets widely and were never deterred by such obstacles as burden of proof, reasonable doubt, due process, or any other concept subsumed under the 'rule of law'" (Brown 1997: 29).

The controversial and sometimes highly emotional public debate that has ensued (see: *Transitions*, No.2/1997 and No.9/1998), allowed the introduction of certain distinctions. First, most participants agree that outright criminal acts committed by the communist authorities or party apparatchiks should be brought to the courts of law. Two periods are selected for particular attention: the Stalinist time up to 1956, and the martial law crushing the Solidarnosc movement in 1981-1982. But even here, except for cases of particular personal viciousness or abuses of office, it can be argued that the authorities acted according to the laws of the day. A counter-argument must invoke some parallel to



the Nürnberg trials and the notion of basic lawlessness of some anti-human laws. Anyway, a number of court trials have been started and linger to the present day.

The second category contains high-ranking communist politicians, who - with the benefit of hindsight - may be seen as collaborators of the foreign, Soviet regime and traitors to their nation. Some would forbid any political roles for them in the present democratic system. But again controversy arises when their past moral responsibility is matched with their present potential usefulness for the country. They happen to be very well trained and skilled professionals of politics - qualifications that are not in abundance among oppositional activists, who have no earlier experience of rule. The present policy leans to pragmatic arguments about using the "cadres", and in fact the conduct of former communists who have gained political offices in a new system (e.g., the highly popular President Aleksander Kwasniewski) provides evidence that this attitude is correct and fruitful (Brown 1997: 33). But of course the opponents from the extreme right do not desist in their personal attacks under the banner of anti-communist purge.

The third category includes the unknown echelons of those who have been implicated in some form of collaboration with the secret police. It has been accepted that such a role would disqualify a politician, and therefore all candidates for high office are now required to file a statement denying collaboration. A special independent court was established to check those statements at random. It also took almost ten years of debates to force through the Parliament a recent law allowing citizens harmed by the secret police to look at their files in the secret archives, to discover who was spying on them or denouncing them. The opponents of the law raised doubts about the veracity of the archives, which could have been purged of some evidence over the years or could even contain evidence faked for political purposes.

The proponents of "de-communization" have their weakest case when applied it to the fourth category of villains: the rank-and-file members of the communist party, of whom there were more than two million, and whose political role or influence on political events was absolutely minimal. Some of them, a narrow minority, came to the party because of their leftist ideological convictions. But for most of them it was an opportunistic choice, allowing fuller participation in occupational and public life, proceeding with normal careers, and often contributing considerably to the life of society, when the communist system seemed to be strongly entrenched and destined to persist for centuries. Should they now be punished for leftist beliefs or for innocuous opportunism?

How can one measure their guilt compared to their professional contributions? This is another contested problem.

The very scope and intensiveness of the debate surrounding these issues indicates that there is a trauma of collective memory, with strong sentiments of guilt or shame, self-righteousness or forgiveness, concerning the communist past. "Some see it as a rigorous pursuit of justice, others as the perpetuation of injustice; some maintain it is essential for a new beginning, others that it vitiates democracy right from the start; some see it as a breakthrough, others as a massive diversion" (Brown 1997).

There are three more specific "traumas of memory" which in the post-communist period are the subject of lively public debate and strongly contested, opposite points of view. The first concerns the episode of martial law and crushing of the Solidarnosc movement in December of 1981, and particularly the role of the communist leader of that time General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The public opinion is polarized: some believe that it was a necessary "lesser evil" in the face of inevitable Soviet invasion and therefore a patriotic deed, some construe it as national treason in the service of Soviet masters. The second and related controversy relates to the decision of President Reagan's administration to stand by idly and not to warn Solidarnosc leadership of the coming martial law, even though they were fully aware of the plans brought to the US by the high ranking colonel in the Polish Army Ryszard Kuklinski. Was the American decision a prudent attempt to prevent bloodshed, or rather another Yalta-like sellout of Poland in the name of American geopolitical interest? And should colonel Kuklinski be treated as a traitor and a spy at the service of foreign government, or as a national hero fighting in disguise for national liberation (Michnik 1998). The third "post-communist hangover" concerns the agreement reached between the communist regime and the opposition during the round table talks of 1989, and particularly the supposed secret clauses added at the behind-the-scene talks at the village of Magdalenka outside of Warsaw, concerning the immunity and certain political and economic privileges for communist leadership. Was it the inevitable price for the peaceful and bloodless abdication of power, or rather treason or at least political incompetence of the Solidarnosc negotiators? And what was the role of the opposition charismatic leader Lech Walesa in the "Magdalenka sellout"? All three traumas linger on, occasionally reappearing in heated public debates, often cynically manipulated for political benefits by various political parties.

## 8.6 Coping with trauma

Faced with traumas, people resort to various strategies to cope with them. I shall present these strategies applying the already discussed typology of adaptive reactions to anomie developed by Robert K. Merton (Merton 1996 [1938]).

First, there are *innovative strategies*. Here the people take the systemic change as given, not to be reversed, and make attempts at creative reshaping of their personal situation within the system, in order to alleviate trauma. They try to strengthen their position in the new circumstances by raising or mobilizing resources: either economic capital (monetary resources) or social capital (interpersonal resources).

Almost immediately after the break of 1989 we could observe on a large scale three methods of *accumulating economic capital*. There was an outburst of small-scale trading and peddling in the streets, state enterprises were sending trucks of merchandise to the cities and selling directly from them to save on wholesale and retail overhead, spontaneous bazaars were opening at sport stadiums and street corners, and cross-border traffic was immensely intensified by speculators and traders profiting from price differences. Another method was taking extra jobs or supplying other paid services outside of a job. This was typical for professionals: lawyers taking consulting practices in enterprises, medical doctors opening private offices apart from jobs held at state hospitals, academics getting involved in teaching or training outside of the universities. Temporary employment abroad - legal or illegal - and intensive saving on considerably higher foreign wages or salaries was another strategy used to some extent under communism, but much more common after the full opening of the borders.

Even more interesting strategies are aimed at *raising the social capital*, interpersonal resources that become a kind of background support or springboard for launching a career or raising living standards. One of those, used quite extensively, was pooling the savings of extended families to support one "delegated" family member in starting an enterprise, specialized farm, or other business venture. Another, typical for the members of the earlier political or managerial elite (communist "nomenklatura") was to use their networks of acquaintance, influence, and privileged information for profitable market deals (e.g., purchasing at below-market prices the whole enterprises they had formerly managed, which were undergoing privatization). This practice has a label in the sociological literature: the "conversion of social capital into economic capital" or the "endowment of the nomenklatura". Another characteristic process was the eruption of

voluntary associations, foundations, clubs, and community organizations. People were seeking collective support in their fight with traumas and were pooling individual resources for more efficient efforts.

Finally, we can observe a true educational boom. Education has become perceived as a crucial asset, transferable into occupational or professional positions, higher living standards, or raised prestige. The numbers of students at the university level have more than doubled from 403,824 in 1990 to 927,480 in 1997, accompanied by similar expansion of the schools providing higher education, from 112 in 1990 to 213 in 1997 (Source: Rocznik Statystyczny 1997, p.240). Apart from state-run schools, where education is in principle free, new private institutions of higher education are cropping up, and in spite of high tuition they draw great numbers of students. There were 18 such schools in 1992 and 114 in 1997 (Source: Rocznik Statystyczny 1997, p.244). Equally significant is the strikingly changing profile of educational choices. They become clearly oriented toward future occupational opportunities, which was not at all true under communism. Hence the most popular departments at the universities now are law, business administration, management and finance, medicine, computer science, sociology, political science, and European studies. Under communism, students were choosing history of art, archaeology, musicology, philosophy, and other esoteric subjects, just for the fun of studying and enjoying a kind of temporal leave from their mundane, dreary existence, as their academic credentials were irrelevant for their future occupational success. Among private schools the most successful are those offering practice-oriented instruction in management, economics, and public policy. All those fields are obviously related to the emerging employment opportunities in a market-based economy and democratic polity.

The strategies described above are legitimate, falling within the scope of normatively prescribed conduct, even if they sometimes stretch the letter of the law and operate at the border of legality. But of course there are also *illegitimate adaptations* to new conditions, attempts to raise economic or social capital by illicit means, running against moral or legal rules. People are clearly aware of spreading corruption, nepotism, and favouritism. In the nationwide poll carried out in 1992, 86% of the respondents defined corruption as a very grave social problem, and 54% claimed that giving bribes is the only effective way to deal with the administration, even in simple and uncontroversial cases (CBOS Bulletin, April 1992: 40-42). In another poll 48% saw public administration as the seat of corruption (Source: GW, March, 19, 1994). As the domains of life where

corruption is most pervasive, the respondents indicated the public and governmental sphere: public institutions (44%), courts and judiciary (41%), police (39%). (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.5/1994: 113). Even more disturbing is the spread of common crime, with burglaries, robberies and car thefts becoming incomparably more common than before. Finally, the emergence of gangs, mafias and other criminal organizations is a vicious parallel, at the level of the underworld, of the flourishing associational life in the wider society.

So much for innovative responses. Irrespective of their moral or legal qualifications they are all activist and future oriented, revealing originality and resourcefulness. But - following Merton - we may also find opposite, *retreatist adaptations*, an escape from trauma toward passivism, resignation, and marginalization. Faced with sudden changes and uncertainty in their lifeworld, many people turn to the discourse of fate, adopting providentialism or a "wait-and-see" orientation. In 1994 68.3% of the respondents from the city of Warsaw believed that "planning for the future is impossible because too much depends on chance", 74.2% complained that "most people do not realize how their lives are guided by chance", and 62.8% claimed that "most of us are victims of forces that we can neither understand nor control" (Marody 1996: 216). Other people turn their hopes toward benevolent help from the state, or an autocratic strongman, or a savior-to-come. The craving for paternalist care, a strong ruler, and simple solutions to economic problems opens the door for all kinds of populists and demagogues. There is still a persistent expectation typical of the old regime "that the state is responsible for all aspects of economic and social life and, therefore, should solve all problems" (Ekiert and Kubik 1997: 26). This attitude perhaps explains why 65% of the people would still choose a state-owned enterprise as a preferred workplace, and only 15% a private one (Source: CBOS Bulletin 4/95: 98). The case of Stanislaw Tyminski, the businessman from Canada who was able to draw almost one-fifth of the votes in the presidential elections by empty promises of immediate prosperity, seems a telling indicator of that populist-claimant orientation.

Another retreatist reaction may be called ghettoization. We observe the revival of all sorts of primordial social bonds of an exclusive sort, building barriers around ethnic, regional, or occupational communities, and attempting to gain some privileges irrespective of or even against the interests of wider society. Once such special interests obtain their representation in the political arena, we observe displays of group egoism or factionalism (e.g., by the peasants or coal-miners fighting for monopolistic privileges, or

the inhabitants of some cities or regions violently defending their autonomy or former status of independent cities in the face of major reform of local government). Finally, a retreatist strategy resorted to quite widely is system-blame, or in other words complaining about external conditions and shunning any responsibility for problems. It takes various forms. One is to blame the past and seek the sources of present troubles in the days of communism, and the villains of present traumas among former communists. The calls for "decommunization" (i.e., purging those formerly involved in any political roles, including mere membership in the communist party) are a typical manifestation of this strategy. A more restrained version is the policy of "lustration", eliminating from public office those who had any links with former secret services. But system-blame may also be directed differently. Some people blame capitalism and democracy for their current predicament, and exhibit nostalgic cravings for the past. They would condone slowing down or braking the development of capitalism (e.g., of privatization and marketization) and call for state intervention and control close to the "central planning" of the past. Finally, there are also widely circulating conspiracy theories blaming the international corporations, global financial markets, George Soros, or the bureaucrats of the European Union for all perceived problems and troubles.

The third type of adaptive responses falls under the Mertonian label of "*ritualism*". These are cases when people find some measure of security in following traditional, accustomed patterns of action, even if under changed circumstances they lead nowhere. A particularly paradoxical example of such misplaced strategies is turning to the "repertoires of contention" developed during the period of democratic opposition, and particularly during the eighteen months of the Solidarnosc movement in 1980-81, against new democratically elected power. One of the unfortunate legacies of that period is a reluctance to resort to routine political processes of democracy in order to resolve grievances, and the tendency instead to continue the strategies and tactics of the "movement society", once instrumental as the sub-institutional alternative to official politics, but no longer necessary under new political conditions. It is a bit paradoxical, for example, to see industrial strikes, sit-ins, protest marches and rallies, or prolonged fasts, organized in the nineties by the trade-union Solidarnosc, used against the activists and veterans of the Solidarnosc movement now serving in the parliament or the government. Other actions of similar sort are directed at misplaced targets, as for example the march on the Polish Parliament of the aggrieved and striking workers of a metallurgical plant in Warsaw owned now by the Italian conglomerate Lucchini.

As Ekiert and Kubik claim on the basis of thorough analysis, "Poland of the early 1990s would rank among the most contentious nations in the world" (Ekiert and Kubik 1997: 17). Their count of "protest events" shows 306 for the year 1990, 292 for 1991, 314 for 1992 and 250 for 1993 (ibid. p. 19). The number of workers on strike doubled between 1990 and 1991, from 115,687, to 221,547 (ibid. p.21). During the year from 1992 to 1993, the number of those who believed that nothing could be attained without strikes rose from 20% to 40% (CBOS Bulletin No.5/1993: 115)

All three types of adaptive strategies discussed above - innovation, retreatism, and ritualism - took the existence of the new system for granted and aimed only at carving out some better niche for oneself or one's group within the system. The fourth strategy differs from them in being truly radical. It attempts to alleviate traumas by attacking the foundations of the system, either under the banner of reversal to communist or socialist institutions, or in the name of some not too clearly specified "third way" or "middle of the road" system combining the effectiveness of capitalism with the social security of socialism. After Merton, we shall call this adaptive response "*rebellion*". In Poland the most radical forms of the contesting orientation are to be found among considerable segments of the peasantry, who resort to forced blockades of the roads and even of the state borders, destroy transports of imported grain and other foodstuffs, and organize violent manifestations in the nation capital to force their demands of protectionism, curbing competition, closure from the developed Western Europe, stopping the bid to join the European Union, and returning to some traditionalist, provincial, secure enclave of folk economy and folk culture at the margins of modern Europe. There are also some groups of youth united in the "Republican League", who proclaim anarchic ideas, organize various street events, rallies, and happenings to carry their message.

## 8.7 Toward the overcoming of trauma

Contrary to many pessimistic expectations, post-communist trauma seems to enter the healing phase relatively quickly. In the Polish case already in the middle of the nineties most negative trends are reversing and several traumatic symptoms seem to be disappearing.

How one could explain the reversal of those trends and visible healing of traumatic symptoms? If my theoretical account of the etiology of post-communist trauma makes any sense, there are three directions the answer must take. First it must be shown that the *traumatizing situations* seen as immediate, precipitating factors of trauma are disappearing or at least redefined, losing their salience. Second, it must be shown that the *coping strategies* adopted against trauma, or at least some of them, have real healing effects. And third, it must be shown that the *cultural ambivalence* or split between the legacy of the bloc culture and the emerging democratic and capitalist culture is no longer acute, and therefore the cultural definitions of various "pains of transition" as traumatic are less probable to arise. Let us follow these three explanatory avenues in turn.

It seems that the most important factor for eliminating post-revolutionary malaise of uncertainty, and anomie is a widespread perception of *continuity and success of democratic and market reforms*. In the political realm a very important achievement was the enactment in 1997 of a new constitution, patterned on classical Western constitutionalism. Another was the successful multiple turnover of power through elections (Juan Linz's "test of democracy" [Linz in Przeworski et al.1995]), proving that the fundamental mechanism of parliamentary democracy actually operates. The new democratic institutions have confirmed their resilience: the Constitutional Tribunal has been involved in several cases correcting faulty legislation and its head has become one of the most respected public officials, the Ombudsman office has been highly active in defending citizens' rights, the free independent media have been providing visibility of political life and have unravelled abuses of power. Functioning democracy enhances the feelings of stability, security, accountability and transparency - all fundamentally important for alleviating anxiety, distrust, pessimism and apathy.

The second important factor confirming the success of transition was the *vigorous take-off of economic growth*. The enactment of a constitution and a series of specific laws dealing with the economic sphere have built a legal foundation under the new capitalist economy. The principle of private ownership has been reaffirmed, and the continuing privatization of state-owned enterprises, as well as the consistent reinstating of property confiscated during the communist period, proves that the policy is stable and irreversible. At the same time a new capitalist infrastructure: banks, stock exchange, brokers, insurance companies, credit associations, mutual funds, and so on - has rapidly emerged. All this has provided a framework conducive to a true explosion of entrepreneurship, which over some years has evolved from street peddling and illicit financial speculations



to large-scale industrial ventures. Stability and certainty of the terms of trade, as well as a secure business environment, contribute in important measure to the climate of economic vitality. The delayed results of early "shock therapy" applied in 1990 according to the Balcerowicz plan, plus a period of reasonable and professional management of reforms by the former communists in power from 1994-1998, finally started to assert themselves. Poland came to the fore of other post-communist societies. GDP growth reached 6.1% in 1996, 6.0% in 1997, and almost the same in 1998. At the same time inflation fell from 20.1% in 1996 to 16% in 1997, 12% in 1998, and an expected 8-9% in the 1999.

Macro-success has been reflected at the micro-level. The personal costs of reforms began to be outweighed by benefits. Large segments of the population started to experience rising wages, growing prosperity, comfort, and sometimes true wealth. The new quality of everyday life - an easier, more attractive and "colourful" life world - is now perceived by large segments of the population. After the darkness and greyness of socialist city landscapes, the misery of the "queuing society", the deprivations of the economy of shortage, and the tyranny of a producer's market, most people enjoy the opportunities of the consumer society to a much greater extent than their blase Western counterparts. Shopping, dining out, driving fast cars, foreign trips, lavish entertainment, and increased leisure are newly discovered pleasures that raise the general mood of satisfaction and optimism.

The next set of factors conducive to the alleviation of trauma has to do with the *expansion of personal and social capital*, the growth of resourcefulness, at least of some considerable segments of the population. A sizeable, relatively affluent middle class has emerged in Poland, feeling more secure and rooted (Mokrzycki 1995). With the powerful rush for higher education, the level of scholarship has been significantly raised, and with that an overall feeling of competence in the new conditions. With the proliferation of voluntary associations, clubs, and organizations, spontaneous social participation rises and personal networks expand. Again, this social process gives people the feeling of security, roots, and support.

Apart from the new forms of personal and social capital, there are old, traditional resources successfully tapped under the new conditions. Strong personal networks of friendships, acquaintanceships, and partnerships were inherited from the communist period, when internal exile, privatization of life, and "amoral familism" (to apply Eugene Banfield's phrase [Banfield 1967]) were typical adaptive measures. When asked about the secret of their business successes, top Polish entrepreneurs almost unanimously indicated

their rich personal networks, even before their actual capital assets. In the Polish General Social Survey 60.43% indicated "good connections" as a decisive or very important factor of life chances (Marody 1996: 63). Another traditional resource available in Polish conditions is strong and extended families. They provide insurance in case of life calamities; support in raising children, therefore allowing the pursuit of educational aspirations or professional careers for the parents, and pooled capital for new business enterprises. The third less tangible but perhaps also important, resource is religious community. In one of the most religious countries of Europe, with more than 90% Catholics and some 60% churchgoers, the support and security provided by the church may be important in alleviating the trauma of transition.

Factors of another type, *external contingencies* that happen to be advantageous, are helpful in alleviating trauma. One of these is the political will of NATO countries to extend the alliance to the East, and particularly the strong American support for the Polish bid to NATO resulting in the formal inclusion of Poland in March 1999. The prospect of lasting military security and a guarantee of political sovereignty seem to be assured. This is not a trifling matter in a country so badly mauled by history: invaded innumerable times from the East, South, North and West, partitioned among imperial European powers for the whole of the nineteenth century up to World War I, and suffering Nazi occupation and Soviet domination for a large part of the twentieth century. It is no wonder that the bid for NATO is a matter on which Poles came closer to unanimity than on any other political issue. It is supported by around 80% of the citizens, with 10% against it, and 10% undecided (Source: CBOS Bulletin, No.90/1997, p. 1). The motivations for support indicated by the respondents mention most often national security (68%) and full sovereignty (56%) (Source: CBOS Bulletin No.27/1997, p. 6-8). The beginning of negotiations with the European Union has a slightly different meaning. In spite of some doubts and anxieties that it raises in segments of the population more vulnerable to foreign competition (for example, among the farmers, 75% of whom express worries, and only 16% hopes; Source: CBOS Bulletin, No.66/1998, p. 2), there is one widely understood asset: the unification of the Polish legal system - and hence the political and economic regime - with well-established market democracies of the West provides a strong, external guarantee that new institutions will be lasting and firm. With incorporation into the EU a new kind of accountability appears: of the whole polity, economy, and legal system before the authorities of the Union. The reversal of reforms seems even less probable. Thus external security and external accountability allow for more predictability and trust. This seems to be recognized by 71% of the Poles, who in

1998 supported joining the EU (Source: CBOS Bulletin, No.66/1998, p. 4).

Another contingent development that is helpful in alleviating trauma is the prolonged economic boom in the West, and particularly the US (which seems to continue in spite of some recent market turbulence). It implies the availability of free resources and the interest of foreign investors in new emerging markets. Poland got ahead of all countries of the region in cumulative foreign direct investment. It reached 20.3 billion US dollars as of December 1997 (Source: International Herald Tribune, June 24, 1998:12). For some years it was a crucial factor invigorating the Warsaw stock exchange, and the sale of government bonds to foreign banks has helped to reduce the deficit.

Now let us note that some significant contributions to those healthy developments come from the *coping strategies* used by the people in order to counter trauma. Of course not all strategies work in this direction. Innovative strategies of the legitimate sort help to transform the traumatizing situations, whereas illicit innovativeness (corruption, crime, mafias) only adds to uncertainty and anomie. The same negative, counterproductive impact is effected by rebellious strategies, whereas retreatist and ritualistic adaptations are more neutral in this respect, lacking any immediate effectiveness vis-a-vis traumatizing situations. Thus the overall importance of coping strategies depends on the relative proportion of the various reactions to trauma. It seems that in the Polish case, the innovative strategies aimed at raising the economic and social capital have been applied quite widely, providing a part of the explanation for the diminishing salience of traumatizing situations.

Still, the background, namely *cultural ambivalence or split* between the heritage of the "bloc culture" and the democratic and market culture must be somehow accounted for. Only if this legacy fades away or disappears, may we expect lasting healing of the post-communist trauma. And here the most significant effect is exerted by the universal and inevitable process of generational turnover. The carriers of cultural legacies are generations, which were socialized, indoctrinated, or habituated in a particular cultural milieu. This means that the powerful legacies of bloc culture derived from earlier history, and internalized by the generations whose life was spent during the rule of communism, may lose their grip as the new generations emerge, raised under different conditions, in a democratic, market society. And this is precisely what is happening in post-communist societies. The young people graduating from universities and starting careers today have been practically insulated from the destructive cultural impact of the communist system. For them it is history long past. They were raised when the system was already falling

apart and educated in a free, democratic society. Thus they have not fallen prey to all those "trained incapacities", "civilizational incompetences", "cultures of cynicism", and "deficiencies of trust" haunting the generation of their fathers. They have also been saved from the anxieties and uncertainties of oppositional combat, the elation of revolution and the early disappointments of transition. Their world is relatively stable, established, secure, and predictable. And their culture is no longer ambivalent, internally split. They are the children of a new epoch, the carriers of a new culture inoculated against post-communist trauma.

## 9. Cultural trauma as the means of social becoming

Within the incessant flow of social change the cultural trauma may appear in a double capacity: as the consequence of some other changes (traumatogenic in character), but also as an instigator of another stream of changes effected by coping actions. This scenario is optimistic. Trauma appears as a stimulating and mobilizing factor for human agency, which through coping with and overcoming of trauma contributes to the "*morphogenesis of culture*" (M. Archer). Here cultural trauma in spite of its immediate negative, painful consequences shows its positive, functional potential as a force of *social becoming* (Sztompka 1991, 1993). In spite of the disruption and disarray of cultural order that it brings about, in a different time scale it may be seen as the seed of a new cultural system. But trauma is not necessarily creative.

The alternative scenario indicates that mobilization against trauma may be too small, and coping strategies - ineffective. Then trauma initiates self-amplifying vicious spiral of *cultural destruction*: traumatic symptoms become more grave, cultural incompetence and disorientation deepens, social activism is paralyzed, widespread distrust, apathy, pessimism and resignation leads to the loss of cultural identity. In the long run this is a sure prescription for the collapse of culture and dispersal of a society. Perhaps the story of the collapse of great empires, or the degradation of aboriginal communities, could be rephrased along the lines of this scenario.

Why trauma itself is so ambivalent: sometimes constructive and sometimes destructive? Hypothetically, one may suggest that there exists some threshold beyond which trauma is too deep, or too pervasive to be healed. The *resistance potential* against trauma manifested by a society seems to depend on the following factors. First, the strength of initialising traumatogenic change. The change of great scope and depth which hits the institutional core rather than periphery of the old culture may give it a deadly blow and paralyze efforts to resist. Second, it depends on the gap between old and new cultural syndromes. If new culture is radically new, i.e. does not have any common or overlapping components with the old one, or in other words did not have any inroads into the old cultural universe, the dissonance may appear overpowering. Third, an important factor is the relative size of traumatized groups. If trauma affects all or most groups, rather than being selective, it may be more difficult to fight. Finally, the chance to overcome trauma depends on the scope of individual resources - like education, connections, rootedness, financial capital etc. that can be mobilized in defence against trauma and insulate against its impact. It depends as well on the openness of the channels of mobility - which allow individuals to escape the traumatized groups or social positions and liberate themselves from trauma. If these safety valves are missing, trauma may become unmanageable.

## Coda

In this article I have outlined a perspective on social change recognizing the intrinsic *ambivalence of social change*. Change is behind all triumphs of humankind, but it is also a source of trauma. Perhaps this reflects a perennial predicament of a human condition.

The proposed theory of cultural trauma, that was illustrated by selected evidence from post-communist societies of East-Central Europe, and particularly from Poland, is mostly tentative and hypothetical. In many places it merely indicates the areas of "defined ignorance" (Merton 1996). It is up to the future research and analysis to provide more adequate understanding.

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