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Ethnicity and Marginalization

In this short study I intend to discuss the problem of ethnic groups in post-war Poland. The question concerning social position of these groups and the chances to keep up their distinct features in confrontation with the domineering culture are for me the most interesting issues.

The ethnicity and cultural identity problems have recently been the subject of study of many branches' specialists in Poland. Sociologists, historians, politologists, ethnologists and linguists simultaneously find these problems interesting. No doubt, the popularity revival is the effect of socio-political processes in Central and Eastern Europe. They result, as we observe, in growing importance of national ideas' meaning among small ethnic communities, the increase of religion's role in defining distinct ethnic features, the intensification of religious-national problems in the borderland.[1]

After the period of specific "sleep" of these problems in Poland of the seventies, now the sociological circle, and not only, again "discovers" the world of little homelands and ethnic differentiations. The most attractive here are the borderland regions (e.g. Upper Silesia) and the cases of these minorities that keep up their cultural separateness on the level of culture's patterns, as: Ukrainians, Germans, Byelorussians, Lithuanians or Lemkos.

Rich empirical material, gathered for the last years, points rather clearly to demonstration of non-Polish population's separateness mostly through language, religion, common values and ethos, territory and collective memory. These are not all the designations of cultural emancipation, anyway they make us aware of unification processes' failure. Taking into consideration the latest sociological research, it is difficult to accept the thesis of ethnic groups' assimilation with Polish population. There has not occurred the process of

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[1] Cited after A. Sadowski, "Narody wielkie i małe. Białorusini w Polsce" ["Big and Small Nations. Byelorussians in Poland"] (Kraków 1991), p. 5.

one-way assimilation of minority to majority. No doubt, there have existed conditions and factors conducive to assimilation, where the following can be included:

—spatial scattering of ethnic groups and post-war displacements (e.g. Germans, Ukrainians, Lemkos),

—education in Polish schools (minority educational system included several per cent of children and at schools with mother language teaching as supplementary or additional subject, some ethnic groups have not been included into such a programme),

—rising rate of intermarriages,

—restrictions concerning freedom of forming an association and surveillance of minority circles by special service of the state (subordination of all socio-cultural companies to the Ministry of Home Affairs in ancien regime times),

—divisions within the ethnic groups themselves (caused for example by different outlook on national identification matters).

Ultimately, majority of intercultural relations in post-war Poland had a confrontation character. The interethnic relations resolved themselves into Polish character's domineering and at best making no mention of difference, if it was not discriminated directly. Obviously, this discrimination was something different after 1956. Aggression directed straight to non-Polish population has been gradually replaced by the activities directed into symbolic universum sphere of particular groups. Institutions, not military or strength-testing solutions started to foredoom different ethnic groups in this country.

In this situation the question arises how to define the state and social position of minority groups if the fussion and assimilation with Polish population has not taken place. An alternative hypothesis suggesting the marginalization state seems to be better here. Marginalization is the result of long duration along with the institutions forcing "the semantic homogeneity". This process means in fact the temporary limitation of possibilities to realize and experience the native cultural content. As a result marginalization can lead to revaluation on the level of symbolic universum of the group, and in the sphere of criteria and conditions of the affiliation to . . . So contemporary ethnicity is the marginalized ethnicity. Obviously, these are personal reflections of the author. However, they are supported by local research of unification and differentiation of cultural patterns in one of such groups as Lemkos.[2]

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[2] Cited after M. Dziewierski, B. Pactwa, B. Siewierski, "Dylematy tożsamości" ["Identity Dilemmas"] (Katowice 1992).

The thesis of marginalization can be also supported by two general remarks concerning the experience of ethnicity in the conditions of domination and subordination.

Firstly, the ethnicity demonstration forms can be conditioned by many factors. It can be said that they condition some wider structural systems (e.g. political, economic, cultural). For example in post-war Poland political and ideological context have radically limited the affirmation of cultural difference. It should be mentioned here that the ethnic groups' problem in post-war years investigated in purely quantitive dimension is of secondary importance. As in 1931 the participation of non-Polish population in our country's structures was about 35%, after the Second World War it makes a few per cent only. It is obvious, however, that the problem's scale in the "socialist experiment" times was not a simple function of these groups' number. Ethnic minorities were a serious political problem for the authorities. From the very start the Communist authorities declared that Poland is nationally homogeneous country. In practice it meant negation, at least in public, of the existence of any ethnic communities.

There arises a question to what an extent this domination was in fact domination through culture, and to what an extent it was forced by institutions and national ideology. To what an extent was it spontaneous, to what an extent organized and calculated? How and in what a scale could cultural separateness exist in these conditions? We remember that covering up the tracks of difference could have happened in many ways. Through deportations and displacements of non-Polish population from borderland. The change of traditional onomastics and Polonization of surnames. No acceptance of some religious associations by the authorities. A good example of such a policy is the Greek Catholic church. As a big religious association (about 300 thousand of the faithful) has never been formally registered by PRL (Polish People's Republic) authorities. Another of possible ways to limit ethnicity expressions was surveillance control and disturbing policy led by the special service on the level of socio-cultural companies and religious associations. There was a strong influence through education policy and information censorship—also scientific—concerning minority groups. So this political and institutional pressure on the cultural homogenity forced a lot of avoiding and ostentatious behaviours in ethnic groups. On the one hand, we have the desire to keep authonomy and separateness respect, on the other the tendency of uniformization and subordination.

In fact the world of ethnic communities has turned out to be the world only seemingly assimilated. It has preserved many ethnicity attributes in local or peripheric dimension. In every day's practice the world's construction broke up in two separate, autonomous spheres: *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*. This rule falls deeply into the mental structures of an individual.

According to this rule, the interactions with the world of one's countrymen and the world of strangers take place.

In these abnormal conditions traditional values and behavioural patterns could only survive on the family home, parish group and local community level. There one spoke, prayed and celebrated as one's folks. This was the area inaccessible for an outsider, and that is why it is more difficult to perceive the traces of cultural difference. Some small village local communities are especially lively here, what is frequently mentioned in contemporary local research.

In contacts with outside world, the world of institutions there existed the rule: "the same as everyone". A good example of such an attitude can be very frequent cases of fitting the language code into social situation. In the atmosphere of home, familiarity you often speak as your folks. In the atmosphere of uncertainty and beyond *orbis interior* you use Polish language. The whole rule of code switching gave an individual a feeling of security in contact with strangers. That is why a certain attribution to minority category was avoided.

I think that only nowadays when open society formation brings about difference respect, it is easier to notice outer, spectacular signs of separateness and spontaneous self-definitions. However, we cannot forget that this situation, new in quality, is still a minority situation. After June 1989, some new frames for minority functioning within Polish state borders were formed, but it is impossible to remove all the cultural consequences of the past period. So generally making a research on ethnicity we have to consider all the situational context, which is formed by:

—the place which minority group takes in relations with majority group (equality, subordination, discrimination, privilege),

—the ratio of both groups,

—scattering degree—diasporisation of a minority group (e.g. the existence of some enclaves, uniform concentrations of such population or their lack),

—the degree of closure and isolation of mutual contacts (e.g. the inhibition degree of social contacts of Romanies with Polish population is higher than other ethnic groups),

—the perspective of long interethnic relations lasting (e.g. historical context becomes indispensable to understand the present situation of Germans or Ukrainians living in Polish territory),

—the attitudes of ethnic groups' members towards the political system and the country.[3]

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[3] See E. Nowicka, "Etniczność a sytuacja mniejszościowa" ["Ethnicity and Minority Situation"], *Przegląd Polonijny* [*Polonia Review*], No. 1 (1989), pp. 48-49.

Secondly, when we analyse ethnicity, we have to consider the attributes making the basis of identification and separateness of the group. One should remember a certain differentiation in an individual's and the whole generations' life some identity determinants. The ethnicity attributes can become deconstructed as well as the cultural canon of some ethnic-national communities. The reproduction of cultural habit of the group does not have to consist in invariability, identity or homogeneity of symbolic behaviours. For example in 1947 within the military operation (known as action "Wisła") most of Lemkos and Ukrainians were displaced from south-eastern areas of the country and deprived of the Greek Catholic church. A part of the population has converted into Orthodox. This change of religion does not have to mean the decrease of attachment to religion as a value in groups. It is not true that religiousness stops playing the part of group identity factor of Lemkos and Ukrainians. Maybe the change itself was caused by the outer situation, the diaspora situation where the ethnic identification factor could as well have been the Eastern rite common to both religious groups (Greek Catholic and Orthodox). In this way the eastern belief canon stays intact. Probably the switch into Latin rite (not ascribed into cultural canon of both groups) would have had some stronger cultural repercussions.

The ethnic identification processes are not a simple sum of cultural facts. Frederik Barth has emphasised that following the ethnic group history we do not immediately follow the history of its culture. The ethnicity limits can be realised by an individual even in the situation of considerable modification of its culture's components.[4] Some cultural content can be changed, and the membership criteria will be characterised by continuity, obviously this cultural components' modification can happen spontaneously, through aculturation processes, or through outer, consciously organized constraint, the so-called institutional pressure.

When the ethnicity limits are made not spatially, but categorized according to cultural features, there should be taken a relativistic view of such a wisdom towards the individuals' consciousness according to their definition of the situation. This remark is crucial. You can often decide the attachment of a given local community to a concrete ethnic community on the basis of existence or lack of some single cultural feature. Take language as an example. It is one of the basic symbolic distinguishing marks of each ethnic group. However, making a research on it, you do not always come to similar conclusions. We must remember that there are two attitudes to this matter. First is the research made from the point of view of the outer observer. Through the analysis of its syntactic structure and lexical aspects the

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[4] Cited after F. Barth, "Introduction", in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. F. Barth (London 1969), p. 38.

research worker tries to put it in a wider classification system. The second approach to language is the research of its social context of usage and subjectivistic meanings attached to it by the users themselves. And now, for example, the question of Lemkos' ethnolect's belonging to Ukrainian language is obvious from linguistic point of view. It does not have to agree with subjective language definitions made by Lemkos themselves. In their consciousness, it can stay something separate from Ukrainian language and be connected with the own different ethnic identification. The Lemkos' language and its situational context of usage can at times strengthen the separatistic attitude, and reject what is Ukrainian. Moreover, it remains a living spoken language and can serve as an important identification and cultural separateness criterion.

In the research made on ethnicity, it is very important to refer to social experiences of the actor. Only in widely understood humanistic sociology perspective, it is possible to get to what given conditions decides of belonging to the world of one's folks. Then we get to the lowest level of social life and we discover the sense of the actor's experienced world, frequently we avoid the illusion of assimilation and ethnic differences obliteration. As Ernest Renan said a hundred years ago, nation is a spiritual community and its existence is decided in everyday plebiscite. These preferences and choices, surrounded by the atmosphere of sanctity, and the ones ascribed into the sphere of everyday matters and customary interactions are indispensable for description that claims to be adequate.

The cognitive situation of the research worker can be defined by words: "betwixt and between". We find him between two cultural orders: the domineering and the peripheric one (minority). Intending to play the part of "the strange" ethnicity observer, he should keep to two rules at least. First is the rule of humanistic factor of cultural facts. The social world of the others we should reconstruct through making them speak of their life, problems and their own culture's separateness. As Florian Znaniecki rightly noticed, the cultural reality is always "someone's". The author of *Cultural Sciences: Their Origin and Development* has written that culture research worker takes the empirical facts as they present themselves to the individuals that experience and use them.[5] The second rule is political indifferentism. The social research worker, as Max Weber has written, does not represent any particular political line as long as he is a research worker. Previously this rule has not always accompanied the knowledge of ethnic groups in Poland. Ethnicity is a dynamic outgrowth, investigated in the categories of process, not state or structure.[6]

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[5] Cited after F. Znaniecki, *Nauki o kulturze* [*Lectures about Culture*] (Warszawa 1969), p. 228.

[6] See T. Paleczny, "Subiektywistyczne koncepcje etniczności i ich rola w socjologii amerykańskiej" ["Subjective Ethnicity Concepts and Their Role in Sociology"]. *Studia Socjologiczne* [*Sociological Studies*], No. 4 (1988).

And the way of its being and research depends on the previous assump-
tions (onthological and methodological). The subjectivist orientation was
chosen referring to the consciousness' factors and interpreting the social world
with the humanistic factor. Ethnicity will be the question of "belief" in
common origin.[7] It is also founded on such grounds as: symbolic behaviours,
social ties (e.g. religious, language, territorial or "blood heritage") collective
memory.

The dimensions of ethnic marginalization

The remarks formulated above have been made on the assumption of
ethnic marginalization. This marginalization is completed in three basic
dimensions: biculturalism, strangeness, sense of relative deprivation.
According to the Chicago school traditions, biculturalism expresses the
state of spreading between two, co-existing cultural structures. In the in-
dividual dimension this was defined by Robert E. Park as a "marginal man".
This hybrid-outgrowth, a man of borderland lives and shares the traditions of
two different cultures. The marginal man does never want and break the ties
with the past and traditions. At the same time he is not entirely accepted in
a new community (e.g. because of prejudice and stigmatization) where he is
looking for a new place. He lives on the borderline of two cultures and two
societies, that never totally penetrate and intermingle.[8] This description
mutatis mutandis clearly shows the ethnic groups' situation. Out of necessity
they have to function (through education in Polish schools, everyday life
needs, work, etc.) in institutionalized sphere of Polish culture. Of course they
choose the participation in the minority system of their own culture.
Strangeness can be discussed in a few aspects:
—It can be the result of ethnic group transference in a new spatial and
   socio-cultural environment. Such a strangeness can be the result of forcing
   or collective responsibility. Displacing or deportating an individual, we
   deprive him of the sense of place, support in local institutions, we destroy
   the elementary ties: territorial, neighbour's parish, etc. The feeling of
   strangeness can even be strengthened by the fact of a new place's
   enforcement and the degree of group's scattering. It was the case of Lemkos,
   Ukrainians and in a sense Germans.

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[7] Cited after M. Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*
(New York 1968), p. 389.
[8] Cited after R. Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe 1950), pp. 345-356.

—Strangeness can be the result of destruction of the group's symbolic universum.

The individual loses self-assurance in relations: "me—the outer world". Traditional recipies and rules become non-adequate to interpret current experiences. Analysing strangeness in phenomenological perspective, you can notice that two poles: familiarity—strangeness are the category of description and interpretation of the world in general. According to Alfred Schütz, a stranger is the one whose relatively natural world concept (i.e. the whole system of truthful regulations to interpret the social world acquired during socialization) becomes distorted. The problem of stranger consists in distortion of habitual thinking, a kind of "thinking as usual". The stranger is aware that his knowledge of the world of some concrete "others" cannot remain confronted with everyday experiences and social contacts.[9]

—Strangeness as a result of ascription. It happens because ethnic groups are the objects of status ascription which means that the relations between them are the result of these ascriptions' peculiarity. So the category of strangeness is usually connected with the sphere of social distances and antagonism towards the others. Florian Znaniecki in the treaty *Modern Nationalities* paid attention to four types of antagonism:

1) collective antagonism towards a collective object (it combines mutual relations of big social groups, e.g. tribes, nations, religious associations, etc.),

2) individual antagonism towards a collective object (hostility of an individual towards a strangers' group which did him some wrong),

3) collective antagonism towards an individual object (e.g. the villagers towards a stranger as a Jew described by George Simmel in European societies),

4) individual antagonism towards an individual object.[10]

The sense of relative deprivation can be after David Aberle interpreted in four basic dimensions:

—property level (when an individual or ethnic group loses its property which is righty possessed),

—the level of status (when social position of an individual or a group's status are marginalized in some new circumstances),

—behaviour level (when behaviour's consistencies with own cultural patterns are difficult or impossible),

—values level (low self-estimation of the object).[11]

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[9] Cited after A. Schütz, "The Stranger. An Essay in Social Psychology", in *Collected Papers*, Vol. III (The Hague 1964), pp. 91-99.

[10] Cited after F. Znaniecki, *Współczesne narody* [*Contemporary Nations*] (Warszawa 1990), p. 331.

[11] Cited after P. Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of Cargo Cults in Melanesia* (London 1957), cited after E. Nowicka, *Bunt i ucieczka* [*Rebellion and Escape*] (Warszawa 1972), pp. 28-29.

As we can see, deprivation understood in this way can concern the handicaps of objective character (e.g. no access to some material or cultural goods, limited participation in authority structures, the loss of property) and subjectively understood handicap situation (sense of collective harm humiliation, unjust treatment by comparison with majority). These both aspects very often concern ethnic groups. Also reluctant attitude of majority towards minority (prejudice and negative opinion of other groups), and lack of cultural competence among the minority groups' members (e.g. too poor knowledge of Polish language, no knowledge of certain behaviour patterns) are real social rise bareers. In the informal relations sphere, handicap becomes a strong social distance, social ostracism or the so-called joking relationship.

The stigmatization process described by Erving Goffman forms a symbolic determiner of deprivation. It happens when belonging to ethnic group causes, among other, social life participants an immediate attachment of certain group of features—usually pejorative ones. Unequality and sense of being unjust come as a result of it.

Having realised multiple conditioning of ethnicity in Polish reality, it seems better to consider its particular correlates in the context of meanings ascribed on the level of local communities and individual biographies. This approach can, however, have a few advantages. Firstly, it allows to realize the scale of the marginalization process itself. In this sense the cognitive processes can bring about some practical applications. Secondly, it becomes the condition of deeper and more complicated understanding of difference and strangeness. Thirdly, it allows the careful analysis of protective mechanisms and threats of identity processes in the conditions of domination.