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CONTEMPORARY POLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY. A THEORETICAL MODEL

Summary. *The paper presents a proposed theoretical model of national identity existing in contemporary Polish society. The ambiguous relation between national identity and patriotism is underlined. Two basic dimensions of the model are described – the leftist-rightist continuum and the dimension of engagement. Modern types of national engagement referring to patriotism are shown and interpreted.*

Keywords: *leftist-rightist continuum, national identity, patriotism, Polish society*

WSPÓŁCZESNA POLSKA TOŻSAMOŚĆ NARODOWA. MODEL TEORETYCZNY

Streszczenie. *Niniejszy tekst prezentuje propozycję modelu teoretycznego tożsamości narodowej występującej we współczesnym polskim społeczeństwie. Podkreślona zostaje niejednoznaczna relacja pomiędzy tożsamością narodową a patriotyzmem. Opisanie zostają dwa podstawowe wymiary modelu – kontinuum lewica-prawica oraz wymiar zaangażowania. Wskazane i zinterpretowane zostają powiązane z patriotyzmem współczesne typy narodowego zaangażowania.*

Słowa kluczowe: *kontinuum lewica-prawica, patriotyzm, polskie społeczeństwo, tożsamość narodowa*

Introduction

The issue of national identity became crucial as soon as it appeared in its modern understanding in XIX century during the national consciousness “awakening” process, due to its incontestable meaning for shaping contemporary societies and one’s attitude towards their social group and the state¹. The importance of this con-

¹ S. Kieniewicz, *Historia i świadomość narodowa*, Warszawa 1982.

cept led academics to create numerous approaches and models of this issue heading to understand how national identity influences unit's perception of reality and their behaviour, and what is its functional significance. It needs to be underlined that in our view an attempt to construct a universal theory of national identity misses the point as national identities are differentiated amongst cultural regions, particular historical epochs and individual people – and all of these differentiation aspects cannot be successfully met in a singular approach. This problem indicates that research on national identity requires making choices between various generalization of conclusions areas.

To avoid the risk of inappropriate generalization of presented assumptions the paper is focused on a brief description of contemporary Polish national identity in a form of a proposed theoretical model that could be used to create more sophisticated explanatory tools in the future. Construction of a theoretical approach that enables to deeply understand only one cultural area while rejecting the possibility of intercultural comparison follows principles of indigenous research that refers to local, culturally determined meaning system which remains the primary object of interest in the cognition process². In contrast to research conducted from the perspective of external circumstances and their influence on one's behaviour (like mostly in sociology or political science) the paper presents an approach focused on internal psychic phenomena connected with national identity. In other words, the issue is not to indicate and describe the importance of politicians or authorities and their actions for shaping Polish national identity but to express assumptions and observations on common citizens' point of view in their daily life and daily "waving the homeland's flag"³.

² A.B. Pankalla, K.K. Kośnik, *Indygeniczna psychologia Słowian. Wprowadzenie do realnej nauki o duszy*, Kraków 2018.

³ M. Billig, *Codzienne powiewanie flagą ojczyzny*, [in:] P. Sztompka, M. Bogunia-Borowska (eds.), *Socjologia codzienności*, Kraków 2008, pp. 430-469.

National identity and patriotism

Before presenting the proposed model of Polish national identity it needs to be clarified what the national identity is and how it is related to an issue of patriotism. Basing on the assumption that an interest of present approach is focused mainly on one's perception of themselves as a member of Polish nation we understand national identity in cognitive categories. Nation is treated here as an imaginary community thus as an intellectual idea which has been created by authorities like ideologists or politicians and, what is even more important, is being constantly created and reshaped by "common" Poles in their minds. Cognitive and intellectual character of national identity does not mean that it is detached from external, beyond-unitary ("objective") factors – for it remains strongly anchored in contemporary and past culture and politics. Nation as an idealistic entity becomes one of sources of a unit's personal identity and determines their motivations to real and concrete actions⁴. The way one perceives their nation influences the way they perceive themselves what is assumed here to be the cause of national identity types' differentiation as well as various attitudes towards the nation and the state, and other compatriots.

National identity as a manner of experiencing oneself as a member of a given nation and an aggregation of beliefs about oneself as a member of this community can be treated as a basis of patriotic attitudes⁵. Both of these theoretical constructs: national identity and patriotism function, however, in different areas of human psychic life. The first one, as assumed above, is an intellectual object referring to one's perception of themselves as a member of Polish nation, which engage cognitive processes and possibly affective processes connected with emotions and feelings about the nation, the state, local history and native culture. Patriotism, whereas, is an attitude that combines cognitive, affective and behavioural processes which means that to be recognized as a patriot one needs to manifest some

⁴ J. Grzybowski, *Byt, Tożsamość, Naród. Próba wyjaśnienia formuły „tożsamość narodowa” w perspektywie metafizyki*, Kęty 2012, pp. 627-628.

⁵ J. Szczurkowska, *Ja patriota. Psychologia patriotyzmu*, Warszawa 2016, p. 39.

actions judged as patriotic by their community. In case of Polish society this attitude is believed to be related mostly to love for homeland, perception of homeland as the highest value, attachment to homeland, taking actions towards the state's well-being and fighting in defend of the state during war, what indicates domination of traditional approach in Polish national imagination⁶. The mentioned aspects of daily attitude, thus, are perceived by vast majority of Poles as patriotic and sufficient to prove that a given unit is a patriot. From this theoretical perspective a person's declaration of being a patriot is not enough due to the need of being perceived as a patriot by other members of national community – like in case of national war heroes. This conclusion leads us to the statement that patriotism itself cannot be included to the theoretical model of Polish national identity due to its behavioural aspect that requires to employ perception and higher cognitive processes of other people, not only the one who “owns” their personal, individually shaped national identity.

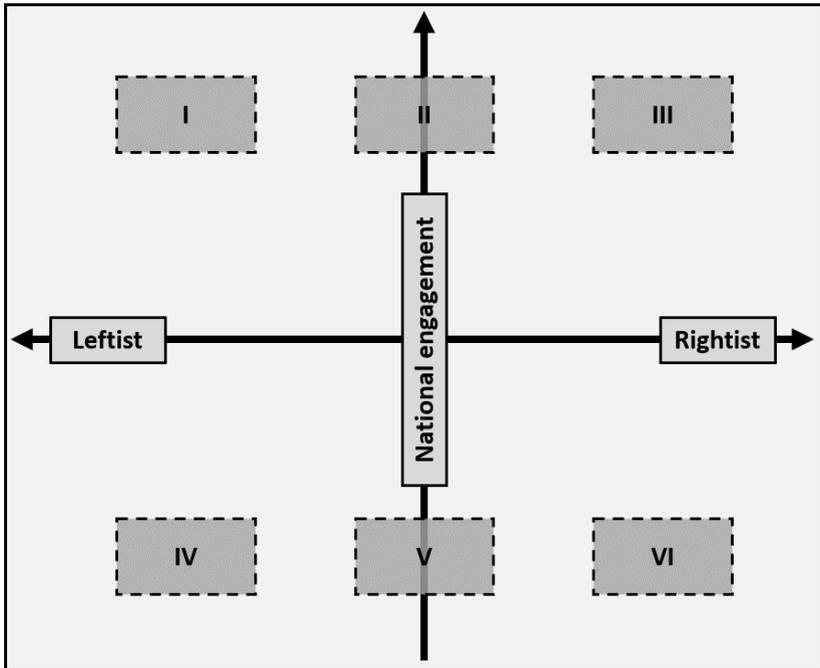
Although national identity remains the source of patriotism their relation stays ambiguous. Patriotism is understood here as an unequivocally positive phenomenon due to a definite distinction between patriotism and nationalism. From this perspective patriotism, thus, is a cultural value which precise meaning is dependent from local and temporal specifics. As a cultural value patriotism can be judged and indicated in behavioural manifestations only by members of a particular national community. This attitude may be evaluated exclusively from inside of a national cultural system that provides adequate set of cultural concepts. If a researcher expresses their opinion on someone's patriotism it should be treated as a private belief of a nation's member, then. The theoretical model of Polish national identity cannot avoid the issue of some kind of devotion to one's nation but the construct of patriotism seems to be inappropriate due to its relation with other people's cognitive processes. The model does include this aspect of national identity but in terms of individual cognitive processes of a given person.

⁶ A. Wilkomirska, A. Fijałkowski, *Jaki patriotyzm?*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 93-101.

The proposed model

The theoretical model of Polish national identity consisting of two dimensions of this phenomenon is presented below in the Scheme 1.

Scheme 1. The model of Polish national identity



Source: Authors' elaboration.

The first (horizontal) dimension is a leftist-rightist continuum. It needs to be underlined that it is not a scheme of political opinions so it does not include economical beliefs (traditionally: leftist – socialism, rightist – free market). This dimension refers only to perception of one's nation and themselves as its member. The rightist side is interpreted here as a cognitive sphere including affirmation of the nation, its history and its cultural expressions. In extreme version

this affirmation becomes uncritical (thoughtless) and manifests itself in nationalistic ideology assuming superiority of the nation over different nation and a principle of a unit's national congruence⁷. While affirming own nation rightists focus mainly on the past as national traits and history are judged positively and celebrated⁸. Contrary, the leftist side expresses criticism against the nation according to a belief that Poland and Poles are "not good enough"⁹. In smooth version the leftist side presents a constructive critique that aims to improve the state and transform Polish society in order to eliminate its disadvantages while radical leftists express causeless critique which may be interpreted as an effect of national complexes. While heading to reform Polish nation leftists are focused mainly on the future promising the nation's improvement due to withdrawal of hitherto "owners" of symbolic, cultural capital. The distinction of the leftist and the rightist side of Polish national identity can be referred to national, historically determined hatred – leftists forbid or disregard this affect that is expressed and even strengthened by rightists¹⁰. The term "hatred", thus, does not explain specifics of Polish national identity that could be treated as related to a local, cultural emotion including a complicated system of relations between national pride, looking for scapegoat, complaining and envy¹¹.

The second (vertical) dimension concerns national engagement being an individual, cognitive equivalent of patriotism. This dimension describes to what extent a person is involved in national matters and problems, and how much their national identity plays a

⁷ J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Chicago 1994; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, New York 1983; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality*, Cambridge 1990.

⁸ M.J. Chodakiewicz, J. Mysiakowska-Muszyńska, W.J. Muszyński, *Polska dla Polaków! Kim byli i są polscy narodowcy*, Poznań 2015; M. Kania-Lundholm, *Re-Branding A Nation Online: Discourses on Polish Nationalism and Patriotism*, Uppsala 2012.

⁹ M. Pielacha, *Wystarczająco dobra Polska?*, [in:] A. Zajenkowska (ed.), *Polska na kozetce. Siła obywatelskiej refleksyjności*, Sopot 2016, p. 71-85.

¹⁰ A. Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej*, Warszawa 2014, p. 35-41.

¹¹ A. Pankalla, *Kultura psychologów. Wprowadzenie do psychologii (historyczno-kulturowej)*, Katowice 2014, pp. 312-316.

role in their daily life. Combination of both of these dimensions indicates a unit's national identity what is presented below on examples of leftists (L), centrists (C) and rightists (R) characterised by high (+) and low (-) national engagement.

I (L+): "Reformer" – a person who notices Polish drawbacks and support any opportunities heading to enhancement of technological or cultural development.

II (C+): "Balancer" – a unit trying to maintain harmony between criticism of national disadvantages and affirmation of national culture and history.

III (R+): "Protector" – an individual that pays effort to promulgate knowledge of Polish history and cultural traditions, being entirely proud of their nation.

IV (L-): "Complainer" – a unit that constantly criticises their nation, believe that Poland is permanently backward and is ashamed of being a Pole, sometimes becoming a cosmopolitan.

V (C-): "Uninterested" – an individual nationally not engaged and not interested in past, present or future national concerns.

VI (R-): "Brawler" – a person who values a current situation and becomes irritated to every attempt to modify hitherto cultural, social or political conditions.

Types of national engagement

Although the application of the two dimensions of the model allows to indicate fundamental types of Polish national identity the national engagement may exist in different forms and originate from various sources. Some examples of these types of national engagement are presented below. To simplify the discourse the types are described in terms of "patriotism", albeit these concepts are not precisely identical, as explained above. The discussed types of national engagement are initially combined (in brackets) with the types of Polish national identity, which corresponds the most common theoretically assumed forms of functioning as a member of contemporary Polish society and a Polish citizen.

One of possible foundations or enhancements of national engagement are religious beliefs which in case of Poles can be connected mainly with Catholicism as a historically dominating confession as well as Slavic Rodnoverie that is based on pre-Christian local culture¹². Religious patriotism (presumably C/R+) delivers a metaphysical explanation of the nation's construct and provides ethical basis perceived as universally uninfluenced by temporal social changes. Religious patriotism rooted in Slavic beliefs corresponds with ethnic patriotism (also C/R+) which contents are derived from attachment to native folk culture considered to be the most local in comparison to the "high" Polish culture connected with the Western civilisation. Although ethnic patriotism refers to ethnos wider than simply Polish nation, pan-Slavic convictions are rather rare in Polish society so the Slavic base of patriotism is interpreted with a limitation to a national sphere.

Another kind of national engagement that pertains a wider social community is European patriotism (L/C+)¹³. In this form of ideological attitude the nation is treated as a part of a superior human aggregation believed to ensure prosperity and well-being for all of Polish nation. This specifically modern type of national engagement rejects the need for fully independent state, in return the "greater good" of united nations. The next modern type of engagement can be called satirical patriotism (C+)¹⁴. This particular form of engagement implies employment of frequently ironic sense of humour directed towards one's nation and some kind of "doublethink"

¹² K. Kośnik, *Religion and nationalism. Example of Ukraine and Poland*, "Contemporary trends in international relations: politics, economics, law" 2017, no 8(20), pp. 369-380; K. Kośnik, *Tożsamość współczesnych rodzimiowierców słowiańskich. Studium psychologiczne aktywności internetowej rodzimiowierców w Polsce*, "Przegląd Religioznawczy" 2015, no 3(257), pp. 119-134; P. Warchoń, *Polsko, Ojczyzno moja! Twoja tożsamość wczoraj, dziś i jutro*, Pelplin 2017.

¹³ J. Fomina, *Integracja europejska jako samokolonizacja? Zawłaszczenie teorii postkolonialnej przez polskich eurosceptyków*, "Czas Kultury" 2016, no 4(191), pp. 100-105.

¹⁴ K. Kośnik, S. Pawelka, *Polska tożsamość narodowa we współczesnej popkulturze internetowej. Prolegomena do konstrukcji teoretycznego systemu interpretacyjnego*, in preparation.

while a person makes jokes of Polish history, culture and politics but on the other hand in different situations becomes serious and expresses deep respect for these objects. This way of functioning indicates the need for “falsificationism” and satirical reflection over the nation.

The final presented types can be described as quasi-patriotism. This category includes temporal patriotism (R-) which is observed during crucial national events such as sport games when a person becomes “more Polish” and more nationally engaged for a short period of time and after the event returns to normal functioning. The next form is forced patriotism (C-) that a unit has to express due to external circumstances. An example of such people are teachers who in their daily life are not interested in national matters but are obliged to promote patriotic attitude amongst their pupils and pretend to be patriots themselves. The last kind of quasi-patriotism is anti-patriotism (L-) – a conviction that any forms of national engagement’s expression are harmful for the society. A person perceives patriotism as a synonym of nationalism or chauvinism and opposes all of patriotic actions and statements.

Conclusions

The discussed above model is obviously only a brief introduction to the presented theoretical approach and requires further elaboration. The proposed dimensions of national identity and exemplary types of national engagement need to be empirically examined to conduct the verification of their accuracy and adequacy towards specifics of Polish modern society and historically determined culture. Further future use of this model after it is compared to reality of Polish nation will potentially support research aiming to understand a diversity of national attitudes towards the community of contemporary Poles, which expresses itself mainly on the deeply divided and polarised political scene. The model tries to embrace all kinds of Polish national identity and not to exclude any group of people identifying themselves as Poles.

The reflection above heads to show that both leftists and rightists (as understood here) may be considered to be nationally engaged (patriotic) or not in cases of particular units, which conclusion seems to remain avoided especially in Polish politics. National identity as a research subject and the matter of theoretical models will probably stay significant for a long time yet – till the end of existence of divisions between human beings. Patriotism and attachment to one's homeland will thus live as long as any social or political communities exist, at least in Western understanding of a social commonwealth¹⁵.

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¹⁵ D. Gawin, *Przyszłość patriotyzmu*, [in:] M. Karolczak (ed.), *Maski i twarze patriotyzmu*, Kraków 2012, p. 89-98.

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