

Summary

Eternal nation. A Pole and a Catholic in the village of Żmiąca

In the summer of 1901, Franciszek Bujak, a promising newly minted Ph.D., the author of *Maszkienice*, the first Polish monograph of rural areas in the sociological literature, visited another, “in the middle of nowhere,” village called Żmiąca, which is sandwiched somewhere between the steep slopes of the Island Beskid in the Carpathians, seventy miles to the south of Cracow. Stanisław Uryga, the village official, who hosted the writer, did not even presume that this was the start of research that would last for over a hundred years, and make the village the longest researched village in the world.

In writing his second monograph, Bujak above all wanted to raise the standard of living of the people. He presented a pretty typical for that time primordialism, believing that the Polish nation is (a) the only one, (b) moral and (c) immortal. In this perspective, however, peasants were an anomaly. Their most important disadvantage – he noted with some resignation – was a “lack of national awareness, a lack of feeling Polish”: “National Awareness has not gone so far yet as to renounce essential feelings of enmity and distrust for ‘frock coat lovers.’ There are many who, when asked what kind of nationality they are, answer after some reflection that they are Catholics, as opposed to the Lutherans and Jews, or that they finally become ‘Emperor’ peasants.” In this way, Bujak’s fundamental, patriotic convictions were painfully undermined by its own field research. The reality turned out to be much more constructivist than earlier primordialistic theories.

The greatest paradox, however, was that in 1901 the villagers of Żmiąca were obstinate constructivists, but the modern villagers transformed into primordialists, and sometimes they were even more radical than Bujak. In this way his theory was a self-fulfilling prophecy. 111 years later, in the third monograph of the village, I answer the question – “why did this happen?”

The main purpose of this study – apart from describing and explaining the process of nation building over 700 years is, in line with a reflexive revisit (Burawoy) to develop my own theory (in this case: an integrated theory of the nation), and simultaneously test competing theories (in this case:

primordialism [Bujak] ethnosymbolism [Smith], modernism [Gellner] and constructivism [Brubaker]).

Defining a nation. In the study a nation was defined as a collection of national ideologues, to show in the empirical chapters that such a definition is a very good basis for analysis of national development as such. In comparison to others, this definition is more complete. Primordialism, ethnosymbolism and modernism are closer to the definitions of objectivity, which treat the nation in terms of community, while in constructivism the nation is seen more in terms of subjectivism, so the integral theory tries to combine these conflicting concepts together. I bow to the opinion of the constructivists that there is no nation without a national ideology, but I do not agree with the statement that a nation is a national ideology, devoid of material correlates, and exists only in people's minds. Assuming, in line with the trends of objectivity, that a nation is a community, we do not accept the conclusion that it must be a community of a particular type, such as a community of character (primordialism), communication (modernism) or culture (ethnosymbolism). The ideologues of a nation do not have to create a "happy family," which comes into violent conflicts, as it often happens. For this reason, in the case of Poland, we should not speak so much about the community of national ideologues and or the Polish nation but about communities of national ideologues and about Polish nations.

Just as the definition of a nation as a set of national ideologues is more general than other definitions, so it may lead to a deeper recognition of national phenomena. In particular, the integral theory formulates a more complete definition of the national ideology by pointing to its three dimensions: national identity (internalised nationalist ideology), the national discourse (externalised national ideology) and national ideology as such (objectified national ideology). While ethnosymbolists, primordialists and modernists focus on national identity, constructivists concentrate on objective national ideology and national discourse. However, the integral theory, takes into account the opinions of all rather than advocating on either side.

Describing a nation. The second advantage of an integral theory over other competing theories concerns the description of national development. The latter either ignores this issue (constructivism, primordialism), or does not develop it sufficiently (ethnosymbolism, modernism). The superiority of the integrated theory of the nation lies in the fact that, firstly, it does not stop dichotomous distribution: agrarian society → national communities (modernism), or ethnic groups (Ethna) → national societies (ethnosymbolism), and secondly, is not limited to the analysis of nationalization, but it shows that, as national identity (nationalization)

is important, the belief in unity, immortality and morality of the nation (primordialisation) is equally essential.

In place of dichotomous division, the integral theory introduces a multi-staged division, modified as appropriate. With its use, I divided the national development of the village Żmiąca into six phases, which partly overlap: (a) a stage of marginalisation, which lasted until 1770, when a peasant remained completely outside the nation, although at that time his religious and class identities were formed, (b) a stage of forming the Empire which lasted until 1846, when a peasant became an “Emperor” peasant, (c) a stage of national dimorphism, which lasted until 1918, when the rural political elite acquired national identity, which they merely articulated in front of the national movement, although hiding it from villagers (d) a stage of three nations, lasting until 1945, when villages were dominated by three conflicting national ideologies: Polish-peasant, Polish-Catholic, Polish-state; villages got completely nationalised (e) a stage of Polish Catholics until 1989 when Catholic ideology became the strongest, and the countryside was divided into an anti-communistic part (very strongly associated with the Polish-Catholic ideology of the nation) and an anti-anti-communistic, (f) a stage of primordialisation; after 1989 the nation in the village Żmiąca was immortalised (forgetting the beginnings of the nation, an identification of a nation with religion and devotion), unified (denial of a conflict between anti-communists and anti-anti-communists) and moralised (based on a prototype of a Catholic Pole).

Focusing on the level of the environment, social relationships and an individual we can deepen the description of national development even further.

First of all, on the level of cultural context (objectified national ideology) we can identify the dominant ideologies and national counter ideologies: Sarmatian ideology and the ideology of Bar Confederation, Imperial ideology (counter ideology: the ideology of radical democrats), the Polish-imperial ideology (counter ideologies: “Ultramontan” by Fr. Stojałowski and the peasant movement), the ideology of the Polish sanation (the counter ideologies: ideology of Polish-Catholic and Polish-peasant), communist ideology (counter ideology: Polish-Catholic anti-communist ideology), post-communist and liberal ideology (counter ideology: anti-communist and traditional ideology). Here it can be clearly seen how the next dominant ideologies encounter counter ideologies, and are then replaced by new ideologies.

Secondly, on the level of social relations (national discourses), various forms of resistance against Polish can be shown: (a) in the first period peasants were outside the realm of Polish culture, (b) in the second period

they applied political forms of resistance against Polish nationality, including physical violence (Galician slaughter), (c) the third period was dominated by everyday forms of resistance (back-biting, rumour, ridicule, avoidance of contact with “Poles”), (d) in the Second Republic of Poland, Polish identity was increasingly accepted, however, a strong conflict between the three national ideologies aroused: peasant, state and religion, which through informal resistance led to the elimination of the state ideology, (e) the period when communist Poland began with political resistance to the imposed communist ideology (civil war), and as a result of an increasing resistance to state repression, it changed its formula into a non-political one (slandering, threatening, ridiculing “communists”), (f) after 1989, the resistance against the new dominant ideology, which I call post-communist, is expressed through democratic elections.

Thirdly, on an individual level (national identity) it can be concluded that the adoption of national ideology is caused by various factors, which systematically vary over time. In each period, we can provide a dominant means to internalise the national ideology: (a) a miracle (the formation of national identity is a result of a unique confluence of circumstances – such as the first Pole from the village of Żmiąca, Fr. Jan Chełmecki), (b) individualisation (the nationalising agents are individuals: teachers and priests), (c) institutionalisation (the nationalising agents are institutions: schools, the church), (d) familiarising (nationalising agents are immediate families), (e) being obvious (units cease to notice the process of nationalisation, the nation is becoming obvious to them).

Explaining of a nation. The third advantage of an integral theory of the nation lies in the fact that it provides a fuller explanation of national phenomena. Firstly, it combines the objective elements (as primordialism, ethnosymbolism, modernism do) and subjective (constructivism), and secondly, it combines past and present (on which primordialism and ethnosymbolism focus), and thirdly, it combines the micro-sphere with the of macro-sphere (modernism, constructivism).

Primordialism emphasises the objective belonging of social agents to the community and from the nature of this community it brings the character of its members, thereby negating their autonomy. But, for a long time peasants opposed the Polish national ideology, and when they finally learned it, they still had a choice of its different versions. The independence of the agents cannot be disputed. It manifests itself directly in resistance against imposed ideologies – whether in the form of a riot, or “mobbing” Polish agitators, ridiculing the peasants who had acquired a peasant identity, and finally the national dimorphism.

Modernism, which emphasises the processes of modernization, also presents the role of state institutions and industrialization as too deterministic, but the vision of reality is a changing one, too. It seems to assume that social agents in the conditions of modernity somehow automatically became aware of their nationality. Consequently, modernism does not allow us to understand that the first national ideologies emerged long before industrialisation (Bar Confederation, radical democrats), that the Polish speaking nationalists and modernisers were rejected by the peasants, that the increasing mobility of the wealthy peasants (joining the imperial army) led to their becoming imperialistic rather than nationalistic, that the drive to modernise rural communities drew them against the Jews, but this did not immediately result in the development of a national identity, that the rural elite, participating to the greatest extent in the exchange of goods, was also the most resistant to the idea of nation. A lack of understanding of all these phenomena is due to overlooking the fundamental fact that people are not agents who lack willingness, falling to the pressures of the modernization automatically.

Ethnosymbolism also falls victim to a deterministic view of society, emphasising the role of pre-modern ethnic communities based on a common religion and language. However, the transition between ethnic and national group is not smooth. Taking the example of the village of Żmiąca, it can be shown that the (Polish) nation is shaped not so much on (Polish) ethnic ties but more often against them. In Western Galicia, strong ethnic associations did not lead to a faster, but subsequent formation of the nation. The ethnicity of the Polish-speaking Catholic peasants made it possible that – as “potential” Poles – at the moment of the development of national movements in the nineteenth century, they became the object of interest only to Polish patriots, and not, for example, to Ukrainian ones. Meanwhile, the conflict between Polish patriots and peasants, which continued with varying degrees of severity until the First World War, did not favour taking over the national ideology. Since the wealthy peasants did not trust Polish agitators, and at the same time Polish ideology was the only ideology of national ideology directed at them, they were forced to acquire it relatively lately, with strong resistance. Unlike in Eastern Galicia, where the conflict between Poles and “Russian” peasants could be articulated in the language of Ukrainian national ideology, Polish-speaking, Catholic peasants took on no national ideology. So that is how the fact that the village of Żmiąca was nationalized later than most of East Galician villages – the ethnically Ukrainian ones could be explained (see Himka 1988). However, ethnicity, including religion should therefore not be regarded as the origin of the nation, but as the context of its creation. It should

also be noted that Catholic nationalist ideology was only one of many types of national ideology, and it became dominant after the Second World War.

Finally, constructivism, especially in its extreme form, presents a very proactive vision of reality. The identity of the individual is not infinitely smooth, it cannot freely choose between competing ideologies. Ethnosymbolism and modernism rightly point out the restrictions of liberty. Firstly, competing national ideologies exist and are part of the cultural context, which does not easily fall into the will of individuals. Secondly, Polish-speaking peasants became Poles in the end, or more so – they were not able to become anything else. We should agree with the ethnosymbolists who pay attention to the importance of culture and ethnicity, although they do not entirely identify accurately the causal mechanisms between them and the nation. On the other hand, the modernists are right to indicate that the nation in Poland, traditionally separated from the state, remained in a very strong relationship with the state. Polish nationalists have always acted on the conditions defined by the state. In this sense, the fathers of the Polish people can be both Joseph II and Bolesław Bierut (who shaped the political context), and also Tadeusz Kościuszko, as well as Cardinal Wyszyński (who acted in it).

The basic advantage of an integral theory of the nation is that analysis of social life leaves room for both freedom and determinism, i.e. for accident. Social reality does not fall to the whims of individuals, or the powers of the structures. Thanks to it, national phenomena are dynamic and are still a mystery to the national ideologues, as well as theorists themselves.

Based on a reflective monograph I cannot make far-reaching generalisations as the process of forming a nation ran differently in other areas of Galicia (e.g., on royal estates, in villages closer to towns), differently in parts of Prussia, where the peasants' national identity was formed at least one generation earlier, and differently again in the Russian zone, where the national identity grew at the same time as in Galicia, but – as in the Prussian zone – in generally unfavorable religious and national contexts. In the village of Żmiąca there is also another point of arrival – the dominant ideology in the village is a Polish-Catholic nationalist ideology, whose influence in other regions of the country seem to have been much weaker. However, the history of the village lying in the Island Beskid is not exotic. On the contrary, precisely these kinds of stories make up what is called the history of Poland. When we look closer, we see that only it is thanks to such a small history that a great history can be created.