

MOWA PROFESORA EISENSTADTA

Szanowna Pani Rektor, Drodzy Koledzy, Panie i Panowie,

Jestem ogromnie zaszczycony decyzją Senatu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego przyznania mi honorowego doktoratu. Dziękuję Profesorowi Szackiemu za hojne wyrazy uznania i cieszę się z wyróżnienia przyznanego mi przez uniwersytet miasta, w którym się urodziłem.

Podczas pierwszych dwunastu lat mojego życia w Warszawie wiele dała mi nauka w hebrajsko-polskim gimnazjum Hinuch, które otwarło przede mną szerokie intelektualne i językowe horyzonty i które przygotowało podwaliny mojej przyszłej edukacji w Tel Awiwie i na Hebrajskim Uniwersytecie w Jerozolimie.

Po drugiej wojnie światowej, zakończonej tragicznie eliminacją kwitnącej kultury żydowskiej w Polsce, miałem przywilej poznać w 1949 r. Profesora Ossowskiego. Podziwiałem zarówno jego moralną postawę, odwagę, z jaką propagował wolną myśl w niezmiernie trudnych warunkach, a także wspańnię osiągnięcia naukowe w dziedzinie analizy stosunków klasowych, które przyniosły mu międzynarodowe uznanie. Uważam, że jego praca *Więź społeczna i dziedzictwo krwi* stanowi do dziś kluczowy wkład do problematyki socjologicznej. Chciałbym tu również wspomnieć moje kontakty z innymi wybitnymi socjologami — Janem Szczepańskim i Józefem Chałasińskim — a także bliski związek z Profesorem Leszkiem Kołakowskim, a później z Profesorem Wesołowskim i Profesorem Sztompką. Zanim spotkał mnie obecny zaszczyt, moi polscy koledzy obdarowali mnie honorowym członkostwem Polskiego Towarzystwa Socjologicznego. To wszystko pozwoliło mi na zapoznanie się z szerokim wachlarzem studiów socjologicznych w Polsce, które rozwijały najlepsze tradycje z początków XX wieku.

Chciałbym podzielić się z Państwem kilkoma refleksjami na temat socjologicznej analizy. Nie śmiem jednak męczyć Was moją polszczyzną, która nie jest tak dobra jak siedemdziesiąt lat temu. Mam nadzieję, że mi Pani Rektor — i Państwo — wybaczą, że będę kontynuował po angielsku.

Thank you very much. The short talk or discussion which I want to present before you, does indeed start from Ossowski's book on "więź społeczna" of which, if I may continue for a moment on a more personal note, I still cherish very much the copy which Ossowski sent me in 1949 a few months after we met for the first time in Oslo when the International Sociological Association was founded. I was very much impressed at that time with the book and lately, and not only for this occasion, I looked at it again and, as I said in my rather broken Polish, I still think it is one of the most important books on this subject — and I am very hopeful that it might be also translated into other European languages so as to become much wider known.

What is the importance of this book; and for which problems of contemporary sociology it is important? Concretely, Ossowski's book dealt mostly with the refutation of the racist ideologies which were very very strong in Europe, Germany, but also in other countries in the 1920s and 1930s, and out of which, of course, also the Nazi ideology came out. Ossowski was very critical of the racial schools and he emphasised very strongly that there is no scientific basis for these theories but at the same time he strongly stressed that the constitution of collective identity, of collective memory, is a very important aspect of social life and that it has to be analysed very thoroughly both in its positive and negative aspects; that it should not be neglected, it should be focus on systematic analysis. Unfortunately, for a very long period, before this book and afterwards, the problem of constitutions of collective identities, especially of the primordial components of collective identity has been rather neglected in sociological and historical analysis. It veered between two extremes: one, which has very strong roots, already in the Enlightenment, in some of the early evolutionary schools, certainly in Marxism, which can also be traced in works of many contemporary sociologists — has been to neglect this problem.

Collective identity and especially primordial elements thereof were seen as a survival of old pre-modern times. Survival may be a danger but certainly not a basic constitutive element of social life, especially of modern life and on the whole it was not systematically analyzed. This theme was repeated very strongly in some of the theories to which professor Szacki has referred, in many of the theories of modernisation and of convergence of industrial societies — up to the works of contemporary globalists, of the contemporary ideologues of market liberalism in which these elements are often seen as becoming obsolete. About twenty years ago, if I'm not wrong with the date, a very interesting book was published by an American scholar of Japanese origin, Fukuyama, who declared the end of history. At the end of history these primordial collective identities will on the whole disappear or at last will loose their significance; the world will become more or less an homogenous world with different, maybe local variations but basically it will be ruled by some sort of combination of liberal Enlightenment ideas with freemarket approaches. Well, history did not do Mr. Fukuyama the honour

and the pleasure of disappearing and indeed in his later works he has emphasized the importance of collective identity, especially for the constitution of trust.

Collective identity indeed appeared again and again, and very often in not the very nicest ways, in fundamentalist movements, in ethnic, racial wars, in genocide, and here also sociologists, social scientists and historians could not fully understand this phenomenon — and hence there developed the second approach — the claim that all these constitute some sort of return to barbarism, a recidive of barbarism, something not fully understandable in terms of modernity. The fact that these destructive forces constitute a basic component of modernity was not confronted. But if we look more closely at some of the hints which we can find in Ossowski's work, they point out to very important directions for analysis of constitution of collective identity in modern world — directions which should be worked out more systematically. Some such possibilities have indeed started to be worked out by different scholars.

Among contemporary scholars it is the distinct contribution of Edward Shils to emphasize the importance of the primordial component in the constitution of collective identity. Anthony Smith has undertaken a systematic analysis of ethnic origins of modern nationalism. It is important also to mention one well-known scholar who has really done important preliminary work in this direction, Benedict Anderson in his book on nationalism *Imagined Communities*. In this book he emphasised very strongly that whatever primordial symbols are, they are basically social constructions, basic components of constitution of social life — especially indeed of modern societies. They are neither fixed given hereditary nor survivals — they are continuously reconstructed in different historical settings.

Thus indeed in any period of history when new borders, or new collectivities are constituted, the problem of the primordial component thereof, of its reconstruction, reappears. Today they are very important in the discussions on European Union, in which you are very much interested and involved. As you well know it, these problems emerged with respect to extensions of European Union and are very fully documented today in the discussion about the accession or non-accession of Turkey to European Union. This discussion again bring up the problem of what can be a legitimate, constructive phase for different primordial traditions in a broader, more open, pluralistic way, or does it necessarily imply strong, very exclusivist tendencies, rifts, conflicts, which are seemingly insolvable. But this is not only in Europe. It happens all over the world. The reconstruction of primordialities in potentially constructive open, multifaceted way or in a totalistic exclusivist way constitutes a very great challenge in every period of history. So we have the problem really, which I think Ossowski hinted at, of course, he could only hint at us — let's not forget the book was published in 1939 (to be re-published in 1947) — under what conditions primordial elements and tradition can be reconstructed, not

as something essentialistic, but as a component which is continuously transformed in constructive or destructive ways. It is very interesting to look at this problem from a comparative point of view.

One such interesting comparison which I often make — of course, other comparison can be made — deals with Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Here one of the most fascinating comparisons is that between Germany and the Scandinavian countries. It is a very interesting comparison because many of the elements which we think are peculiar to Germany and explain, as it were, the success of national socialism were also very strong in Scandinavia. In Scandinavia there were very strong Fascist, as well as very strong Communist movements, which threatened the pluralistic constitutional arrangements of the Scandinavian states. We know what happened in Germany, but the Scandinavian societies overcame these negative possibilities. I can not go into a very long analysis of the conditions which explain it, but I want to point out to something which I think is a very important point and which has not been emphasized enough in the literature. One of the amazing things about Scandinavia — Sweden, Denmark and Norway — is that they were able to incorporate into their tradition, into the reservoir of symbols of collective memory both, what one would call rightist and leftist symbols. Let me just give you one or two illustrations. In Germany today it is on the whole politically and academically not politically correct to talk about *Volk*. Germans are very afraid to use this term. They have to discuss it, especially after the unification of Germany, but they know that given the Nazi past they are facing a very difficult problem here. In Scandinavia folk not with a 'v' but with an 'f' — *folkhouse, folkhuset* is something entirely integrated, accepted by the left and by the right alike. It is not a term or symbol which is an object of contestation — its potentially exclusivist components, as those of socialist symbols, are weakened.

Thus comparisons point out to the importance of finding how and in what conditions some societies are able to create a relatively flexible multifaceted common repertoire of symbols, which can be interpreted in different ways by different groups without being conflictual. In this context I shall give you one very short, not adequate — and maybe professor Weiss will be able to elaborate it, I understand his teaching here about Israeli society and he would someday tell you in greater detail — one interesting detail from my country, from Israel. When the declaration of independence had to be prepared in 1948, it had to be decided what to do with somebody called God. It's difficult to talk about Jewish tradition without God. The religious groups wanted, of course, to include God. The secular did not want to include God because they were afraid that it may lead to religious dominance. One man, who later became the president of Israel, Shazar, found a solution. In the declaration God is not mentioned, but what is mentioned is, *Zur Yisrael* in English translation, the *Rock of Israel*. For the religious it is clear that this is God. For the non-religious, you can interpret it in any way you want. So we find here a common symbol interpreted flexibly

by different groups. No such symbol lasts forever. It can be taken up, it can be contested but so long as it is accepted there exists very constructive solutions to the problem of incorporation of primordial component in the symbolic repertoire of respective societies.

My last illustration is connected with one of the most fascinating — and paradoxical case as with India. It's a paradoxical case. First of all, factually, it is the largest democracy in the world, largest simply in terms of numbers — which in itself constitutes a great challenge to the unity of the state. But the paradox is how India continues to be a democracy. Everything there is seemingly working against democracy — India is not yet highly developed, although it moves in this direction. But above all it is full of conflicts, caste, regions, languages, you name it. And already in the 1950s just after the Union of India was created there were predictions that it will very soon desintegrate, I think it would be easy to fill up this room with books and articles which predicted in the 1950s and 1960s the desintegration of the Union of India. The book I use very often as an illustration, was written by a very good, eminent journalist, who still is with us, Selig Harrison, who published a book in the early sixties entitled *India: The Next Dangerous Decades*. He made there two predictions. One: the level of inter-whatever conflict, inter-caste, inter-region, inter-language, you name it, will increase; second: the Union of India will disintegrate — he was not even talking about democracy. The interesting thing is, he was totally right about the first prediction. The level of conflicts increased. But he was totally wrong about the future of the Union of India. India is until today a vibrant, dynamic democracy, maybe not the most liberal democracy in the world, but a very dynamic and open one. How do we explain it? Again, I can not touch here on all the reasons like the federal structure of India, of the British heritage and other factors. But one of the interesting things is: under the first Indian government, even already the independence movement, the Congress under Gandhi, Nehru, promulgated a very flexible ideology or symbolism of collective identity. It was Indian, but it was open, not religiously defined in an exclusivist way. It was not religiously closed. It was very flexible and able to incorporate different types of traditions and there was no attempt at that time to impose any single interpretation. It was a very multifaceted collective identity with which could accomodate different approaches. And it worked, it works till now. So it was very much like in the Scandinavian case, but, of course, in a different concrete way. But, just as I said before when I gave the illustration from Israel and from Scandinavia that no such construction is guaranteed to last forever. So we see today in India many attempts, especially by the extreme, nationalist movements to destroy this multifacetedness and to make it much more totalistic Indian, Hindu. It doesn't work very well. India still resists this tendency but it constitutes a challenge.

So what we can learn from this and many other illustrations which I will not bother you with, is that one of the great challenges in almost every period of

human history — when states, empires, political regimes and frameworks are constructed in a way in which the primordial component of collective identity is reconstituted — and collective identity can not be reconstructed without taking into account some of these primordial elements. But it can be reconstructed in a totalistic exclusivist way, or reconstructed in a multifaceted, more pluralistic way. And the mode of this reconstruction is something of crucial importance basically for the whole future of multiple modernities. Thank you. *Dziękuję bardzo.*

S. N. Eisenstadt

Warszawa, 26 października 2005