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**SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN POSTMODERN SOCIETY.
THE CASE OF POLISH TENSIONS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Abstract:

A conflict is a natural element of social life. Such a thesis has been developed for many years by numerous thinkers. Nevertheless, there have been several social phenomena that oblige us to analyse social conflicts in more depth in the twenty-first century. The article tries to explore new – what means different than in the past - types of conflicts, which however having old roots, at present seem to have different impact on individuals' and global security. The main research questions the article tries to answer are connected with the relation between various conflicts and characteristics of postmodern society. To understand what kinds of conflicts are signs of postmodern society, Polish conflicts have been considered as cases taking into consideration the results of the Polish opinion polls on issues directly connected with the main characteristics of postmodern society.

Key words:

conflict, postmodern society, postmodernity, cultural relativism

Introduction

A conflict is a natural element of social life. Such a thesis has been developed for many years by numerous thinkers. Nevertheless, there have been several social phenomena that oblige us to analyse social conflicts deeper and wider in the twenty-first century. There are various theories that try to analyse and explain what conflict is and why it happens in almost every society. For this consideration a generic framework (Cheldelin, Druckman, Fast 2009: 6) for conflict is analysed, which refers to a three-pillar approach developed by Dennis Sandole (1998). Each type of conflict has its own sources

and dynamics, although those features depend on the following components, present in the social surrounding: culture, legal institutions, structure, identities and particular situations. Such a framework concentrates on the context as a crucial part of conflict analysis. This is why it is valuable to consider some types of conflicts which appear due to specific circumstances. The first one is closely connected with culture and its social and political meanings (Street 1997). Considering a broadly accepted wide definition, culture means a set of beliefs, values and attitudes shared by a particular social grouping. The change of values, value system is due to postmodern society. Since the publication of a book by Samuel Huntington, where he started a discussion on the role of culture in the contemporary global world (Huntington 1994), and later the tragic event on 11th September 2001, and finally the debate about the refugees in Europe in 2015 and 2016, scholars, politicians and even ordinary people have been discussing the impact of culture on people's opinions, attitudes, emotions and behaviours as well as on the idea of cultural diversity and cultural relativism.

Another noticeable conflict nowadays is connected with the extremely increasing role of the media. Mass and so-called social media has been developed greatly since the beginning of the 21st century. Because of new technologies and an easy access to media by the whole society, it plays much more crucial and influential role in the contemporary society than it had ever played in the past. It is not only a channel of transmitting information, today it is also a powerful instrument of shaping people's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes (Antonova 2014). Media has great impact on what people think about and how they think about it (McCombs 1993: 65).

Additional controversy waiting to be analysed in order to better understand social conflicts in the postmodern society is connected with the economy. Last years of the twentieth century have shown that the economy plays the most significant role in the policy making and social and political activities. As Castells suggests there is a link between substantive well-being and macroeconomic variables, such as unemployment and inflation that influence electors' decision-making (Castells 2000: 38). Inglehart points to a different approach to the link between the economy and social attitudes. He says that there is a shift from materialistic to non-materialistic (he calls them postmodernist) values crucial for a society. At present, society of a well-developed state relates economic prosperity and security to the quality of life (Inglehart 1997). Society today is divided into the poor and the rich, into those who live, or seem to live, in a protected world and those who feel threatened most of the time; it is divided into the people who focus on the quality of life and people who dream about simple life. Such reflections can be enriched when we point to the fact that the economy brings to people both prosperity and failure.

This is why economy is an essential root of conflicts in the postmodern society whose members might feel confused over the question whether the economy is the indispensable element of social life or not.

Apart from the prominent role of culture and economy there have been other tensions which are the consequences of natural disasters in the global world (Xu, Wang, Shen, Ouyang, Tu 2016). Such events as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, tsunamis and many others have been always happening in the world. Nowadays, natural disasters cause political and social conflicts due to the severe experience of citizens (Brancati 2007). Because of economic and technological development one may notice conflicts over protection of natural environment. Conflicts also arise in relation to protected species of wildlife (Kovács, Fabók, Kalóczkai, Hansen 2016). There are still conflicts over needs, values, interests, political, cultural, economic, natural or energy sources and many others in the world. Environmental scarcities have caused many violent civil and international conflicts. So far, they were rather typical for developing countries. Today, considering the large number of people in the world, which in the nearest future may reach 9 billion, it is easy to foresee more such problems not only in poor countries, but also in rich ones (Homer-Dixon 1994; Klare 2002).

Concluding, it should be stressed that international conflicts, struggles over leadership in the world and conflicts over political power have been replaced by new types of conflicts which are complex and deeply embedded in individuals' everyday lives. The article tries to analyse new types of conflicts, which however having old roots, at present seem to have different impact on individuals and global security than they had in the past. Analysis of conflicts in postmodern society, taking into consideration conflicts happening in Poland in 21st century, is the main objective of the paper. The article tries to answer the following research questions:

- a. What kinds of conflicts are typical for the first fifteen years of 21st century?
- b. Are conflicts happening in 21st century distinctive of postmodern society?

It is not easy to do research on conflicts. As Daniel Druckman stresses, both aspects, art and science, basic and applied research, scientific (theory) and clinical (practice) work are important in conflict research (Druckman 2005: 3). Numerous books and articles written about that issue focus mostly on typology of conflict, roots of conflicts, conflict resolution process, intervention, etc. Only few try to indicate methods of conflict research. Obviously, this field is a part of the social sciences and can take advantage of their methods, however the complexity and diversity of conflicts require more

precise approaches to them. The most common methods used to study conflicts are ethnographic approach (Druckman 2005: 227) and case-based inquiry (Druckman 2005: 167). To understand what kinds of conflicts are signs of postmodern society, Polish conflicts, reported in media, have been considered as cases taking into consideration the results of opinion polls on issues directly connected with the main characteristics of postmodern society.

Conceptual framework

The terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘postmodernity’ have many different meanings and the fact that they are ‘highly loaded’ makes them hard to define (Bauman 1992). The idea of postmodernity indicates the people’s experience of modern thoughts and conditions. It is *situated in relation to developments and transformation in sociality, culture and communications, technological innovation and economic production, and political life* (Smart 1997: 39). Postmodern society is characterised by co-existence of many different discourses that divide it into two opposite parts: those who perceive differentiation, diversity and relativity as challenging and those who search for one common and socially accepted platform (Cilliers 1998: 114). Postmodern society appeared after modern society and, according to some sociologists, it rejects what modern society stood for. There has been much literature on postmodernism and postmodern society (Lyotard 1979, 1992; Smart 1997). Each thinker has their own perception on postmodern society depending on the assumed theses. Considering many different approaches some characteristics of postmodern society can be pointed out:

- a. Pluralism (Jencks 1977; Whiteley 2012),
- b. Cultural relativism and pluralism (Jencks 1977), which is modern phenomenon (Young 1976) although in the current society it is a key challenge (Tillett 227).
- c. Hyperreality, simulation of reality (Baudrillard 2005)
- d. Permanent changes (Jameson 1996: 212), what Bauman calls a ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000)
- e. Economic and financial power which has replaced political institutions (Bauman 2007)
- f. Risk (Beck 2002) and uncertainty (Bauman 2007)
- g. Society resembling a net rather than a community (Castells 2010, Bauman 2007)
- h. Individualism that has substituted collectivity (Bauman 2007).

The list of postmodern society's main features is definitely not complete. Nevertheless, those mentioned above have been analysed and discussed by many scholars, thinkers and researchers. When exploring main characteristics of postmodern society in more depth one may accept the hypothesis that conflict is implicitly encoded in postmodernity, so contemporary society is rather conflictual not compliant.

For the purpose of this paper the typology of conflicts elaborated by Wnuk-Lipiński (2005: 251-262) is considered, as it takes into account – unintentionally – most of the postmodern society characteristics, especially differentiation due to values systems and ideology. The author specifies the following types of conflicts, as (what might be supposed) symbols of characteristics of postmodern society mentioned above.

1. An axiological conflict on what in a given society is defined as good and bad (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005: 254). One may stress that such a conflict emerges due to pluralism and cultural relativism of the contemporary society. The relations between pluralistic society and conflicts possibilities have been scrutinised broadly in the 1970'. More pluralist societies are more prone to get involved in conflict because there are lines of cleavage absent in less pluralistic societies (Smootha 1975: 69).
2. Conflicts of interests – the most important social conflict because it leads to social changes and is firmly connected with the economy. Nowadays changes are the most representative characteristics of the society in 21st century starting from the simplest - such as conflict over smoking ban in public spaces - to tension over responsibility for economic development.
3. Political conflicts over access to power. Such a conflict in fact is not a new one, however the sources of it are novel. Strong position of financial and economic organisations diminishes the role of politics, which used to be much stronger earlier than nowadays (Coleman 2006: 133).
4. Conflicts of rules of the game about the directions that should be applied in a society. Post-modern society has a problem to define what is a reality and what is not. There has been vast spectrum of tensions starting from the conflict between free access to scientific discovery and intellectual property rights (Bentwich 2010) to the conflicts on policy making (Immergut 1992).
5. Conflicts of different ethnic, national, religious and cultural identities what means that each party has different and irremovable identity. Individualism and more and more important role of the net instead of community are behind such a conflict. A brief survey of the most severe religious conflicts in the whole world reveals how critical

role religion, and at the same time cultural diversity, plays today (Moix 2006). Cultural diversity is not the latest social phenomenon. Although cultural relativism is quite new and, what is more, criticised because some interpreters perceive it as the idea of uncritical acceptance of others' values (Kimmel 2006: 636-637)

6. Conflicts based on different ways of remembering the past, which have resilient connections with identity conflicts, however, their main root is a different interpretation of the same historical facts. There have been many examples of how history becomes the major field for political and other disagreements (Papadakis, Persistianis, Weltz 2006: 6).

The typology of conflicts proposed by Wnuk-Lipiński is not comprehensive enough and it might raise critique. However, it lets us observe a wide spectrum of conflicts in a society, especially a contemporary one, and displays many characteristics typical of the postmodern society.

Axiological conflicts in Poland in 21st century

Axiological conflict can be also called a 'philosophical conflict' - the phrase taken from Millard's book *Polish Politics and Society* - because it raises crucial cognitive dilemmas. Millard observed that several philosophical problems have appeared in Poland since 1989, and they have much wider and deeper implication within the Polish society. One of the most important sources of conflict, which is deeply hidden in people's motives and behaviours, is the atmosphere of uncertainty (Millard 1999). This is why there is a necessity to recognise new values, new cultural and social norms, a new social perspective and how all of them are placed in a contemporary social life. Analysing results of opinion polls of the Polish society one may see the following types of philosophical conflicts in the twenty-first century:

- a. Conflicts between pluralism and monism (Millard 1999: 126). Such a conflict emerged several times in Poland when the society was witnessing the parliamentary discussion on abortion, concordat, death penalty, homosexuals' rights and, quite recently, over the problem of refugees (CBOS 69/2016). Discussions on such crucial matters always engage people's emotions, needs and values. As Burton's theory of conflicts suggests such sources as needs and values generate deep-rooted conflicts that require much time and scrutiny to be resolved within a society (Burton 1990).
- b. Another philosophical clash is the conflict of interests between liberal democrats and conservative nationalists (Millard 1999: 12), which in fact is a conflict over fundamental social values. Such a conflict has lasted

since the very beginning of transformation in Poland. Democracy brought to the Polish society pluralism and the possibilities of choice. What people used to fight for during the communist past e.g. freedom to express opinion, free access to sources of information, is no longer a predicament. Variety of opinions, differentiation of lifestyles, new patterns of behaviour, are now openly expressed by many social groups, not only young generation. It creates tensions between people who have easily adapted to democracy and civil liberty and those who still try to protect conservative values and norms inherited from earlier times. Such a split in the Polish society has been visible since 2005 and it has revealed many deeply hidden fears, anxiety and phobias. Consequently, attitudes of the Polish people towards other nations are worse in 2016 than they used to be earlier (CBOS 53/2016)¹, what might be assumed as a consequence of those worries.

- c. Last but not least, as a result of postmodern times, a philosophical conflict has emerged. It is a dilemma of an individual choice. Nowadays, every individual, not only in Poland, has to make a choice between modernity and tradition. This is a dilemma of whether to protect traditional lifestyle and internalised traditional community values or to accept the challenges of modernity with all their consequences. Such a situation carries benefits and costs. A person who has chosen modernity may succeed in adjusting to the social and economic changes, but at the same time they lose ties with tradition and the past. For those who decide to defend their cultural bonds, every single protected traditional value will be their success. However, avoiding the possibility of benefitting from modernity will mean their loss. Thus, the Polish society is almost divided into two extremely mentally remote parts. The ones referring to the past and traditional Polish cultural values and norms tightly connected with the Catholic religion, history and tradition, and the others rather accepting the 'European values' such as democracy, integration, solidarity, freedom, cultural relativism, openness to change, as well as looking into the future and economic development (Petrilla 2015). As recent empirical research shows, the system of values of Poles demonstrates much greater importance for conservatism than openness to change (Błoński 2015). An intrapersonal conflict which an individual faces – dilemma between the traditional approach against modernist one – is a typical item of postmodern times.

¹ In 2015 the attitude of the Poles to most nationalities included in the survey (CBOS – Public Opinion Research Centre) became worse. See more details: CBOS 53/2016.

Axiological conflicts are not open or hot conflicts, they are hidden and latent, cognitive not behavioural, but they have powerful impact on how people think, make decisions and interact with one another. They also build a new, post-modern society with all its advantages and disadvantages. One may conclude that in Poland axiological conflict is a conflict between tradition and modernity or in other words: ‘traditional modernity’ versus postmodernity.

Conflicts of interests

After the collapse of communism – in political election in 1989 Polish society showed its will and determination for economic changes. Economic reforms were introduced, which created the foundation of a market economy such as privatisation, restructuring state-owned enterprises, new tax laws, the state budget control. Those changes exerted a great influence on the society, but especially on workers who had to find their social setting in a new socio-economic realm. A number of social benefits, characteristic of previously state-owned enterprises, were sharply reduced (e.g. easily available free medical services, cheap holidays for adults, free holidays for children, etc.). Unemployment became a real fact, which people began to fear. Moreover, the changes severely affected their standard of living through limiting wage increases and at the same time increasing the availability of the goods. Hence, the open conflicts between employers and employees, owners and employees appeared. Stronger trade unions’ activity occurred with many forms of protest. This is why strikes as a social phenomenon are not forgotten, but still exist in the Polish public space. Lately, the traditional social group that used to go on strike - the working class - have been joined by others, i.e. nurses in 2016². Such conflicts are not only simple conflicts of interests; they are also conflicts over dignity of a particular pressure group, over its role in the whole society.

Conflicts of interests are not only over different interests; they are additionally conflicts of values and social differentiation. For example, the group of coal miners who was clearly socially defined and consensually accepted as ‘superior’ in the socialist time as well as during 26 years of social and economic changes in Poland, now, when its position is threatened by social and economic changes began in 1989, feels insecure and exploited. Working class solidarity has been threatened by economic conflicts, new norms of the local and regional community, free market economy, individualism and international perspective (EU and globalisation). Lack of security is one of the most important causes

2 Nevertheless, although in June 2016 only nurses from one Polish hospital were on strike, they manifested much wider and systemic problem. The strike was about a deep gap between doctors’ and nurses’ salaries.

of such social conflicts. This is the condition for creation of new ideology, e.g. injustice of present situation and justice of the former one. Globalisation, and all its consequences, is not helpful but rather makes the situation even worse. Such circumstances influence tensions over the protection of traditional values and norms.

In conclusion, it must be stressed that there are several reasons why the new free market economy is creating a vast range of conflicts of interests. The process of socio-economic transition was overlapped with the process of rapid globalisation that generates circumstances, which affect society in general, and attitudes to change. One may notice the following problematic conditions, which are making both the process of democratisation and the process of economic development more difficult. They are: unemployment, number of poorly skilled workers, regional employment imbalance, the existence of pressure groups, decline in real incomes, economic diversity and persisting poverty of many people. Despite various positive conditions in the economy, the Poles still perceive the situation as hostile. This is why, while analysing these conflicts, one must go beyond the economic data and make a cross-cultural investigation. Deeply fixed values from the past, especially high level of egalitarianism, influence social perception that creates new tensions.

As it was mentioned earlier, the economic conflicts occur in two forms as open, hot conflicts which happen between, for example, employers and employees (i.e. strikes), and in a hidden form as tension between groups divided by income and economic status in a society. The first group is well known, discussed, broadly represented in the media. The second group of conflicts over economy is invisible. What is more, regulations introduced in the EU countries are non-conflicting, but they do not solve problems of individual's needs, interests and values. However, analysing public opinion polls of the Polish society one may notice that the most important conflict is a political one. Conflicts between the poor and the rich, the employers and employees are not so irrepresentable as those over political differentiation (CBOS 141/2013).

Political conflicts (conflicts over access to political power)

Political conflicts have accompanied the Polish society since the beginning of the transformation processes. Such conflicts are representative of liberal societies and one may point out many of them in almost every modern society. Every political election creates an atmosphere of such a conflict; every controversial decision connected with values, norms traditions, the past and the future has implicitly encoded tensions. No one is surprised when they hear about a new

disagreement over social, economic or political issue. Traditional political conflicts focus on three opposite value orientations: religious vs. secular, economic left vs. right and materialistic vs. post-materialistic values (Knutsen 1996). Poland is not an exception. Such tensions mostly take a form of stormy debates in the parliament or sometimes in private discussions of citizens.

Nonetheless, one may notice that in Poland the political stage is extremely violent and emotional. Political discussion about Constitutional Court, which has been on-going since December 2015, is an example (CBOS 88/2016). Fortunately, political conflicts in Poland and Europe are a natural element of democracy and they are not hot, but still stirring. Exploring the content of political conflict in Poland in 21st century one may notice manifestation of symbolic violence accomplished through the acts of misrecognition of the opposite political parties and its supporters. As P. Bourdieu says symbolic violence is a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible (Bourdieu 2001: 1-2). Similarly, the Polish political stage is full of symbolic violence used by all political parties.

Conflicts of rules of the game

Conflicts of rules of the game have irregular character, because they are about the rules and regulations that should work in a public life, which quite frequently are very unbalanced and changeable. They have critical significance due to their wide social scope, initiation of social group activities in a political life as well as they frequently lead to principal social changes including a change of social system (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005: 255). The democratic revolution in Central-Eastern countries after 1989 is the characteristic example of such a conflict. Most of the conflicts of rules of the game are clashes between democratic and undemocratic forces.

Considering Poland it should be stressed that such conflicts regularly appear on the political stage and in the public life. Although unconstitutional power is not tolerated by the Polish society, autocratic approach to political solutions sometimes reveals its strength. At present, they are not violent or aggressive conflicts, but they engage strong emotions of committed parties. Conflicts over constitutional changes, discussion about the Constitutional Court, debate about the installation of anti-missile shield in Poland, conflict over the role of public media in the society, tension around the responsibilities of The Institute of National Remembrance, arguments over the use of natural sources, especially forests, and others are the examples. They exist in a democratic state either because of the lack of some legal regulations or due to the badly prepared legislative process. Some political authorities take advantage of such a state of affairs in political games. Emotions are means in the struggle

for political power. The key problem when discussing conflicts of rules of the games is manipulation. Pressure groups, depending on how much influence on the media they have, try to control the public opinion to reach their goals.

In the process of transformation from totalitarian society to democracy such conflicts occurred as a result of processes of liberation, free media existence, open education system and many other regular social phenomena in a democratic state. It is difficult to specify any structural and psycho-cultural indicators, let us assume that conflicts of rules of the game, given as examples, are regular practice in a liberal, democratic society. Although it should be remembered that such conflicts lead to new structures and deep systemic changes.

Conflicts of different identities

Social identity theory suggests that inter-group relations determine all interpersonal behaviour (Tajfel 1981). A person behaves as a representative of a group towards a person from the other group or towards the other group as a whole. In this manner, social identity provides members of a given group with the basis for social differentiation, categorization and comparison. According to their social identity, an individual becomes and feels like a social group member, shares its values, customs, stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes towards other groups, social events and facts.

Political, economic and social changes are also important causes of identity tensions such as ethnic, ideological, religious or regional. Attitudes towards minorities, different ethnic groups, refugees are to a large extent based on stereotypes and past relationships. Today, when Europe tries to solve refugee problem and at the same time has to deal with terrorists' attacks, national, ethnic, religious identity has become one of the most significant difficulty waiting to be worked out as soon as possible. What is more, there are conflicts between different cultural identities; nevertheless, there is a tension between authorities that follow the idea of multiculturalism and the part of the society, which may have difficulty to understand this idea, feeling threatened by terrorists. The problem of multiculturalism in Europe is not new. In fact it started with the end of World War II (Rex 1996). Just after the war many Western European countries searched for unskilled workers and for professional migrants. Today, migrants come to Europe in search for better economic and social circumstances. But the world today is different and multiculturalism, which has never been fully accepted in Europe (Lentil, Titley 2012), is pejoratively perceived by many Europeans.

Religiousness is one of the most important components of Polish identity. An overwhelming majority of Poles (more than 90%) declares as Roman-Catholic, most of them also participate in religious practices (ap. 50%)

once a week (CBOS 26/2015). This characteristic explains strong traditionalism and pro-church attitudes typical for Poles. However, the same report stresses that systematically since 2005 more people declare themselves as unbelievers and those who do not participate in religious practices. Because of such a large number of Catholics in Poland, the religion has never been the root of social, hot conflicts.

Identity is a very complex phenomenon. Considering some factors influencing the identity, Poles can be divided into many identity social groupings. Adding to ethnic, political, religious (to a lesser extent) and ideological differences between people also regional differentiation, the complex identity, easy to cause conflicts, can be received as a result. Conflicts of different identities are usually very intense by reason of cultural values protection and are characterised by strong affection.

Conflicts based on different ways of remembering the past

History has a crucial impact on the social awareness (social identity) of a particular social group. It does not only merely help to build and confirm national identity; history is also a background for political activities. Every political movement when building its ideology looks for public support. In this process it deals with the prejudices, stereotypes, values, judgements and attitudes which are the elements of social awareness and which are the base for the differentiation between groups of people. Historical grievances and memories provide the basis for a national identity, which is a form of social identity. National identity reminds us of factors which suggest that there is a link between current members of a social group and cultural, social, political, religious and national experiences in the past. It serves as a bond between current members of a given group and cultural, social, political, religious and national past experiences. In the face of a significant internal or external confrontation, historical events may serve as a confirmation of a group identity. History stimulates the manner in which an individual and/or a social group recognises and evaluates current events and changes in the social realm.

One of the issues that allow analysing conflicts of different historical memories is the judgement of some historical facts. Conflicts over different ways of remembering the past occur first of all between two nations and two cultures. Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-German and Polish-Russian relationships are the examples. However, the Poles should also become aware of different ways of remembering historical facts. Debate about 'lustration', differentiated interpretations of the opposition's role during the communist time, conflicts over Lech Walesa's role in the communism collapse (CBOS 48/2016), or the tragedy

in Jedwabne (CBOS 120/2001) or Kielce is perceived by different people differently. On the other hand, clashes of opinions about the past are typical characteristics of every society with a long history.

Conclusions

Transformation, modernity, postmodernity and globalization coexist in the contemporary society. Today societies are experiencing a high degree of socio-economic uncertainty unknown in the previous era. Postmodern society which is experiencing pluralism, cultural relativism, hyperreality, permanent changes, economic and financial dominance which is unavoidable, risks and danger, uncertainty, individualism and lack of traditional community belonging, faces many 'hot' and 'cold' conflicts.

Modernisation has brought to people freedom, human rights, free market economy, development, globalisation, new technologies and many other factors perceived sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. The belief in modernisation evoked new approaches – represented by ordinary citizens as well as by thinkers - to interpretation of an individual life and social life in the 21st century. Analysing the content of new types of conflicts which have happened in Poland in new Millennium one may stress that they occurred because society needs to make choices representative for postmodern society. Postmodern society, which means the society after modern society - faces at least four dilemmas. Firstly, there is the necessity to make a choice between the past and the present, between tradition and modernisation. Secondly, society must deal with uncertainty that comes from multiculturalism, tolerance and technological development. Thirdly, free market economy has brought inequalities and redistribution that are both the most important causes of political conflicts (Piketty 2015: 7). Finally, the fourth one has a sociological meaning - it is a choice between conflictual or consensual framework of a new model of the social realm explanation.

Social conflict is not openly revealed, it is deeply submerged in individual's identity and leaves the individual alone searching for a conflict resolution which might help them accustom to a new social reality. The problem of an individual living in postmodern society is their individual identity, which they try to name: Who am I? Where am I going? *The fact that we feel isolated from others and thus, from our own selves, says something about the type of social relations in which we live in the modern world, rather than about our essential nature as human individuals* (Burkitt 1991).

The examples chosen for this paper illustrate that some conflicts that occur in contemporary Poland as the analysed case, happen because the Polish society, after rapid transformation and modernisation is challenged by totally

new phenomena of postmodernity. Pluralism, cultural relativism, changes, risks, uncertainty, symbolic violence and others have strong impact on society split and provoke many conflicts. The open question is whether conflict influences postmodern value system or postmodern society causes conflicts. Proposed data analysis does not allow for final answer for the research questions, it only gives an illustration to the considerable scope of conflicts in postmodern society.

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