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A REAL BRAIN TWISTER, OR, HOW TO OUTLINE THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF NATION BETWEEN THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE YEAR 1939?*

Abstract

Most historians studying the evolution of the concept of nation and national idea in East Central Europe, assume that through the nineteenth century the political meaning was gradually giving place to the ethnic understanding of 'nation'. Without radically questioning this evolution of the meaning, I would like to stress that it is far from obvious. Starting with the Enlightenment, the term and concept of 'nation' were used so widely in the Polish public debates that it is relatively easy to find quotations to support any generalisation. Any decision about choosing some source materials and discarding some others is inevitably grounded in certain methodological and philosophical assumptions. Some assumptions have to be accepted (for otherwise, a historian would not be able to say anything), but we need to be conscious that their choice is, in the last resort, arbitrary.

Key words: conceptual history; concept of nation, political nation, ethnic nation, historical nation, nationality

I

'It is a truth universally acknowledged' (if I may borrow a famous opening line) that the evolution of the idea of 'nation' between the

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The essay is a reworked version of a chapter that was originally published in Polish as *Same problemy: jak nakreślić ewolucję pojęcia narodu od oświecenia do 1939 roku?* in a collective volume dealing with the history of concepts: Maciej Janowski (ed.), *Z dziejów pojęć społeczno-politycznych w Polsce XVIII–XX wieku* (Warszawa, 2019). The volume contains essays by seventeen researchers, including Piotr Kuligowski, Adam Kożuchowski, and Kamil Śmiechowski whose articles, also in a changed version, are presented in the current volume of *APH*.

Enlightenment and the Second World War, at least in East Central
Europe, runs roughly from 'political nation' to 'ethnic nation'.
To put the same story a bit differently (but it remains still the same
story!) – what we have to do with is a politicisation of the ethnic.
The traditional political nation of nobility, defined mainly through
belonging to a legally-defined noble estate transformed itself – in the
process of the growth of modern nationalism – into an ethnic nation,
defined by language and symbols, and in more extreme versions by
'race'. One can relate this story, in its various configurations, not only
on the Polish or Hungarian examples (which are the most obvious,
given the strength of the noble estate in the starting point of the
story, i.e. in the eighteenth century). The Czech case would be equally
fitting, and even the Ukrainian or Lithuanian ones could be taken into
consideration. Followers of Miroslav Hroch may divide the process
into Phases A, B and C, but the essence remains unchanged.

  I do not wish to destroy this narrative. In fact, I endorse it more or
less myself. I believe that historians need specific general guidelines
to order the chaotic material they gather from primary sources –
otherwise, they turn into antiquaries, collecting unconnected 'facts'
and putting them on the shelf, one next to another, often without
logical arrangement. I would like, however, to show – using some very
unrepresentative examples – how problematic any such generalisation
may be. A historian has to accept one or another; but he or she has
to be conscious that every choice is controversial, and that each is
based on assumptions that are far from obvious.

  This goes for any topic a historian may choose, but perhaps more
so for the concept of 'nation' than for most others. Looking at the
fortunes of the concept (or of the idea) of nation throughout the 'long
nineteenth century' – and putting aside the problem of relationship
between concepts and ideas – we are bound to be struck by the
sheer number of references. The question is not just that they are
unmanageable by any individual historian. This could be solved:
either in a traditional way by the collective endeavour, or in a modern
way by quantitative methods. The main problem lies elsewhere:
however broadly (or narrowly) we spread our fishing nets, we end
up with ever more innumerable instances of various meanings of the
concept that interests us – and we have to categorise them somehow
in order be able to put them into any meaningful sequence. The
central element of this categorisation is to discern between more

and less important meanings, i.e. those central to our concept and those peripheral to it. But how to do that? And what are the criteria? These are the fundamental questions. Statistical criteria obviously do not work; various mentions may be of different weight, depending on an infinite number of circumstances. Sometimes this difference in weight is pretty apparent. For example, it is clear that a mention in an essential and widely-circulated journal of opinion 'weighs' more than a mention in a provincial, or very esoteric, publication. In many cases, however, one cannot be so sure.

We are painfully reminded that the very phrase 'the meaning of a concept' in any epoch or language is an unwarranted generalisation. To be sure it is an indispensable one, as without it we would not be able to characterise any period, region, or community; but it is unwarranted nonetheless. Not only do individual people have their own individual languages that differ from one another, and generalisations like 'Polish', 'German', or 'English' are ideal types constructed by researchers, without any exact equivalents in historical reality (there is not a single person who knows the whole 'English' or 'Polish' language as described in dictionaries and grammar handbooks). Even assuming that individuals are conscious of the meaning of the concepts they use (which is obviously not the case), we have an infinite number of individual 'Polish' languages. Should we give priority to great intellectuals who could be supposed to use concepts in a most conscious and orderly way (which they usually don't); or to popular authors who have probably been more successful in popularising their understanding of terms than scientists and philosophers?

Should we turn to encyclopaedias and dictionaries, as Reinhart Koselleck and his German colleagues, or rather to political treaties and debates, as Quentin Skinner, John Pocock and other Cambridge School historians have done? In other words, should we prefer normative texts which intend to teach the readers a 'correct' definition, or should we instead give priority to concepts used in real communicative situations, when their task is to argue some case or dispute with an adversary?

Such questions could be multiplied endlessly. Various researchers and political philosophers give different answers and ground their choices in an array of justifications. The problem, as mentioned, is that all opinions are equally convincing: it is hard to find good reasons to prefer some rather than others. Given such a diverse and numerically

overwhelming primary source material, historians can pick and choose whatever material they like, and according to their choice arrive at whatever conclusions they prefer. This is, I presume, the essence of the long and by necessity inconclusive debate of 'perennialists' and 'modernists' as regards the national question. It is possible and plausible to organise, *bona fide*, the entirety of material in such a way as to demonstrate clearly the modern nature of national consciousness; and it is equally possible and plausible to establish beyond doubt that nations and national consciousness have developed gradually since the Middle Ages. An excellent example is provided by Benedykt Zientara, a leading Polish adversary of the 'modernists', who disputed, among other things, the ideas of the eminent Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs, a supporter of the 'modernity' thesis.[2]

Szűcs was perfectly able to build a coherent model of a non-national Middle Ages. Zientara, in turn, was equally able to challenge this model by offering quotes from primary sources that hinted at the existence of what can be seen as ethnic nationalism already in fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. The problem is not in misquoting, but in selecting, interpreting, and hierarchising the primary sources. The sources that were central for one historian may be considered marginal for his or her adversary. The same can be said on other debates of this type, e.g. the 'perennialist' Anthony D. Smith with the 'modernist' Ernest Gellner.[3]

Even if one takes the shorter period, i.e. between the French Revolution and the Second World War, the problem is similar. Depending on the selection of sources, we may arrive at very different conclusions.

Let us now have a look at some problems connected with the Polish transformations of the concept of 'nation' between the end of the eighteenth century and 1939. The case study may be useful, I hope, for other European (and perhaps extra-European?) cases as well.

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[2] See Jenő Szűcs, 'Nationalität und Nationalbewusstsein im Mittelalter', in *id.*, *Nation und Geschichte. Studien* (Budapest, 1981), 161–244; and other studies in this volume; a review essay of the above book by Benedykt Zientara, 'Korzenie nowoczesnego narodu', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xc, 1 (1983), 184–98.

[3] For a short presentation of their positions, see Anthony D. Smith, 'Opening Statement: Nations and Their Pasts', *Nations and Nationalism*, ii, Part 3 (November 1996), 358–65; Ernest Gellner, 'Reply: Do Nations have Navels?', *ibid.*, 366–70.

II

Historians tend to accept the Enlightenment as a breakthrough moment, and there is no reason to step outside of this line of demarcation. As the first, rough approximation in exploring the problem of nation, let me introduce two pairs of concepts (of course they are not an idea of my own; there is a long history behind them): the oppositions 'ethnic nation' vs 'political nation'; and 'modern nation' vs 'pre-modern nation'. What they actually mean is not important at this point, as this will become clearer soon. By juxtaposing these two oppositions, we arrive at four options, i.e. modern ethnic nation; pre-modern ethnic nation; modern political nation; and pre-modern political nation. We do not know yet whether each of these options is fit for the present analysis, as the categorisation is done *a priori* and on a purely formal basis.

These analytical categories will help us to see the situation at the outset of the period of interest here, i.e. the time of the reign of King Stanislaus Augustus (1764–95). Let us assume then that we have an idea of a 'political pre-modern' nation, that is, merely an estate nation, with the rough approximation being that 'nation equals the nobility estate'. Beside it, there is the idea of a 'political modern' nation, which is, in rough terms, a Jacobinic idea: a nation is the state's residents in their entirety. After the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, the idea became 'romanticised': the 'Jacobinic' nation now covered all the inhabitants of a non-existing country (or, a country that only existed in the hearts), namely the (now defunct) Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth within its 1772 borders. While the change was basically considered to be non-existent for those who never accepted the legitimacy of the partitions, in reality it was decisive as the lack of statehood promoted the awareness element at the expense of the legal aspect. This leads us to a later time though; so now let us return to Stanislaus Augustus's years.

There is also an idea of 'modern ethnic' nation, i.e. that all those who spoke Polish (or who participated in Polish culture or were of Polish ancestry) were Poles, irrespective of their estate affiliation or social position. This idea did not yet exist under Stanislaus Augustus, but its first heralds did appear at that time. What ethnicity is, or was deemed to be, is a separate issue.

This quadripartite concept finally leaves a fourth option – a 'pre--modern ethnic' nation. This option encompasses all the Baroque

considerations on respectability and nobleness of blood, the ancient origin of Poles, and so on. To what degree this way of thinking came into contact with modern ethnic nationalism is a fascinating question – one which is temporarily left unanswered.

As already mentioned, the story changes in the period of Romanticism (which in Poland essentially means after 1830). The stress on a subjective national consciousness is understandable in a situation where the Polish state ceased to exist; any idea of a political nation can only be grounded in the recollection of frontiers as they used to be before the first partition, not actual frontiers. More important perhaps is the 'spiritualisation' of the concept of nation, which will be alluded to later on.

Let us now stop around the mid-nineteenth century and try, before going any further, to identify a series of problems – the questions concerned with the concept of '(the) Polish nation' as it was comprehended by the people of that time; namely:

  1) Did the concept of '(the) Polish nation' imply a group of speakers of one language?
  2) Was it connected to a specified social class?
  3) Was it connected to a specified religion?
  4) Did it cover a specified territory?
  5) Did it refer to a specified political system, or some political whole?
  6) Did it imply a state(hood) dedicated to the nation concerned?
  7) Was it related to a sense of a shared history?

As we respond to these questions, we could position the understanding of 'Polish nation' on our coordinates (i.e. ethnic/political; modern/estate; historical/non-historical). The problem is, the questions are unanswerable. Or rather, each implies an answer like 'yes/no/it depends'. Since the concept of language was not obvious, there is no meaningful answer to question one. As to question two, the issue is blurred owing to the semantic duality of 'noble' as of high birth or exalted rank [*szlachecki*] and 'noble' as possessing, characterised by, or arising from superiority of mind or character or of ideals or morals [*szlachetny*]; a conditional ascription of the petty nobility to the commons by a number of democrats, or an idealisation of nobility's democracy may (though they do not have to) testify to a combination of the 'Polish nation' and the 'nobility' concepts. Question three is a similar case: on the one hand, the association between Polishness and Catholicism often seems obvious (also to scholars). On the

other hand, from today's perspective, we know that Polish Romanti-
cism was religiously heterodox, while throughout the nineteenth
century Rome looked suspiciously upon the Polish national movement
owing to its revolutionary tints. There were, moreover, numerous
other situations – like for instance in the Teschen [Cieszyn] Silesia
and, to an extent, East Prussia, where Polishness was associated
with Lutheranism and Germanness with Catholicism. As to territory
(question four), the issue seems obvious: the 1772 frontier was the
point-of-departure for all Polish political projects, with diverse addi-
tions to the east, west, and north (not so much in the south). But, was
this the frontier of a Polish nation, or of the state? Stefan Witwicki,
an émigré poet and friend of Adam Mickiewicz – and occasionally
a critic of his output – criticised the opening phrase of Mickiewicz's
epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*: "Lithuania, my homeland!", arguing that
Mickiewicz's homeland "is not one or the other piece of Poland,
but Poland entire".[4]

Witwicki opposed using the word 'homeland' [*ojczyzna*] for any
region smaller than the pre-Partition country (which he always calls
'Poland', and never a Commonwealth [*Rzeczpospolita*]). He was afraid
that someone might sometime say, "O Land of Czersk", or, "O Country
of Hajsyn, my homeland!" (which for that matter Czesław Miłosz,
as the author of *Szukanie ojczyzny* [In Search of a Homeland] would
otherwise have nothing against). Witwicki opposes considering Poland
and Lithuania as two separate nations. "That Lithuania used once
to be a separate state is certain; but no less certain is that the old
genuine Lithuania has been absent from this world for long years
now. … It once merged with Poland and subsequently melted itself
within it, and completely vanished in it as a separate nation. … So
ideally was Lithuania united with Poland that subsequently both of
them became one soul and one flesh".[5]

One should not conclude, though, that the concepts of 'Poland'
and 'Lithuania' had as yet no clearly defined meanings at that time.
It instead seems that these dissimilarities were somehow felt, but
there was a problem with their articulation. "Is a Lithuanian at odds
with a Pole over the borders of the Niemen River, and Grodno, and

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[4] Stefan Witwicki, *Wieczory pielgrzyma. Rozmaitości moralne, literackie i polityczne*,
i (Lipsk [Leipzig], 1866³), 42–3.
[5] *Ibid.*, 39–40.

Białystok?"[6] One may ask what Mickiewicz's vision of (the) nation was at the moment he wrote down these words?

As to the political system (question five), the memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was inscribed, in some imprecise manner, in the thinking about the Polish nation, but no specific political system was associated with the Polish national idea – in such a way as, during the twentieth century, 'republic' and 'monarchy' related to French and British patriotism, respectively.

As regards a separate state (question six), the issue is again blurred. Does a personal union constitute a separate state(hood)? Maurycy Mochnacki's critique of the view that the Kingdom of Poland was a separate country before 1830 can be recalled here. On the other hand, it does not seem that such views were common at the time.

With respect to the last question, a 'yes' is potentially the easiest answer. However, with the development of left-oriented movements – above all socialist and peasant ones – the images of the past were growing more diverse.

In further trying to resolve the potential meanings of the concept of nation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we may turn our attention to phrases or idiomatic expressions and syntactic structures in which the term 'nation' appears. Let us, therefore, think what a nation does: what are the verbs that the noun 'nation' is associated with, and the clauses or sentences in which it acts as the subject. Yet this can lead to some disappointment, for it seems that there are no verbs which are not associable with the noun 'nation'. Whenever needed, the nation is treated as an individual organism, or as a social institution; and it appears, though not as frequently, as a mechanism too. Hence, a nation evolves, becomes modernised, develops, becomes dismembered into classes or groups, creates its organs; it wakes up, rejoices or saddens, awaits, expects, feels or senses, desires, fears, and even weaves out of itself various things, ideas, or documents (such as, for instance, Poland's 'March Constitution' of 1921). Moreover, a nation fights for its existence or survival – a phrase that combines the individual and the organic aspect, since both individuals and organisms do so. Finally, a nation lives and dies.

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[6] Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego*, chap. XVIII, in Adam Mickiewicz, *Dzieła. Wydanie Narodowe*, vi, Part 2, ed. by Leon Płoszowski (Warszawa, 1950), 48.

III

Let us furthermore see what nouns nations tend to be contrasted with – not as a simple opposition perhaps, but as an expression of the awareness that we are dealing with concepts whose mutual relation needs, in any case, to be explained.

(i) Nation and state. Let us recall the Witwicki quotation: "Lithuania used once to be a separate state … It once merged with Poland … and completely vanished in it as a separate nation". Quite evidently, within the same paragraph, the notion of 'state' turns into 'nation'. And one may cite an example from fifty years later – the entry 'Państwo' [State] from the *Orgelbrand Encyclopaedia*: "S t a t e is the name for the people, in their entirety, settled-down in a certain, precisely demarcated, space of land, who recognise one shared supreme authority above them, and are associated into one durable moral-and-political organism driven by the collective will of all of them …".[7] Is this indeed a definition of the *state*, or the *nation*?

There are several studies addressing the issue of 'state vs nation'. Here one may mention Stanisław Herburt-Heybowicz's *Zarys pojęć o narodzie* [Concepts of a Nation: General Outline], published in 1901 (but written a few years earlier), as one of the most interesting works in Polish post-Partition political thought dealing with the subject matter. It is an interesting situation: on the one hand, these two concepts are apparently differentiable: even if somebody believes that a state should embrace the people of one nation, this postulate itself proves that he or she sees these concepts as different. On the other, however, in colloquial uses, and even in some texts with systematising ambitions (like the above-quoted encyclopaedic entry), these concepts are manifestly blended together. Historian Władysław Konopczyński in the 1940s was aware of this intermingling and treated it as natural and harmless: "As an object or subject of history, each of 'Russia', 'France', 'Sweden', or 'Germany' signifies the same thing as a nation – that is, not an area, government, or state, but the nation as such, overshadowing in the course of the ages the endeavours of individuals and generations".[8]

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[7] *Encyklopedyja Powszechna S. Orgelbranda*, viii (Warszawa, 1884), 423 (*s.v.* 'Państwo').

[8] Władysław Konopczyński, *Historyka*, ed. by Maciej Janowski (Warszawa, 2015), 135.

(ii) Nation and the Church, and similarly, nationality and religion. The title of a well-known article by Roman Dmowski from 1927, 'Church, Nation and State', is one of the most important instances of such a triad. Probably, however, texts that stress the opposition between 'nation' and 'religion' are more interesting from a semantic point of view. Here is a clear, and, as we shall see, very non-typical, example of such an opposition: Jan Karol Sembrzycki, a noted Masurian activist from East Prussia, remarked in an 1883 private letter: "To me, the national cause stands higher than faith. … I know that people respond adversely to conversions, but if I am to choose between faith and [Polish] nationality, I prefer to stick to this [i.e. nationality] position".[9] There is a paradox here though: the faith which Sembrzycki refers to as a rival to Polish nationality is nothing other than the Catholicism, while the arena is East Prussia, where Polish-speaking Masurians were Lutherans and most of the Catholics, especially the clergy, were German.

(iii) Nation and the people: What is the interdependence between these two concepts? They may mean the same thing; or nation may be a broader concept, encompassing all strata of society; or even (as in the title of Józef Szujski's paper: "The nation's obligations toward the people in respect of education"[10]) the nation may be seen as those educated persons who are conscious of their duties, as opposed to the oppressed people. As we read in an 1839 French-Polish dictionary, *Peuple*, is "a nation, people – population, mob – fry: petty fish designed for propagation – branch stemming from the root; *peuple-roi* – the reigning people; the Roman people; *le petit peuple, le menu peuple, le bas peuple* – people, petty commonalty, mob".[11] '*Les nationaux*' are explained as 'natives' [*krajowcy*], as if the difference between a member of the nation and an inhabitant of the country [*kraj*] was not clear enough in 1839.

The German-Polish dictionary of legal terms, edited by Jan Zarański (1874), defines '*Volksfest*' as a 'people's [*resp.* folk] national festival', as

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[9] 'Jan Karol Sembrzycki to Karol Żółkiewski, Tylża [Tilsit] (22 Apr. 1883)', in Władysław Chojnacki (ed.), *Sprawy Mazur i Warmii w korespondencji Wojciecha Kętrzyńskiego* (Wrocław, 1952), 252.

[10] Józef Szujski, 'O obowiązkach narodu względem ludu w sprawie oświaty', in *id.*, *O fałszywej historii jako mistrzyni fałszywej polityki*, ed. by Henryk Michalak (Warszawa, 1991), 274–83.

[11] *Słownik francusko-polski. Dictionnaire français-polonais* (Berlin, 1839[?]), 754.

if once again there was no difference between people and nation – or as if the German *Volk* bore two meanings. But there is no division into meaning number one and meaning number two, so the first possibility is apparently more plausible. In any case, there is a shared semantic field. If we leave dictionary entries and take a look at source quotations with a stronger ideological load, we will easily see that the most contradictory combinations are possible. Florian Ziemiałkowski, a Galician politician with a democratic background, who grew conservative over time and was a resolute opponent of recognising the Ukrainians [whom he referred to as Ruthenians] as a separate nation, remarked: "In our country, nation does not mean the same as lineage or people. In the logical Polish language, nation has a political meaning and frequently, and justly, takes itself [i.e. stands] for a state. … Ruthenians created various small states, or were part of another state; as such, Ruthenians never were a Ruthenian state, and therefore are not a Nation, in our understanding of the word".[12] This is quite clear: a nation is identical with a state, rather than with a people. One generation passed, and the peasant movement flourished in Galicia. Then Franciszek Bujak, associated with the movement, wrote (in relation to these same Ruthenians/Ukrainians) about the association between the concepts of people and nation in a completely different tone: "In the nineteenth century, the Ruthenians discovered, following the example of the other nations, the actual source of national development – that is, the people".[13]

(iv) Nation and humanity (or, as Eliza Orzeszkowa put it in the title of her book from 1880, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitism"). Apparently the most frequent idea in the then-Polish thought – among the Enlightenment, Romanticist, and Positivist authors – was that there was no contradiction between these two values: "A true cosmopolitan is based upon a fondness for his own country, and admits the spirit of nationality. The one who is not a zealous citizen of his nation, cannot be a friend of humanity. A man who belongs to all countries altogether, and to none of them in particular, is a being alien to the

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[12] Florian Ziemiałkowski, *Pamiętniki,* Part 4: *Rok 1863* (Kraków, 1904), 192; quoted after Michał Jagiełło, *Narody i narodowości. Przewodnik po lekturach,* i (Warszawa, 2010), 55.

[13] Franciszek Bujak, *Galicja,* i: *Kraj. Ludność. Społeczeństwo. Rolnictwo* (Lwów–Warszawa, 1908), 88 ([reprinted:] Rzeszów, 2014).

entire world".[14] Such quotations can be multiplied; the emphasis is at times placed – as in the above citation – on the role of nationality for cosmopolitism and, some other times, conversely on the need for a 'generally human' element (as Bolesław Prus put it) in the patriotic ideology. The disjunction of these two elements became clearly evident in the National Democrats' ideology of national egoism, as well as in consistent Marxists.

(v) Nation and class: as a contradiction, or conversely as a class (whichever one) as an expression of the nation.

(vi) Nation and individuals.

(vii) Nation and other nations. Let us pay attention at this point to just one two-pronged issue: enmity, or collaboration? In other words, what was the role of Machiavellianism in the Polish perception of nation? It might seem that this tradition was marginal in the Polish thought, for a variety of reasons. The strength of the antique tradition, rooted in the Aristotelian idea of the common good and in the neo-stoical idea of virtue, would be expected to weaken the power of Machiavellian ideas. And yet, elements of such thinking were present already in Stanisław Konarski (mid-eighteenth century), although in a soft version: not as 'Machiavellianism' in its popular understanding, but rather as the Enlightenment-based consideration of the problem of how to harness individual human flaws to work for the common good. There is probably no stronger voice against Machiavellianism than Mickiewicz's emigration writings. In parallel, there is a tradition (Ivan Franko, Jan Walc) that sees Mickiewicz as a 'poet of treason'. I think that the awareness of this Machiavellian element, hidden in his own personality, forced Mickiewicz to fight this attitude so strongly in his works. This question is only apparently detached from the question of understanding the concept of nation. It is, essentially, one of the most important questions for understanding the concept's evolution in Polish thought.

(viii) Nation and government. "What each government aims at is the welfare of its nation":[15] so wrote, in 1807, Antoni Gliszczyński,

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[14] 'Duch narodowy i kosmopolityzm', *Orzeł Biały* 1820, iv, 3, 41–3; quoted after Andrzej Zieliński, *Naród i narodowość w polskiej literaturze i publicystyce lat 1815–1831* (Wrocław, 1969), 35.

[15] *Korespondencja w materiach, obraz kraju i narodu polskiego rozjaśniających*, Part 1 (Warszawa, 1807), ed. by Józef K. Szaniawski, 160, letter XXIV Antoni Gliszczyński to Józef K. Szaniawski (12 July 1807).

one of the leading representatives of the 'enlightened liberality', the last generation of the Polish Enlightenment that combined the classical liberal phraseology with etatism – the conviction that state power was the main ally of the 'enlightened liberality'. The opposition of government vs nation remained in force over the entire period of our interest (Konstanty I. Gałczyński, in a satirical poem in early 1939, wrote: "Like a feather, the Government's floating up; the nation, like a leaded chunk…"). But again, the language situation in this respect is far from clear. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was not yet a clear differentiation between nation and state – or, more precisely (as was noted in the initial section), the word 'nation' was frequently used in the sense of the word 'state' today. Consequently, it could be expected that there would be some semantic proximity between the concepts of 'nation' and 'government'. But I am not certain this is the case.

(ix) One of the most interesting problems is the relation between 'nation' and 'nationality'. These concepts have been relatively rarely contrasted against each other. A rare example to the contrary is the Habsburg monarchy, with its legal theory that differentiated between fully developed nations (e.g., Poles) and less developed nationalities (such as Ruthenians/Ukrainians). In the Galician soil, Stanisław Madeyski was the main theoretician of this approach. Michał Jagiełło's extremely interesting book, which (with its modest title *Przewodnik po lekturach* – 'A Guide to the Books-to-Read'), is essentially one of the most important introductions to the subject of this essay, offers an enormously abundant material, together with valuable interpretative suggestions. It is also head-spinning, for the diversity of meanings seemingly prevents the drawing of any line of development or firm conclusions. What is nationality, after all? Two major meanings are perhaps discernible: nationality as a complex of characteristics conditioning the separate existence of a nation (which seems to be an earlier meaning); and, nationality, as opposed to nation, as a group of people or ethnic group: i.e. the Poles are a nation, the Ruthenians a nationality. Less ideologised is the meaning of nationality as a state of belonging to a given nation (as in Cyprian Kamil Norwid: "every decent man – regardless of his nationality"[16]).

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[16] Cyprian K. Norwid, *"Żydy" i mechesy* [1882], see *Internetowy słownik języka Cypriana Norwida* [A Web Dictionary of Cyprian Norwid's Language] *s.v.* 'Narodowość':

Closely connected is the problem of the interdependence between the concept of 'nation' and some other concepts. We have already referred to 'people', 'state', and 'nationality', as well as 'homeland'. For the first three or four decades of the twentieth century, the semantic correlations between the adjectives 'national' and 'nationalist(ic)' (and, perhaps, ethnic [*narodowościowy*]) should be discussed. The relation between nationalism and patriotism would also have to be addressed. All this clearly exceeds the scope of a single essay.

Some of the authors from the period of our interest tried, in one way or another, to set in order the meaning of the concept of nationality. They would repeatedly find that complete chaos prevailed in this respect. In 1891, Stanisław Szczepanowski pondered what the concept 'nationality' might mean, and came to the conclusion that nationality was not identical with tribality (meaning what we would describe today as ethnicity), since the inhabitants of Holstein were close to the English whilst belonging to a nation different than English. Further, he stressed that nationality was not a language, for Englishmen and Americans formed separate nations, whereas Celtic-speaking Welsh were part of the English nation. Nor was it identical with religion, for there were religiously divided nations (Germans, Hungarians) which were cohesive in their patriotism.[17] Szczepanowski offers no solution: nationality – and its growth, fall, or transformations – is/are describable but not explainable.

In his interesting and too little-known study *Naród a państwo jako zagadnienie Polski* [Nation versus State as the Issue for Poland], Olgierd Górka offers exemplary telling quotes from Wojciech Stpiczyński, member and ideologue of the Piłsudski camp, and Stanisław Grabski, a National Democrat, based on which one would infer that the former was a 'nationalist' and the latter, a 'supporter of an 'etatist' ideology. Clearly, these quotes, selected in a deliberately biased manner, testify not to these politicians' real views but to the internal incoherencies in their thought. Górka explains this conceptual chaos by stating that people tend to think in terms of ideas or representations, rather

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https://www.slownikjezykanorwida.uw.edu.pl/index.php?korpus=&idf=2391&haslo=narodowo%C5%9B%C4%87 [Accessed: 10 Feb. 2019].

[17] Stanisław Szczepanowski, 'Walka narodu polskiego o byt', in *id., Idea polska. Wybór pism*, ed. by Stanisław Borzym (Warszawa, 1988), 51–87 (fragment under discussion: 76–8).

than concepts or notions, and whenever writing, they explain the pre-notional or pre-conceptual ideas using a conceptual language – each time in a different way.[18] I do not know whether this is so; I believe that there must be some general conceptual network for one to be able to think about a given subject or matter, i.e. there must be an idea of nation, even if vague, if the 'issue' of nation is to be considered. Yet, similarly to Górka, it seems to me that the problem lies in the vagueness of the thoughts rather than in the unclearness of their expression.

At least some of the astonishing number of meanings can be explained by the fact that in a given text the concept of our interest is not a central element of the doctrine presented by the author. Put differently, the authors use the words as a word or a term, rather than a concept or notion. Such is, apparently, the case with a number of texts appearing throughout the nineteenth century (and perhaps later), where the word 'nation' is used, clearly thoughtlessly, in the sense that it can be reconstructed as 'the inhabitants of a given territory' – meaning any territory chosen by a given author for the purpose of his or her text.

IV

In historiography, situations sometimes happen where the slogan *ad fontes*, so repeatedly proclaimed by diverse currents of renewal of the historical science, is fully legitimate, since a fresh glance into historical records enables one to spot certain, previously neglected, possible interpretative directions. A different situation is no less frequent, though – one that can be described as 'no theory, no history', to follow Werner Sombart's phrase from his polemic against Talcott Parsons. This is a situation where no interpretation at all can be read from the sources without applying a theoretical apparatus of whatever sort. Hence, calls to theorise history have been made by various reformers of historical knowledge no less frequently than calls for a return to the primary sources (sometimes both slogans are used by the same author). The need for theory appears in two cases: when the quantity of sources is too small for them to become 'spontaneously' arranged into a sense-making pattern and thus such pattern has to

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[18] Olgierd Górka, *Naród a państwo jako zagadnienie Polski* (Warszawa, 1937), 43.

be provided from the outside; or when there are too many of them, and therefore we need a guide so as not to get lost in the barrage. When researching the concept of 'nation', we are dealing with the latter phenomenon. The problem is that there are no rules to tell us how to legitimately select a theory which would serve as the basis for a concrete study. If the theory is to be a guardian that ensures the aptness of analysis, the question arises: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*? And there is no answer, for justification or acceptance of a given theory would call for a meta-theory, and so on, and so on, endlessly.

Thus the only thing we can do is present diverse theoretical problems which call for reflection. The results of such reflections might subsequently be used to arrange the enormous lexicographical material reasonably.

Therefore, the following issues arise:

1. Are we interested in casual, or conscious uses? One may legitimately claim that such casual uses are the most important – in line with the assumption that if we want to get to know the foreign pronunciation of a given word, rather than asking a native speaker how s/he would pronounce it, we would rather wait till s/he uses it 'naturally' in a conversation, without focusing on it. However, for research of socio-political language (not language as such), I should think that we can – if not for deep methodological grounds, then at least in order to save ourselves some labour and find some signposts in the overwhelming maze of material – try to separate, in every individual specific case, those spontaneous usages where the author seems to really have some clear meaning in mind from those, where a given concept seems to be used automatically. Then, we could discard this second group. In his consideration of the roles of the 'strata of linguistic sound formations' in a literary work, Roman Ingarden remarks that one cannot learn the sound of the word in a given language through recording "the concrete pronunciation of living people with the use of a gramophone or tape recorder. … What is noted down is a concrete acoustic material which in itself is not a constituent of any language and not the sound of words as linguistic formations". The converse is also the case: those learning a foreign language, Ingarden observes, "are too precisely focused on a concrete vocal material", and thereby cannot understand what is being said to them –

as they "cannot guess what are the words, in specific, that can be uttered in these manifold sounds. Only when they come to disregard concrete differences in the way of speaking and refocus on a certain t y p e of sound … will they begin … to understand their interlocutors".[19] Whether Ingarden was right about phonetics, I am not in a position to judge. But, does this reasoning not refer to the meaning of words, *mutatis mutandis*? If this is so, our excessive knowledge of individual shades of meaning attached to particular words by individual speakers would make the understanding of concepts and studying their history more difficult rather than easier.

2. Perhaps a different limitation should be imposed. Should we not accept that only those texts are of our interest which can be described, in approximation, as primary sources for the history of political thought (treatises, brochures or pamphlets, perhaps also – albeit a disputable matter – parliamentary speeches or legal acts)? Such an approach was taken by Anna Grześkowiak--Krwawicz in her pioneering, and indeed fascinating, study on the political language of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[20] This enabled her to reduce the enormous material and, above all, establish a hierarchy of importance of the texts, thus making a rational analysis possible.

3. Should we not assume that there are diverse 'political languages' and c o n d u c t r e s e a r c h i n t o t h e c o n c e p t o f n a t i o n w i t h i n i n d i v i d u a l l a n g u a g e s ? Such languages would need to be singled out, which is always a more or less an *a priori* action.

4. Should we not accept, outside the source material, some historiosophical theory that would suggest to us the general pattern of historical development? This would obviously mark an intellectual capitulation to some degree, but at the same time, it would give clear indications as to the views worthy of taking into account. A relatively 'mild' theory of this sort (as it does not require powerful metaphysical assumptions) would be

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[19] Roman Ingarden, *O dziele literackim*, transl. Maria Turowicz (Warszawa, 1988), 62–3 (fn. 2). Ingarden's book is available in English as *The Literary Work of Art*, transl. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, ILL, 1973).

[20] Cf. Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Dyskurs polityczny Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów. Pojęcia i idee* (Toruń, 2018).

based on the premise that the history of ideas can somehow be a guide to the history of concepts. It is interesting, and not easy for me to comprehend, why in the history of ideas it is easier to identify specific far-reaching trends than in the history of concepts whilst somewhat mysteriously the phenomenon itself seems indisputable to me. The reason behind this might be that the shift of attention from concepts to ideas pushes to the margin the whole world of concepts that remain outside the ideas and ideologies, retaining within the scope of our attention only those concepts that are 'used' as ideas. Hence, regarding the history of ideas as a guide to the history of concepts would be yet another way to restrict and hierarchize the material under consideration.

5. Do we assume that people basically know what they mean? Anna Wierzbicka has given a very nice – simple and comprehensible to non-experts – definition of meaning: "The meaning of a word can be defined, in most general terms, as something that people 'think' or 'have in mind' whilst using the word".[21] But, d o they have anything in mind? This is a very important point, for if we assume that the answer is yes, we must endeavour to find the concept's meaning whenever we come across the word. If the answer is, 'well, not always', our mind records the words without thinking what stands behind them. As I have said earlier, one might separate the reflective use from an unreflective use (i.e. one in which the speaker has something specific in mind versus one where the intended meaning, if any, is very vague in every utterance). But I am not sure whether this would be practicable.

But maybe the problem is deeper? Possibly, the point is not that we cannot discover the actual semantic evolution of the concept of 'nation', put perhaps that there is no such thing as an 'actual semantic evolution'. If we really have (to use Jan Baudouin de Courtenay's concept) as many Polish languages as there have been speakers of Polish over the last millennium (a side remark: how does this relate to Wittgenstein's noted argument that a language is conceivable only in interactive conditions?), then any hierarchization or ranking is done *a priori*. At the end of the day, it all boils down to individuals – several

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[21] Quoted after Ryszard Tokarski, 'Konotacja a problemy kategoryzacji', *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 3060: *Język a Kultura*, xx (Wrocław, 2008), 145.

million speakers of Polish in the period of our interest, i.e. between 1764 and 1939, each of whom had his or her private linguistic world, and each of which worlds are equal to one another. What we can do is present different theoretical options for the arrangement of conceptual evolution, realising that all of them emphasise some aspects of reality whilst reducing the importance of others. The issue of the authenticity of one of them thus becomes groundless – not just unsolvable, but groundless. If this were so, a historian would have to conclude that the changes in the meaning of the concept of nation are like a Brownian motion – chaotic, unpredictable and unexplainable.

I am sometimes afraid that the only way out is the following: Theoretical works should obviously be read, and the theory behind research into conceptual history is indeed worth considering; but this should be done for the sake of general intellectual culture, without expecting that such books or studies will be helpful in finding an appropriate research procedure. Methodological reflection provides historians with valuable inspiration, but no procedural algorithm. When it comes to the examination, just get acquainted with as many primary sources as you can, keep in mind the relevant theories, and wait until some picture spontaneously appears in your mind. This is, in fact, is what historians usually do anyway, even though they would vow that this is not the case. However, this would mean that an 'atheoretical' approach takes the upper hand. So I still entertain the hope that some procedural model useful in the analysis of the concept of nation can be built; although what sort of a model it would be, I cannot say.

<div align="center">V</div>

Despite the above, I would not like to conclude by pointing only to the difficulties. So let us try to somehow, hypothetically, outline the course of semantic change. Let us assume our story from the period of Romanticism, where we left it a few pages earlier. Romanticism, as has been remarked, did not solve the conceptual problems related to the perception of the concept of nation. Positivism, in turn, endeavoured to do so. It basically had no choice, since the Positivists perceived nation not as a metaphysical entity but a social phenomenon subject to the laws of sociology – then a new science which, with varying degrees of success, tried to replace metaphysics for the Positivists.

In one basic sense, which is perhaps not fully appreciated by historians, there is a continuity between the Romanticist and the Positivist national idea. Essential to this continuity is a universalistic approach. One need only glance at the other East Central European nations in the Positivist time to notice that in many countries of the region, Positivism was a time of accruing social Darwinism and of a peculiar preparation for the later entry of racism. While these elements were also present in Polish culture, the Polish Positivism was basically convinced that 'universal human' ideals dominated over any national ones. A turn in this approach came only in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. To my mind, the strength of a supra-national approach testifies to the power of the Romanticist tradition in Polish culture – even in the then-current paradigm of Positivism, which programmatically opposed the Romantic tradition.

Apart from this one important factor, the image of nation is different in the two periods. Positivists saw it in more historicised terms – which seems astonishing to me since it was the Romanticists, with their love for history, who were particularly sensitive to historical changes in (the) nation (both the phenomenon and the concept). While the 'nation' developed in the Romanticists' vision, it basically strove for its destiny, i.e. 'awakened' from a dream, it "recognised itself in its very-self" (to quote Maurycy Mochnacki) – in other words, it gained an awareness of its identity. Such a development stood for accomplishing the nation's hidden potentialities rather than for a change. In the Positivist thought, a nation develops like any other social institution, going through stages that are basically common to different European (and, possibly, not only European) nations. As Marian Henryk Serejski wrote, the emphasis was placed not on individuality, but rather on subjection to the general laws of social development.[22] If 'nation' was a concept from the domain of social sciences, it required a more clear definition than the Romanticist thought could give. As it seems, the epoch of Positivism saw a reinforcement of the idea of ethnic nation (or, cultural nation – let us leave this point imprecise) at the expense of the earlier idea of political nation. I have no source-based evidence concerning the semantic evolution outlined below; for the time being, let it be a presumption or hypothesis to be checked. It seems to me

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[22] Marian Henryk Serejski, *Naród a państwo w polskiej myśli historycznej* (Warszawa, 1973), 247.

that this has to be so because of the Positivists' refocus on small-scale actions, i.e. on 'organic work'. It was not those who lived within the 1772 borders (this particular aspect was temporarily somehow muted for a time-span of one generation) who were Poles, but those who felt Polishness as their identity. There is a trap here, though. Those who identified themselves as Poles – the intelligentsia, landed gentry, a handful of the bourgeoisie, and some completely exceptional individuals among the peasants: is this really all? Of course not. A mental process was going on – unconsciously, I think – that allowed for including among the Poles the 'still-unconscious' people from the lands regarded as ethnically Polish. But what was the difference between the 'ethnically Polish' lands and those 'ethnically non-Polish'? It was not based on the local intelligentsia being Polish, but on the fact that the local 'masses' spoke Polish and were identifiable as Polish, even if in some unspecified way. In some parts of the Belorussian and Ukrainian lands, the landed gentry and a considerable part of the intelligentsia could be Polish as well, similarly to central Poland; and yet the peasants from central Poland were Polish while those from Ukraine and Byelorussia were not. If this hypothetical direction of semantic change can be confirmed, then we have to do with an interesting phenomenon: the concept, expressed at least until the mid-nineteenth century, that the 'Ruthenian' [*ruski*] language (and even Lithuanian – however weirdly it was out of touch with reality) was a dialect of Polish, was implicitly denied. The 'Masurian' peasants spoke Polish, and so were objectively Poles. If my reconstruction is apt, such an approach does not have to mean that the territorial aspirations were restricted, but it does indeed alter the concept of nation.

And this is probably an explanation of the development of federalist conceptions in Polish thought. They had to come out if there was to be a striving for the preservation of the historical borders whilst at the same time accepting that non-Polish languages existed within the former Commonwealth frontiers. Alternatively to federalisation, Polonisation was on the agenda; but even such a striving assumed the existence of separate nationalities, as it aimed at something other than deeming the Ukrainians, or any of the other ethnic minorities, simply unconscious Poles. If Roman Dmowski, in his *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka* [Thoughts of a Modern Pole], or the other nationalist activists postulated that the ethnic minorities (save for the Jews) be Polonised, they thereby implicitly assumed that the Polonisation of the Ruthenian peasants

in Eastern Galicia was something different than raising the national awareness among the 'Masurian' (as it was called then) peasants in Western Galicia. The latter group was part of these activists' idea of 'nation', the former was not, or at least not entirely.

Did any fundamental changes take place in the interwar period? On the one hand, it seems that there were none: the chaos continued, and similarly as in the preceding period, it would be easy to find sources attesting to any of the proffered meanings of 'nation'. On the other hand, however, I would risk the presumption that two parallel processes of semantic evolution of the concept in question occurred during the Interbellum.

The first was disambiguation, never completed but more considerable than before. Somehow slurring over the fact that a third of the Polish Republic's population were members of ethnic/national minorities, the Polish intelligentsia apparently accepted the division of the world into nations as a natural thing. In 1917, Józef Ujejski proposed a quasi-biological taxonomy, which was perhaps not endorsed by hardly anybody without a reservation but which, I believe, established a direction in popular thinking. He wrote:

> Is nationalism really, as a feeling and incentive of action, an essential characteristic of human nature, one of its downright primordial instincts? Everything speaks in favour of this statement. … Humanity is divisible, according to various psychophysical properties, into races, which are in turn divisible into strains, which are divisible into nations, and nations into tribes. Accordingly, the human instinct of preservation as such can be classified, or rather gradated, into the human instinct of preservation of whole humankind, the instinct of preservation of the race, strain, species, or nation, and then the family, and lastly, the individual one.[23]

One example of such disambiguation of concepts across political views is the quite similar definition of nation as a basic category in historical research, as given in the textbooks on the theory and methodology of historical research penned by Marceli Handelsman and Władysław Konopczyński. Both scholars belonged to the same generation and shared the background of Warsaw intellectual circles, but were quite distant from each other as far as their worldviews were concerned (Konopczyński was a moderate National Democrat, Handelsman –

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[23] [Józef Ujejski], *Nacjonalizm jako zagadnienie etyczne* (Kraków, 1917[?]), 2–3.

a liberal 'Pilsudskiite'). Handelsman pointed to "investigation into the life of a nation in its development" as "the most general task for history as a science",[24] whereas Konopczyński described the nation as "the most durable and most continuous of the historic assemblies", constituting "both the subject and the object of history".[25]

The other trend was an ideological appropriation of the concept of nation by the so-called 'national movement', i.e. the nationalist political camp. An exponent of the latter, Władysław Konopczyński explained that: "When the parties standing on the ground of the all-Polish idea use … the adjective 'national' [*narodowy*] (e.g., national bloc, an assembly of national formations and factions), the opponents of various shades call it boastfulness (as if the other parties were not national!). And yet there is no vain--gloriousness here: there is only an objective statement of a directorial idea, similarly as the name 'peasant activist' only expresses that he finds the common folk dearer than the nation".[26]

Rather than an altered lexical or linguistic term, this points to a semantic surplus associating the concept of nation with the (broadly understood) National Democracy camp. That the 1935 April Constitution of Poland never mentions 'nation' is a striking example of this attitude – as if the *Sanacja* camp had defaulted any attempt to compete with the National Democrats in this particular field. (The name 'Camp of National Unity' testifies, in turn, to an opposite trend within the *Sanacja* camp – namely competing against the National Democrats over the concept of nation.)

These two tendencies, i.e. the popularisation of certain stereotypical views on nation on the one hand, and combination of the idea of nation with one specified political option on the other, seem mutually contradictory. How can these two processes take place in parallel? Well, it seems that they can – not only because history is full of parallel processes with opposite vectors, but because such tendencies are not necessarily contradictory. It seems that the intelligentsia, as a whole, intuitively adopted the perception of the National Democrats as above-

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[24] Marceli Handelsman, *Historyka*, ed. by Piotr Węcowski (Warszawa, 2010), 9.

[25] Konopczyński, *Historyka*, 17.

[26] Władysław Konopczyński, 'Partyjność a bezpartyjność z punktu widzenia etyki' [1929?], in *id., O wartość naszej spuścizny dziejowej. Wybór pism*, ed. by Piotr Biliński (Kraków, 2009), 388–405 (quoted: 394).

-described; at the same time, however, the ruling *Sanacja* noticed the process and came to the conclusion that instead of hopelessly fighting it, other concepts, such as 'state', should be invested in instead. One example is the aforementioned book by Olgierd Górka, where the postulate of toleration towards ethnic minorities is perceived as a consequence of the assumption that Poland was a nation-state. Another example is the proclamation delivered by Ignacy Mościcki, President of the Republic of Poland, on 1 September 1939, opening with the words: 'Citizens of the Republic' – completely in the spirit of French republicanism. The following sentence features 'the Polish nation', as if it were identical with the 'citizens': "I am addressing all the citizens of the State, in the deep conviction that the entire Nation …", etc.[27] This almost imperceptible passage from 'the citizens of the State' to 'the nation' testifies, I believe, to the identification of these two concepts as the same; the opening invocation to 'Citizens' attests that the speaker endeavoured to omit the concept of nation in the key moments of the text.

In sum, we can see and sketch out the following picture: The Romanticist authors elevated, or ennobled, the concept of nation, without providing any semantic precision that would have contributed to its understanding. The Positivists added a scientific tint to the concept, thus reinforcing its ethnic and cultural perception. Following a series of modifications, this perception turned in the early twenti-eth century into an idea of the modern ethnic nation. This concept remained prevalent, to a varying extent, throughout the interwar period. Importantly, and interestingly, both adherents and opponents of nationalist ideas accepted it (the above-quoted Ujejski polemicized against the National Democratic conception of national egoism). At the same time, 'nation' gained a rightist-cum-nationalistic connotation, and, consequently, followers of other ideological currents found the use of the concept somewhat troublesome, but did not entirely quit using it. On the other hand, 'nationality' [*narodowość*] marked, with increasing unambiguousness, one of three things: either a complex of traits identifiable with the members of a given nation (or, with such a nation as a whole); or an ethnic group; or one's membership in a nation.

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[27] For the wording of the proclamation, see https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Or%C4%99dzie_Prezydenta_RP_Ignacego_Mo%C5%9Bcickiego_z_1_wrze%C5%9Bnia_1939_r. [Accessed: 11 Feb. 2019].

Perhaps the changes in the concept of 'nation' are not a Brownian motion after all – maybe something could be said for the direction of development presented in the first sentences of this paper. Maybe meanings are concentrated around some centres, though such concentration may be highly relative and not apparent. I would like to see it this way, but there is no certainty.

transl. Tristan Korecki

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