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Identity Based on Subjectivity: The Usefulness of Feliks Koneczny's Statements for Research on the Contemporary Clash of Civilizations

ABSTRACT

In Latin civilization, subjectivity and the associated identity are integral components of the human being. In this area, one person can fully update their potentialities – as Koneczny says. Other civilizations perceive the individual being differently; rather as an object than as a subject. These differences are particularly important in the face of the growing number of migrants coming to Europe from the Middle East and Africa.

KEYWORDS: identity, subjectivity, multiculti, Feliks Koneczny, Arabic civilization, Latin civilization, migration crisis

STRESZCZENIE

Tożsamość oparta na podmiotowości. Przydatność tez Feliksa Konecznego do badań nad współczesnym zderzeniem cywilizacji

W obrębie cywilizacji łacińskiej podmiotowość oraz związana z nią tożsamość są integralnymi składowymi osoby ludzkiej. Dzięki temu, zdaniem Feliksa Konecznego, człowiek może w pełni aktualizować swoje potencjalności. Pozostałym analizowanym cywilizacjom autor historiozoficznej teorii przypisuje przedmiotowe traktowanie jednostki. Rozróżnienia te dają dodatkowe narzędzia interpretacji zjawisk kulturowych i nabierają szczególnego znaczenia w obliczu rosnącej liczby migrantów przybywających do Europy z państw Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: tożsamość, podmiotowość, multi-kulti, Feliks Koneczny, cywilizacja arabska, cywilizacja łacińska, kryzys migracyjny

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In the face of the decreasing population of Europe and a simultaneous influx of people from other parts of the world to the continent, issues related to cultural identity and the consequences of accepting foreign patterns are increasingly being raised. Openness to otherness may result in disintegration, as Leszek Kołakowski points out. In his opinion, the confrontation of various visions of reality and of a human being results in criticism not only towards foreign elements, but also towards native ones. In this way, some distance to one's own culture and cultural identity is born (Hańderek, 2015). The concept of identity (cultural identity as well) is closely related to the issue of subjectivity. It can even be argued that it grows out of it. The perception of subjectivity is very different in different regions of the world, which was indirectly pointed out by Feliks Koneczny, who is, incidentally, often quoted in the context of refugee and migration problems. Following the course of thinking of this Polish philosopher of history, one should assume that only "Latin civilization" valorizes a person as a subject. Adopting such an attitude would justify the fear of foreign cultural influences – all the more so because, according to certain representatives of the academic community, Europe is currently experiencing a serious civilizational crisis over a disruption of the system of values and norms (Szabelski, 2016). The resulting void can easily be filled, for example, by Islam, a phenomenon which is already happening in Western Europe, e.g. in Germany. At the same time, the proportion of the Old Continent's population among the global population is significantly decreasing, and a significant increase in the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is forecast. Among the causes of this state of affairs, some mention the use of demographics as a kind of weapon ("*broń D*"). There are voices suggesting that Muslim communities, for example, may deliberately act in this way. One of the rationales is the higher fertility rates observed within these communities as compared to the overall fertility rate of the European continent (Repetowicz, 2018). Unruly birth rates are also one of the causes of migration. They lead to changes in the proportion of religious communities, and in consequence – to the movement of population surpluses, and to conflicts. Among the proposed theoretical analyses of the current global situation, the theory of the multiplicity of civilizations by Feliks Koneczny is cited more and more often. The critical reflection on its validity has indicated a number of problematic issues that require deeper analysis. Is it really only Latin civilization that sanctions the subjectivity of a human being? Is personalism, as understood in the Latin world, really be threatened? Is the use of Koneczny's theses justified in this current cultural and geopolitical situation? The rest of the text will focus on these questions.

The issue of identity enjoys unflagging interest in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. In each of these approaches, the answer to

the question, “Who am I?” sounds different. It is worth considering, however, why and in which circumstances we ask this question at all. According to Zygmunt Bauman, reflection on identity arises in a situation of danger or confrontation. One can compare it to a besieged fortress (Bauman, 1993). He also states that “identity is not given as a gift or as an irrevocable sentence; it is something that is constructed and that can (at least in principle) be constructed in various ways” (Bauman, 1993, p. 8). We create ourselves, incorporating various content into our own identity. One trend that can now be observed is the abandonment of traditional values in favor of the lifestyle promoted in the media, which is largely based on consumerism and unification (Bauman, 2014). Thus, identity is no longer a uniform phenomenon, uniquely bound with the place of origin. Modern people seem to be first of all citizens of the world or of Europe, and only secondarily residents of a specific country. This is how the “identity for rent” is born. This entails a lack of the sense of belonging to a specific place and the impression that you are “at home” everywhere. Another phenomenon is “insert identity.” This is based on constant becoming; including new elements from every available source (e.g. one’s own experiences, but also the media) and rejecting other, previously assimilated elements (Bauman, 2014). Since identity is such an unstable and changeable construct, including elements from foreign cultures and civilizations into it should not be difficult or problematic. Similarly, neither should a rejection of one’s own culture patterns. Consequently, it would be possible to consider a modification of the identity of European residents and a European approach to subjectivity under the influence of constantly inflowing foreign patterns.

Identity is inseparably connected with subjectivity. One can even say, following Charles Taylor, that subjectivity determines identity (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, 2014). Speaking of identity from a subjective point of view, one should distinguish its cultural, religious, social, territorial, and national variety. They are shaped by both similarities to the representatives of one’s own group and separateness from others. All of these elements are included in the definition of identity as a whole

structure of the subject, which he refers to himself, but ... it is an integrated system in accordance with some principle. Elements of identity structure are derived from identification with other people, groups, [and] selected social structures ... they are also derived from such cultural categories as values, norms, and even artifacts. (Boksański, 1999, p. 4)

In turn, subjectivity itself means that “a person is a being capable of subjectifying (emerging from oneself) autonomous actions, capable of self-organizing various types of activities” (Maryniarczyk, 2014). Tadeusz

Tomaszewski defines the area of subjectivity even more broadly (in a psychological perspective), claiming that it includes a specific identity, individuality, and separateness from others, and is largely independent management of one's own activities (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, 2014). In conclusion, a person is an individual who is obliged to update their potentialities, and who has their own unique identity.

A phenomenon that is parallel to the aforementioned crisis of European identity is the increase in the number of communities representing non-European civilizations on the Old Continent. We can observe cases where minorities are gradually beginning to dominate the local population.¹ In recent years, the migration crisis has raised concerns about the potential escalation of such events. Since 2015, no solution has been found that would be accepted by all European Union countries. Emotional media messages and the involvement of politicians using the topic to achieve their own goals seem to strongly influence the social perception of the problem. The increased influx of people from regions affected by civil war raises the fear of many Europeans. Difficulties with dislocation and the inability to meet the basic needs of people staying in refugee facilities – e.g., insufficient food and drink, lack of cleaning products, a large number of births, social mechanisms that are incompatible with the conditions, and cultural diversity – are just some of the problems. These circumstances are accompanied by growing concerns about the potential Islamization of Europe, which would result in the collapse of Latin civilization and all its fundamental values. One of those values is a subjectivity-based attitude towards the individual, which, in Koneczny's theory, should be traced to the concept of personalism. The Polish philosopher of history argues that

man consists of body and soul... all human knowledge will not provide a better and more accurate anchoring. Everything, whatever is human and has anything to do with man, everything has an external and internal side (form and content). The inner, spiritual side consists of the concepts of good (morality) and truth (natural and supernatural); on the other hand, the corporeal, external side consists of the matters of health and well-being; moreover, there is the concept of beauty, common to body and soul, which is a great bridge from the outside to the inside. (Koneczny, 2002, p. 16)

1 One example is Frankfurt am Main, where the German population makes up 48.8% of the city's population. The remaining 51.2% consists of minorities, mainly Turkish (12.9% of immigrants), Croatian (7.3%), and Italian (7.2%). In turn, in Berlin Kreuzberg, a district inhabited mainly by Muslim immigrants, is commonly referred to as "Little Istanbul" (Matros, 2012).

According to Koneczny, humans are characterized by rationality and irreducibility, which are found in aspects of life such as knowledge, love, freedom, responsibility, subjectivity of the law, sovereignty, and religious dignity. According to this approach, personal life consists in actualizing those potentialities (Kiereś, 2000). According to the author of this theory, it is only possible to fully accomplish this in Latin civilization.² Koneczny defines it as a personalist civilization, i.e., a civilization in which the individual has the highest value. It seems that this approach is compatible with the previously mentioned approaches to subjectivity and identity. On the basis of this similarity, an attempt can be made to reformulate Koneczny's theories in the following way: only in Latin civilization is the individual a subject and able to base his/her identity on this subjectivity.

Developing the interpretation of Koneczny's thought as outlined above, one should recognize that the level of subjectivity of an individual and the way they function in society result directly from the civilization to which they belong.

Civilization is the sum of everything that is common to a given branch of humanity, and at the same time the sum of all that differentiates this branch from others (Koneczny, 2015, p. 204).

Koneczny recognizes a number of factors which differentiate civilizations into two categories. These are certain general, abstract concepts. The Polish philosopher writes about them as follows:

there are six such dichotomies in the system of collective life: personalism or collective life; apriorism or aposterorism; historicism or negation of everything; unity in diversity or uniformity; organism or mechanism; legal dualism or monism.... They always occur together to form this or that series of features. Based on the first term mentioned, it is appropriate to call them personalistic or collectivist. (Koneczny, 1997b, p. 141)

In other words, according to him, there are two types of civilizations: collectivist and personalistic. The former includes almost all civilizations identified by Koneczny: Turanian, Jewish, Brahmin, Arabic, Chinese, and Byzantine. Only Latin civilization is attributed the term personalistic. Koneczny sees in it the affirmation of the human being and the supremacy

2 Koneczny very clearly values Latin civilization. He believes that it is better in every respect than the others. As Leszek Gawor writes, "due to this kind of Eurocentrism, non-European civilizations are underestimated and even simply depreciated. By contrast, Latin civilization becomes a measure of progress and development; it plays the role of a guide of humanity on its way through history in the thought of the Polish scholar" (Gawor, 2005, p. 87).

of spiritual forces. In order to better understand the diversity of these two types of civilization, one should look at dichotomies laid out by Koneczny:

1. Personalism or collectivism

A personalistic civilization, in Koneczny's view, is a set of individuals responsible for their own decisions and fate. Here, people are integral personal beings, not just a component of a larger whole. Hence, a society of people guarantees diverse attitudes, behavior, and personalities among its members. On the other hand, Koneczny believes that collectivist civilizations are made up of uniform, homogeneous communities. Passivity, apathy, coercion, and lack of interest in public affairs is typical of them.

2. Organism or mechanism

Koneczny claims that organic communities are shaped in personalist civilizations, while collectivist civilizations are associated with mechanical communities. Organism understood in this way develops on the basis of history, collective experience, and a common pursuit of goals that is consistent with the beliefs of the general public. It is self-sufficient, i.e., it can solve crises on its own and return to balance. Things are different in the case of collectivist civilizations: the mechanism of other civilizations manifests in an artificiality and formalization of interpersonal relationships. According to this approach, they are unable to avert the danger arising from a crisis on their own. According to Koneczny, external intervention is necessary. All aspects of life are centrally managed in such communities.

3. Legal monism or dualism

The state apparatus may rely entirely on the monism of private or public law, but in Latin civilization they have relied on legal dualism from the outset... Legal monism is combined with mechanisms in social and state life; dualism promotes organisms (Koneczny, 1997a, p. 20).

According to Koneczny, this is because monism, which is linked with the use of one type of law, results in slavery and despotism. However, the duality of private and public law allows society to dominate over the state, the family over the community, and, finally, an individual over groups (Skrzydlewski, 2009).

In the approach of the Polish historian, what distinguishes a personalist civilization from a collectivist one is the aggregate pentagon of being, the tri-law, the presence of ethics in the life of the community, the valorization of spiritual (not vital) forces, the monogamous nature of marriage, and the presence of Catholic ethics in public and private life (Brzuzy, 2015). The quotes from the Polish scholar can be reduced to the following statement: Koneczny unambiguously presents Latin civilization as the only form of social life where the individual dominates over the collective.

It is worth pointing to one of the arguments on which Koneczny builds his thesis, i.e., monogamy, which, according to the researcher, stems from the presence of Catholic ethics in Latin civilization. As the historian notes, it strengthens the subjectivity and dignity of a woman.

It is well-known that this ... gave her rights, and finally moral and property equality. Monogamy makes a woman a creative factor in collective life, and doubles the number of civilization workers. It is less well-known that monogamy is the basis of personal property, that these two concepts are inextricably linked (Koneczny, 1938, p. 14).

The other three postulates of Catholicism indicated by Koneczny are “striving for the abolition of slavery, abolition of revenge and transfer of revenge to public justice, and, finally, the independence of the Church from state government” (Koneczny, 2015, p. 269). In addition, Latin civilization is the only one, in Koneczny’s opinion, to possess a historical awareness. In other words, it draws conclusions based on past experience and takes them into account when formulating and achieving goals (Szabelski, 2016, p. 31). In this way, according to this theory, social awareness and the perception of tradition are formed.

Koneczny contrasts Latin civilization with Arabic civilization, which embodies the collectivist type. He believes the differences are visible, for example, in polygamy. The consequence of polygamy is to severely reduce women’s freedom and subjectivity. They have no right to intellectual development and their children struggle with problems arising from the law of succession, which results in poverty that affects the entire community, according to Koneczny. He contends that only a man can grant a divorce and that it can lead to the stoning of a wife if she is accused of cheating. In this way, by means of terror, the family law set out by the Qur’an is respected – according to the philosopher/historian. The holy book of Islam and Islam itself, according to his theory, are very important elements of Arabic civilization, yet Koneczny does not recognize this book as sacred.

Koneczny also noted how freedom is understood in Arabic civilization. This aspect is important in his reasoning, as subjectivity and personalism

are associated with responsible, independent management of one's own behavior, which are only possible if the autonomy of the individual is maintained. In Islam's theology, there are two currents that interpret this matter differently. The Kadarites (and later Mutazylites) postulated man's freedom and his full responsibility for the acts he commits. This approach also implies the existence of God's justice. The Jabrites, however, rejected free will. In classical theology, a specific compromise was adopted in Al-Ashari's teaching. According to him, there is determinism arising from God's will, but at the same time man has a choice. "God is the actual perpetrator of human deeds, but there is a responsible human participation in the deeds, because man acquires them for himself" (Gondek, 1998). It is a certain, perhaps limited, form of freedom. However, we should be keep in mind that we are talking only about theological discourse, which is not necessarily reflected in the beliefs of the followers of Islam. Nevertheless, the literature shows Muslims' attachment to a passive attitude resulting from their belief in destiny and the inability to modify reality: only God has that ability (Gondek, 1998). These views deprive the individual of the responsibility that is inextricably linked to free will and independent decision-making.

The notion of freedom is inseparably connected with dichotomy when dividing people into free men and slaves, Koneczny points out. According to the philosopher of history, slave systems reduce one's existence to finite goods and take from an individual private property as well as the possibility of intellectual development. Based on ancient sources, a free man should be seen as one who participates in public life and influences the fate of his community. The slave, in Koneczny's opinion, "was neither an exemplary nor a causal nor an intentional being" (Skrzydlewski, 2000). Rather, he was a kind of tool in the hands of his master.

He is more a caricature of man than man himself, because he does not have what is characteristic of man – meaning a spiritual, rational, virtuous life, manifested in the ability to distinguish between good and evil, justice from injustice, and truth from falsehood (Skrzydlewski, 2000, p. 227).

Aristotle, on the other hand, claims that the slave does not have reason, which is a key element that constitutes humanity. The result is an inability to direct one's own actions and a "lack of harmony in sensual and lustful realms" (Skrzydlewski, 2000, p. 228). An individual who is a slave, according to the Greek philosopher, is reduced to being the property of others. Meanwhile, objectification

is clearly in contradiction to the internal experience of man, by virtue of which man recognizes himself and his action as always being above,

open to even greater good than what is currently the motive of his action (Skrzydlewski, 2000, p. 230).

In Koneczny's view, a man who is a slave is only an element of a larger whole. He loses freedom, dignity, subjectivity, and – consequently – the purpose of life and the sense of life's meaning. Following this way of thinking, free communities should be regarded as the opposite of this state of affairs (Skrzydlewski, 2000). When analyzing the theory of Koneczny, it is necessary to juxtapose Arabic civilization with a slave community. Identifying them as the same leads to the conclusion that in Arabic civilization, the individual is not a subject – so Koneczny claims.

According to Koneczny's theses, Latin civilization valorizes spirituality and puts the person above the group. In turn, Arabic civilization consists of a crowd of uniform, indistinguishable individuals. According to the Polish historian, Latin civilization unites free communities, while Arabic civilization incorporates slave communities. In reference to the picture of reality sketched this way, one should ask the question that was asked at the beginning of the article: are Koneczny's theses valid today? Such a doubt cannot be answered without being fully aware of the allegations directed against the Krakowian researcher. One concern is the explicit glorification of Latin civilization. Every other civilization is assessed poorly by Koneczny, and all errors or mistakes appearing in Latin civilization result from the harmful influence of the others, in his opinion. According to Koneczny, Latin civilization is a determinant of progress and humanism (Gawor, 2005). Another matter is the total separateness of the civilizations he described. They are separate, highly diverse entities. This perception of reality can be contrasted with the thesis about the interconnectedness of civilizations that occurs in space and time. The intensity of their characteristics varies with their location. In turn, the fact that they originated at different times means that subsequent civilizations can be treated as the result of a convergence or divergence of other civilizations. Koneczny is also accused of anachronism in assessing Latin civilization. It should be noted that he attributes features (such as citizenship and nationality) to this civilization, which were not seen as culture-forming factors before the end of the 18th century (Leszczak, 2011). It is also worth bearing in mind the dependence of Koneczny's theory on the realities in which it originates. Perhaps the professor from Krakow had not only a scholarly objective but an ideological one as well.

In a sense, this explains the general glorification of Latin civilization, recognized by the author as the best of the methods for a system of collective life. The then Polish society and the ruling class turning towards

values considered typically Latin was a factor that stimulated the sense of patriotism and enhanced national identity in difficult times. (Niewęglowski, 2008)

Also, the methodology used by Koneczny raises doubts, expressed in allegations of inconsistency and heedlessness. Hilckman (1991) argues that Koneczny essentially reaches for more and more facts and only then interprets them, which means his method is inductive and a posteriori. Koneczny perceives and describes the world through the prism of Catholic philosophy and neo-Thomistic anthropology, which certainly makes him biased. Another problematic issue is the diversity of civilizations in the context of their genesis. These are impenetrable structures, however their numbers must have grown and commensurability must have been produced in the past (Niewęglowski, 2008).

These examples of criticism of Koneczny's ideas, although they raise important and even fundamental issues, do not, in my opinion, fully discredit his theory. One of the most important problems addressed by Koneczny – though perhaps imperfectly – is the diversity of the world's population. Despite the progress of globalization, humanity has not yet been fully unified. There are communities which are strongly tied with their own tradition and culture. Undoubtedly, these include representatives of Arabic civilization, which Koneczny describes in his classification. The ethics originating from the Qur'an has become deeply embedded into the life of this community and, despite some exceptions, are a hallmark. At the same time, it is incompatible with the ethics underlying Latin civilization. Following Koneczny's thought and assuming that a less-developed civilization is able to dominate a more-developed one, one should assume that there is indeed a certain threat to personalism in European terms and to the identity of the inhabitants of the Old Continent – especially because a significant proportion of immigrants from Islamic countries do not make any effort to assimilate, isolating themselves from European society and its traditions (Mrozek-Dumanowska & Zdanowski, 2011). Terrorist attacks by radical followers of Islam are also a source of concern. To interpret these events in accordance with Koneczny's idea, we should refer to the law of expansiveness and of the impossibility of synthesizing civilizations. The first law says that every vital civilization tends towards expansion at the expense of others. The other law can be summarized in the words of Koneczny: "Civilizations do not unite the peoples of the earth, but divide them, and will never stop dividing them" (Koneczny, 1991, p. 15). Therefore, according to him, they cannot become united with each other. The disproportion between them stands in the way. Following this line of thinking, one should perceive the wave of immigrants as a kind of civilization

invasion, which may result in the collapse of Latin civilization. These are, of course, hypothetical and deliberately exaggerated considerations based on the assumption that Koneczny's theory is at all usable in modern times.

In the context of Koneczny's differentiation of civilization, it is worth quoting a statement by Leszek Kołakowski from 1980:

Whoever says in Europe that all cultures are equal would normally not want to have their arm cut off when they cheat on taxes, or to be publicly scourged – or stoned in the case of a woman, if they make love with a person who is not their legal wife or husband. To say in this case “such is the law of the Qur'an, you have to respect other traditions,” to say in fact “it would be terrible in our culture, but for these savages it is just right”; so, it is to express not so much respect, but contempt for other traditions. (Ślusarczyk, 2009)

Therefore, even out of respect for other civilizations, one should be aware of their differences and, at the same time, remember the uniqueness of the Latin civilization from which Polish culture originates. By maintaining your own civilizational and cultural identity, so strongly rooted in personalism, you can best avert the danger of losing your identity. Such an attitude can also become a model for Islamic societies, in which groups are now being formed to fight for individual rights, even women's rights (Brzezińska, 2011). Koneczny's theory, which is valued by such researchers as Anton Hilckman and Arnold J. Toynbee (Białkowski, 2009), is definitely worth pursuing and rereading in the context of this difficult contemporary history. On the other hand, using it without the necessary reinterpretation and criticism seems pointless.

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