The Noble Family as "Singular Multiplicity"? Redefining the Smoczynski–Zarycki's Totemic Definition of Nobility through the Lenses of Alain Badiou's Mathematical Ontology

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Abstract. In our paper, we redefine the category of "family" denoting the relationship of selected members of a post-noble/post-aristocratic milieu in Poland using Alain Badiou's terminology. Badiou's ontology based on a mathematical set theory and a generic theory is the most developed, complex, and revolutionary ontology of the 20th and 21st centuries. However, it is rarely adapted to new empirical studies probably because of its novelty and complexity. We do not intend to use the empirical case study made by Smoczynski–Zarycki to inform our argument but instead perform a translation of the Durkheim–Lacanian theoretical standpoint from "Totem…" into the category of "singularity" [*singularité*] in its relation to "the state of situation" [*état de la situation*] from "Being and Event" (Badiou 2005). This approach seeks to find a universalizing potential of nobility that will allow it to become a relevant subject for truth procedure analysis.

Keywords: badiousian ontology, singular multiplicity, noble family, honor, totemic society

Introduction

The aim of our research is to conceptualize Smoczyński–Zarycki's thesis about the role of a post-noble community in the contemporary democratic Polish society, using some concepts borrowed from the French philosopher Alain Badiou. This attempt could be considered as a challenge for the theoretical standpoint (or standpoints in plural) of the authors of "Totem", but being aware of its provocative aspect we will

elaborate this issue only as an *experimentum mentis* open for further discussions. The provocative aspect of this proposal refers, of course, to the ideological identity of Alain Badiou, who is well known to be the last French philosopher faithful to the ideals of May '68. His Marxist provenience, and the concept of the militant truth of the subject, perceived under the figure of a revolutionist seems at first glance hardly consistent with the feudal identity of nobility, which is the main subject-matter of Smoczyński–Zarycki's book. But we should not stick to these first appearances and ideological issues but rather approach Badiou's metaphysics as a genuine philosophical apparatus engaged in truth procedures.

The clue theoretical concept of Smoczynski–Zarycki's (henceforth S/Z) thesis is the totem, which agency mirrors Lacan's *objet petit a*. The totem at the core of the post-noble milieu, inscribed with heraldic symbols, coats of arms, and family alliances constitutes an invisible pole of attraction according to the authors – invisible for the empirical sociological analysis, invisible in terms of numbers, and transgressing social hierarchies based on economic status, etc. Like the Lacanian *object a*, being invisible and impossible to describe, it nonetheless contributes to uphold the consistency of the symbolic order. This analogy is not unexpected because Jacques Lacan and his tripartite distinction of the real, symbolic, and imaginary are obviously the linking elements of this experimental translation to Badiou's terminology. Firstly because Lacan was Badiou's teacher, and, even more than a teacher, he arguably acted as a master for Badiou, as it has been explicitly expressed in his conversation with Elisabeth Roudinesco: "Lacan always remained for me a thinker of the first order rather than a psychoanalytic master. Always the primacy of the written! For this reason, he occupied a considerable place in my philosophical work, and this from my very first synthetic work 'Theory of the Subject' (1982)".

Further in this dialogue, Badiou admitted that "[Lacan] has been, and still is, constantly present on [his] intellectual horizon" (Badiou–Roudinesco 2014: 6). Secondly, Badiou makes use of the Lacanian category of antiphilosophy and his conception of the Borromean knot between the registers of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary as crucial for a non-philosophical (i.e. non-Kantian) approach of the Real (Lacan 2005: 101). Lacan's influence on Badiou's thought is significant up to the point of calling his theory of being a "Lacanian ontology".[1] Although Badiou does not share the psychotherapeutic framework that is crucial for his master, he borrows Lacan's central ideas and creatively develops them in his ontological concepts. While the imaginary order is not so important for Badiou because of his subtractive method, the most important insight is brought by the opposition between the real and the symbolic, which are mirrored in the

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1   Here, we borrow the term used by Fabio Vighi in his paper: Dall'evento al sintomo: Badiou e l'ontologia lacaniana. In: M. J. Kelly, A. J. Rose (eds.), *Badiou Studies* 3(1): 23–42. New York: Punctum Books.

Badiousian theory of being by inconsistent multiplicity and the language of the situation. We will develop these concepts in the following sections of our article.

Meanwhile, we need to tackle the already mentioned dissonance between Badiou and nobility treated as a political subject. Indeed, we have to take under consideration that Badiou still approves the validity of the communist idea and has been a member of communist parties (Unified Socialist Party, Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste, L'Organisation Politique). This active participation in emancipatory movements is considered by Badiou as politics *par excellence* – one of the domains of the truth, a subject of philosophy. Therefore, to treat nobility as a singular multiplicity within the political discourse of Badiou seems at first glance paradoxical, if not contradictory. In order to defend this position, we have to interrogate the Polish historical background and take under consideration the position of noble classes in communist and post-communist countries.

According to the modernization thesis, ascribed characteristics such as nobility play no longer a determinative role in shaping one's career. Instead of ascribed features, society begins to cherish achieved ones such as work, talent, or education. However, it is obvious that Eastern European modernization has evolved differently, and its pathway has been molded by a forced change in class hierarchies. Since 1944 (we will symbolically refer to the date of the imposition of the Agricultural Reform that legitimized confiscations of land above 50 ha), inherited or ascribed characteristics, such as noble origin, have not stopped to have an influence over one's place/position in society, but they definitely ceased to be an advantage. Inversely, it has become a burden. In communist Poland (henceforth PRL – Polish People's Republic), to be born of noble origin meant that one was not only deprived of his/her natural/inherited life facilities (land, palaces, domestic workers) but presumably was not allowed to study at higher education institutions, attend elitist courses (like equestrian sports, sailing activities, etc.) because these amenities were reserved for children of the proletarian origin. In the context of political change, we will define S/Z's concept of "family" as "singular multiplicity". In this article, we intend to ask what possible outcomes will result from such a translation, that is to say: how can we benefit from Badiou's ontology applied firstly to sociology and secondly to noble studies?

Badiou's Set Theory

Badiou is first of all a mathematician who is aware of the revolutionary aspect of his main oeuvre entitled *Being and Event* (Fr. ed. 1988, 2005). Its revolutionary character is not located in the realm of politics but in ontology. What Badiou challenges is the singularity of the ontos – i.e. the singularity of being that

constitutes the Parmenidisian ground of philosophy. The radical thesis consists in approaching being not as an existing singularity ("there is being") but as multiplicity. "The one is not" (Badiou 2005: 23), states Badiou, breaking with the monarchy of the monad that has been dominating the western onto-theological metaphysics since Parmenides. Badiou starts with an impasse of ontology based on a double aspect sentence that can be read as follows: "What *presents* itself is essentially multiple, *what* presents itself is essentially one" (Badiou 2005: 23).

The two versions of this statement are possible depending on which word we will emphasize. If we put an emphasis on "presents", we will end with multiple; if, on the other hand, we put an emphasis on "what", we will end with "one". "There is no One" – instead, there is the fact of "counting-as-one" (fr. *compter pour un*) (Badiou 2005: 24). The one, which "is not", exists only as an operation of "counting as one", wherefore it is never a presentation because it is the "multiple that is the regime of presentation" (ibid.). But we cannot say that as a result "being is multiple" "because the multiple is solely the regime of presentation" (ibid.). Therefore, the one is not an entity but an operation. It operates.

"Insofar as being, qua being, is nothing other than pure multiplicity, it is legitimate to say that ontology, the science of being qua being, is nothing other than mathematics itself" (Badiou 2005: xiii).

Hence, Alain Badiou borrows language from Georg Cantor's "set theory" and establishes his ontology on classes and sets. Multiplicities are the only real, and set theory is the only theory that provides the law of being (Badiou 2005: 66).

"1. The multiple from which ontology makes up its situation is composed solely of multiplicities. There is no one. In other words, every multiple is a multiple of multiples.

2. The count-as-one is no more than the system of conditions through which the multiple can be recognized as multiple" (Badiou 2005: 29).

Secondly, the category of multiple is double-faced: there is inconsistent multiplicity of inertia [*multiplicité inconsistante*], the multiplicity without any ones, which serves as primordial material to create consistent, structured sets through the procedure of "counting as one", and there is the one of composition, which is the consistent effect of the structure (Badiou 2005: 25). Nevertheless, reality is composed solely of multiplicities – a thesis that corresponds in mathematics to the Zermelo–Fraenkel axiom according to which all objects are sets. This statement (all objects are sets) equals Badiou's thesis: "the multiple is composed solely of multiplicities". A set that has two elements x and y is written {x, y}, but even if it consists of a single element x, it must be recognized as a set, namely, singleton {x}. This bracketing refers in logic to what Badiou calls count-as-one, which means creating consistent, structured sets. We deal with a multiplicity even if we have a simple singleton {x}. Every multiplicity contains elements that are themselves multiplicities.

After introducing this preliminary logic that is more or less based on the Zermelo–Fraenkel axioms, Badiou comes up with the most important question for ontology: "Is there something rather than nothing?",[2] and he answers: "The solution to the problem is quite striking: maintain the position that nothing is delivered by the law of the Ideas, but *make* this nothing *be* through the assumption of a proper name" (Badiou 2005: 66–67). To name means to postulate the existence of something. Subsequently, Badiou names the empty set "the set ø". The rest will have to be created out of this nothing.[3] Usually, set theories start with the sentence "there is a set". Hence, "a set", any set is axiomatic, and after establishing its existence we usually proceed to define the empty set. Inversely, Badiou chooses a more difficult path, starting with an empty set. The point zero, the *creatio ex nihilo* he postulates, is enough to make a short-cut and approach more sophisticated object sets of his theory such as the state, which appears only in meditation 8: "The State, or Metastructure, and the Typology of Being (normality, singularity, excrescence)". After we introduce the category of the "state of situation", it will be possible to present the crucial term of "singular multiplicity". Subsequently, the term will be applied to the more detailed analysis of the (post-)noble family.

The State and the Typology of Being

One of the crucial axioms of the Zermelo–Fraenkel set theory (henceforth: ZF) is undoubtedly the axiom of power set, according to which for every set exists a set whose elements are subsets (…) of a given set (Badiou 2005: 501). If we have a set *p* containing two elements *x* and *y*, there is a set of its subsets (possible combinations of its elements), which is denoted by *p(x)*. In our case, it will be: {{*x*}, {*y*}. {*x*, *y*}, {ø}}. In the Badiousian ontology, the power set is called "the state of the situation" (fr. *l'état de la situation*), which brings his reflection to a higher level. So far, we have only talked about the basic level of our given set, called "situation". An element belonging to a situation is "presented", while on the level of the "state of the situation" we are dealing with "representation". In this case, for example, the element {x}, which was presented in the original situation, is represented in the state of this situation.

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2   This question follows the presentation of the logical axioms in Chapter 5: "In sum, these five axioms or axiom-schemas fix the system of Ideas under whose law any presentation, as form of being, lets itself be presented: belonging (unique primitive idea, ultimate signifier or presented-being), difference, inclusion, dissemination, the language-existence couple, and substitution. We definitely have the entire material for an ontology here. Save that none of these inaugural statements in which the law of Ideas is given has yet decided the question: 'Is there something rather than nothing?'" (Badiou 2005: 66)

3   Mathematicians such as Nirenberg/Nirenberg are highly critical about that point asking where the logical necessity of this empty set is (in: *Badiou's Number: A Critic of Mathematics as Ontology*).

Generally, every element of the situation should be at the same time presented and represented. However, the original Badiousian thesis is that there are always some abnormal elements that are missing either presentation or representation. When there is an element which is represented in the state of the situation but absent in the original set, we are dealing with something called "excrescence" ("I will call excrescence a term which is represented but not presented" – Badiou 2005: 99). In our example, it will be {x, y} seen as an element of the power set. The original situation consisted only of two autonomous elements: *x* and *y*. They have their representations {x} and {y} in the state of the situation, but the element {x, y} as such is already an excrescence.

According to the ZF axiomatic set theory, the power set is always numerically bigger than the situation, so we always have some excrescences. The Badiousian "theorem of the point of excess" means that there are always more representations than presentations ("the one multiple composed from its subsets, whose existence is guaranteed by the power-set axiom, is essentially 'larger' than the initial multiple" – Badiou 2005: 84).

It should be noted that this terminology has a visible political motivation. If we consider as the "situation" a group of people, the function of the "state of the situation" will be fulfilled by the administrative metastructure, which seeks to organize this entire group. At the level of the whole society, such a function will be fulfilled by the state, in French: *État*, which corresponds to the term *état de la situation*. The fact of the existence of excrescences symbolically expresses the irremovable excess of administration in relation to what it attempts to order.

We can ultimately pass to the concept of singular multiplicity, which is crucial for our analysis. It is a multiplicity that has no representation (is absent on the level of the power set) but which is present in the situation (our original set). Obviously for Badiou, it applies e.g. to a discriminated social group deprived of support from the state. Such a group is present in the situation, but the official discourse does not seem to notice it. In the next chapter, we will apply the category of singularity to (post-)noble families.

The Concept of "Singularité" and the Problem of (Post-) Noble Family

As has been said at the beginning, it may be surprising that we refer to a figure corresponding to discriminated minorities while speaking about nobility. Therefore, we must emphasize again the specificity of the post-noble milieu in Eastern Europe since the installation of the communist regime. In the classical, pre-modern structure of society, noble families would probably cherish the

status of normal multiples[4] as they would have significant support from the state and the greatest influence on the narration produced by its official discourse. Consequently, it would be the peasantry which would have the position of the singularity, i.e. of those who cannot actively participate in the official discourse operating in the situation and whose rights are not respected. The situation radically differs in the context of communist and post-communist societies. As we have said at the beginning, nobility in the communist era became a nuisance and used to be an unavoidable obstacle to fulfill one's career (higher education, professional success). "Unavoidable" because while one cannot deny his/her pedigree and one's surname displays the class origin of your ancestors (fathers, grandfathers as landowners) one could have become an "enemy of the people's republic", especially during the Stalinist era.

Nevertheless, Badiou, being faithful to the idea of communism and its aims of total equality, fulfilled emancipation, and fulfilled "generic humanity" (exceeding all hierarchies of subsets), considered East European communism as a "procedure of truth". However, he admits that its first ideals have deteriorated throughout history (Badiou 2007: 103). We nonetheless hope that our audacious attempt can be considered within his theory if one knows the emancipatory struggle of the Polish nobility in the communist era.

After the Second World War, together with the establishment of the communist PRL, instead of eliminating inequality and abolishing the state, a substitution of power and an introduction of new hierarchies took place. It is justified to say that after that substitution it was the Communist Party which had the position of normal multiple. So, once the state of the social situation became a communist state, the condition of nobility underwent a radical transformation, which enables us to consider it as a singularity. We refer to this historical condition asserting that it has a continuation in the contemporary social position of post-noble families, whose world vanished at the beginning of PRL together with the loss of material assets. In the following chapters, we will attempt to show how the historically shaped specificity of Polish *noblesse* (not only during communist PRL but also during the period of the partition of Poland, i.e. 1772–1918) assumed the position of the dispossessed, what allows to redefine Polish nobility into a flexible singular multiplicity in compliance with Badiou's understanding of this figure.

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4   In reference to this issue, B. P. Bednarczyk is currently preparing an M.A. thesis (in the Institute of Romance Studies of the Jagiellonian University) entitled *Les épiphanies de l'inconsistance. Alain Badiou et les images littéraires de la révolution*, where he analyzes the classical Polish drama *Non-Divine Comedy* by Zygmut Krasiński (1835). Inside this drama, the aristocracy as a group under the command of Lord Henry are dramatic personae. They represent the resistance of the old world, which could be read as an attempt to defend itself from being pushed into the position of an abnormal multiple. On the other hand, the Revolutionists under the command of a peasant named Pancracy, who themselves start their action as a radically singular multiple, do not want simply to abolish the power of state but rather to substitute the relation of power. The substitution of the position of normal multiple is undoubtedly a universal problem of revolution.

Badiou's structure evolves: once a singular multiple is presented, but not represented, the lack of representation means that this multiplicity was not counted in a normal way by the state. This is because certain components of the singular set are also not-presented. If all of them were presented as such, the state would normally count the multiple. Hence, we can recapitulate the following characteristics of singularity: a) it is non-represented by the state; b) it is presented in a situation; c) some of its elements are also not-presented. To give a clear view of this concept, Badiou gives the following example:

> ... A family of people is a presented multiple of the social situation (in the sense that they live together in the same apartment, or go on holiday together, etc.), and it is also a represented multiple, a part, in the sense that each of its members is registered by the registry office, possesses French nationality, and so on. If, however, one of the members of the family, physically tied to it, is not registered and remains clandestine, and due to this fact never goes out alone, or only in disguise, and so on, it can be said that this family, despite being presented, is not represented. It is thus singular. In fact, one of the members of the presented multiple that this family is, remains, himself, un-presented within the situation. (Badiou 2005: 174)

Reflecting on the last aspect of singularity, we can envisage a multiple of which not only some elements are not-presented but all of them share this status. In this case, the singularity of the multiple attains the highest level and is called technically "evental site": "I will term evental site an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation. The site, itself, is presented, but 'beneath' it nothing from which it is composed is presented. As such, the site is not a part of the situation" (Badiou 2005: 175).

We can now consider a noble family as such a multiple, applying to it the three features of the singular set:

a) The lack of representation of nobility, when the state of the situation became a communist state, is obvious. Nobility has lost its assets and its privileged position. It has disappeared from the discourse administered by the Communist Party except from having been labeled as the enemy of the proletarian state and therefore having been persecuted. That loss of a privileged position is a loss of representation.

b) The non-existence of the nobility on the level of representation and its disappearance from the official discourse and official narration of the state does not entail a complete physical elimination. Thus, noble families exist, but they exist only at the level of presentation.

c) At the level of the situation, exists a "noble family" set. Other multiplicities (other families) can be aware of its existence, but at the same time their knowledge

cannot be precise, they are not able to indicate accurately who is from this family and who is not. Only from the inside of a given family (being a component of a singular multiple) can one determine the belonging of concrete elements to this set. Such a multiple is like a net whose exact construction may only be known from within. We can notice here the specificity of the familial structure in the post-noble milieu. We are dealing here with something that is exemplified in *Totem* by the term "extended family". This expression – sometimes abridged to "family" by its members – denotes a number of families of a noble origin that keeps the memory of their lineages. Their members call themselves respectively cousins, aunts, and uncles, meet regularly on familial gatherings and charity parties, and, most of all, have the inner knowledge about who is "ours" and who is not (but only aspires to be one of "ours"). Therefore, we deal with this sort of paradoxical situation underpinned by the fact that this noble "Family" is a set that is completely ignored in the order of representation. It is only vaguely presented in the situation, and its internal structure can be clear from the inside but is illegible from the outside.

The Structure of Noble Family and "Point d'Excès"

Badiou's analysis leads to the conclusion that in a situation with an unlimited number of elements it is not possible to determine the number of subsets. Thus, the state falls into an impasse, it cannot fulfill its task of introducing the total order and classification. Therefore, the situation becomes – in spite of the efforts of the state – unstable and unclosed, and the state cannot fully control its own content. Badiou describes this ontological fact as "the errancy of excess" (Badiou 2005: 420).

Every multiple can be considered simultaneously in the context of its subsets, so each one creates its own subsets. In the case of nobility, we deal with families, each of them consisting of successive subgroups like cousins, aunts, uncles, ours, those-who-become-ours, etc. We, therefore, notice that nobility, non-represented by the state, has an extremely complicated structure. It generates its own subsets, its own order, which is invisible from the outside. The rule of the excess works also in respect of singular multiple as this set generates its own internal order of subsets (of representations).

In Badiou's theory the "language of the situation" (*langue de la situation*) can be regarded as the equivalent of the Lacanian symbolic order (*le symbolique*). The language of the situation is composed by the linguistic resources. The order of subsets is reinforced when each of them is denoted symbolically by a name (that creates "knowledge" accessible in a given situation – Badiou 2005: 328).

Nobility from the point of view of the state's official discourse remains absent. However, as nobility develops its own micro-order, which is completely

unnoticed on the macro-level of the state, it uses its own symbolic resources (such as expressions denoting family affinities, history of one's ancestors, etc.). Nobility undoubtedly creates its own order, and its own symbolic dimension is appropriated to its specific net-like structure. This mechanism is informed by the particular status of the singular multiple called here "Noble Family". First of all, it is a singularity in the vertical aspect (described in point A of the previous chapter), i.e. non-representability by the state, being invisible to its classifications, statistics, and hierarchy. However, it is also a matter of singularity in the horizontal aspect (described in point c) above): even for other multiplicities of the situation, concrete elements of this set are not presented – it is only present as a whole. The specific status of the post-noble family with its complex net-like structure and its internal symbolic order is based on its ontological condition, i.e. being founded on the void, being absent for the state, and being unintelligible for other multiples. And the fact of being founded on the absence stimulates it to generate its own internal symbolic order. It is possible to see here the Lacanian scheme mentioned at the beginning: an empty object that is invisible and impossible to describe; nonetheless, it is a necessary factor contributing to trigger a symbolic order. Because such a singular multiplicity is "on the edge of the void" and remains unintelligible for other multiples, it must construct its own symbolic order to preserve the identity of the family from within. The production of its own internal micro-symbolic order and its own network of subsets, therefore, make possible the care of the familial identity and memory in spite of the abnormal status of this set in the social situation. The production of the symbolic order and the construction of internal subsets have no end because, as for every multiplicity, the principle of *point d'excès* works also there.

This appliance of Badiou's structure to the concept of a noble family has two weak points. Firstly, it is too strictly embedded in the communist period when a noble man was perceived by the state as the enemy of the working class, whereas the *Totem* touches upon the contemporary condition of a post-noble milieu. Secondly, the lack of discriminative practices against nobility in the contemporary Poland gives a false impression of a highly visible social group that has a representation (using Badiou's expression) and is present in the institutionalized realm (nobility associations, intense social life, presence in the media). For that reason, Badiou's theory should be preferably applied to these groups of gentry origin that have no connection with the "extended family", that is to say, petty gentry, located outside of the two most important Heimats of the "family", Cracow and Warsaw. Although aware of their noble past, the post-petty gentry families have less intimate kinship relations, do not socialize children within the greater kin network, have also stopped practicing matrimonial homogamy, and rarely participate in family rituals that exceed their closest, usually limited circle of relatives. Hence, our theoretical scheme

should be applied to something that refers to the title of S/Z's book, that is, the totemic entanglement of the intelligentsia and aristocracy and going further in that direction – to something that historian Janusz Tazbir has called the noble–peasant osmosis (Tazbir 2011: 68).

Nobility as a Universal Idea

Referring to Oskar Kolberg and Franciszek Bujak, Tazbir explained the specific similitude ("osmosis") between the cultures of peasantry and petty gentry based on their similar economic potential. The petty gentry led a very similar rural life to that of the more affluent peasant families, and their respective forms of life inspired one another (Maciejewski cited in Tazbir 2011) in terms of outfit (Turnau, Maciejewski), literary practices (Borowy qtd. in Tazbir 2011: 75), and social practice (religious celebrations). This dual influence is explained on the one hand by a social and economic downward of the petty gentry (mostly deprived of its assets by the actual occupants of Poland during the partition, mainly by the tsarist Russia for participating in insurrection movements). On the other hand, the peasantry imitated the noble way of life. This imitation and the possibility of maintaining those practices without economic and social privileges show that the noble way of life can be considered as a universal practice.

Therefore, we need to ask what the foundations of this paradoxical universalism of nobility are. Or how is it possible that the figure of a nobleman could be a universal ideal for every Pole? The hidden mechanism of this peculiar universality has been elaborated by S/Z within the Durkheimian perspective of the totemic figure. However, this apparently crucial thesis of *Totem* seems overshadowed in the reception of the book driven predominantly by the social analysis of the post-noble habitus of the contemporary Polish society. More specifically, the totemic hypothesis of S/Z's book consists in showing how Polish culture has been shaped by the noble legacy.

Historically, the Polish noble totem – currently shaping the habitus of every class, not only of the intelligentsia but also of peasantry and other classes – was embodied by the coats of arms, and its most important (and typically Polish) element is the "proclamation" (translated into English as battle cry, motto, or slogan, etymologically derived from the Gaelic *sluagh* 'people' and *gairm* 'call'). This *proclamatio* in the Polish heraldry is most often an identification calling for the members of one clan, i.e. a name motto (Pol. *zawołanie osobowe odimienne*) or place motto (Pol. *zawołanie topograficzne*) identifying the Heimat (Neighborhood) of the clan. Very rarely in the Polish heraldic, the *proclamatio* is a battle calling. But in order to illustrate the totemic character of the Polish kinship, we might put a hypothesis according to which this universal motto could read "God, honor,

fatherland", that is to say, the Polish nation's military motto used first probably by the independence movements during the partition of Poland. This motto officially appeared on standards in 1943 and has been restored in this form after the fall of communism in 1993. Obviously, the main attention was paid to the term "God" as the axis of the conflict with the communist government. But within our perspective the most important would be the word "honor". Under this "call", Poles express their "noble spirit" that unites them and makes them different from other nations. Whilst "fatherland" is an undisputable expression of patriotism, and the term "God" adds to this patriotism a hint of messianic identity (studied and elaborated in numerous sociological and political science analysis), the term "honor" – underpinned by the heraldic genesis – seemed to obtain the least concern (Górski 2013 – qtd. in Smoczyński–Zarycki 2017: 121, Ossowska 1973 – qtd in Smoczyński–Zarycki 2017: 120). Meanwhile, honor accompanied by pride and chivalry (Smoczyński–Zarycki 2017: 247) is historically a distinctive feature of nobility. It is the noble class that is able to act out of pure honor, independently of instrumental rationality. But that is exactly what S/Z raise as the constituting moment of the noble-originated ethos of the Polish intelligentsia.

"Whereas based today on democratic ideals, a number of noble-chivalry ideals have been inscribed in its ethos which differentiates [the intelligentsia] from a typical bourgeois class" (Smoczyński–Zarycki 2017: 239).[5]

The totem symbolizes the migration of symbolic content from class (nobility) to class (the intelligentsia). Among the Polish intelligentsia, it is a noble totem used as a figure of their imagined *noble* ancestor. But in terms of "honor" this totemism is shared by a wider range of Polish society, as it is vividly shown in another publication by both authors of *Totem*, entitled *The Intelligentsia Informed Habitus in Social Distance Strategies of Polish Migrants in the UK* (Smoczyński et al. 2017). This article shows a specific universalization of social distance strategies among Poles coming from very different social milieux. The distancing is underpinned by the binary opposition "lord–boor" (Pol. *pan–cham*), playing a key role in differentiating status positions, symbolic hierarchies in the Polish culture and society (Tazbir 2011). From our perspective, we might say that a lord is a man of honor, while a boor is someone who lacks honor at all.

This dialectic is not only a social game, but it has a definitely wider role in Polish culture, firstly because the first term "Pan" corresponds rather to the term "Sir" and is a regular way of addressing a stranger (Fr. Vouvoyer), while the second term "Cham" originally meant a peasant and was a vulgar way of denoting peasantry. Etymologically, the term "cham" refers directly to the Biblical name of one of Noe's sons, an etymology that every Pole knows, at least from their most famous epic poem by Adam Mickiewicz, *Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray* (1834):

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5   Translation of the study's authors (from Polish).

…we are all derived from Adam,
but I have heard that the peasants proceed from Ham
the Jews from Japhet, and we gentry from Shem;
hence we are lords over both, as the elder brothers.

Prawda że się wszyscy wywodzim of Adama
(Alem słyszał że chłopi pochodzą od Chama,
Żydowie of Jafeta, my szlachta od Sema
A więc panujem jako starsi nad obiema) (Mickiewicz 1916: 540)

But the "pan–cham" dualism has also been subject of a number of important literature oeuvres important for shaping the Polish identity (E. Orzeszkowa, Z. Kraszewski, A. Dygasiński, S. Wyspiański, T. Dołęga-Mostowicz, S. Mrożek, and L. Kruczkowski). In the symbolic year 1944 when the Second Republic of Poland collapsed and the small reminder of the former Polish feudal properties were confiscated by communists, the term "boor" has also lost its original meaning and class reference. It is now used to denote a cad, a brute who does not know how to behave: "Analogically, as we address everyone by 'sir' without taking under consideration his/her social position, everyone can be called a 'cham' (boor)" (Tazbir 2011: 174).[6]

The fact of employing this term to express contempt shows how Polish culture is shaped by the noble legacy (Świętochowski 1935) and how this form of expressing social distance has "journeyed from their clannish regions and reached the wider spectrum of Polish strata to the degree that the intelligentsia legacy with its social rituals informed by elitism, social distance, and appeal for higher culture constitutes a significant part of contemporary Polish habitus (Gella 1976; Zarycki 2009)" (Smoczyński et al. 2017: 4).

And this "journey" has a follow-up: "Old intelligentsia members may condemn the arrogance of the new intelligentsia as 'boorish', [...] former anti-communist opposition members may condemn former communist party members as boors" (Smoczyński et al. 2017: 5).

Moreover, this "lord–boor" opposition seems to create a ladder of contempt and social distancing among the most unexpected social groups. For example, as Smoczyński et al. (2017) show among Polish migrants in the UK, we clearly distinguish the 2nd World War Polish diaspora as a group strongly affirming its superiority in terms of culture, lifestyle, and ideals (mainly patriotic), which distances itself from the post-2004 EU accession economic migrants (Garapich 2008). Nevertheless, these groups can be described by similar patterns; superiority informed by the lord/boor opposition towards the English working class, termed as boorish with no culture at all (Smoczyński et al. 2017: 6).

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6   Translation of the study's authors (from Polish).

This dialectic might have a universalizing potential, which would be of course paradoxical because we deal here with the essence of elitism. But the fact that even representatives of the working class may employ an elitist social distance strategy informed by the intelligentsia-based cultural capital shows that lordship can characterize anyone who refers to the class difference in order to speak about his personal culture.

This aspect adds to our analysis another interesting point of reference linked to Badiou's ethics. The central concept of the Badiousian ethics is the truth procedure. His ethical reflection, as well as his theory of event, begins beyond the limits of ontology understood as the theory of static being. However, there is a contact point between these orders, which is also a potential source of change in the situation and the beginning of the procedure (Badiou 2005: 179). This point is a radically special multiplicity named evental site (described earlier in our article). Our experimental analysis of the noble family as this type of singular multiplicity leads us directly to the problem of the procedure of truth. Such a procedure is also called a generic procedure, while it generates a generic set, i.e. a universal one, which exceeds the initial sets. Therefore, Badiou develops the concept of a singular universality,[7] which is a generic set that arises from a specific situation, in relation to a specific event and to a radically singular multiplicity.

It is well known that Badiou calls for a breakthrough in ethics because he neglects the negative aspect of emancipatory ethics reckoned as "smug nihilism" (Badiou 2002: 39). The anthropological difference that distinguishes the way a man lives from an animal's survival is based solely on "truth" understood as "fidelity to an event" (Badiou 2002: 42). The event is a break that triggers the truth processes or truth procedure because it is impossible either to notice or to understand within the actual and reputable knowledge. The event is discerned by "the apostle of truth" (Badiou 2013), who is the only one who recognizes in the established order the possibility of a new order and a new reality. This anamorphic perspective is not based on the recognition of a negative difference, according to the logic of minority or exception. On the contrary, it follows the perspective of an *Übermensch* who becomes immortal through his fidelity to an immortal truth. This ethical aspect of Badiou's subject has a Nietzschean feature that places our reflection on the perilous ground of the master and slave dialectic. For Nietzsche, this dialectic is performed in the domain of ethics and characterizes an attitude towards life. The noble spirit affirms life, while the decadent neglects life and loses the will to power, falling in a state of rottenness, which characterizes human morality. For Nietzsche, human morality is a slave morality that negates life-power values on behalf of the good–evil morality of weakness that refuses to the other what it cannot have itself. Hence, morality is

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7   "Tout universel est singulier, ou est une singularité" (Badiou 2004).

shaped by slave consciousness instead of the master and Dionysian enjoyment with the ultimate value of life.[8]

Conclusions

We have introduced a couple of genuine and highly innovative figures from Badiou's ontology in order to show the theoretical possibilities with which this system can contribute to the sociological analysis of clandestine phenomena. The noble family understood through the Durkheimian perspective as a totemic figure, instead of numbers and registers, seems corresponding to the figure of singular multiplicity. To be noble means to belong to a set that is not understood in terms of being (pedigree, genealogy) but rather as an operating force. The one is not, but the one operates. This multiplicity has no representation in the registry office but is present in the original set. Paraphrasing the example of family that we have borrowed from Badiou (Badiou 2005: 174), following the modernization thesis, the contemporary nobility is a multiple of which each member is clandestine, that is, un-presented within the situation. Such a case is called "evental site". The site is there, but none of its elements are presented and, consequently, cannot be counted by the state of situation and cannot be re-presented. In other words, it has no representation at the level of "état de la situation". This term "état", like the English term "state", is used in its double meaning: État means the state as a political entity. Not belonging to the situation means also not belonging to the state's administration registers. However, observing the contemporary nobility, it is difficult to agree on some clandestine or illegal condition – this obvious inconvenience gets in the way of our analogy.

Obviously, the familial affinities, genealogical lineages and even reclaimed – after the fall of communism – real estates are registered and represented data (in Badiou's sense), and so we are facing the question: what inside Polish nobility corresponds to the right evental site that may trigger a truth procedure according to Badiou? Facing this difficulty, we have looked for a universal potential of nobility that is characteristic for the Polish case. Three elements have contributed to our hypothesis. The first is the Lacanian link between Badiou and S/Z's book. In the totemic theory of S/Z, nobility works as a totemic *object* around which the symbolic order of the intelligentsia is being established. The positive content of totem itself, that is, the Thing itself is never achievable and describable – but observing the symbolic and its shape we can guess what invisible forces have

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8   Badiou clearly supports certain aspects of Nietzsche's critical thought, which condemns the will of nothingness or the lack of will typical of a slave morality (E 33–34). At the same time, however, Badiou remains critical to Nietzsche's claim that the *Übermensch* may return to the primordial innocence beyond good and evil. For Badiou, the heroism of life is a life in accordance with an event that opens the dimension of properly understood good and evil (Badiou 2002: 59).

been exercised upon it. Those forces are related to some universal ideas that attract other social classes to the totem of nobility. S/Z focus on this influence over the Polish intelligentsia. But in other publications they acknowledge that this attraction of the totemic noble legacy, even though not explicit, can be seen among very different social groups such as the working class (Smoczynski et al. 2017). This universalization is expressed basically, if not only, by social distance practices under the form of the lord–boor (Pan/Cham) dualism. Every Pole can imaginarily adopt the position of a Lord, which equals being well-mannered and cultivated against some other dubbed as boor (or exactly a peasant). This observation has inspired us to attach more attention to this figure characteristic of Polish social relationships and culture. We, therefore, followed one of the most famous Polish historians, Janusz Tazbir, who paid attention to this dualism and its role for the Polish culture and referred to something that he called the peasantry–lordship osmosis. What needs to be studied historically is the closeness of those classes and the lack of visible differences between rich peasantry and poor gentry.

The *proclamatio* that traditionally functions as an identitarian motto (name or place) hence it differentiates us from them (friend and enemy, we and they) and functions here as a universal calling. This universality of honor gathers not only those who have some chivalrous ancestors, but every Pole can feel called by this truth procedure.[9] Every Pole addressing another by the form "Pan" (Sir/Lord) plays this game of social distance. His culture, his ambitions are not entities, facts but operations according to the French aphorism *noblesse oblige.* The knight's honor is a universal calling and a truth to which the majority of Poles would claim its attachment since many different historical events (insurrections from the time of the partition of Poland, World War II, the Warsaw Uprising, etc.). It can be a characteristic sign of a belligerent nation but we must not overlook the noble spirit that is attached to it. We must also be aware of the historical and cultural specificity of this state, where each person addresses the other one by "Pan" (Sir/Lord), and the state itself is etymologically linked to lordship in plural: "państwo". Around this homonym, we could perform a play à rebours around the Badousian dualism "Etat/état de la situation", but we must take under consideration how difficult the universalization process of such a "state" would be. However, we hope that, inspired by the totemic reading of the legacy of Polish nobility, we have at least opened up further lines of meta-theoretical inquiries into truth procedures observed around eclipsed social phenomena.

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9   In the context of our analysis, the interpretation of the ideal of honor as the content of a potential procedure of truth is limited to the Polish society. We are aware, however, that this point is difficult to accept from the perspective of Badiou's ontology, in which the ideal is a generic set exceeding all subsets, including those related to belonging to a given society or nation. So, here we have a typically generic moment of transgression beyond social classes, but at the same time the question arises if this particular procedure could be extended beyond Polish society. The answer to the question would require a reflection that goes beyond the framework of our paper.

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