

EWA GOLACHOWSKA

CATHOLICS IN BELARUS: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF POLISH IDENTITY?

Abstract

The article discusses the transformations in the national identification of members of the younger generation of Catholics in Belarus through the context of the language changes resulting from the use of Belarusian in the Catholic Church and the increasing prestige attached to this language. The political transformations at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, which led to modifications in the situation of the Church in Belarus, have influenced these processes. Simultaneously, the model of religiosity has undergone reconstruction so that it has gradually ceased to be linked with issues of national identification. Religious practices are becoming a more personal matter and are less dependent on social pressure. Similarly, the choice of one's nationality in a diverse society have become an individual matter.

Key words: sociolinguistics; multilingualism; national identity; borderland; Belarus; Catholicism

KATOLICY NA BIAŁORUSI. CZY DEKONSTRUKCJA POLSKIEJ TOŻSAMOŚCI?

Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu są przemiany identyfikacji narodowej młodego pokolenia katolików na Białorusi w kontekście zmian językowych związanych z używaniem w Kościele katolickim języka białoruskiego oraz wzrostem prestiżu tego języka. Do tych procesów przyczyniły się przeobrażenia polityczne przełomu lat osiemdziesiątych i początku dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku, które przyniosły zmianę w sytuacji Kościoła

.....
EWA GOLACHOWSKA
Instytut Sławiastyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk,
Warszawa
E-mail: egolachowska@ispan.waw.pl

CITATION: Golachowska, E. (2017).
Catholics in Belarus:
The Deconstruction of Polish Identity.
Sprawy Narodowościowe. Seria nowa, 2017(49).
<https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.1156>

This work was supported
by the author's own resources.
No competing interests have been declared.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2017.
Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

na Białorusi. Równolegle miała miejsce przebudowa modelu religijności, który powoli odchodzi od zagadnień identyfikacji narodowej. Praktyki religijne i stają się sprawą osobistą i mniej zależą od presji społecznej. Również wybory narodowościowe w zróżnicowanym społeczeństwie są sprawą indywidualną.

Słowa kluczowe: socjolingwistyka; wielojęzyczność; tożsamość narodowa; pogranicze; Białoruś; katolicyzm

The history of Catholicism in the territory of contemporary Belarus dates back to the end of the 14th century.¹ However, it is the religion of the majority only in the north-western peripheries of the country, similarly as historically in this region. Throughout the rest of the territory, it has co-existed with the Orthodox Church from the very beginnings. This situation persists to this day despite various turbulent historical events. As a result, when writing about Catholicism in Belarus it should be remembered that it is developing within a society in which the majority of the population belongs to the Orthodox Church. This is also true of the Grodno region, where the percentage of Catholics is the highest but still does not amount to half of the population. Individual localities, especially those situated near the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, can sometimes be in majority Catholic, but within larger territories one has to note the predominance of the Orthodox Church (and atheism). Within the remaining regions, Catholics constitute a very small percentage. In consequence, it is common to encounter mixed families, whose members possess broad competences both within the scope of Catholicism and the Orthodox Church. This pertains to the ways in which holidays are celebrated and how fasts are observed. In such families, it is frequently encountered that they attend services conducted both in Catholic and Orthodox churches.

In the case of Catholics in Belarus, the co-existence of the Polish and Belarusian languages within religious practices is extremely important. In this context, we are dealing with the issue of territorial and generational diversity. Polish is the main language of the Catholic Church in the Grodno region. In the Grodno Cathedral, all the masses during the course of the day are conducted in Polish, except for one which is in Belarusian, while in the cathedral in Minsk the situation is the exact opposite—there is only one mass in Polish, while the remaining are conducted in Belarusian. Generational diversity refers to the fact that older people choose liturgies conducted in Polish (they also pray in this language), while members of the younger generation more frequently come to the decision to attend liturgies in Belarusian and also use this language for praying. Linguistic issues within the Belarusian church to this day remain an important and controversial subject; however, gradually the dispute is dying down.

Other particular issues are related to this choice of language. One of these would be the changes in Catholic anthroponyms in Belarus, which result from contacts with the

• • • • •

¹ This article has been written on the basis of fieldwork conducted in Belarus since 2009 and continued to the present day. Between 2009 and 2012, the research was conducted within the framework of grant no. N N104071837 "Język katolików na Białorusi" [The language of Catholics in Belarus]. The main aim of the research was to establish whether the increasingly more common use of the Belarusian language in the Catholic Church liturgy changes the status and scope of functioning of Polish in Catholic circles in Belarus, as well as to determine what influence this has had on the national identification of the Catholics living in the country. The research was of sociolinguistic and anthropological character. It was conducted using the participatory method and resulted in the publication of the book by Ewa Golachowska (2012), from which the interviews quoted in this article have been taken. The subject of interest was the Catholic Church in Belarus. Research was not conducted among the representatives of other faiths.

dominant Russian-language and Orthodox majority. Due to these changes, the anthroponymic system (which among the Belarusian Catholics was homogeneous until the 1960s) has undergone various transformations. In the 1960s and 1970s, diverse names foreign to Catholic tradition began to appear, such as Tatiana, Alla, Dimitrij, Wadim, as well as such forms as Jekaterina, Iwan, Jewgienij.² Since the 1990s, it is possible to observe the Belarusization of Catholic anthroponyms in Belarus (at least on the level of phonetics). Children are given such names as *Кацярына, Ганна, Сафія*.³ Among male names, it is worth noting the shortened forms of a folk provenience, such as *Генадзь, Саша, Яўген, Сяргей, Анатоль, Валер, Рыгор, Аркадзь* (Golachowska, 2013).⁴

The language of Belarusian liturgical texts provides some particularly interesting material which has thus far not been researched. The influence of Polish and Latin vocabulary is clearly observable. In the liturgical texts of holy masses, we have the following: *Пан* and not *Гасподзь*, *Баранак Божы* not *Агнец, анёл* not *ангел*, *Езус* not *Ісус*, *касцёл* not *царква*, but also characteristic duplicates such as *Дзева / Панна, ксёндз/ святар*.

Without any doubt, more factors indicate that Catholicism in Belarus is in fact a peculiar hybridization of cultures. In this article, I focus on the national identity of the younger generation of Belarusian Catholics.⁵ This issue cannot be detached from the language transformations which have taken place within the Belarusian Church over the last 20 years. The starting point for these deliberations is the situation towards the end of the 20th century, as described by anthropologists, in which members of the Catholic Church self-identified as Polish due to the fact that they always prayed in Polish and participated in liturgies conducted in this language. The Catholic religion performed the function of a criterion of social and cultural identification within a multilingual and multi-ethnic society, carrying with it not only religious content but for many people also patriotic connotations. Despite this, Polish was rarely the primary language for Catholics in Belarus. Its usage was frequently limited to the religious sphere. The anthropologists wrote that it was common to treat the terms “a Pole” and “a Catholic,” “the Polish faith” and “the Catholic faith” as being synonymous. The concepts “the Orthodox faith”—“the Ruthenian faith,” “the Ruthenian language”—“the Orthodox language” functioned in a similar symmetrical synonymy (Engelking, 2004; Kabzińska, 1999). One fact which clearly shows that such ways of thinking are still very much alive among members of the older generation involves a story I heard as late as in 2011 told to me by a 70-year-old woman in the Grodno region concerning Catholic Church services conducted in the Orthodox language.

The research I conducted between 2009 and 2012 encompassed Catholics with various national identifications, since it was their faith and not their nationality which constituted the starting point for my analysis. For the same reason, the majority of those interviewed constituted deeply religious people and those with a very serious approach to issues of faith. The problems of the choice of the language for liturgies and prayers as well as the dependence of these choices on national identity were the subject of in-depth interviews. My interlocutors were frequently young people. Questions connected to their

• • • • •

² The English transcription of these names would be: Tatiana, Alla, Dimitrij, Vadim, and also Ekaterina, Ivan, Evgeni. The forms of the names provided in the article are in accordance with how they were originally written down in the parish records from the last few decades. Modifications in how the names are recorded result from linguistic and identity changes among the Catholics in Belarus.

³ Katerina, Hanna, Zofia (Sofia).

⁴ Gennady (Henadz), Sasha, Evgen, Sergey, Anatoliy, Valeriy, Grigory (Hryhorii), Arkadi.

⁵ The definition of a ‘generation’ adopted by sociologists as “a collectivity of individuals (...) who have had similar life experiences” (Fatyga, 2005, my translation) provides a very apt description of my young informants, as well as the middle-aged ones, for whom their formative experience was being brought up and educated between 1990 and 1995, during the intense Belarusization of public cultural and religious life.

religious and national identities had not been previously comprehensively described by researchers, in contrast to issues of the identity and language of the older generation of Catholics in Belarus which have on numerous occasions been the subject of analysis.

The issue of the identity of the younger generation should be raised since—due to the completely different social conditions in which people born at the beginning of the 1970s were brought up and which shaped their attitudes—their identity is constructed differently than that of older people. Statistics indicate that in this case we are dealing with an intensive Belarusization process (the two last population censuses showed that the number of Polish people in Belarus has fallen by one quarter). As a result, it is worth considering what aspects influence such changes and what currently shapes the Polish and Belarusian identities among the middle and younger generations of Catholics, as well as what role families, the local community and contacts with Poland play in the preservation of this identity and what role is performed by contemporary transformations in the religious model.

The interlocutors I interviewed are linked by their active involvement in the life of the Belarusian Church, as well as by the fact that in the first half of the 1990s they were either children or young people (in the process of being educated). This period was crucial both for the Catholic Church in Belarus and for the Belarusian language (even though the initiation of my interlocutors into the faith—their baptism and first communion—had taken place during Soviet times).

Yet another feature which makes these people similar to each other is that all of them spent a longer period in Poland. The nature of these excursions was very diverse. Some spent a year in Poland, while others a few years. Frequently, they divide their time between Belarus and Poland, working in Poland and taking care of their families in Belarus.

However, the most characteristic features of all my interlocutors were their strong religiosity and close ties with the Belarusian Catholic Church. This is where the similarities end as the paths they took to their faith differed. Some come from peasant families (their parents' generation was brought up in the countryside), among which the Catholic religion traditionally signified a Polish national identity. Others were brought up in mixed families, while their own religious beliefs were shaped by various factors in their youth. I also encountered the descendants of gentry families, within which both fervent Catholicism and a Polish national identity are transferred to the children even in present times.

The analysis of the conversations I conducted concerning the identity of Catholics in Belarus at the beginning of the 21st century should be preceded by some short theoretical considerations concerning the definition of the term 'identity'—a word frequently used in contemporary studies of the humanities. Antonina Kłoskowska wrote that "identity ought to be understood as a process, like personality or self in Mead's approach. For identity is a subjective, self-reflexive aspect of the personality" (Kłoskowska, 2001, p. 93), and also that "the individual is placed, or places himself, within these various associations, but does not spend himself entirely in connection with any one of them and draws certain elements of his self-identification from each and every one of them" (Kłoskowska, 2001, p. 92). Elżbieta Smułkowa in her article *Wokół problemu poczucia tożsamości mieszkańców Białorusi* [The issue of the sense of identity of the inhabitants of Belarus] defines identity as a set of "factors significant from the point of view of the comprehensive self-identification of an individual and a group, as well as its qualification by others" (Smułkowa, 2002, p. 521; my translation). Both researchers draw attention to the fact that the identity of an individual is a complex multidimensional notion which may undergo evolution.

It seems worthwhile to precede the statements made by my interlocutors with a quotation taken from Anna Engelking's article:

[...] the sense of Polish identity among my interlocutors is an exceptionally complicated phenomenon, composed of diverse elements, dynamic, subject to the influence of both traditional mental patterns which have feudal roots and the contemporary cultural and political conditions in the post-Soviet society and state. As a result, it is very far from the popular stereotype of 'the Pole from the Borderland regions', which would have us perceive them as our countrymen, separated from us and homesick for their homeland, who find solace in reverently cultivating Polish culture and a deep devotion to the Polish language and Catholic faith. It is simultaneously a phenomenon which eludes synthesis and generalisations; it would be most appropriate to discuss the issue using individual unitary categories and rather from the perspective of concrete details than from the level of society as a whole with its statistical data and survey results. (Engelking, 2004, pp. 232–233)

In the below-cited statements, it is possible to observe different understandings of Polish identity: the traditional one—referring to the Polish roots of one's parents and grandparents, and newer ones—connected to reflections on the complexity of one's own situation. For the older generation, being Polish resulted from having been born in a Catholic family, baptized in the Catholic Church and the solidified custom of praying in the Polish language. All of these criteria are also fulfilled by the young, but they call their own Polish identity into question. In the conversations I conducted with younger people, the criteria of participation in Polish culture, knowledge of Polish history and a clear motif of ties with the Belarusian region where they had been brought up and which functions as their "local homeland" were also breached. In many of the conversations, a two-level identity becomes apparent—a sense of belonging to the local community which is defined as Belarusian and loyalty toward Poland. Attachment to one's place of birth is strongly emphasized in the statements:

*Jestem miejscowy. Jestem Polakiem i jestem z Białorusi.*⁶ (Grod KS 38/2010M)

One young man states:

*Liczyłem się Polakiem, bo z taty korzenia wszyscy Polacy.*⁷ (Grod AB 26/2009M)

Another said the following about his family:

*Wyrosłem w Grodnie, rodzina moja nie była cała katolicka, mój ojciec był katolikiem, w paszporcie Polak, matka pochodzi z rodziny prawosławnej, niepraktykująca. Duży wpływ miała moja babcia. Na lato byliśmy u babci. Ona w paszporcie ma Polka i cała rodzina polska, ona jest prawdziwy człowiek wierzący. Dzięki niej byliśmy u Komunii i byliśmy ochrzczeni.*⁸ (Grod KJ 26/2010M)

The family house and the environment in which they were brought up provided them with a sense inherited from their parents and grandparents that they were Polish and that a Polish identity was clearly linked to Catholicism. However, their individual choices are usually connected with a situation of confrontation with a new environment which they

• • • • •

⁶ *I am local. I am a Pole and I come from Belarus.* (All translations of fragments of the conducted interviews provided in the footnotes are my own).

⁷ *I considered myself Polish, because from my father's roots all of us are Polish.*

⁸ *I grew up in Grodno, not all of my family was Catholic, my father was Catholic, Polish according to his passport; my mother comes from an Orthodox family, non-practicing. My grandmother had a lot of influence. We spent the summer at our grandmother's. In her passport, it is written that she is Polish and the whole family is Polish. She is deeply religious. Thanks to her, we went to [First] Communion and we were baptised*

encounter during their studies or in their work. For many of them, such a confrontation took place in Poland, for others in Minsk or another city in Belarus. The answer to the question about one's sense of identity is often linked with a situation they experienced in Poland—without any suggestions made by the one posing the question.

Czułem się Polakiem, znałem kulturę i język polski, ale wielu rzeczy nie rozumiałem. Niby jestem Polakiem, ale wielu spraw nie rozumiem, tutaj ten duch był zupełnie inny. Nie trzeba by mi było dużo czasu, żeby się przyzwyczaić, chociaż trochę czasu potrzeba. Dziwnie się czułem i trochę języka znałem, ale się czułem trochę pomniejszony.⁹ (Grod AB 26/2009M)

Travelling to Poland to study in the case of people who spoke Polish in their homes and cultivated Polish traditions was often connected to trauma and disappointment:

Na zerówce to byliśmy wszyscy razem, a na studiach na pierwszym roku byłam sama, w grupie nikt nie wiedział, że jestem z Grodna i tylko jedna dziewczyna ze mną kolegowala się i później wyjaśniło się to w trakcie zajęć, bo wykładowca powiedział, „ja rozumiem, że pani może popełnić jakieś błędy, bo nie kończyła szkoły polskiej, bo jest stamtąd”, to już połowa grupy się ze mną nie witała. I już zawsze trzeba było udowadniać, że nie jesteś jakaś inna czy gorsza. To był 1991 rok. Ale później też, jak już byłam tu w Grodnie po studiach, to parę studentów narzekalo, jedna dziewczyna nawet w Warszawie mówiła, że jest nie do zniesienia stosunek do niej ze strony Polaków, bo dla nich, dla tych, co mieszkają, dla obywateli, tych studentów, to my jesteśmy Ruscy i tam choć byś ozłocił, to zawsze będziesz Ruski.¹⁰ (Grod IC 40/2010F)

It follows from the above statement that the author had not been 'unmasked' either by how she spoke the language or by her appearance or material situation, but rather by a statement formulated directly by her lecturer. The disappointment with the situation in Poland is all the worse the more problems were connected in Belarus with having Polish origins.

Jak byłam w szkole, to czułam powiedzmy jakieś ograniczenie, że jestem Polką, bo „Przeczek”¹¹ i to tak jakbym czuła się gorzej, jak pojechałam do Polski, to okazało się, z innej strony, że ja jestem też inna. Tu mnie traktowali jako osobę obcą, a w Polsce też była obcą i to mnie bolało, ale rozumiałam, że są ludzie źli i różni. I to nie zależy od państwa. Chciałabym mieszkać w Polsce i może dlatego, że już jestem bardziej świadoma siebie, może pewniejsza i nie czułaby się tam, że muszą coś komuś udowadniać, a jak człowiek młody, po szkole to jednak był takim szokiem, ja nie mogłam zrozumieć... i dlatego jest takie przywiązanie do tej matki ojczyzny, miejsca urodzenia, bo tu jest swoje, swoje podwórko, taki azyl, rodzina. To może łatwiej powiedzieć, że się jest Białorusinem, w Polsce niż cały czas udowadniać, że ja jestem Polakiem. To jest taki może konformizm.¹² (Grod IC 40/2010F)

• • • • •

⁹ *I felt myself to be Polish, I knew the culture and the Polish language, but I didn't understand many things. Supposedly I am Polish, but I don't understand many things, here the spirit is completely different. I wouldn't need a lot of time to get used to it, but I would need some time at least. I felt strange and I knew the language a little, but I felt a little diminished.*

¹⁰ *During the "zero" year we were all together, but during my first year [of studies] I was alone, in my group no one knew that I was from Grodno and only one girl became friends with me, and later it became clear during the classes, because the lecturer said, "I understand that you might make some mistakes as you haven't finished a Polish school, because you are from there", and then half of the class stopped greeting me. And from then on I had to constantly prove that I wasn't any different or any worse. That was in 1991. But later also, when I was here in Grodno after my studies, a few students complained, one girl said that even in Warsaw the approach of the Polish towards her was unbearable, because for them, for those that live there, that are Polish citizens, for those students, we are Ruthenian, and even if we turned ourselves into gold, we would still be Ruthenian.*

¹¹ *Przek, Przeczka—a nickname given to the Polish in Belarus, referring to the high frequency of the linkage of the consonants prz in the Polish language.*

¹² *When I was at school, I felt, let's say, somehow limited by being Polish, because "Przeczek", and it's like I felt myself to be worse, when I went to Poland, it turned out from another perspective that I was also different there. Here they treated me like a foreigner, and in Poland I was also a foreigner and that was painful, but I came to understand that there are bad people and that people differ. And this doesn't depend on the*

An important statement is made in the last sentences of the above interview: frequently, the reason behind the conscious choice of a Belarusian national identity by those studying in Poland is that migrants from Belarus are rejected by their student environment and they are not acknowledged as Polish. The lack of acceptance from the Polish side as a result of the clear cultural differences and the feeling of homesickness for one's closest surroundings often lead to the Belarusian identification option ultimately winning. The following statements confirm this:

Określam się raczej jako Białorusin, powiem dlaczego, bo nie odczuwam takich związków z Polską, niby słowiańskie narody, ale to są inni ludzie. W czasie studiów w Polsce zacząłem się interesować historią. Myślę, że w większości moje dookreślenie dokonywało się w Polsce, poczułem przywiązanie do tej ziemi (do Białorusi), do tego regionu.¹³ (Grod KP 32/2010M)

Another interlocutor states:

Trudno mi jest powiedzieć, że jestem Polakiem, lubię Polskę, ale Kocham Białoruś, czuję, że jestem stąd. Różnica pomiędzy Polską a Białorusią jest z każdym rokiem coraz mniejsza. Na wsi czuje się większe różnice.¹⁴ (Grod FG 24/2010M)

Below is the most complete and moving statement of a young priest:

Jak byłem w Polsce, odkryłem swoje pochodzenie polskie i odkrywam niesamowitą miłość do Ojczyzny. Trzeba znaleźć złoty środek, żeby nie utracić swojej narodowości polskiej i nie utracić swej białoruskiej specyfiki. My jesteście potrzebni Białorusi, jako mniejszość, bo tworzymy nowe wartości, inną Białoruś. Mnie nie uczyli, „kim ty jesteś – Polak mały”. To, co Kocham, to Grodzieńszczyzna. Bo ja nie czuję się związany z Kaszubami, góralami, choć mam tam przyjaciół. Mam humor radziecki jak Ukraińcy. Polacy tego nie rozumieli. Różnię się od Polaka, Polacy nie mogli przyjąć Ukraińców, mając w pamięci walki polsko-ukraińskie, a ja nawet o nich nie wiedziałem. Nie mogę utożsamiać się w pełni z Polską. Wiara mi dodała skrzydeł, że potrzebny jestem tu właśnie taki, jaki jestem. Nie mogę powiedzieć Białorusi, że nie jestem jej synem, i nie mogę powiedzieć Polsce, że nie wyszedłem od niej. Jestem tu potrzebny dla takich ludzi jak ja. Jestem Białorusinem polskiego pochodzenia, rosyjskojęzycznym. Różnimy się od katolików innych diecezji Białorusi. Jesteśmy bardzo silnie związani z Polską, ale się od niej oddalamy.¹⁵ (Grod AW 35/2010M)

.....

country. I'd like to live in Poland and maybe, because now I'm more self-aware, maybe more confident, and I wouldn't feel there [anymore] that I have to prove something, and when a person is young, after school, then it is such a shock, I couldn't understand.... And for that reason there are such ties to the local homeland, the place you were born, because this is your own place, your backyard, your refuge, your family. It might be simpler to say you are Belarusian in Poland than to constantly attempt to prove that you are Polish. It might be a type of conformism.

¹³ *I define myself rather as Belarusian, I'll tell you why, it's because I don't feel any relationship with Poland, supposedly a Slavic nation, but they are different people. During my studies in Poland, I became interested in history. I think that in the majority the clarification of my identity happened in Poland, I felt ties to this land (to Belarus), to this region.*

¹⁴ *It is hard for me to say that I am Polish, I like Poland, but I love Belarus, I feel that I am from here. The differences between Poland and Belarus become smaller with every year. You notice larger differences in the countryside.*

¹⁵ *When I was in Poland, I discovered my Polish origins and I continue to uncover my exceptional love for the Homeland. You have to strike the right balance in order not to lose your Polish nationality and not to lose your Belarusian specificity. The Belarusians need us, as a minority, because we create new values, a different Belarus. They never taught me "kim ty jesteś – Polak mały". What I love is the Grodno region. I don't feel any ties with the Kashubians or the Polish highlanders, even though I have friends there. I have a Soviet sense of humor, like the Ukrainians. The Polish do not understand it. I am different from a Pole; the Polish could not take in the Ukrainians, having in mind the Polish-Ukrainian battles, while I didn't even know about them. I can't identify fully with Poland. My faith has given me wings, showing me that I am needed here precisely as the person that I am. I can't say to Belarus that I am no longer her son, and I can't tell Poland that I was not born of her. I am needed here by such people as I myself am. I am a Belarusian of Polish origin, a native speaker of Russian. We differ from Catholics in other dioceses in Belarus. We are very closely tied to Poland, but we are gradually moving further away from her.*

This interlocutor can be characterised as having a multidimensional cultural and national identity. He has a strong awareness of his "Polish roots" (a term which is differently understood by the inhabitants of Belarus than by Polish researchers). He also understands that the contemporary transformations within the Catholic communities in Belarus, even in the Grodno region, are heading towards a Belarusian identity construct. In the above-quoted statement, it is especially interesting that the priest perceives this multidimensionality of his identity as an inner richness which makes priestly ministry easier to administer among people with similar experiences. Anna Engelking writes about such people that

A much more nuanced and careful description is required for example in the case of Belarusian patriots, cultivating Belarusian literary language, who declare themselves to be Polish (because of being Catholic); these are young people who have inherited the local Catholic-Polish tradition of their parents and grandparents, Poles from Belarus who have been to Poland to study, and come back as people who were rejected by a mythologized homeland, because they were marked by the stigma of being 'Ruthenians' but at the same time no longer identify with the local Polish identity. (Engelking, 2004, p. 238).

Similar conclusions are reached in the collective text by R. Dzwonkowski, O. Gorbaniuk and J. Gorbaniuk:

[...] during their stay in the country of their ancestors people have experiences which contribute to the re-evaluation of their previous identification and nationality to the detriment of their identification with Polishness (Dzwonkowski, Gorbaniuk, & Gorbaniuk, 2002, p. 138).

The above statements should be agreed with, to the exclusion of the authors' basic assumption that Poland is the country of origin of the ancestors of all the students coming there from the former USSR.

The following statement demonstrates that national identification often depends on social contexts and external circumstances:

Nu, może kiedyś tak z rozmów ludzi, to czują się raz Polakami raz Białorusinami i to najczęściej pokolenie starsze, bo mi na przykład babcia mówiła: jaką ty jesteś Białorusinką, skoro ja jestem Polką, zawsze byłam, jakoś tak, i niektóre babcie tak rozmawiają po polsku, mianowicie w tej dzielnicy (okolicy), gdzie ja mieszkam, bo tutaj w Mińsku jeszcze nie wiem dokładnie sytuacji. Bo tam gdzie jest Grodno, mój brat na przykład jak tam mieszka chyba trzy lata, już czuje się za Polaka. I trochę rozmawia w języku polskim. A też mieszkał niedaleko Narocz i po polsku nie rozmawiał w ogóle, a po trzech latach już trochę mówi. Z rodziną mieszka. To znaczy, że w zależności od sytuacji może się ta tożsamość różnie klarować.¹⁶ (Min OS 20/2011F)

This is a statement made by a female student who comes from the village of Postawy in north-west Belarus. Her family, living in an area which is predominantly Catholic, identifies itself as Polish and uses the Polish language in the sphere of the sacrum. After coming to Minsk to study, the girl has been actively involved in the activities of the University Catholic Ministry. The student meetings are conducted in Belarusian. My informant, after changing her language in the sphere of the sacrum, has also changed her choice

• • • • •

¹⁶ *Well, maybe sometimes during conversations with people... they sometimes feel Polish and at others Belarusian and most often this is the older generation, because my grandmother for example used to ask me what kind of a Belarusian I was since I was actually Polish and have always been, or something like that, and some grandmothers speak Polish, even in the area where I live, but here in Minsk I don't know the situation yet. In Grodno, my brother, for example, since he's lived there has already begun to feel he is Polish. And he speaks a little Polish. But he used to live not far from Narocz and he didn't speak Polish at all, and now after three years he already speaks a little. He lives with our family. This means that depending on the situation, this identity can be constructed differently.*

of national orientation, opting for a Belarusian identity. Her brother, who lives in a Polish-language environment, chooses the Polish national identity and the Polish language for the sphere of the sacrum.

The above personal story may serve as a model illustration of the discussed issue. However, this is not always the pattern that occurs. Many conversations reveal more complex and multi-dimensional dependencies. An exceptionally interesting task involved the analysis of the statements made by two female students brought up in Catholic families with a Polish orientation, who during their studies in Minsk—after being confronted with Belarusianess—made completely contrasting choices. The first student switches to the Belarusian language for praying and during liturgies, even though her religious upbringing was under the auspices of her grandmother and took place in Polish. In consequence, the crossing over to Belarusian in the sphere of the sacrum (our conversation was conducted in Russian) does not change her Polish identity.

Я думаю, что это идет из детства. Бабушка была полька, она рассказывала много, как жила в те времена (она была 1925 года рождения), и все у нас в семье поляки считаются. Я всегда говорю, что полька (когда спрашивают). У меня отчество – папу зовут Войтек. В университете спрашивают: „католичка?“, „полячка?“, или могут сказать: „наверное, из Гродненской области.“¹⁷ (Min AS 21/2010F)

In this case, the orders of language and of national identity follow different paths. The conviction developed within the home of the family's Polish identity has not been verified in adult life. The language of everyday communication remains the same—in Minsk it continues to be Russian, while at home—'simple speech';¹⁸ however, it does change in the sphere of the sacrum but this does not influence her national identification. It should be added that my interlocutor had never been to Poland and had never had the opportunity to compare her understanding of Polishness with any other form of Polish identity even though she has a 'Karta Polaka' (translated into English as the Card of the Pole, Polish Charter or Polish Card).¹⁹

When asked about her primary and most important identification (the one that cannot be changed), she answered:

На первое место поставила бы, что я католичка, потом полька, потом другие вещи. Наверное, в первую очередь, будет трудно с религией, тяжелее ее поменять. Думаю, вообще невозможно. А о национальности не задумываешься. Полька и полька.²⁰ (Min AS 21/2010F)

The other female student makes completely different choices. She comes from Rubiezewicze, located not far from Minsk, in an area which formerly was within the borders of Poland (in the period between the two World Wars). As was the case of my previous interlocutor, she comes from a family with Polish traditions and she was taught

.....

¹⁷ I think that "comes from" or has its source in childhood. My grandma was Polish, and she told us a lot about her life in those days (my grandmother was born in 1925). In our family, everyone regards themselves as Polish. Whenever I am asked, I always say that I am Polish. My father's name is Wojtek, so I have that name after him. At the university, they always ask me if I am "Catholic", "a Pole", and they also sometimes state that "she's certainly from the Grodno district".

¹⁸ The term 'simple speech' is used in reference to a local variant of Belarusian and is juxtaposed with Belarusian literary language and the Polish spoken in the northern borderlands.

¹⁹ The 'Karta Polaka' is a document which confirms that a person belongs to the Polish nation while being a citizen of another country. The Card offers certain rights, such as the possibility of receiving long-term visas to Poland or receiving an education within the Polish public education system. It was established by an act of the Polish parliament from 7 September 2007.

²⁰ Above all, I would say that the most important thing is that I am Catholic, then Polish, after that there are other things. First of all, it will be difficult to deal with my religion. It is hard to change that aspect. I think that it is completely impossible. And I do not even debate my nationality. Polish and Polish.

her first prayers in Polish by her grandmother. It could be stated that for both interlocutors their starting points—family situation and place of birth—are comparable. However, the second student declares herself to be Belarusian and in everyday life she uses Belarusian when she is among her student peers. The Polish identity of her family—of her parents and grandparents—is not disputed; in fact, my informant is clear in her evaluation of her Polish roots:

Urodziłam się na Białorusi, dlatego tu czuję się bardziej, no... ojczyzna jest Białoruś. [Twoi rodzice uważają się za Polaków?] Tak, no u nich tam w świadectwie napisane, że są Polakami. Ponieważ rodzice ojca z Białegostoku, no on już urodził się tutaj. Chociaż po polsku nie umię nic powiedzieć, no rozumię, mimo to są Polakami.²¹ (Rub IP 22/2011F)

During our long conversation, we tried to distinguish which aspects appealed to my interlocutor from her Polish identity and which from her Belarusian one:

No, białoruskość u nas na przykład w języku, ponieważ my rozmawiamy po białoruski, nie po rosyjsku, wiele osób tutaj rozmawia. Nawet babcia, nu, po białoruski, lecz ze słowami polskimi, ale to tak bardziej, jeżeli to mówić, że to język mieszany, to on mieszany pomiędzy białoruski i polski, nie pomiędzy rosyjskim i białoruskim. Potem, no, co jeszcze, że my urodziliśmy na Białorusi i polski, jeżeliby w szkole nie było języka polskiego, to nawet mogliby i nie rozmawiać, no tak pacierze by odmawiali, ale tak nawet bez zrozumienia, o co chodzi. [Jeśli mówisz, że jesteś Białorusinką, to się identyfikujesz z terytorium?] Tak. [Jeżeli mówisz, że jesteś Polką?] Że moje wszystkie babcie, dziadki, pradziadki, przodki są Polakami. [A jeżeli chodzi o twoją religijność, gdzie byś ją umieściła – po białoruskiej stronie czy po polskiej?] Po polskiej.²² (Rub IP 22/2011F)

What follows from the above conversation is that similarly as one can speak a few languages which consistently and separately serve for communication in various areas of life (such a state is called diglossia by sociolinguists), so can a person separate various spheres of his/her life and in some cases identify as Polish while in others as Belarusian. For one of my interlocutors with a Polish identity, the Belarusian language was tied to the sphere of the sacrum, for the other—with a Belarusian self-identity—the whole sphere of religion was part of her Polish heritage.²³ At the end of my conversation with the female student, I asked her about her hypothetical future life choices:

[A jak będziesz uczyła swoje dzieci pacierza, to będziesz je uczyła po polsku czy po białorusku?] Mam taką sytuację, że jeśli będę miała dzieci, a mąż rozmawia w języku rosyjskim, ja rozmawiam po białorusku, to chciałabym, żeby dzieci uczyli się i tego, i tego języka, lecz będę z nimi rozmawiała po białorusku, ale oczywiście, że będę uczyć pacierzy. No jeszcze będę patrzeć, jaki kościół, w jakim tam języku będą msze, no jeżeli tam msze po białorusku w tym mieście, gdzie będę mieszkała, czy tam we wsi, jeżeli msze tam będą po białorusku,

• • • • •

²¹ *I was born in Belarus, which is why here I feel more... well... my homeland is Belarus. [Do your parents think of themselves as Polish?] Yes, it's written in their certificates that they are Polish. Because my father's parents are from Białystok, but he was born here. Even though they can't say anything in Polish, well, they understand, despite that, they are Polish.*

²² *Well, a Belarusian identity is for example in the language for us, because we speak Belarusian and not Russian, many people speak it here. Even my grandmother speaks Belarusian but with some Polish words, but it's more like a mixed language you could say, mixed Belarusian and Polish, not Russian and Belarusian. And also, well, that we were born in Belarus, and the Polish [language], if we hadn't had Polish at school we might not have even spoken it, at least not really understanding it. We might have said prayers in Polish but not understanding what they were about. [When you say that you are Belarusian then do you identify with the territory?] Yes. [And when you say you are Polish?] That all my grandmothers, grandfathers, great-grandparents, ancestors are Polish. [And in the case of your religion, where would you place this aspect – on the Belarusian or the Polish side?] On the Polish side.*

²³ Justyna Straczuk (2006) discussed the usefulness of sociolinguistic theories in anthropological research.

*muszę uczyć po białorusku pacierza, lecz bardzo będę chciała, żeby język polski też znali.*²⁴
(Rub IP 22/2011F)

In the above-cited fragment, the most interesting aspect is the pragmatism with which my interlocutor approaches linguistic issues. The Belarusian language is important but Polish also finds a place in my interlocutor's children's educational process. However, the most important factor would be the language in which the services were conducted in the church the children attended.

*

An analysis of the interviews has shown that the interlocutors' identities are not homogeneous but are made up of many levels or various currents which run parallel to each other. Anna Engelking writes that in the Polish-Belarusian borderlands identity is constructed "...from such elements as, among other things, religious, local, state and national identities, which frequently enter into very complex interdependencies with each other" (Engelking, 2004, p. 264).

For my interlocutors, that part which is considered Belarusian does not function in an antagonistic relation to that which is considered Polish. One can have a Polish family background or Polish history and choose a Belarusian identity in the present. One may pray in Polish and sympathize with the Belarusian opposition. If we add to this the widespread presence of the Russian language and culture, we find that it is possible to simultaneously listen to Russian radio programmes and read Russian literature, go to Polish church services, and declare oneself Belarusian. As in the case of polyphony, the melodic line first finds itself in the first voice, after which it rings out in the second voice or in the basso, while similarly a Polish identity can be linked to one's religion or nationality or family heritage. In literature on multilingualism and multiple identities, such a polyphonic identity is defined as di-ethnia by Fishman (1980). Elżbieta Smułkowa uses this term in her description of the situation in Belarus when considering the Belarusian and Russian elements in its contemporary culture, while also finding similarities to the symbiosis of cultures that existed during the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Smułkowa, 2002, p. 421). In turn, in her anthropological description of the borderlands Justyna Straczuk refers to Ferguson's sociolinguistic concept of diglossia (Ferguson, 1959), which shows the mechanisms of social multilingualism among the inhabitants of the borderlands as complementary to their multiculturalism (Straczuk, 2006, p. 13). The heritage of this multiculturalism manifests itself not only in my interlocutors' complex identities but also in the originality of the Catholic Church in Belarus, with a characteristic feature of the intermingling of Belarusian and Polish motifs.

Several studies on relations between nationality and religion confirm the departure from defining one's nationality through religion. Piotr Rudkouski writes that this is a positive development for Catholicism in Belarus:

• • • • •

²⁴ [And when you teach your children to say their prayers, will you teach them in Polish or Belarusian?] *My situation is such that if I had children and my husband spoke Russian and I spoke Belarusian, then I would want my children to learn both languages, but I would talk to them in Belarusian, but of course I would teach them to say their prayers. And I would also check the church and what language they conduct their masses in the town where I would live, or in the village; if the masses were in Belarusian, I would have to teach them their prayers in Belarusian, but I would very much like them to also know Polish.*

It might seem paradoxical at first glance but I am simultaneously an adherent of Polishisation and Belarusization. (...) Both Polishisation and Belarusization (of course other national projects might also enter the game) are welcome phenomena and extremely important for the shaping of civil society in Belarus and the formation of a space for intercultural dialogue. (Rudkouski, 2009 p. 204)

This has also been confirmed by Iwona Kabzińska's research (Kabzińska, 2004). Similar conclusions are reached following the research I conducted between 2009 and 2012 of the language of the Catholic population in Belarus. The respondents with a Polish national identity who belong to the Roman Catholic Church allow for the possibility of modifying their nationality while retaining their Roman Catholic faith. The political transformations which occurred at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s have brought about changes in the situation of the Church in Belarus. A parallel reconstruction of the religious model occurred, whereby religion has gradually come to be perceived as separate from issues connected to national identity. Religious practices have become a personal matter and are increasingly less dependent on pressure exerted by the local community and the family. Choices linked to one's nationality have also become a consequence of individual judgement. The representatives of the middle and younger generations have more contact with other behavioural patterns and values than those offered by schools, universities, youth subcultures, the workplace or the mass media and Internet. Linguistic issues that evoked so many emotions among the older generation have ceased to be as important for younger people, since they do not perceive the Belarusian literary language as a low language, not fit to be used in the sphere of the sacrum, while multilingual communication in Polish, Belarusian and Russian is increasingly becoming part of their everyday life.

*Translated by
Miłka Stępień*

A LIST OF THE INFORMANTS

Grod KJ 26/2010M – male, age 26, Grodno 2010
Grod KP 32/2010M – male, 32, Grodno 2010
Grod AB 26/2009M – male, 26, Grodno 2009
Grod AW 35/2010M – male, 35, Grodno 2010
Grod FG 24/2010M – male, 24, Grodno 2010
Grod IC 40/2010F – female, 40, Grodno 2010
Grod KS 38/2010M – male, 38, Grodno 2010
Min AS 21/2010F – female, 21, Minsk 2010
Min OS 20/2011F – female, 20, Minsk 2010
Rub IP 22/2011F – female, 22, Rubiezewicze 2011

REFERENCES

- Dzwonkowski, R., Gorbaniuk, O., & Gorbaniuk, J. (2002). *Świadomość narodowa młodzieży polskiego pochodzenia z byłego ZSRR studiującej w Polsce*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Engelking, A. (2004). Etnograf wobec stereotypu „Polaka z Kresów”: Z przemysłu w 10-lecie badań terenowych na Grodzieńszczyźnie. In A. Kuczyński & M. Michalska (Eds.), *Kultura i świadomość etniczna Polaków na Wschodzie: Tradycja i współczesność* (pp. 231–240). Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Katedra Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej.
- Fatyga, B. (2005). Pokolenie. In H. Kubiak, G. Lasowski, W. Morawski, & J. Szacki (Eds.), *Encyklopedia socjologii: Suplementy* (pp. 193–197). Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15(2), 325–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1959.11659702>
- Fishman, J. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturalism as individual and as societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1) 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995>
- Golachowska, E. (2012). *Jak mówić do Pana Boga: Wielojęzyczność katolików na Białorusi na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*. Warszawa: Sławiściyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy.
- Golachowska, E. (2013). Zmiana repertuaru imion katolików w Świrze na północno-zachodniej Białorusi w drugiej połowie XX wieku. In E. Dzięgiel & T. Korpysz (Eds.), *Niejedno ma imię: Prace onomastyczne i dialektologiczne dedykowane Profesor Ewie Wolnicz-Pawłowskiej* (pp. 145–158). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego.
- Kabzińska, I. (1999). *Wśród kościelnych Polaków*. Warszawa: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- Kabzińska, I. (2004). Czy zmierzch stereotypu Polak-katolik? In A. Kuczyński & M. Michalska (Eds.), *Kultura i świadomość etniczna Polaków na Wschodzie* (pp. 191–202). Wrocław: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej.
- Kłoskowska, A. (2001). *National cultures at the grass-root level*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Rudkouski, P. (2009). *Powstawanie Białorusi* (J. Bernatowicz, Tłum.). Wrocław: Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego.
- Smułkowa, E. (2002). *Białoruś i pogranicza: Studia o języku i społeczeństwie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Stracuk, J. (2006). *Cmentarz i stół: Pogranicze prawosławno-katolickie w Polsce i na Białorusi*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.