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NATIONAL MINORITIES IN POLAND An Anthropological Outline

Abstract. The article focuses on the question of national minorities in Poland in the context of anthropological reflections. Contemporary discussion about national and ethnic minorities occupies an important place both in the political debates as well as in cultural studies in Europe and the world. The increase of significance of this issue is for the authors a pretext for a closer look at the current situation of national minorities in Poland. Authors includes historical perspective which shows fundamental changes occurring among minority groups in this country. In the Polish history, we can distinguish various stages which influenced the social structure of national, ethnic and religious minorities. The article includes,

first of all, the situation of national minorities in the Second Republic of Poland (1918-1939; Poland as a multi-ethnic country), Polish People's Republic (1945-1989; Poland as a country with a small number of minorities), and after democratic transformation after 1989 (rise of interest concerning the question of nation and national minorities in everyday life).

Keywords: Poland, national minorities, national transformations, multi-nationality, mono-ethnicity, assimilation.

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НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ МЕНЬШИНСТВА В ПОЛЬШЕ

Антропологический аспект

Аннотация. Эта статья посвящена вопросам, связанным с национальными меньшинствами в Польше, в контексте антропологической рефлексии. Сегодня дискуссия о национальных и этнических меньшинствах занимает важное место как в политических дебатах, так и в культурологических исследованиях в Европе и во всем мире. Растущая важность этого вопроса является для авторов предлогом взглянуть на текущее положение национальных меньшинств в Польше. Авторы учитывают историческую перспективу, которая показывает основные изменения, происходящие среди меньшинств в стране. В истории Польши можно выделить различные этапы, которые повлияли на социальную структуру национальных, этнических и религиозных меньшинств. В статье в основном учитывается положение национальных меньшинств во время Второй Польской Республики (1918–1939 гг.; Польша как многоэтническая страна), Польской Народной Республики (1945–1989 гг.; Польша как страна с незначительным числом меньшинств) и после демократических изменений после 1989 г. (возрождение интереса к вопросам, связанным с нацией и национальными меньшинствами в повседневной жизни).

Ключевые слова: Польша, национальные меньшинства, национальные изменения, многонациональность, моноэтничность, ассимиляция

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Diverse communities of non-Polish provenience always lived, apart from Poles, in the Polish state. Till the end of the 18th century, people speaking other languages and observing different customs, although very few, did not constitute a big problem in Poland. Living in the territory of the Polish Republic, one had to be a loyal subordinate of the current king. But the subordinates seemed more or less suspicious if they

believed other religion than Catholic. Belonging to a given religious community was at that time more important than being a member of national and state community.

National questions started to be important in Europe during the 19th century. At that time Poland did not exist as a separate country but was divided between Russia, Austria and Germany, and the Poles were practically constituting national minorities in these three states, although in particular territories – in the area of former Polish Republic – they generally were most numerous. Also representatives of other nationalities lived there, with time having more and more distinct identity. At the end of that century, it was already obvious that if the Polish state was to be created once again, not only Poles would live there, but also national minorities. The proportions between them were still a question of speculation.

Only after the creation of the new Polish state, that is after the end of the first world war, it was known what kind of minorities lived in Poland. However, precise data were not determined. In 1931, a census was carried out, during which citizens were asked not about their nationality but only about language and religion. Based on the obtained data about the languages spoken and religions practiced in Poland, a number of particular national group was estimated, which could not be, of course, precise. Anyway, from the published results of the census it could be said that among almost 32 million people in the country, 22 million were Poles. Thus, national minorities were relatively numerous: Ukrainians – 4,5 mln (14% of the population), Jews – 2,7 mln (8,5%), Belorussians – 990 000 (3%), Germans – 740 000 (2,3%), Russians – 139 000 (0,4%), Lithuanians – 83 000 (0,3%), Czechs – 38 000 (0,1%) [Tomaszewski 1985: 35], Slovaks – 20 000 [Ciągwa 1997: 181]. Besides, there were “locals”, people not having any national consciousness who were estimated at as much as 707 000 (2,2%), and who lived in Polesie, that is at the borderlands of today Western Ukraine and Belarus [Obrębski 2007: 223-224]. Researchers of national questions believe that the number of three biggest minorities was lowered and because of that Poles were probably 1,5 mln fewer. We should emphasize that till the end of the interwar period, due to a high birthrate, population of the country increased to 35 million, so also the population of particular minorities increased. In Poland at that time, there were also minorities of no more than several thousand people: Tatars – 5 500, Armenians – 5 000, Karaites – 1000, and even several hundred people: Bulgarians – 300, Georgians – 200 and other small communities [Pełczyński 2017: 9-34].

Minorities were mostly concentrating at the borderlands, in the territories where Polish population was beginning to be smaller than another national group, dominating outside Polish borders, in Soviet republics or in their countries. So, Ukrainians lived in the South-Eastern territories. Germans could be encountered in the West. Next to the Polish-Slovak border, Slovak population lived.

Moreover, there were minorities whose representatives had come to Poland some time before from the territories far from its borders. Firstly, we should mention here Jews, the groups of whom were located in the entire territory of the country, although they predominated in cities and towns in the east. Also Tatars and Karaites came from afar. Their small colonies were located in the north-western part of the country. Armenians were connected to south-eastern regions. The biggest number of Russians lived in the east of Poland, also in Warsaw and Łódź – more or less a half of them were descendants of the Russians who settled in the territories belonging before the first world war to Russia. The rest of them were the refugees from the times of the October Revolution [Stanisławski 1996: 26-29]. Czechs, in

turn, had their locations not at the Polish-Czech borderland, but in Volhynia and in the town of Zelów close to Łódź.

After the second world war, the population of each of the enumerated communities was significantly reduced. This was caused by extermination of Jewish and Gypsy people (in the interwar period estimated at 30 000), carried out by the German occupant. This was also caused by the change of borders – most of Ukrainians, Belorussians and Lithuanians, before the war constituting minorities, remained on the territories joined to the Soviet Union. Another reason were voluntary or forced migrations. The later concerned mostly Germans: these who lived in Poland before the war and these from the so called Recovered Territories, which mage centuries ago belonged to Poland, but later were taken by Germans, and returned to Poland after the second world war. However, Silesians, Masurians, Warmians and Kashubians, considered Poles, were not displaced from there. In the later period, the population of minorities in the Polish People's Republic was still decreasing due to subsequent emigration as well as assimilation. And only individual people were coming from abroad, for instance to get married with a citizen of Poland. But at times, political refugees were showing up, mostly Greeks and Macedonians from Greece, who came to Poland in the second half of the 1940s.

These are the numbers of the populations of minority groups from the beginning of the 1960s, established based on the analysis of various data: the population of Poland was at that time almost 30 million people, among whom the minorities constituted together 1-2%. The numbers were as follows: Ukrainians – 180 000, Belorussians – 165 000, Jews – 31 000, Slovaks – 21 000, Russians – 19 000, Gypsy – 12 000, Lithuanians – 10 000, Greeks and Macedonians – 10 000, Germans – 3 000, Czechs – 2 000 [Sakson 1991: 4].

These data can raise some concerns. Especially the data concerning Germans. After the war, as a result of the decisions of great powers (USA, Soviet Union and Great Britain), Germans were resettled from the Recovered Territories, while Silesians, Masurians, Warmians and Kashubians remained. In 1971, their population was estimated at over million, and in 1985 at 984 000, including 330 000 – 400 000 Silesians, 200 000 – 300 000 Kashubians, 10 000 Masurians and 5 000 Warmians [Sakson 1990: 167]. A large number of each of these groups was constituted by people considered themselves Germans. It is difficult to give concrete numbers as their national identity was characterized by changeability.

Only in the Third Republic of Poland, proper national statistics was taken care of. By conducting in 2002 a census, people were also asked about their nationality. It was possible to get information that minority groups are very small and constitute no more than 1% of the population of the country. It results from this census that the most numerous group are Germans – 152 000. In turn, Belorussians – 48 000, Ukrainians – 30 000, Romani – 12 000, Russians – 6000, Lemko 5000, Lithuanians – 6000, Slovaks – 2000, Vietnamese – 1800, Greeks – 1400, Jews – 1100, Bulgarians – 1100, Armenians – 1000. So, these numbers are a lot smaller than those obtained from earlier estimates. Representatives of some minorities could have been less numerous due to emigration. In various years, Jews were emigrating from Poland to Israel, America and other countries. Silesians, Masurians, Warmians were emigrating to Germany. Ukrainians to Canada. Greeks and Macedonians, being political refugees, after normalization of the political situation in Greece in 1974, were in majority coming back to their motherland, and a part of Macedonians settled in Macedonia.

Besides, the fact that relatively small number of the inhabitants of Poland declared as non-Poles, was undoubtedly influenced by assimilation, visible especially among Russians and Armenians.

The census organized ten years later, allowed not only one identification, thanks to which, another percent of people was enabled to described themselves as Poles and at the same time members of one of the minorities.

In the interwar period, when the minorities in Poland were very numerous, their representatives were often creating local communities. There were villages inhabited in majority or even in total by Belorussian or Ukrainian peasants, there were towns dominated by Jewish population. In Podlasie (north-eastern Poland), there are Belorussian and Lithuanian villages. In south-eastern territories, there were towns with a high percentage of Ukrainian and Lemko population. Because in the years after the second world war, the members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (so called *banderowcy*), who committed unprecedented massacre of Poles, were mostly recruiting from them, the authorities displaced them in 1947, in order to settle individual families or small groups in various regions of the country.

Although after the Second World War, the population of particular minorities was greatly decreased, questions of nationality did not stop to be important. Poland, together with Lithuania, was for century constituted the Commonwealth, which was de facto a state of many nationalities. And its contemporary homogeneity happened due to the activities of great powers that decided about its fate during the war and after its end. That does not mean, however, that non-Polish population, in the past numerously inhabiting the Commonwealth, although also limited to one percent, is to Poles indifferent. Both of them are still related by many matters, not only from the past.

For the states of the European Union, to which Poland belongs since 2004, cultural difference is treated as a value. Poland, already in 2000, ratified a frame convention of the European Council about protection of national minorities [Nowicka 2014]. This way, protection of national minorities belongs to the duties of the state, and preserving cultural diversity is *sine qua non* of contemporary European democracies.

Currently, the legal base of the relations national and ethnic majority – minority is the law about national and ethnic minorities, operative in Poland since 2005. It distinguishes two types of minority groups. National minorities are constituted by Polish citizens of non Polish provenience, living in the Polish territory for at least one hundred years, and coming from the nations having their own states. While ethnic minorities are the ones that do not meet the last condition. A national minority are for instance Jews, and ethnic one – Karaites. Such differentiation, fur sure serves political or administrative purposes. But for a historian, sociologist or ethnologist researching minorities it is little useful. Each of the minorities, regardless of being considered national or ethnic, has its own specificity which makes them a completely separate issue. Also the requirement of living in the Polish territory for at least one hundred years can hardly be taken here into consideration. There are communities which live in Poland for a shorter time, and still cannot be considered anything else but national minorities. They are constituted from people of foreign origin and for that reasons have various elements of non-Polish culture.

In the law from 2005, there are groups which meet the conditions described by the legislator in the definition of national or ethnic minority. National minorities are: Belorussians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Germans, Czechs, Slovaks, Jews, Russians, Armenians. Ethnic ones are: Romani, Tatars, Karaites, Lemko. The later were consid-

ered, already in the interwar period, a part of Ukrainians, but in result of later ethnic processes, their separateness became clear [Żurko 1997: 51–62]. To the listed groups, we can also add Georgians and Bulgarians, anyway, they lack not much to meet the conditions of the law.

Each of the minorities inhabiting Poland has its own cultural specificity. Not seldom it is connected to social configurations dominating in them. Belorussians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, belonged in majority to the social class of peasants, so for them folk culture is most characteristic. National culture began to be created among them relatively late – in the second half of the 19th century. Besides, there were communities with a high percentage of intelligentsia – Russians, Germans, Armenians. Jews, in turn, living for centuries in a kind of isolation, created a very original religious and secular culture.

Generally speaking, the majority of inhabitants of Poland pays attention to two elements of culture of the minorities: language and religion. Language different than Polish and not Roman Catholic religion.

All the minorities in Poland are, or were not long time ago, also linguistic minorities [Brzezinowa 1999: 3–51]. However, in the case of each of them, language has different influence on their identity. Often, linguistic specificity of given minority is related to its earlier or current location. In borderlands, there are minorities living using languages close to the Polish language. To them belong: Belorussians, Ukrainians, Slovaks and Czechs. Boundaries between the Polish language and Ukrainian, Belorussian and Slovak dialects (Czechs are here a problem as they live in centers far from the Polish-Czech border) are quite blurred, what makes them at times hard to distinguish. Representatives of the minorities often know the language of the majority to an extent as if they belonged to it. Probably it is more rare the other way. Anyway, both among them as well as among the later, bilingual people can be encountered.

In the borderlands, there are also minorities whose languages are completely different from the Polish language, such as Germans and Lithuanians. The truth is that their languages are not related to Polish, but at times, they influence it somehow, especially in the scope of lexical and phonetic systems.

Languages of other minorities can be divided into diaspora languages: Jewish, Armenians, Kraite, and Balkan: Greek, Bulgarian and Macedonian. The first one had the biggest significance, as a large and settled in Poland for ages community was using it.

We also have to mention Kashubian language, related to Polish, but distinct from it, which is used by native population in the Gdańsk Pomerania. Since 2005, it has had a status of regional language.

A kind of curiosity is the dying language of the town of Wilamowice in Lesser Poland. It was created in result of mixing various, difficult to identify, linguistic elements, transferred by immigrants from Germany, Holland, Belgium and Great Britain.

Religion has been a very important differentiator of minorities in Poland [Urban 1994]. It unifies the members of a minority group in a separate organization, continuing their religious traditions. There are minorities, however, whose members, like the majority of Poles, belong to the Roman Catholic Church – mostly Lithuanians and Slovaks. Greek Catholics are in majority Ukrainians and Lemkos. While Armenians are Catholics of Armenian Church. Belorussians and Russians are connected to the Orthodox Church. Among the later are also Old Church Believers, living in the Polish territories since the XVIII century. Moreover, Greeks, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Georgians, and partially Ukrainians and Lemkos. Finally, Germans, especially

these groups which lived in Poland in the interwar period, are Protestants: Lutherans, more rarely representatives of other branches. It is worth adding that also Masurians and Silesians from Cieszyn Silesia are Lutherans. Czechs are partially descendants of Hussites, but currently connected to Calvinism.

Non Christian minorities, for centuries connected to Poland, are Jews, Karaites and Tatars: Judaists, believers of Karaism and Muslims. For merely several decades, there are here Vietnamese people, mostly Buddhists. Such groups as Vietnamese are not considered national minority but immigrant groups that more and more numerous are coming to Europe, including Poland. It should be mentioned here that the processes of migration have an influence on the concepts of national minorities. As Ewa Nowicka notices, it is difficult to classify a person to national minority in the case of Ukrainians, Byelorussians or Armenians. They exist in Poland legally as national minorities and for centuries inhabit Polish territories. At the same time, many immigrants coming from Ukraine, Belarus and Armenia live in Poland, who belong to the same national groups that the representatives of the mentioned minorities, living in Poland and being Polish citizens. Formally, in the case of immigrants, the difference is only having or not having the Polish citizenship, in practice, the Ukrainians or Armenian economic immigrants coming to Poland, build strong relations with Polish Ukrainians or Armenians [Nowicka 2014]. Importantly, some groups of immigrants, mostly Ukrainians, dominated in number the Ukrainian national minority living in Poland for centuries. According to the data of the Polish National Bank, around 1,2 mln Ukrainians went through the Polish job market in 2018¹.

Linguistic and religious specificity of particular minorities is connected to many issues contributing to their culture. The fact that almost every of them has their own language, implies the existence of minority school system and writing (journals, literature). They were very developed in the interwar period when the minorities constituted one third of the inhabitants of Poland. However, not equally among all of the groups. It depended mostly on having numerous intelligentsia – the most numerous was among Jews, Russians and Germans. In the postwar period, together with the decrease of the number of particular minority groups, also education and publishing was reduced. Not without significance was also the fact that communist system dominated and the authorities limited such activity [Pełczyński 2016: 62–64]. It began to re-emerge after the collapse of communism in the late 1980s.

Religion different than Roman Catholic was not without significance. Although even among Lithuanians and Slovaks, being Roman Catholics, we can observe their own religious culture. The more it is developed among the other minorities. It includes not only the activities in the temples, but also ceremonials, especially customs outside their walls. Usually, national minority in Poland is to some extent a religious minority. It can be clearly seen in the case of Jews, Karaites, Tatars, Byelorussians.

Nationality situation in Poland after the collapse of communism underwent significant change. It was a result of immigration of the representatives of various nationalities, mostly from outside the eastern border. In the 1990s, a not precised group of Vietnamese people showed up. In the recent years, the most numerous newcomers were Ukrainians, the number of whom is estimated at even 2 mln [Figura 2018: 261–262]. Besides, the Polish border was also crossed by numerous Byelorussians, Russians, Moldovans, Georgians and others. To dominant majority of those

¹ See: <https://businessinsaider.com.pl>

immigrants are people looking for a job in Poland. Not all of them are going to settle here for ever. And indeed, we can notice, after several months or several years of stay in Poland, their returns to the motherland or emigration to other countries. A part of them, however, stay in Poland for good. If not the, their children will probably co-create national minorities in the future.

Contemporarily, national minorities in Poland, are undertaking a number of various political activities. Ethnopolitical processes constitute an important barometer of control and development of own identities, as well as they are a result of broadening, by the minority groups, their own possibilities in the sphere of public activity. Currently, we can distinguish four main strategies undertaken by minorities in the Polish society. The first strategy is "ethnic (national) organic work". It is characterized by the aim of the minority group to maintaining and development of their own culture through work and engagement of their members. It is based on their own creativity (especially in creating institutions organizations), and not on help from the state. This strategy is present among the minorities which in the 1990s rebuilt their sense of ethnic identity: Germans, Kataites, Tatars or Romani. The second strategy is "citizen way of treating minorities". It is a strategy directed by the state. The leaders of the minority groups demand from the state realization of the laws they are entitled, resulting both from the Polish law, as well as from international law. The representatives of these circles often raise postulates of equal treatment. Such attitudes dominate among large organizations focusing such minorities as German, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Slovak. The third strategy can be described as "strategy of cooperation and going outside". The feature of this strategy is political participation of the minority and active involvement of the minority into the social live of region and country, as a part of activities performed by the minorities. The minorities not only take part in elections, but they also have their representatives in the structures of local self-governments and national parliament (e.g. in 2011, a senator's mandate was exercised by a candidate coming from Armenian minority, and the most numerous German minority has their own candidates running from their own election committee). The last strategy it «to be 'the minority in the majority'», which consists in maintaining separateness not arousing among the majority society negative associations and enables simultaneous use of all the rights that majority has. This strategy dominates among the representatives of Belorussian minority [Łodziński 2005: 264; Kowalewska 2015: 31].

Among the national minorities in Poland, we deal with communities of several thousand members (e.g. Germans) and of merely several hundred people (e.g. Karaites). This results in the development of their culture and identity being different. National and ethnic minorities are under constant assimilation pressure. The dominating culture require from the members of minorities proficient use of the official language. Because of that, among some of minority groups practical skills of using ethnic language disappeared (e.g. Tatars). Relationships with their own culture are manifested by media, press, cultural events, or as a part of activity of organizations which are quite numerously represented in Poland. The mentioned assimilation processes merge with rebirth of national identities. Activation in the area of politics brings to the first plan, the norms, values and cultural patters, important for cultivating own, separate identities. Attraction of tradition and cultural heritage of minorities helps the development of the mechanisms legitimizing their activities in the dominant society. At the same time, "historicity", "ethnicity" and "separateness" are

accepted by the majority. Constant readiness to maintain the difference, as well as a kind of competition with the dominant culture, is able to formulate tactical alliances within federation and co-existence of many cultures. Constructing identities remains then in the process of constant changes, and the awareness of difference and similarities toward the majority remains a foundation in thinking about national minorities.

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