ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ALTERNATIVE STATE MEMBERSHIP REGIME: THE CASE OF BELARUSIANS ACQUIRING KARTA POLAKA

By
Volha Biziukova

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Supervisors: professor Dan Rabinowitz
professor Ayşe Çağlar

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the ethnic identification of Belarusian citizens who applied for the Karta Polaka (The Pole's Card), a type of alternative state membership regime introduced by Poland. The membership in two countries conditions a specific situation for ethnic identification. In the present research I consider the biographic dynamics of ethnic identification in connection with the cultural practices and family stories, the trajectories of identification and the construction of the categories of affiliation. The analysis is made on the basis of the in-depth interviews with the applicants for the Karta Polaka. The process of identification is contextualized in a broader structural and historical context.

The narrative of the Karta Polaka affects the way the applicants assign themselves and their ancestors to the ethnic categories due to the introduction of bureaucratic discourse. The cultural practices changed dramatically through generations and at present moment cultural traits are not the strict criteria for the attribution to an ethnic category. The applicants affiliate themselves with several communities simultaneously but describe theirs ways of belonging using different tropes. The applicants follow multiple routes in their identification conditioned by the common structural and historical context along with individual biographical stories. The identification and the status of the Karta Polaka holders are characterized with exclusive and inclusive tendencies.

Content

Introduction

Many nation states in Europe and worldwide have been recently introducing the alternative citizenship regimes for different groups of the population. The alternative regime endows an individual with the status or/and the attached set of rights that are different from those provided within the dominant citizenship regime (Joppke 2003, p.429-430). In most cases alternative regimes are associated with multiple-state membership of the individual. The present research deals with the way the alternative citizenship regimes challenging the classic model of a single state affiliation affect the individual ethnic identification following the example of the alternative state-membership introduced by Poland.

Initially, the alternative regimes were associated with granting substantial rights to immigrants by welfare states in response to the growing immigration flows. Manifold examples from Germany, France, Britain, USA and other countries seem to support the idea of a movement towards de-ethnitisized post-national forms of citizenship embedded in transnational fields (Soysal 1998). However, the world-wide examples of introducing the new inclusive regimes for ex-citizens and emigrants, often by the states from the aforementioned list, proved that the re-ethnitization tendency is not less influential. Hence, current changes in citizenship discourse, even within one state, are shaped by both ethnitization and de-ethnitization tendencies. This duality is conditioned by the persistency and convergence of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* principles for citizenship transfer (Joppke 2003, Vink and Baubock 2013). The national state in this situation rather re-configures the channels of control over population than declines in power (Ong, 1999).

The alternative citizenship regime is not a homogenous practice with regard to its premises and consequences. Each case should be considered in its unique context (Baubock 2010) with regard to the states involved, the relations between them, the target population group, scale,

the broader political and economic context and the place in historical consequence of events. The case of granting alternative citizenship to border minority members may differ dramatically from endowing immigrants with substantial rights.

The multiple state membership regime creates distinctive circumstances for the individual identification. The affiliation to more than one state is fixed in the official status of individual. The acquisition of this new status often is caused or accompanied by the change in his or her economic, political position and status among fellow-members in different communities. The individual has to negotiate the self-perception and the way of affiliation to different categories. The alternative membership regime, when targeted at the co-ethnics, is granted on the origin principle and appeals directly to the ethnic background of the candidate, expecting him to accept and actualize ethnic-based affiliation. The granting state encourages candidates to take this step with beneficial rights attached to the status but the actual motives driving individuals in accepting multiple-membership may be more complex.

The change in the identification process, imposed by a new membership status, does not occur from scratch but is introduced in the previous biographical background and identification of a person. Apart from the state other agents such as church or informal associations may influence the way a person perceives him/herself. The situation of uncertainty determined by multiple affiliation, diverse agents involved and the uniqueness of biographical situation facilitates multiple routes for identification.

In this research I deal with the ethnic identification of the Belarusian citizens who acquired the identification document issued by Poland, named Karta Polaka. This document confirms the belonging to the Polish nation but does not grant the citizenship, creating the case of an alternative state membership regime. The people who accepted this status have to negotiate their affiliation to the Polish and Belarusian states. To comprehend the situation created by

Karta Polaka for the individual identification, we need to look at the general context of the introduction of the document.

Poland introduced Karta Polaka (Pole's card in translation) in 2008. This document, confirming the affiliation of an individual to the Polish nation, endows the grantee with the following set of rights: free long-term national visa, unrestricted work, education, access to healthcare, reductions for public transport costs, free visiting of museums and receiving certain funds. The fact that Karta Polaka does not provide citizenship is underlined in all official proclamations. The document also does not make the acquisition of citizenship easier. The basis for granting the document is the evidence of Polish ancestry (at least, one grand or two grand grandparents), acceptable knowledge of Polish, a signed declaration of affiliation to the Polish nation, knowledge and practicing Polish traditions and customs. In the exclusive cases Karta Polaka may be granted to individuals for the promotion of Polish culture that should be supported by the confirmation from an accredited Polish cultural organization.

The law targets the citizens of the 15 countries of the former USSR that prohibit dual citizenship. However, the law does not address a considerable Polish minority in Germany. The official justification is that the Polish state is under duty to compatriots that appeared out of the state territory in consequence of moving borders or other involuntary displacement.

The Karta Polaka Law should be viewed in the general course of Polish migration/diaspora policies of that period. Firstly, the Karta Polaka project was initiated in 1999. The discussions over the compliance of the project with the international law and the absence of support from the political forces at power resulted in the failure of the initiative (Kicinger and Korys 2011). The important circumstance was the expected acceptance of Poland to the EU and the integration of legislative norms in the EU system (Fox and Vermeersch 2010, Kicinger and Korys 2012). At the same time, the repatriation process toward deportees and their

descendants in Central Asia initiated under the "Repatriation Act" (2000) did not acquire any significant scale (Kicinger and Korys 2011).

The issue of Karta Polaka re-emerged in 2005 after Poland faced a wave of emigration outflow of population to European countries and the right-wing pro-nationalist party came to power. The support of the projects granting state membership to co-ethnics by right-wing politicians is a typical case (Joppke 2003). The law was targeted at a much broader group of co-ethnics than the Repatriation Act. The bill was accepted by the Parliament in 2007 and came in force in 2008. By the end of 2012, according to the estimation of the Polish officials, more than 100 thousand people received Karta Polaka, including about 42 thousand of Belarusian citizens. Another major group was the Ukrainians who form the largest group of labor immigrants in Poland[1]. In other countries the number of the card holders was an order less.

The introduction of Karta Polaka constructed a specific category of state members. The official narratives present the people targeted as Poles who moved out of the Polish borders involuntary, mostly the residents of border regions. They are claimed to compose the Polish diaspora (Polonia) and preserve cultural traditions that is often not the case. The joining with the kin-state becomes the overcoming of historical injustice. The official proclamations refer to these people as "compatriots" and "co-nationals" while avoiding names derived from "citizen". The membership regime offered by Karta Polaka differs from the Polish citizenship in both status and set of rights. The state creates an officially fixed status of a non-citizen national member who belongs to the state but does not belong to the citizens' community. It resembles the colonial model of state membership that distinguished nationals and full citizens (Joppke 2003, p. 432). The activity of Polish state in a broader context can be seen as

[1] Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Strategie przetrwania: Adaptacja ukraińskich migrantów zarobkowych do polskiej rzeczywistości instytucjonalnej Warszawa 2009

a reaction to globalizing processes in the economy, that were facilitated in the locality by entering in the EU zone. Poland faced with a massive outflow of people. Through the introduction of the Karta Polaka the state attempts to expand the sphere of control, following the model of "graduated sovereignty" suggested by Ong (Ong 1999), - it incorporates a new category of people from the citizens of other states by creating a zone of a special membership regime for them.

The general frame created by the Karta Polaka acquired a different sound when introduced in the context of different states that reacted in diverse ways.[2]. Belarus qualified the Karta Polaka as an interference in the internal affairs that does not comply with international legislation norms and discriminates different groups of citizens. At the beginning of 2012 amendments were accepted that prohibit governmental employees and the Parliament members to hold the Karta Polaka. The acute reaction of the Belarusian state follows the general course of relations between two countries in the last decade and was conditioned by the internal political and economic situation.

The situation in Belarus is shaped by the authoritative governmental regime, established in 1994, and an administratively controlled economy system. The relations of Belarus with European countries, including Poland, are downhill because of political confrontations and the countries maintain a visa regime. Belarus forms a political alliance with Russia, the main economic partner.

In Belarus more than 80% of population identify themselves as Belarusian[3], being rather a homogeneous country at this respect. However, in the sphere of cultural and national policy

[2] Belarus and Lithuania met the initiative of Poland in an unequivocally negative way. Lithuania claimed that the law puts the Lithuanian people in unequal positions following the national principle. However, the legislative project to forbid deputies to hold Karta Polaka failed.

[3] Here and all other statistical data in the section are taken from National statistical committee of the Republic of Belarus, The results of national census 2009, available at http://census.belstat.gov.by/intro.aspx

the state does not have an articulated course and the "ideal image" of a Belarusian citizen is vague. Russian language is dominating both in the official discourse and the daily communication of people, while the Belarusian language is used marginally. The dominating religion denominations are Orthodox (about 80%) and Catholics (about 10%).

The introduction of Karta Polaka coincided with a series of economic crises in 2008 and 2011. The rapid reduction in well-being and uncertainties in some segments of the job-market made migration plans attractive for many Belarusians. According to the common the opinion economic considerations and geographical mobility are the leading motives for people to get Karta Polaka while cultural or political intensions are neglected. Considering the number of potentially eligible candidates, the Karta Polaka creates the potential for a significant emigration outflow.

According to the official statistics the number of people claiming themselves to be Poles in Belarus is 294 000, 230 000 reside in Grodno region in Western Belarus. Potentially the number of people who can claim Polish origin may amount to 900 thousand (Winnicki 2009). In Belarus the release of the Karta Polaka may achieve a significant scale. The Polish descendant population in Belarus hardly forms a diaspora community in a sense of self-perception and the activity of people (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Although there are a number of local associations, they do not embrace the major part of Poles' descendants. This fact also makes the approach of diaspora studies not relevant for the present research.

A considerable share of the population with Polish origins in Belarus is conditioned by a long common history of Belarus and Poland. Their territories were united in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth until its partition at the end of the 18th century. Afterwards the territories of the modern Belarusian state were incorporated into the Russian Empire. After the war between Soviet Russia and the recently re-established Polish state, the territories to the West

from Minsk were included in Poland. According to the census results in 1921 about 1 million of Belarusians resided on the territory of Poland[4]. The territories were subjected to active polanization in the course of the Sanation movement. In 1939 the annexion of Western Belarus to BSSR brought another dramatic change of incorporation in the soviet economic and political system. After WWII in the course of the repatriation program approved by the Soviet government, a considerable number moved from the Western Belarus to Poland. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarus became an independent state in 1991 in the borders of BSSR.

The dynamic historical changes shaped the biographies of people who went through several rapid transformations of all spheres of their lives. The establishment of a new state brought a new political system, economic organization and national-cultural policy. The states intended to alter the identity of people in the course of realization of own national-building project. The channels to influence the identification process included, among others, linguistic and religion policy, the change in official legal status of people accompanied by granting new identification documents. These peripeties determined the biographies of today's applicants for Karta Polaka and their ancestors conditioning the situation of ethnic identification.

The general research issue of ethnic identification of the applicants for the Karta Polaka includes the following specific research aims. The research describes how the Karta Polaka conditions the way the applicants perceive themselves and their family stories. It also deals with the ways of constructing the categories of affiliation and the trajectories of identification conditioned by the external forces and subjective agency. I approach the ethnic identification of applicants for Karta Polaka as the process embedded in a broader structural setting and the

[4] Polish 1921 Census and Demographic Data, available at http://www.kresy.co.uk/census_demographic.html , date of access 13/05/2013.
In censuses held previously the category of nationality was not presented, instead the religion affiliation and mother tongue were used

context of individual biographical background. The research provides an insight into the applicants experience of ethnic identification conditioned by the alternative state membership following the example of Belarusian young people in the local context of Belarus, which is an issue that has not received sufficient academic attention.

In the frame of the research the identification is interpreted as a narrative representational process that takes place in a given cultural context within existing discourses and practices. (Somers 1992, 1994). Ethnic identity formation goes within "ongoing discursive struggle about the meanings that define social relationship and positions in society" (Vila 2000, p. 228). The process cannot be reduced either to personal agency or to the external forces. In this perspective, the categories of ethnic belonging become the narrative devices that are always reconsidered. The narrative approach allows incorporating in the identity concept the dimension of time, locality and relativity (Somers 1994, p. 606). The ethnic identity is conceptualized following Weberian definition as identity referring to the "origin" or "descendant connection", while national identity implies references to an institutionalized political community (Weber 1968, Williams 1989, Joppke 2005). As long as this distinction serves only for the conceptual purposes, in text the term ethno-national is also used to denote the affiliation to the community. The applicants for the Karta Polaka are not perceived as the members of a united ethnic group since they do not interact with each other comprising community with shared collective activity or specific cultural patterns (Brubaker 2004).

In structure of the work the first chapter deals with the current debates in literature on the issues of alternative citizenship regimes and ethnic identification. The second chapter provides the overview of the methodology applied in the research. The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of empirical findings. In the first section I deal with the applicants' cultural background and family stories. In the second section I turn to the categories and

trajectories of identification. In the general discussion I frame the ethnic identification of the applicants in relation to their status and activity in the broader political and economic context.

Chapter I. Literature review

Current debates on alternative multiple-state citizenship regimes

The major research trend follows the change in citizenship discourses conditioned by migration in the globalizing world. The emergence of an alternative to classic citizenship form of state-membership for migrants was analyzed by Brubaker (1989). He calls this new form *denizenship*, after Hammer, and associates it with granting partial civil rights to migrants on the basis of their continuous residence on the state territory (p. 161). Embededness of new membership claims in the national state discourse was challenged by Y. Soysal (1998). Referring to the experience of guest-workers, she suggests that the new multiple membership model defines the individual's status on the basis of universal human rights fixed on the transnational level (p. 189). This post-national model establishes different right-status positions in contrast to the egalitarian principle of national citizenship. It leads to the rise of particularistic identities on diverse bases and the decline of the universalistic national identity coded in principles of "blood" and "lineage" (p. 209-211). Sassen (2002) suggests that the concept "denationalized citizenship" describes current tendencies in citizenship transformation in the more adequate way. She suggests that 'denationalized' denotes the transformation of meaning of national itself in contrast to 'post-national' that refers to being partly outside of nation limits (Sassen, 2002).

Ong (1999) reconsiders the idea of post-national approach about the decline in the nation states influence. She underlines the necessity to approach the new citizenship regimes as strategies for the capital accumulation in the context of interplay between national states and global capital. The subjects driven by striving for the capital accumulation are expected to be flexible to changing political, economic and cultural conditions in their cross-border experience. The transnational practices condition the new mode of identification as flexible

subjectivity making under the disciplining control of late modernity situation (Ong 1999). Following the requirement of flexibility the nation states introduce differentiated regimes of treating their citizens in different zones. Ong conceptualizes this phenomenon as graduated sovereignty (Ong 1999, p.7).

To complete the image of alternative membership regimes that initially relied mostly on the immigrants' research scholars turn to the cases of emigrants policies. A. Caglar on the example of "pink card" in Turkey investigated the introduction of an alternative membership regime by the state in response to emigration flow (Caglar, 2002). She concludes that such models may fail to offer a sound alternative to classic citizenship for potential candidates despite the granting state intentions. Caglar argues that citizenship cannot be reduced to socio-economic rights and is associated with the broad set of ties with fellow-citizens and the state. Such "light citizenship" regime has a potential to marginalize the holders and, hence, loses the attractiveness for the potential grantees (Caglar 2002). The way sending state reconsiders its boundaries and sovereignty by the means of the emigrant policy in the frame of transnational fields was investigated by Levitt and Dehasa on the examples of Mexico, Brasil, the Dominican Republic and Haiti (2003)

Joppke (2003) considers both membership models for immigrants and emigrants as characterized with two opposite trends: de-ethnitization for the former and re-ethnitization for the latter. These imperatives impinge within one state and often correspond to right versus left political forces division (Joppke 2003). He challenges the linear trajectory to "post-national membership" and argues that globalizing tendencies may result in both ethnitization and re-ethnitization simultaneously (Joppke 2003, p. 454).

Alongside with approaches concerning primarily with migrant practices, a substantial body of research deals with cases of alternative citizenship regimes for border minorities. Essential

commonalities between these two groups juxtapose to crucial distinctions in the ways of formation and members' statuses. It affects the way the claim-making basis, the role of nation state and the statuses of minority representatives are conceptualized.

Analyzing the Hungarian case of granting dual citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in other countries, P. J. Spiro (2010), among others, calls to approach cases of border minorities in the post-national framework. He sees overcoming the constraints of bounded nation-states as liberating steps toward the realization of the individual rights for free self-identification and group affiliation. Spiro assumes that it allows coping with "imperfect territorial boundaries" (Spiro 2010). Flower follows the similar way suggesting that the Hungarian status law and legislation alike are the signs of post-modern development in relation between people and national states (Flower 2004).

Baubock (2010a) calls for more cautious and less generalizing estimations. He argues that the pragmatic and consequences of multiple citizenship regimes should be considered individually regarding the unique context of interstate relation and the inner political situation, targeted groups and general scale of phenomena. He sees granting citizenship to border minorities as a distinctive situation. As distinct from migrant cases, it has the potential to challenge the political borders between states (Baubock 2010a). The case of Hungary, which issued ID cards and then dual citizenship to border minorities, illustrates the use of multiple membership regimes by states in the attempt to expand the realm of their control out of their borders. It also raises the question about the place of political rights in new citizenship regimes (Baubock 2010b). The author also denies the idea about modern citizenship regimes as ethnic-free (Baubock 2010a,b). Kovács suggests that granting membership to ex-citizens facilitates ethnic preferentialism in citizenship discourses (Kovács 2010).

Developing the criticism of possible consequences of the multiple membership regimes for the borders minorities in Hungarian case, Stewart (2004) argues that the issuing country may aim at the recovery of the unified nation image and single-identity in the context of historical revanchism. He points at the creation of different status groups on formal and informal bases within the assumed national community. It can become the source of economic exploitation and social injustice towards new members (Stewart 2004).

The theme of an alternative citizenship regime as a tool to marginalize the group on the ethnic basis and to reproduce the power dominance by the state was analyzed by Rabinowitz (2001). Following the experience of Palestinian minority in Israel he suggested the concept of "trapped minority" as a group of people marginalized by both their legal status and the non-admission by the members of the national communities they affiliate themselves (Rabinowitz 2001). At the same time, in the case of Palestinian refugees Rabinowitz shows how the regime with decoupled state membership and residence may be used by the minority members to actualize their resistance to the state dominance (Rabinowitz 2010).

While considerable number of research in Europe deals with situation around Hungarian minority policy (Stewart 2004, Fowler 2004, Kovács 2010, Baubock 2010a,b) the case of Poland and Karta Polaka is not so widely investigated. The Polish and Belarusian literature follow distinctively different lines in analyzing the Karta Polaka case. Z.J. Winnicki (2009) defends the introduction of Karta Polaka with references to moral justice regarding the Poles who were separated from their relatives and kin-state. He emphasizes the importance of an individual choice in accepting national membership and the right of an individual for self-realization (Z.J. Winnicki 2009). I.Kabzińska considers Karta Polaka in the context of the suppression of Polish cultural practices and the deficit of protection for Polish minority abroad (Wolnicz-Pawłowska 2011). While Tsichomirov (2009) suggests, in agreement with the official position of the Belarusian state, that the introduction of the Karta Polaka violates

sovereignty, discriminates Belarusian citizens and evokes the alienation between citizens with different national backgrounds (Tsichomirov 2009).

The researchers, situating themselves out of interstate debates, suggest different views on the Karta Polaka case. Leibich (2010) defines the Karta Polaka, along with the Hungarian status law, as a quasi-citizenship that provides benefits on an ethnic basis. From his point of view, such regimes are typical for Eastern Europe states (Leibich 2010, p. 24). The Karta Polaka is also recognized as the sign of the re-introduction of nationalist discourse (Fox et al. 2010). Gobert (2012) argues for the prevalence of economic and political interests of the Polish state over the idealized image of post-national cross-border cultural unification with compatriots (Gobert 2012). Kicinger and Korys define the Karta Polaka as a semi-citizenship regime. They see it as an element embedded in the general course of the Polish policy toward co-ethnics developed in the response to emigration by right wing political forces (Kicinger and Korys 2012).

In the research on multiple citizenship regimes scholars refer almost without exception to ethnicity and ethnic identity, however, they do not give the explicit definition of the concepts as if their meanings are obvious. Such putative apparentness may work against the validity of analysis since it handicaps the comprehensive approach to the complexity of ethnic identification. In the next part I give a general overview of the approaches to ethnicity and ethnic identity.

Approaches to ethnicity and ethnic identification

The issue of ethnicity as a mode of individuals' self-perception, connected with their collective activity, was articulated by M. Weber (1968). He suggests approaching ethnic belonging as a social construct, rather than biological fact, establishing the constructivist principle for ethnicity studies. An ethnic group is joined by the belief in a shared ancestor and

emerges in the course of mobilization of individuals in their collective activity for gaining power and status (Weber 1968). An ethnic group sustains its boundaries by a monopolistic closure of certain cultural traits (Weber 1968, p. 388). The way the ethnic group is formed and performs its collective activity became the basic issues for ethnic studies.

The concept of generating and maintaining cultural boundaries between ethnic groups was further developed by Barth (1969). He challenges the concept of bounded culture that overlaps with an ethnic group. The boundaries generated by a group are only relatively persistent and can shift. Fellow-members share the criteria of group inclusion, performed via other- and self-ascription (Barth 1969, 13). Barth associates ethnic identity with the "culturally specific set of value standards" (Barth 1969, p. 25) providing the possibility for identity change.

The idea of commonly shared criteria for the ethnic group membership was questioned by R. Cohen (1978). He argues that the categories ascribed to the group members by outsiders may vary dramatically from insiders' categories. The objective criteria of cultural differences are accompanied by the subjective categories of self-definition, so that both objective and subjective criteria are in play in the group ascription (Cohen 1978). Cohen stresses the exclusive-inclusive character of ethnic identity (Cohen 1978).

The inability of cultural-differences focused approaches to explain why people actualize their ethnic belonging in different ways under different conditions gave the rise to the instrumentalist interpretation. A. Cohen (1974) argues that an ethnic group as a collective of people emerges in the interaction with other groups framed by the resource struggle. He conceptualizes ethnicity as the degree of loyalty to the shared norms in the course of this interaction. (Cohen 1974). Ethnicity becomes the strategy manipulated by individuals in order to gain power and resources (Cohen 1974, p. 13). Developing instrumental approach Hechter

analyses ethnic group mobilization in the frame of rational action model and argues for the dominance of instrumental motives in the ethnic group affiliation (Hechter 1995). The instrumentalist approach displays how individuals, moved by different motives, actualize their ethnic belonging in one situation and keep it silent in another

The distinctive modernist approach to ethnicity was developed within nationalist studies (Gellner 1997, Smith 1991). Ethnic group and ethnic identity are regarded as pre-modern precursors for the nation and national identity. According to Smith (1991) the traits of ethnic communities is self-name, a shared myth of ancestry and historical memories, cultural elements, association with homeland and solidarity (Smith 1991, p. 21).

The criticism of the group realism principle inherent to both cultural and instrumentalist approaches became the other significant trend in ethnicity research. Anderson challenged the "reality" of nations and defined them as "imagined communities" that lack intimate interaction between members (Anderson 1991). Brubaker questioned the relevance of essentialized ethnic groups as the relevant categories for ethnicity studies. Instead of the term "group" that implies mutual interaction within members of community, he suggests using an "ethnic category" (Brubaker 2004, 2006). According to Brubaker, ethnicity should be approached in processual terms (Brubaker 2004, 11). Processes are recognized as ethnic due to interpretative frames (Brubaker 2004, p. 174). Ethnicity is treated as a way of understanding, interpreting and framing the life experience (Brubaker et al. 2004, p. 52).

The criticism of ethnic group realism finds a logical continuation in the criticism of collective identity concept that is inherent to group-centered theories. The approach to ethnic identity as a relatively persistent ascription to ethnic group was systematically re-considered. The relevance of the collective identity concept has been questioned since it relies on a personalized image of bounded ethnic groups (Handler 1996). Hybridity and other "disjunct"

identity (Caglar 1997, p. 171) approaches, suggested as alternative for overcoming the bounded group affiliation, were also criticized for the preservation of the politicized essentialist underpinning in viewing the culture as a "whole" (Caglar 1997, Friedman 1999).

The departure from this fixed identity image shifted the focus to the processual character of identity. Hall (1996) suggests that identity is constantly negotiated and redefined in dialogical communicative acts. The identity formation never achieves its final aim and is conceptualized as a process of "identification" (Hall 1996). Along with these premises M. Somers, among others, develops the narrative approach toward identity (Somers 1992, 1994). Narratives are "constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by casual emplotment" (Somers 1992, p. 601). She suggests that identity is constructed and mediated through narrativity (Somers 1992, p. 606). People actualize themselves, become who they are "by being located or locating themselves in social narratives rarely of their own making" (Somers 1994, p. 606). Subjectivity in such context appeared to be only provisionally fixed (Vila 2000, p. 228). In reaction to such an extremely flexible image of identity, Handler (1996) and Brubaker (2004) question the power of "identity" as an analytical concept and, hence, the relevance of it used in social science. However, an alternative concept expressing the dialogical character of personhood has not been suggested.

The issue that is not generally widely discussed in the literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity is the specificity of ethnicity, or in other words, what allows labeling certain identifications as ethnic in distinction from regional, religious or other socio-cultural identifications. The few suggested interpretations mostly refer to Weberian idea of assumed common origin or ancestor. Ch. Keyes calls it the "aura of descent" that comprises the core of ethnic community reproduction (Williams 1989, p. 424). Providing the overview of the conceptualization of ethnicity, Joppke (2005) that in all cases the ethnicity refers to the

"descendant" or "origin" However, the ratio between the kin ancestry and cultural affiliation in defining "descendant" varies dramatically depending on the perspective.

The reviewed literature forms a comparative framework for the current research. In present work I engage with the approaches from both alternative citizenship and ethnicity studies, integrating them to achieve comprehensive insight of the way personal ethnic identification is localized and conditioned by a broader structural context.

Chapter II. Methodology

The research questions and general theoretical approach chosen for the present inquiry are preoccupied with the way people are able to actively construct their identities using the meanings that are translated from the outside. I chose interviewing as the most relevant method for my research aims. It provided the necessary freedom for the respondent to express himself in his personal suggestions, adding, specifying and opening new themes.

Specifically, I used the semi-structured interview since it allowed concentrating on the issues of research agenda while preserving open-ended questions for discussion (Schensul et al. 1999, p. 149). The participants were encouraged to share expanded and detailed subjective considerations or reports on the themes proposed by the researcher and to offer the themes that seemed to them relevant to the point of the conversation. The interviewing focused on the way meanings were constructed, what relations or linkages were set between them, the way the conversational situation (the setting, the consequence of questions etc.) affected the utterance (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, 113).

In the interview guide I included the set of open-ended themes for discussion to facilitate the respondent to act as an active participant in the conversation. The questions containing suggestions about causes-and-effects were not included in the guide in order not to fasten the explanatory models on the participants. The guide included a set of questions on the following themes (domains) – family story and biography, cultural practices including language and religion, the perception of the countries/communities of affiliation, the process of getting Karta Polaka and relations with state. The domains were formulated on the basis of preceding informal conversations with applicants and my personal acquaintance with the issue as a resident of Belarus. The domains were regarded as theoretical tools but not as the elements of intrinsic conceptual structure of individual perception (Schensul et al. 1999). The

consequence of the questions was built beginning from questions that are considered to be less vulnerable for this cultural setting – family and religious practices, whilst the most vulnerable issues of getting the Karta Polaka and the state were put into the last part. If the actual conversation offered different route for the discussion the consequence of topics was changed.

The technique of "snowball" was used for the search of participants. This method was the most appropriate since the number of applicants is not so big, but they often know each other due to common experience and background. The Karta Polaka is also a vulnerable topic in the political context of Belarus and the applicants are reserved on it with the strangers. Contacting via familiar person increased the chances for an open conversation.

I interviewed 25 people in total. The interviews were held in three cities of Belarus: Minsk (the capital), Grodno and Baranovichi (both situated in the western part of the country). These are the areas where the majority of holders of Karta Polaka reside, while contacting people from different regions provide the basis for making the comparison regarding the locality of residence. In Minsk 15 interviews were conducted; in the regional cities - 10. The majority of respondents were under 35 years old. The elder respondents were the parents of the younger participants. They were interviewed to get information on the inter-generational dynamics. All participants had higher education or were in the process of the study that was to great extent the effect of the "snowball".

The interviews were mainly conducted at home of a participant or at his/her workplace. Respondents in most cases were limited in time they could devote to the conversation– typically the conversation took about one hour. Mostly I met the participants for the first time for the interview. The considerable part of the applicants was employed in the state-funded organizations like educational institutions and administrative organizations that could affect

their utterances. Participants often expressed their concerns about the guarantee anonymity for fear the negative reaction of state bodies "just do not tell anyone or I will be taken to the prison (*laughing*)" (interview with Lilia). The issue of privacy and anonymity becomes especially urgent – in the report all the names were changed and in some cases the exact city of residence is also not disclose due to the wish of the participants.

The analysis of the interview included on the first step approaching the conversation as a whole, the reflection on general setting of the interview and the consequence of conversation that could affect the respondents' answers and the content (Briggs 1986, p. 104). General course of conversation was considered regarding the consequences of the issues discussed the themes that the participant discussed jointly. The narratives of the respondents were analyzed by registering the events mentioned, the metaphors used, ways of organization and the content of plots with further contextualizing regarding dominating discourses (Somers 1994, Vila 2000). Another level of contextualization approached the current situation of the participant – his/her biographical moment, position in economic, social and political setting.

During the interviews one of the main challenges was to motivate the respondent to be an active participant. Today "interview" has entered deeply in popular discourse as a form of conversation when you as a participant are supposed to answer the posed questions. When I asked people to narrate in free manner sometimes they were confused and asked for specifications: "in this situation I cannot say which issues are important or not important, I think that you pose the questions and I answer them and that is all…" (interview with Victor). Such situations were overcome individually depending in which part of conversation they appear and whom I was talking to.

Chapter III. Empirical findings and their analysis

3.1. Applicants' personal background: given and chosen

Being a descendant

The procedure and the conditions of getting Karta Polaka make the applicants see their family stories in a certain way. At least, each applicant is expected to look at himself as a Polish descendant, since it is explicitly stated in the narratives of the Polish state that apply to them as Poles. Being of the Polish descendance becomes the fact that has to be proven in accordance with formal requirements. The applicants are supposed to turn to their family history and to be able to identify their ancestors as members of certain nationalities – Poles, Belarusians, Russians or other. Moreover, they need to acquire official material evidence – sufficient documents that come from the family archive or ordered in official institutions. This interweaving of informal self-identification and formal evidences of belonging creates the clashes in attribution: the parents are officially recognized as Poles while their children are not.

Intending to get Pole's Card, the applicants speak about the complexity of their background. For the rare exception, they see their relatives as representatives of different nationalities. The story told by Lilia, a 26-year specialist in Belarusian language residing in Minsk, can serve as evidence. Her father's mother came from the famous kin of Polish Tatar. After WWII she anchored in Belarus in the settlement for refugees. Another Lilia's grandmother was a Pole. Both grandfathers were Belarusians. She describes herself as a mixture of three bloods – Tartar, Polish and Belarusian. During her life her image of the grandparents changed as she learned new facts about their origins. Today she regrets that here grandparents are dead and she knows little about their ancestors. Describing the history of her family as unique she at the same time believes that such mixtures are typical for people from Belarus because of the

history– "there are many Russians, some people who were born earlier are Belarusians, others were born when there was a Poland and who knows how to sign them in?! And whether there are any pure Belarusians?". The question posed by Lilia reveals the ambiguous character of the attribution of people to ethno-national categories both on the formal and informal basis. She also puts stress on the historical transformation of the territory that conditioned this uncertainty.

In the stories about the family formation the central themes were shifting border, changing states and, periodically, migration. The attribution of a person to the ethnic category by the applicant cannot be deducted from the circumstances of his life: the natives of the same territory appeared to be of different nationalities, while migrants were marked with local categories. Not regarding the complexity and uncertainties, the applicants were able to identify belonging of their ancestors. The routs that they followed in this process could be found in their description of their parents, grandparent's r other ancestors.

Anna, a 26-year governmental employee, speaks about her grandmother the following way:-

> My grandmother was a Pole - it was written in her birth certificate, that her father and mother were Poles. She was born on the territory of Poland because Western Belarus was Polish territory. She finished 4 classes of Polish church school, she could write only in Polish. She was a Catholic and visited church each Sunday".

Anna adds that in their village a Pole was synonymous to a Catholic. Additional biographical details are that Zosia was an orphan and grew in the family of her elder brother and came to believe in her adult years. Anna constructs the image of her grandmother as a Pole engaging with the facts from different stages of her life: beginning with the birth certificate to the religious practice at her adult age.

In some cases the leading reason for the attribution of a person to a certain ethnic category becomes his/her personal identification. Olena describes her grandfather:-

> My grandfather is a native Pole. His parents lived in the territory of Western Belarus. From childhood I remember as we were watching "Four tank-men and a dog" (*a cult Polish movie of soviet time*)… I remember as his relatives came to visit us from the territory of Poland (*they moved there in soviet time*)… I think that he is a native Pole because of his parents and because I remember him this way. I do not have such memories about other grandparents.

Olena's grandfather belonged to the Orthodox Church and never used Polish as the language of daily communication- only separate words. He did not preserve any documents confirming his belonging to the Polish nation and Olena made her Card on the basis of the certificate about the participation of her grandparents in election. The image of the grandfather lacks any cultural traits canonized as Polish; however, his ethnic belonging is unequivocal for his descendant.

At the same time when applicants spoke about other their ancestors, whom they call Belarusians or Russians, they as a rule did not tend to give such explicit description. They also did not explain why they attribute them to these categories. This fact suggests that Karta Polaka could affect the way people tend to think about different lines in their ancestry.

The criteria of language, religion, the place of birth, self-identification and official documents emerged with different emphases and with different interpretations in the stories of other participants that describe their ancestor affiliation. The theme of engagement with official documents seems especially curious since it is rarely discussed in relation to ethnic affiliation. In the applicant's narrations the holding of official documents was no less important or even more important than cultural practices. In such statements as "by my mother line everyone was a Pole, in her documents it is written that she is a Pole" (interview with Karina) the presence of documents sounds as an objective and undeniable proving of the belonging to the

group. The twists and turns with the documents were also used to explain the change of ethnic affiliation from generation to generation. "The generation of my parents lived in Soviet Union. At that time everyone signed people as they wanted: if you said Jew – you are signed as a Jew, if you said you are Belarusian – they signed Belarusians. In my mother's family three daughters: the elder was signed in as a Belarusian, the middle – a Pole, the youngest – Belarusian. Everything depended on who went to sign the child… and the generation of my mother – they didn't care" (interview with Lilia). The changes in the official belonging of individual occurred also in result of almost accidental self-ascriptions. Nina, a 53 university employee from Western Belarus, describes how in 1979 when the residents of village in the Soviet Union began to get passports [5] and people just said that they are Russians or Belarusians, some people were not properly asked. Nina's father protested and demanded to be signed in as a Pole. Applicants also mentioned the people who did not have any affiliation with Polish culture, managed to find the documents to get the card.

Official documents, therefore, play a significant role in the way applicants recognized their ancestors. Moreover, the manipulations with documents could affect the identification and sometimes to give it new content. The possibility to influence the bureaucratic discourse or ethnic identification through the material objects (documents) accord with the concept of material objects as a special type of mediators that can influence social reality (Bruno Latour 2005). The identification documents can fix, conform and translate ethno-national belonging to other generations. The official narrative of state that labels nationality of the citizens in the document can be converted into the informal discourse of ethnic belonging. In the case of Karta Polaka the significance of official documents was valorized by the bureaucratic procedure, where they feature as the main approval of belonging.

[5] Before the 1976 the members of kolkhozes in the USSR didn't have write for personal documents to prevent their mobility

Speaking three languages

The general approach to language as a marker of belonging to the ethnic group assumes that different languages are shared and practiced by different communities. The language situation in Belarus makes such an approach inapplicable. Russian, one of two state languages, is dominant both in everyday communication and on an official level. Belarusian is used in some schools but it is spoken marginally in daily life. However, many people especially in rural areas speak local dialects comprised of Russian and Belarusian languages sometimes with the elements of Polish, while the Polish language is almost excluded from daily use.

In applicants' stories revealed themselves in manifold unique variations. The majority of the applicants recognize Russian as the language of first use. However many call the native language Belarusian, even when not using it. The applicants share the wide-spread idea of correspondence between state, nation and language. It makes them feel uneasy of being citizens and not speaking the language. They express regrets of this situation and would like to change it. Only few people said that they do not accept Belarusian and do not see any point in spreading it. In the failure of the population to speak national language they see the failure to create mature Belarusian nation – "for me the language is the sign of nation, if there is no language there is no nation too" (interview with Lilia). The applicants put the responsibility for this situation on the government who do not speak the language. Some applicants see in it a goal-seeking line of policy.

The marginalized position of Belarusian language on the political basis became another core motif. The Belarusian language acquired a strong association with the radical opposition to existing political regime. A person speaking Belarusian is recognized as an oppositionist. The use of Belarusian language became stigmatizing – "when you speak Belarusian people step aside in public transport" (interview with Lilia) or "you became not like other, a white craw"

(interview with Grigoriy, a 24 logistic manager living in Minsk). People do not want to be excluded and stigmatized on the basis of language use. As the result, even those who studied in Belarusian-speaking schools give up using the language. Belarusian became a language of niche use by limited number of people – it can be spoken in interfamily communication with a spouse and children or periodically with friends, while still using Russian in public.

The local dialects, composed of Belarusian, Polish, Russian and Ukraine in different proportions depending on the region, are still reported to be used actively in villages and small towns. For some applicants this was the language of the first use and they still speak them with parents and relatives. But when they move to a big city they abandon these local dialects in favor of Russian because local dialects are stigmatized as the signs of a "red-neck" background.

Polish is also niche language. The use is even smaller that Belarusian and is recognized as a foreign language. None of the applicants named Polish to be their first language. In their stories there are two main routs regarding the relation and practice of Polish language. The first one is a natural acquisition of language from different channels. For some applicants the main source was their communication with grandparents, however, it happened quite seldom. Others said that they just learn it from media and printed materials. A special role in spreading the Polish language in Belarus is played by the Catholic Church – until recent time all ceremonies were held in Polish and believers studied all prayers in this language. Due to it parishioners acquired the basic level of Polish. The applicants did not study the language purposefully – they "just knew it". Apart from the church on an institutional level the Polish language is actively promoted by Houses of Poles, the cultural organizations supported by Poland. However the significance of these organizations varies locally. The House of Poles in Baranovichy is considered to be one of the most active. The organization also holds courses of the Polish language for children in a form of supplementary school. Visiting such schools

children acquire the language from early years. However, being a part of their language repertoire, the use of Polish is restricted to separate spheres by participants residing in Western Belarus. In this border region due to intensive contacts between countries the knowledge of Polish language became just a part of life experience, not associated necessarily with the ascription to national or ethnic category – "my father, not regarding that his mother was Belarusian and father Russian, from the childhood he visited Poland, watched Polish TV and knew Polish excellently. He always encouraged me to study Polish". Olena gives this characteristic of her father in contrast to her mother who has Polish roots.

Many applicants get acquainted with Polish language only in their preparation period to Karta Polaka, before they encountered this language only occasionally in the form of separate words from local dialects. For some the preparation for Karta Polaka became the turning point of discovery of the language and motivated them for further self-study. The language was conceived as a key to the Polish culture and to participating in social life as a student or as a worker. Their use of the -language is also situational during the visits to Poland, reading literature or watching cinema.

The described situation in language use is significantly different from what the applicants were saying about the traditions of language in their stories. At the same time, the present situation derives from and continues the tendencies of previous generations. Grandfathers and grandmothers of applicants spoke mostly local dialects of Belarusian with a significant contribution of Polish, Russian and Ukraine even when they considered themselves and were recognized by descendants as Poles.

The use of Polish language in daily communication was an exception. Most often it was used by grandparents who got their primary education (4 classes) in Polish speaking schools, but then spoke Polish only in limited circle of peers, rarely with children and grandchildren. The

applicants explain that their grandparents could not practice the language in the environment that speaks differently.

Victor's grandmother native language was Polish, but by the end of her life she switched to the local dialect (Victor 30 year old IT specialist residing in Minsk). For her daughter the basic language is Russian, though she began speaking firstly in Polish and knows it brilliantly. For Victor first language is Russian. Due to communication with grandmother he knows some Polish, but he had to take additional courses for the exam for Karta.

For Angelina's grandmother Polish was the native language, but with her children and grandchildren she spoke a local dialect. Angelina's mother spoke Russian but knew basics of Polish. For Angelina the basic language is Russian but now, due to the courses, she knows Polish better than her mother and she helped her in the preparation for the exam.

In these examples that cannot cover the diversity of language use in family histories it can be seen how the language use changed significantly from generation to generation. It changes even within one life story under different circumstances. The translation of the language does not follow the linear pass from a parent to a child. Often the languages the applicants speak in their daily life are different from those that their grandparents or grand grandparents spoke.

The use of the language does not coincide necessarily with the ethnic category a person is attributed or identifies of oneself. People recognized as Poles can speak Polish quite poorly, or people not using Belarusian claimed to be Belarusians. At the same time, speaking the Russian language is not perceived as an anchor for ethnic identification. For the applicants who begin to study the language only for getting the Karta Polaka, self-attribution to the ethno-national category preceded the acquisition of the ability to speak the language associated with it.

The state on all historical stages played a central role in shaping the language use of the population through introducing the state language and the system of education. The examples of decoupling ethnic identity from the titled language can also be seen as results of state interventions. Apart from the state such institutes as the church can play a significant role in translating language practice. In the case of the Catholic Church in Belarus it created a channel of the language preservation that is relatively independent from the state. Being placed in the situation conditioned by the state and other institutional agents, applicants are still able to create and practice different variants of language use engaging with up to three languages in their daily life. People create different niches in their lives for speaking different languages.

Religion practices

Religious affiliation used to be probably the major criteria of social and cultural identification of a person on the territories of Belarus before the 20th century. The religious sphere used to be strongly politicized and, as a result, the categories of national and religious affiliation became synonymous. Pole is used to denote the Catholic affiliation, while Russian or Belarusian – the Orthodox. Today the Orthodox and Catholic churches are still the major denominations: about 81% assign themselves to the Orthodox Church and 10% - to Catholic[6]. All applicants also ascribe themselves to one of the churches. However, among friends and family members they have the representatives of both confessions.

Due to intermarriage the family is often formed by representatives of different denominations. People chose different ways to cope with this situation. The intermarriage may result in the conversion of one of the spouses. The necessity for spouses to belong to the same church that used to be a strong norm for grandparents sill preserves the influence for their descendants.

[6] Informational and analytical center of the president's administration of the president of the Republic of Belarus "The Republic of Belarus in the mirror of sociology", 2011

Grigoriy recollects how his parents asked him whether his girlfriend is a Pole, meaning Catholic and his positive answer made them happy.

For many other people the coexistence of two traditions becomes the habitual part of family life. Family members celebrate Orthodox and Catholic holidays that follow different calendars having two Christmases and Easters per year. Often holidays are named after family members - "grandmother's Christmas". Such paradoxical combinations still contain the cause for the conflict, like for Ilona who cannot explain her daughter how two Christmases are possible.

In mixed families both parents and grandparents make the decision on child baptizing. Grandparents' voices are often the most important. Catholic grandmothers are concerned with the possibility of their grandchildren to be baptized in Orthodox, said Andrei (27, IT sphere, came from Lida and now resides in Minsk). Decision is compromised and tolerated by family. Sharp conflicts are rare but still occur – one of the applicants told that her daughter remained unbaptized until now. In cases when a child was baptized in different denominations relatives still introduce him/her to their tradition. Many perceive such an experience as more meaningful.

In the narrations the grandparents often acted as the main breeders of religious feelings, while parents were not religious often. Applicants believe that their parents' and even grandparents' religious practice was affected by the Soviet regime. They could follow the tradition only withstanding the setting. Some applicants describe themselves as those who return to the traditions of their grandparents.

Being exposed to the influence of two churches in the family, some applicants describe their religious affiliation in an ambiguous manner. Being Orthodox Christians, people prefer visiting the Catholic temple and perceive the Catholic holidays as more genuine. Considering

the possibility of conversion they still do not do it. For other applicants their adherence to a certain confession becomes an important element in their identification: “I do not know why, but I am used to underlie that I am a Catholic” (Anastasia, 23, marketing consultant, comes from Volkovysk and now resides in Minsk). Religiosity tends to metamorphose regarding time and locality. When moving from the native region, people notice the reduction in their religiosity – visiting church becomes less important when relatives are not around anymore.

The applicants perceive the linkage between the affiliation to the Catholic Church and Poland in different ways. For some of them being a Catholic means being a Pole. Whilst others stress the necessity to differentiate these things: “we are Belarusians-Catholics”. Everyone admits the mutual influence that Polish culture has through the Catholic Church in Belarus.

The images of churches and their followers are contrastively different. The Catholic Church is described as better organized and harmonious, actively working with the believers, who follow rituals. In contrast, the Orthodox Church is represented as non-organized, sometimes unwelcoming and even mercantile with followers who believe only nominally.

The religious practices of applicants follow different patterns, often incorporating elements of both religion traditions. The spread assumption about the religious affiliation as a border line between Belarusian and Polish ethnic groups appeared highly problematic on the ground.

The images of three generations

When applicants spoke about their family history, the theme of three generations emerged in their narrations. The people from different generations were described as those who were put in radically different cultural, economic and political environments by the historical transformations in Belarus in the 20th century. Several times the borders were moved and a new state came at power on the territory. Each time the changes were non-recurrent and sharp – they were described as the breaking points. The new state introduced actively a new mode of organization and- people changed their economic and social status. Other cultural practices became dominant. The way Victor describes his grandmother's biography illustrates it: "She lived long and interesting life. … She had such a unique situation. The territory of Belarus was divided into two parts and she was born in Poland, than it was transferred to USSR and finally she lived in modern Belarus. Hence, the experiences were different in her life, she told me very different things".

Describing the generations is not an attempt to make a unified collage image - it will show nothing due to the multiplicity of experiences. The aim is to describe which tendencies were associated with living in the different time and the way it affected personal identification. In applicants' stories the first generation is their grandparents that were born before 1939. For people of that generation work in the agriculture was the main occupation. They used Polish and Belarusian (dialects) in daily life as the languages received from their parents. For the Catholics the church attendance was an integral part of life, even when the church was under official ban. After the borders were moved and relatives migrated to Poland, many preserved a mutual connection with Poland through media and visiting relatives. Grandparents in the perception of applicants were "real Poles". When applicants spoke about this generation of people, they often concentrated on the events of 1939 that they described as the catastrophe for that generation of people whose entire life was changed and who lost the connection with

their motherland. However, the applicants did not project these events on themselves and do not speak about themselves as about people separated from the kin-state and consider these territories Belarusian. The applicants apply different metanarrative frames to describe the same event in relation to their grandparents and to themselves (Abu-Baker, Rabinowitz 2005).

The next generation of parents was born in the USSR and spent the major part of their life there. They spoke mostly Russian. Speaking Polish in daily life became an exception. In the Soviet time religion stoped being the inalienable part of daily life and did not play a crucial role in people's self-description. The departure from the traditional cultural patterns for many of them was the condition for the successful self-realization in the socialist society. Applicants describe their parents often in contrast to the grandparents – "my mother relates to Poland less than her father" (Olena), "my mother was born and grew in the USSR. Poland for her is not an alien country, but she does not feel a true-born Pole" (interview with Victor). Lilia expressed the main trend in the metaphor "the lost generation" in the sense of weakening identification and the loss of cultural practices. Although some people preserve cultural practices and identify themselves as Poles, it became an exception.

The third generation refers to the applicants themselves. They spend the major part of their lives in independent Belarus. The theme of the search and recovery of ethno-national identity sounds in many narration. They rethink the soviet period as a period of loss – "I think that the USSR was bad because it erased the consciousness in people". Applicants build bridges to the generations of their grandparents to overcome this gap. The translation of cultural patterns often took place from grandparents to their grandchildren. The reconsideration of the heritage leads to the creation of new cultural patterns embedded in different local contexts.

The way applicants made the attribution of their parents and grandparents to different ethnic and national categories gives the example of how a person can construct his or her ancestry.

In relation to the individual's origin the widely shared position is that "one's descent and origin surely constitute the one thing in life that is not subject to choice" (Joppke 2005, p.6). The cases of applicants show that their descendance for them is not "one thing" because they recognize representatives of different groups among their ancestors. The situation created by Karta Polaka demonstrates how people can actualize certain lines in their descendance making in many cases the Polish elements sound, while other origins silent. The personal choice, apart from an instrumental aim to be of a "right" origin, is strongly affected by the duration and length of interpersonal communication with different family members.

3.2. Applicants' experience of personal identification

The construction of the categories of belonging

The Polish state in the official narrative calls the people who are eligible for the Karta Polaka Poles. It suggests that these people, being the citizens of other states, preserve this self-attribution unalterably during their lives and share it with other members of the Polish community. This affiliation is fed by the assumed preservation of cultural practices. In this claim the state imposes a certain identity on the applicants– it makes the individual, a Polish descendant, to attribute oneself to the category of Poles that the state intends to fill in with the content.

The applicants have to face this imposed model of identity and to negotiate it with the identification they achieved by this moment. The Poles became one of the categories the applicants engage in their identification and affiliate themselves with. They built their narrations around these categories, incorporating them in different plots. The content of the categories shifts depending on how they are placed regarding other categories, whose linkages were set between them.

The Poles emerge in the narrations referring to rather different categories of people. The applicants tend to distinguish the Poles, as the citizens of today's Poland, and Poles, as the community they affiliate with. The Poles may appear in the stories as the custom officers, shop assistants or professors - in manifold personified images that applicants described from their first-hand experience. In these cases Poles are described as arrogant or supportive, pragmatic or generous, however, they act as aliens or strangers that the applicants have to adapt to.

The Poles also refer to a collective stereotypical image. The applicants describe this category usually in contrast to Belarusians. Poles are displayed mostly in positive characteristics –

religious, adherent to traditions, organized, proud, active, polite. To a certain extent, the Poles are constructed as a positive *alter ago* of Belarusians, as an attempt to overcome the negative traits attributed to the latter. This positive image is also fed by the narratives translated by the Polish state through the preoperational information for the exam.

The applicants affiliate themselves to neither of these images of Poles. None of them used "we" referring to the contemporary Poles - only "they". Admitting the non-correspondence of their self-perception with these images of Poles, applicants suggest that Belarusian Poles are different from Polish Poles, creating another attribution category. This split does not keep some applicants from proclaiming themselves Poles. In many cases, the applicants do not resolve this situation explicitly. Otherwise they find the explanation in the historical conditions: "it was too long ago when we were together in one state" (Evgeniy 32 year old biologist researcher, residing in Minsk) or suggest that Poles themselves are not homogeneous: "they also have division on true and not true Poles" (interview Konstantin 50 years old professor residing in Minsk).

The all-embracing category of the "Polish people", proclaimed by the Karta Polaka to include all Poles inside and outside the borders, seems as all-encompassing as vague. The belonging to this category is officially confirmed by the Karta Polaka. All applicants confirm that they share this attribution with the proviso to the way they affiliate with. Without defining the "Polish people" explicitly they tend to speak about them as a historical entity. To describe their connection they often use metaphors of "genes" and "kinship": "I belong, because my relatives are the Poles, but not because I did something or oriented to the Polish people" (Andrei 24 year's old manager, residing in Minsk) or even vaguer "there is something inside, on the level of genes or the subconscious" (Ljubov 55 year university employee, regional city). The reference to the blood ties can be interpreted as a statement of an objective

character of the connection, which does not depend on the individual's will and, hence, cannot be alienated with the loss of cultural traits and even identification.

Speaking about the Belarusians, in comparison with the Poles, the applicants describe them as passive, genial, indulgent, tolerant. Often applicants use the category of the Russians as a negative pole. In the applicants' narrations the Belarusians are lazy and inaccurate compared to Poles, but hard-working and organized compared to Russians. The latter are endowed with the negative characteristics – arrogant, impolite and negligible. These negative characteristics preserve even in the narrations of the applicants who name Russians among their ancestors. The existence of a progressive vector from East (Russians) to West (Poland) is admitted explicitly. This duality is projected on the Belarusians themselves by mirroring the differences on the dwellers of Western and Eastern Belarus.

The submissiveness of the Belarusians, according to the narrations, conditions their failure to form a nation. The Belarusian history becomes the history of being "under" other nations. The participants refer to the loss of cultural distinctiveness and forgetting the history as the signs of this failure – "everything we could save we have already lost" says Anna. The very possibility of speaking about the Belarusians is questioned – "Who are the Belarusians?!" was the exclamation repeated many times. Olena suggested her answer to this question - "we are just uncompleted Belarusians". But regarding the general discontent, the pronoun "we" in the narrations refers almost exclusively to the Belarusians.

The way the applicants identify themselves with the collective categories (Poles or Belarusians) follows the idea about a member and his/ her inherent characteristics. The categories referring to countries are constructed following the idea of belonging to certain locality and fixedness of the culture to the territory.

For all applicants Belarus is the country where they spent a major part of their life. The experience of contacts with Poland varies. In the narrations of the applicants Poland refers firstly to the place of birth of their ancestors that is today a part of Belarus. For the dwellers of the border regions, the intensive contact with Poland is a customary part of life since childhood – the flows between the borders are stimulated by an economic exchange and relative links. Other applicants have been there only a few times. The applicants use a similar repertoire of metaphors to construct the images of two countries. Below I mention the main plots they use to describe Poland and Belarus.

Poland is the country with a higher level of life, with the opportunities to consume and to work. But all this is valid only until compared with Belarus that has often a label of a dead end. In comparison with the countries of Western Europe Poland is poor and suffers from the outflow of people. Belarusians, in their turn, want to leave for Poland. In this disadvantageous situation the applicants see the reason for the introduction of the Karta Polaka.

Poland is a European country, but less European than Western Europe. European becomes the synonym of the developed in the narrations. Belarus occupies the intermediate position between European and non-European, but always more European than Russia.

Poland is a country of high culture and great history. *Belarus is a country of beautiful nature*. The applicants rarely associate Poland with the sites of nature, while it is typical in Belarus. It is worth mentioning that the images of nature are among the most widely translated by the Belarusian state media images of Belarus. At the same time, the richness of Polish culture and history is the core of the preparational program for the Karta Polaka composed by the Polish administration. However this difference in metaphors provokes the association with the duality of wild nature and civilized culture.

Poland is a religious country. For the applicants religiosity is connected with morality and traditions. However, the associations with religiosity do not appear referring to Belarus systematically.

Belarus - the motherland. The concept of "motherland" becomes central for the participants describing their relation to Belarus – "motherland can be only one – it is Belarus" states Gregoriy, who considers himself a Pole, continuing "all other countries are alien comparing to it". While not all participants share that strong adherence to Belarus, the theme of the uniqueness of the relation with the locality where one were born and raised is widely referred. The connection with Belarus through a personal life experience surpasses the connection through ancestors. To express the relation with the Belarusian state, they use a strikingly different statement- "I have this passport" is probably the most spread first reaction. The theme of the political situation emerges only in the description of Belarus, while for Poland this sphere stays silent. The personality of the Belarusian president is mentioned as one of the emblematic images of the country. The issue of the limitation of freedom and violence is another political-related theme.

Poland – where the roots are. Poland becomes the country of ancestors, the motherland of the grandparents, but not for the applicants. The concept "the second motherland" emerges as very contestable. Some applicants suggest this metaphor for Poland, others claimed it inapplicable. The image of the Polish state combines a benevolent grantor of Karta Polaka with a pragmatic agent, seeking for labor force. Ilona retold her conversation with her grandfather – "You will see, Ilona, Poland will not forget us" (she cried), but then she suggested "Poland began it just because the people are running from there".

This generalizing summary of the ways the applicants fill in the categories with content does not display all individual varieties of the strategies that applicants use to construct the

categories of affiliation. However, it reveals some common tendencies. The categories were actively constructed through contradistinction, but in certain cases to describe one of the categories the applicants used unique tropes. Belarus and Poland, Belarusians and Poles are not just antipodes. The content is richer due to the differences in the experiences of engagement with the countries and the people. The way of the construction of the categories was also affected by the narratives of the Belarusian and Polish states.

It is also interesting to look at the category that does not emerge in the narrations - people who hold the Karta Polaka. All the participants without exception underline the heterogeneity that does not allow them to approach this category as a "whole". According to them the people who get the Karta Polaka do it for very different motives. Among the grantees they distinguish the group who got it for an extremely utilitarian purpose (the border trade practices) and who do not have anything in common with Poles and the Polish culture. Even the fact that they could provide the needed documents do not make them authentic enough in the eyes of the applicants. They believe that these people comprise the majority, but none of them assigns oneself to this group. At the same time, the applicants believe that in the eyes of the outsiders, they all comprise the group of grantees. On the one hand, they are recognized as potential traitors due to holding the document – "today he plays the Jazz and tomorrow he sells the motherland" cites the Soviet time saying Gregoriy. On the other hand, they are envied because of the benefits they have. The category of the Karta Polaka holders remains disjoint for the insiders and integrated for the outsiders(Cohen 1978) due to the differences in their views.

Trajectories of identification

The current biographical situations where the applicants find themselves sharing some crucial traits: they hold or apply for Karta Polaka, spend the major part of their lives in Belarus and

many others. However, their narrations about their self-perception and self-affiliation are concordant at some points but can never be reduced to one other. The applicants suggested their own variants of self-definition and engagement with the categories of belonging. They also report on the different ways their identification affects and is affected by their practical activity. The concept of trajectory (Certeau 1984) as the unique routes the individuals follow in their signifying practices that cannot be deducted from the characteristics of the system(p. 18) grasps the dynamic of identification. The trajectory also stresses the importance of the time dimension and locality.

The applicants describe how during their life under different circumstances their ethnic identification changed. The process of this change was rooted in the event of their personal life-stories and in the context of the broader processes on the state and transnational level they participate in. Identification is also affected by the events as discreet happenings that have their prolonged consequences – like visiting a foreign country or getting a document.

The importance of a historical moment for the self-definition in ethno-national categories is evident for the participants: "If I have lived in the 1930s under Poles, of course, I would have been a Pole" (interview with Gregoriy). However, the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independent Belarusian state offered a different situation for the achievement of a personhood. The families, where the participants were born were often composed of people attributed to different ethno-national categories and preserved limited Polish cultural practices.

The access to the Polish language, cultural and religious traditions varied dramatically: some applicants have been in touch with Poland and Polish cultural practices since their childhood, others not. All who were involved were raised in Western Belarus, but the connection between the locality and the intensiveness of Polish cultural practices is not a cast-iron rule –

Olena and Anna who left Western Belarus only in their teens were such exceptions. Language or religion could also be rejected deliberately.

Angelina's story (27 year old woman on maternity leave, regional city) gives an example how a person could change the attitude to certain cultural patterns in connection with identity. Angelina was born in Western Belarus. From her childhood she knew that her grandmother is a Pole but did not attach any importance to this. At the church she learned some Polish prayers and songs. Her mother sent her to the Polish after-school club to study language and traditions. However, after 2 years she refused going there. At university Angelina studied foreign languages but not Polish. The turning point was when she realized that she was not able to communicate with the Poles as her peers. So she began to learn about the roots of her family and then she found out about the Karta Polaka. She concludes: "partly I belong to Poland. I got adult and understood that it is a part of me". Angelina made the way from disregarding of her Polish background and associated cultural practices to the actualization of her Polish belonging.

The image of identification as a way with different turns is the core of many narrations. Anna describes her teens as "the time when I began to think, who I am". She got interested in the history of Belarus and began to speak Belarusian. After she moved to Minsk she left these ideas. She turned to the affiliation with Poland in reaction to the dissatisfaction with the political and economic situation in the country; she did not want to belong to Belarus: "I wanted to feel myself a Pole, especially after I visited the country" (interview with Anna). The ethnic identification becomes a conscious choice as a reaction to certain circumstances and the possibility to re-position oneself. Although the instrumental motives may be crucial, such a choice cannot be reduced to them. The trajectory of identification may be applied also to the retrospective reconsideration of the background, when the applicants reconsider the significance of the different ancestral lines.

The event of getting the Karta Polaka had a different effect on the way the applicants perceived themselves. Those for whom their belonging to Poland was accentuated from their early years spoke about the Karta Polaka as a confirmation of their origin recognition by the kin-state or just as a useful option. “I deserve it more than the majority who got it” (interview with Karolina) was sometimes the motif to begin this process.

For the applicants who did not have an articulated affiliation, the Karta often caused a significant change. They all report that their initial motives were purely instrumental (visa, shopping etc.). The process of preparation put them in touch with the relatively unknown language and the Polish history, sometimes evoking sincere interest and provoking further studying. The fact of receiving the Karta Polaka became the acquisition of a new status that made them re-consider their self-perception: “If before the Karta Polaka I have never thought about it, now I affiliate a bit. When I received it I began to understand why I have it. It is not just a visa but something spiritual” (Alexandra 28 years old, specialist, residing in Minsk). The motives and approach to Karta Polaka transformed, while nothing else in their lives changed.

The Karta as a physical object acquires a special significance – “I look at it and I like, that there is written that I am a Pole”. The acquisition of the Karta Polaka introduces the objective dimension in the sphere, where before was a zone of their mostly subjective self-definitions. The official document in this case allows to anchor identification and to stabilize it to a certain extent.

The way individuals identify themselves may vary not only with the time dimension, but also with changing the locality. “Whoever you feel here, when you cross the border you become a Belarusian” (interview with Grigoriy). This change occurs in both how an individual feels and how he is recognized by the outsiders.

The analysis of the routes the applicants follow in the identification reveals that the self-attribution is not the matter of compliance with the a of criteria, but the process of re-negotiating the affiliation under the changing circumstances. Although the identity field remains highly contestable for the interested institutional agents, the major influential force that has the exclusive ability to predetermine the way the identification follows cannot be named.

The experience of estrangement - "at home among strangers"

The self-perception of applicants relies on the idea of their connectedness with several communities and cultures. They recognize their affiliation as extremely complex and do not narrow it down to coherent definitions. Their belonging preserves the element of uncertainty for themselves: "after your family, your religion you are a Pole, but if to look in general – you are a Belarusian" (interview with Andrei). The uncertainty also reveals itself in the way the applicants change the tropes to describe their affiliation. Karolina who stated that she is a Pole in further conversation suggested that "the Belarusian core remains with something superficial Polish". Anastasia at the beginning of an interview described her affiliation with Poland as minor but by the end suggested that she belongs equally to Belarus and Poland. Such discrepancies, probably, not just a bias of the interview situation, but the expression of the ambiguous affiliation that the applicants do not try to "brush" and to make coherent in their narrations. Grigoriy described himself using the metaphor of "a salad" – "you do not distinguish in yourself, it is like a cake or salad -there are different components. I am an integral whole, but not a combination of parts".

The ambiguousness is the core motif in the narrations about Poland as something close and even kindred, but not native. This feeling also comes from the way the applicants see how the Poles perceive them: "Maybe I would like to feel at home –they do not accept you. They

declare it on the different levels, give options but the society does not accept you" (interview with Karolina). Even if you have the Karta Polaka and speak proper Polish, you remain a Belarusian or even a Russian for them. The matter of cultural differences, negotiable in the Belarusian context, here play as a sign of distinction – "any minor mistake in the language turns you from a Pole to a Belarusian" (interview with Andrei). The applicants often report dramatic stories about their Polish relatives who refuse to keep in touch with them.

The applicants admit that even if they define themselves as Poles they cannot be equal to Polish Poles - only being a citizen and residing on the territory could give this feeling. Some applicants used the metaphor of the "people of the second class people" (interview with Grigoriy and Evgeniy). But some applicants said that the Poles treat the Karta Polaka holders better than other Belarusians. The emphasis that the applicants put on citizenship and still not equal rights suggests that the Karta Polaka contributes to the fixation of the dividing line between the Polish citizens and their co-nationals. This situation disagrees with the glorification of a new member of the Polish nation during the solemn ceremony of the Karta Polaka handing.

In Belarus participants feel at home and mostly do not feel that they are treated by others differently because there are many people with Polish roots and belonging to the Catholic church. But this picture is not complete without the discordant stories. Karolina remembers how she was jeered at school by classmates for being signed in the class journal as a Pole. The applicants who are today actively engaged in Polish cultural projects reported that the Belarusian state restricts the activity of such organizations using administrative pressure. Some applicants reported about the conflicts on the ground of holding the Karta Polaka. But in many cases applicants feel alienated from Belarus not on the basis of their ethnic background but because of their dissatisfaction with the current political and economic policy of the state. It provokes the desire to detach from the country and prevents from feeling

comfortable. To describe her feeling Karolina used the metaphor of one pop-song: “I am everywhere a stranger and everywhere I am at home”.

The overemphasis on the experience of the estrangement would display the situation in an inadequately one-sided way but it also should not be disregarded. The inclusiveness of the Karta Polaka that gives the applicants the possibility to participate in both Belarusian and Polish state communities may turn into the exclusion in both communities. The bases for exclusion are created, on the one hand, by the legal status of semi-citizenship, on the other hand, by the putative smoothness of the image of co-nationals proclaimed by the state conflicting with the multiplicity of a personal experience.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Karta Polaka in Belarus creates a distinctive situation for the ethnic identification of the applicants. The Polish state introduces the bureaucratic discourse to the sphere of ethnic group belonging. The question of ethnic affiliation that was left before, at least on the formal level, to the private sphere of an individual (Joppke 2005) becomes the basis for claiming a state membership. The official narrative of the Polish state operates with the implacable image of an ethnic Pole who preserves the national culture and a one-sided identity in the non-amicable surroundings. The results of the present research suggest that this image has very little in common with the personal experience of an applicant for the Karta Polaka.

The necessity to demonstrate the consistency with the proclaimed image of a Polish descendant makes the applicants approach their ancestral background selectively and shape it by making the Polish line especially sound. The idea of a Polish descendant, operationalized in the bureaucratic discourse, affects the attribution of oneself and the ancestors to ethnic categories: an official document becomes the most credible sign, while the cultural practices can be negotiated. This situation is also conditioned by the dramatic change in the cultural practices through generations, resulting in the discrepancy between cultural traits and the attribution to ethnic categories.

The civil status of ancestors can be converted in the informal cultural ties and the idea of the origin for the descendants. The membership in the Polish state becomes the joining with the country of kin and cultural ties but not the restoration of the lost citizenship. In this case the formal discourse of citizenship produces the informal discourse of ethnicity. The tendency to re-ethnitization of citizenship reveals itself in the constructing and facilitating ethnic identification as the ground for claiming the Polish state membership. The state discourse

converts the citizenship of ancestors to the ethnic belonging of descendants to offer the latter a partial state membership. The descendant as "a poor cousin" is encouraged to participate loyally and effectively, making ones best to meet the expectations. The Karta Polaka is not recognized as a type of citizenship - it is described as a gift, but not a right.

The construction of the categories of ethno-national affiliation takes place in a highly contested setting: the applicants are exposed to the narratives of the Belarusian and Polish nation states following their own nation-building strategies and instrumental political goals. The process engages also with the metanarrative of Europe as a superior center of progress along with other institutional narratives. However, the applicants' stories are irreducible to any of them. The way they deal with the categories and fill them in with the content is conditioned by the historical context including the interstate relations, the acceptance of Poland into the EU, economic crises in Belarus and others. It is also affected by applicants' life experience: cross-border activities, religious practices, education and locality.

The categories of affiliation, such as Poland and Belarus, Poles and Belarusians, are constructed, to a certain extent, following the principles of contradistinction and relativity. The Poles and Poland are typically described as more advanced, cultural, active, 'European' compared to Belarus and Belarusians. However, the categories are not just antipodes. Due to the differences in life experiences, the applicants also use distinctive tropes, such as "motherland" for Belarus.

The applicants use different tropes to describe the way of affiliation with the categories. The metaphors of origin, genetic and culture refer to Poland that can be conceptualized as ethnic affiliation. They establish the mutual connection between culture and blood, so that their affiliation to the community acquires an objective and unalienable quality. The applicants also perceive Poland as an advanced country and are proud of their affiliation with it. Referring to

Belarus the emphasis is put on the place of birth and the familiarity with the social surrounding that are conditioned by the personal experience. However, the theme of belonging to the Belarusian state is often neglected.

The applicants describe their ethno-national identification as a multiple belonging. Using different tropes towards Belarus and Poland, they do not try to make their narrations about their affiliation coherent and smooth: the content of categories and the intensity of ties shift even during the conversation. The applicants recognize the fluidity of their affiliation in the biographic dynamics.

The applicants in their identification follow different trajectories regardless of the shared economic and political context, and the exposure to similar state narratives. The trajectories are affected by biographical situation and personal motivation. In different biographies diverse events become the turning points, while the same events can have diverse consequences. The acquisition of the Karta Polaka, as an event, tends to make more significant effect on the identification of people who did not affiliate expressively with Poland before.

Actualization of the affiliation to Poland is driven to a considerable extent by the possibility to access the Schengen zone, to study and work in a European country. But the applicants' motivation cannot be reduced to purely instrumental purposes and is complemented with more complex attitudes. In particular, the applicants feel proud of belonging to an advanced country and may detach themselves from the unsatisfactory situation in Belarus. The identification with Poland often becomes a matter of personal choice in the achievement of personhood.

Recognizing the affiliations to both states, the applicants do not perceive themselves as equal members of the Polish national community as it is claimed in the official state narrative. The

applicants recognize the difference in their status from the citizens whom they consider the 'real' Poles. The Karta Polaka holders become simultaneously excluded and included in the Polish state community. The applicants describe the Polish state as pragmatic and seeking for the loyal labor force. However, they willingly accept this status. The applicants admit that they are not recognized by Poles as co-nationals. This re-directs their affiliation to the image of historical entity of the Polish people, rather than to the actual state community.

The intention of Poland to mobilize labour immigration through the Karta Polaka may result in the creation of a marginalized group composed of co-nationals restricted in rights, similar to the example of colonial states (Joppke 2003). The marginalization can be fostered by the unwillingness of the full citizens to treat them as fellow-members. The proclaimed reunion of the Polish people may turn into the appearance of a "trapped minority" (Rabinowitz 2001) within the community of co-nationals.

By introducing alternative membership regime for co-ethnics, the Polish state aims to re-position itself in response to economic challenges and to introduce nationalist discourse in the nation-building project. On the level of a personal experience of the holders' identification such a regime has a dual effect of facilitating affiliation and assigning the difference from the "core" members. The applicants in their identification try to accommodate these controversies matching them with their personal life plans and self-perception.

The presented results also suggest several themes for further research. Among them, the construction of the ethnicity through the selecting mechanisms in the procedure of the granting citizenship, the role of identification documents in the identity construction in the context of Karta Polaka as well as the migration experience of the Karta Polaka holders.

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