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National self-identification of students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Warsaw (late 1920s-1930s)

Introduction

The Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Warsaw (Studium Teologii Prawosławnej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego; StTP UW) (1925-1939) is one of the unique cultural and educational phenomena of interwar Poland. The history of the Faculty¹ has already been the subject of a number of special studies by Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian authors. Most of them, implicitly or explicitly, emphasized the complexity and confusion of the situation of the Orthodox Church in the Second Polish Republic (II RP). Even the idea of creating an Orthodox theological faculty in a country whose dominant religion was Catholicism arose as a result of a painful search for a compromise between the Warsaw Metropolitans and state. The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) needed its own institution of higher education, but did not have the financial and organizational capacity to establish it. The 'flipside' of the state's support in this matter was the latter's tight control over the faculty. Accordingly, literally every step (choice of programme and language of instruction, selection of teachers, etc.) generated many difficulties. Thus, the standard programme of teaching in Russian pre-revolutionary Theological Academies (namely, the Church authorities initially focused on them) could not be automatically 'adapted' to the University requirements, in particular – the language of teaching. For a long time, it was impossible to fulfill the requirement of teaching theological disciplines in Polish. Metropolitan Dionysius (Waledyński) even had to write a special explanatory letter on this subject to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education (Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archives of Modern Records; later AAN], Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego [Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education; later MWRiOP], sign. 1107, c. 26-29, *Letter from Metropolitan Dionysius to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education*, 26.03.1924).

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¹ The Faculty was not a full-fledged department of the University of Warsaw. Its status can be defined as 'a faculty in the process of formation'.

A separate research problem is, so to speak, the ‘national face’ of this institution. In addition to various compromises between the state and the Church, the Faculty had to find ‘balance’ between representatives of different nationalities: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians and Orthodox Poles (representatives of other nationalities, mostly foreign students, never made any significant groups among students). Echoes of the fact that this was not an easy task can be seen in the memories of the Faculty graduates – Anton Martos (religious name – Athanasius) and Mikołaj Lenczewski (Martos, 2005; Lenczewski, 1974; 1992).

The fact that the largest group of teachers and students were ethnic Ukrainians leads some Ukrainian authors to believe that the Faculty “partially served as a Ukrainian higher education institution” in interwar Poland (Portnov, 2008: 154). Polish and Belarusian researchers pay less attention to the ‘national’ moment in the functioning of StTP UW (Bendza, 2000; Samasiuk, 2008; Baczyński, Sawicki, 2018).

In this publication, I will try, based on the personal files of students, reports of the Faculty management, as well as other documents (mainly from the archives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education) to identify and analyze:

- peculiarities of national self-identification of entrants and students of the Orthodox Theological Faculty,
- proportions between the number of people of different nationalities in different periods of operation of StTP UW,
- influence of various external factors on the ‘fluctuations’ in the numerical representation of certain national groups among students.

Analysis of statistical data

The first difficulty that arises in solving this problem is the extremely ambiguous situation with the fixation of the national affiliation of the Orthodox population in interwar Poland (Table 1). Researchers *volens-nolens* have to focus on the data presented in the results of the Second General Census of Poland from 1931.

Table 1. Orthodox population of II RP in accordance with the native language (1931)

	Total	Native language							
		Polish	Ukrainian	Ruthenian	Belarusian	Russian	Local	Czech	Others
Orthodox	3762484	497290	1501308	38754	903557	99636	696397	21672	3870

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (1938: 15).

The methodology used in this census, according to which respondents were asked to report their native language, led to a number of systemic distortions of the overall picture. First of all, a huge group of “Locals” (Pol. *Tutejszy*) (Belarusian and Ukrainian population of Polesia region with insufficiently clear national self-identification) was

artificially 'singled out' and the number of people who could be called Orthodox Poles was significantly overestimated.

The thoroughness of the census and the accuracy of the published data have been repeatedly questioned. Thus, Jan Żarnowski suggested that in fact there were no more than 150,000 Orthodox Poles (and not nearly half a million as it is recorded in official data). 300,000 of the semi-mythical Orthodox Poles were actually Belarusians, and about 30,000 were Ukrainians (Żarnowski, 1973: 375).

Mirosława Papierzyńska-Turek held a similar opinion, but her calculations of the proportions between different groups of Orthodox in the Second Polish Republic still relied (with some clarifications) only on the 1931 census. In her opinion, Ukrainians were 40.9% (among Ukrainians she unconditionally included those who submitted their native language as "Ruthenian" (Pol. *Rusin*), Belarusians – 24%, "Locals" – 18.5%, Poles – 12.1%, Russians – 2.8% (Papierzyńska-Turek, 1989: 195).

Antony Mironowicz, among other contemporary Polish researchers of the history of the Orthodox Church in the Second Polish Republic, refer to the same percentages (Mironowicz, 2014: 510-511).

Meanwhile, if Żarnowski's assessments are correct, we will get a more realistic 'palette' in which there will be about 4% of native Polish-speaking Orthodox. The share of people with unclear self-identification and Russians will hardly change. Instead, the total share of Ukrainians and Belarusians will increase from two thirds (40.9% of Ukrainians and 24% of Belarusians) to three fourth (42% of Ukrainians and 32% of Belarusians).

The academic literature has already repeatedly speculated on the reasons for such significant discrepancies between the figures (Tomaszewski, 1985). It is not particularly controversial that some Ukrainians and Belarusians could declare Polish as their native language, thus demonstrating their loyalty to the Polish state (Eberhardt, 2006: 55-56; Barwinski, 2015: 57).

It is much more difficult to understand the situation of people declaring "Local", in particular, to try to divide them conditionally among the existing national groups. At the same time, there is no doubt that if a different methodology was used, only a few of these 700,000 people would recognize their belonging to some other group, except for the Belarusian and Ukrainian ones. As a result, this redistribution gives us about 90% of ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians in the total number of Orthodox Christians in Poland.

For all their conventionality and approximation, these calculations are important for determining the extent to which the composition of the students of the Faculty reflected the national structure of the Orthodox population of the Second Polish Republic.

It is clear that they could not 'literally' answer the question due to a number of reasons. For example, there were individuals who had already graduated from secondary school. Among them, in principle, could not be any significant number of those who would self-identify as "Local". Many of those seeking higher theological education came from Russified Orthodox clergy families. Therefore, the number of Russians among the

applicants and students could be considerably higher than the proportion of representatives of this nationality among Orthodox Christians in Poland at that time².

It may be just as logical to assume a tangible presence of Orthodox Poles, as this kind of self-identification was welcomed and supported (especially in the late 1930s) by the state.

During the entire existence of the proto-faculty it was graduated by 318-320 students (Papierzyńska-Turek, 1989: 293; Baczyński, Sawicki, 2018: 239). To this figure we can add those who studied but did not manage to defend their master's thesis before 1939, free listeners and persons who for various reasons did not complete their studies (were expelled, died, etc.), which gives about 400-420 people whose data can be found in the archives.

In such a 'statistical sampling' even small changes (for example, the simultaneous expulsion of several persons of the same nationality) significantly influenced the overall proportions of national representation. In addition, the number of students fluctuated constantly, with a clear tendency to decrease. For example, in 1932/33 the number of students attending the Faculty was 1.9 times smaller than in 1929/30 (Table 2). In the following years, the total number of students in I-IV years ranged from 106 to 119 (Portnov, 2008: 140; Baczyński, Sawicki, 2018: 237).

Table 2. Number of students the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in 1929-1933

Course	Academic year			
	1929/1930	1930/1931	1931/32	1932/33
I	38	32	21	27
II	40	32	32	18
III	48	32	36	25
IV	46	45	45	22
Total	172	141	132	92

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1113, c. 271, *Statistics on students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology for 1929-33*.

Unfortunately, the documentation about the first enrollment of students (in particular, the applicants' questionnaires, in which they indicated their nationality) has been preserved only in fragments. However, the records from the archives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs give us the following picture.

First, from the very beginning of the Faculty's existence, there was an abnormally high number of students who declared their 'Russianness'. For example, as of 1929 (Table 3) they constituted 25.7%, a much higher percentage than the proportion of Russians Orthodox in Poland. And this cannot be explained by anything other than the conscious choice of Russian identity by persons of other origins. Primarily Belarusian – as the fate of Belarusians (12%) categorically does not coincide with their share among

² The first Faculty history researcher, 1936 graduate, Archpriest Mikołaj Lenczewski (1912-2003), a native of Kremenets in Volyn, also belongs to this group (originated from a Russified clergy family) (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1137, c. 106-107, *Questionnaire of M. Lenczewski*, 22. 07. 1932).

the Orthodox of the Second Polish Republic. In the questionnaires, there are many examples of such positioning, and in some certificates from local authorities, it is emphasized that a student “indicates his nationality as Russian, but constantly uses only the Belarusian language”³.

At the same time, the figure of 48.5% of Ukrainians also does not reflect the total number of people of Ukrainian origin among students of the Faculty, as there should be added 9.6% of those who called themselves “Ruthenian”. In some places, different (Ukrainian, Ruthenian or Russian-Ukrainian) identities could be declared not only by entrants from the same ethnically homogeneous villages or counties, but also by the namesakes (hypothetically, related by blood)⁴.

Table 3. Data on the nationality of entrants and students of the Faculty (1929)

Categories		Number of students	Nationality of students						
			Poles	Ukrainians	Belarusians	Russians	“Ruthenians”	Romansians	No data
I course	Graduates of Vilno Seminary	10	2		2	5			1
	Graduates of Kremenets Seminary	27		19		4	3		1
	Graduates of other schools	3		1	1	1			
I course (repeat)		4	1	2			1		
II course		37		18	4	8	5	1	1
III course		46		22	9	11	4		
IV course		40		19	4	14	3		
Together		167	3	81	20	43	16	1	3
In %		100%	1.8	48.5	12	25.7	9.6	0.6	1.8

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1124, c. 32-33, *List of students at the State Boarding House for students of Orthodox Theology at the University of Warsaw*, 14.11.1929).

Secondly, at the initial stage of the Faculty’s existence there were significant differences between the general proportions of persons of different nationalities among all students, and the national composition of the students of the Boarding House (Tables 4-5). The share of Belarusians among the latter in 1931/1932 reached 31%, while the share of Ukrainians was only 42%. This is due to the significantly higher rejection rate for appli-

³ AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1125, c. 345, *Characteristic of the student Jerzy Kosciukiewicz*, 21.09.1938; Such ‘discrepancies’ exist, for example, in the personal file of one of the most famous graduates of the Faculty, Protopresbyter Witaly Borowoi (1916-2008). He always wrote “Russian” in his own handwritten documents (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1128, c. 200, *Questionnaire of student W. Borowoi*, 26.07.1936). However, a certificate sent from the Chancellery of the Vilna Province Governor’s Office stated that he came from a Belarusian family (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1128, c. 190, *Note from the Chancellery of the Vilna Province Governor’s Office to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education with information about W. Borowoi*, 15.09.1936).

⁴ Among the applicants from different years, there were full namesakes with different national self-identification. For example: 2 Ewgen Czerwinski (Ukrainian and Russian), 2 Sergei Butsko (Belarusian and Polish), 2 Wiktor Lewitsky (Ukrainian and “Ruthenian”).

cants from Ukrainian dioceses. Interestingly, it is the same (44%) for those who clearly called themselves Ukrainians, and for people with other options for self-identification.

The reason for this *status quo* is a significant percentage of negative characteristics from local authorities (and it was needed to settle in the Boarding House) as received from the Volyn region. In most cases, there were no specific allegations, but many students were suspected of sympathizing with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) or having constant contact with 'politically unreliable' individuals. Similar 'warnings' (for example, about the contacts of future theologians with Belarusian politicians or public figures) from Vilno, Grodno, or Novogrudok Province Governor's Offices were rare.

Table 4. Statistics on the nationality of the Boarding House students in the 1st trimester of the academic year 1931/32

Course	Number of students	Nationality				
		Poles	Russians ⁵	Ukrainians	Belarusians	Others
I	17	1	4	6	6	-
II	23	1	3	3	14	2
III	18	-	4	11	2	1
IV	23	-	5	14	3	1
Total	81	2	16	34	25	4

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1113, c. 409, *Statistical data on students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw in the first trimester of the academic year 1932/1933*.

Table 5. Data on the admission of students of different nationalities to the Boarding House (1929)

Nationality of applicants	Number of students	From them		%%	
		Accepted	Denied	Accepted	Denied
Poles	3	2	1	67%	33%
Ukrainians	81	45	36	56%	44%
Belarusians	20	15	5	75%	25%
Russians	43	28	15	65%	35%
Ruthenians	16	9	7	56%	44%
Romanian	1	1	-	100%	-
Unidentified nationality	3	-	3	-	100%
Total	167	100	67	60%	40%

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1124, c. 34, *Admissions data for the State Boarding House of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Warsaw, 1929*.

⁵ In most statistical reports, SłTP UW maintained the following 'hierarchy' of fixing nationalities: the first column showed the number of Polish students, the second – Russians (although the latter never numerically formed the largest group of students). On the Faculty, the Russians (both in their ethnic origin and in their self-identification) were certainly not a "marginalized group" as was the case in the general ethical "mosaic" of II RP (Kołbuk, 2003).

The tendency of the number of Ukrainians among students living in the dormitory to decrease is noticeable when comparing the data for 1929-1933 (Table 6). As of the academic year 1929/30, Ukrainians were half of those living in this dormitory. In contrast, in 1932/33 – only 34.9%. At the same time, the percentage of Russians in the same period fluctuated less markedly (with a few exceptions in 1931/1932) – ranging between 26.4% and 32.5%.

The increase in the percentage of Belarusians (both in general and among those who lived in the dormitory) can be explained by gradual changes in the self-identification of entrants from voivodships where the Belarusian population dominated. In particular, the increase could be noticed of the number of those who received secondary school education in secular educational institutions, including those where the Belarusian language was studied (among the first intake students there were almost none) and clearly identified themselves as Belarusian⁶.

Table 6. Nationality of students living in the dormitory at the beginning of 1933

		Nationality									
		Poles		Russians		Ukrainians		Belarusians		Others	
Academic year	Number of students (total)	Number of students	%%	Number of students	%%	Number of students	%%	Number of students	%%	Number of students	%%
1929/1930	120	1	0.8	39	32.5	66	55	13	10.9	1	0.8
1930/1931	106	1	0.9	28	26.4	52	49.1	23	21	2	1.8
1931/1932	83	2	2.5	17	20.4	35	42.1	25	30	4	5.0
1932/1933	86	2	2.3	25	29.1	30	34.9	23	26.8	6	6.9

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1113, c. 272, *Statistics on students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology for 1929-33*.

Third, the data on the number of Orthodox Poles among the students of StTP UW are extremely unreliable. In 1929, only three people out of 167 (less than 2%) declared such an identity. This figure roughly corresponded to the real number of “Polish-speaking Orthodox” (3-4%) among all Orthodox believers of the Second Polish Republic. In the following years, there became more and more of them – both in quantitative and percentage terms. Among those who applied for enrollment in the Boarding House in

⁶ It is extremely rare, but there are cases of people from Ukrainian (possibly mixed Ukrainian-Belarusian) families choosing the Belarusian identity. In particular, the family of the future Archpriest Alexei Znosko (1912-1994) is described as “Ukrainianophile” in references from the Polesia Province Governor’s Office. However, Znosko, who graduated from the Russian Gymnasium in Brest-Litovsk, clearly indicated his nationality as “Belarusian” when applying to the University of Warsaw (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1150, c. 210-211. *Questionnaire of A. Znosko*, 8. 09. 1934; sign.1150, κ.201. *Note from the Chancellery of the Polesia Province Governor’s Office to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Education with information about A. Znosko*, 13.10. 1934).

1935/36 (at that time almost all students of the Faculty lived in this dormitory), they amounted to 21%.

These figures did not reflect the real situation very well. Even officials interested in “good reporting” (for example, the Boarding House curator from the Ministry of Religious Affairs) did not believe that they were in fact persons of Polish descent/with a clear Polish self-identification. In the drafts of the lists for the same academic year, near the names of 3 people who identified themselves as “Poles”, there are question marks (“??”). A similar marking (question marks, underlines in red, notes on the need for additional verification) can be found in the questionnaires from different years, in which the column “nationality” is marked “Polish”.

There have been several revelations when references from places categorically denied the truth or sincerity of such an identity. For example, a check of one of the applicants from Polesia province, Alexander Szemetillo, who indicated his nationality as “Polish” in his application form, revealed the following facts. It turned out that he came from a family with Belarusian roots. At the same time, his father (priest) is known as an aggressive Russian nationalist, and all of his children were raised as Russians⁷.

In another case, inquiries made at the place of study and residence of applicant Witaly Golonko were not enough to establish the sincerity of his self-identification as a “Pole”. However, it turned out that his brother “is undoubtedly under the influence of militant Ukrainian nationalism” and is suspected of being disloyal to the Polish state⁸.

Table 7. Nationality of students who applied for admission to the Boarding House for 1935/36

Nationality of applicants	Number	%%
Poles ⁹	9	21%
Ukrainians	13	31%
Belarusians	8	19%
Russians	4	10%
Ruthenians ¹⁰	7	17%
Nationality not specified	1	2%
Total	42	100%

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign. 1125, c. 295-296, *Draft list of candidates for admission to the Boarding House of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Warsaw, 1935.*

⁷ In the characterization of the family of priest Szemetillo, officials of the provincial office emphasized “a hostile attitude towards Polish state”, “an atmosphere alien to Polish culture in which children were brought up” and “the cultivation of a Russian spirit” (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1146, c. 406, *Note from the Chancellery of the Polesia Province Governor’s Office to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Education with information about A. Szemetillo, 17.09.1937*).

⁸ This information was reported to the Ministry of Religious Affairs by the director of the gymnasium where the Golonko brothers studied (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1132, c. 404, *Letter from the director of the Stanislaw Staszic Gymnasium in Grubeszow to the Ministry of Religious Relations and Public Education with the characteristics of W. Golonko, 17. 09.1936*).

⁹ One person recorded his nationality as “Polish-Russian”.

¹⁰ One person recorded his nationality as “Ruthenian-Russian”.

‘Playing’ with a declared identity is also noticeable in the case of constant fluctuations in the number of people who have recorded their nationality as “Ruthenian”. In the 1935 enlistment, there were, for example, as many as 17%. Whereas in the list of new entrants of 1938/1939, there was only one person who declared such self-identification (Table 7). The most likely explanation for such differences may be the assumption of the influence of political conditions on the formal declaration of one’s identity to persons from Ukrainian dioceses. Registering as “Ruthenians”, some students symbolically dissociated themselves from the Ukrainian political movement¹¹ and additionally declared their loyalty to the Polish state. This nuance was especially important at the time of the aggravation of the Ukrainian question in the Second Polish Republic, but lost its significance in relatively quiet periods.

Table 8. Nationality of students admitted to the 1st year in 1938/39 academic year

Nationality of applicants	Number	%%
Poles	5	20%
Ukrainians	7	28%
Belarusians	6	24%
Russians	3	12%
Ruthenians	1	4%
Nationality not specified	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Source: AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1125, c. 370-372, *Draft list of first-year students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw, 1938.*

Conclusions

The national composition and national self-identification of the students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw in 1926-1939 were determined by the following factors:

1. Incomplete nation-building processes among the Ukrainian and Belarusian population of the Second Polish Republic. In the case of Ukrainians, this was manifested in the presence of a significant number of people who preserved the archaic form of national self-identification as “Ruthenians”. The lack of national conscience among

¹¹ In this regard, the case of 1930 applicant Illya (Elias) Gudzowaty, of a Ukrainian Greek Catholic family, is interesting. Gudzowaty converted to Orthodox Christianity during the Russian occupation of Galicia in 1914-1915 and joined with the Russian army. He took part in the Civil War as a member of the White Armies, after whose defeat he fled to Constantinople and later moved to Germany. In search of financial support, he returned to his original confessional affiliation. However, after moving to Poland in the early 1930s, he converted back to Orthodox Christianity. Declaring himself a “Ruthenian”, he fixed a specific *status quo*: dissociation from the Ukrainian political movement and, at the same time, unwillingness to recognize himself as an “ethnic Russian” (AAN, MWRiOP, sign.1132, c. 134, *Letter from the Polish consulate in Berlin to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education with information about E. Gudzowaty*, 26.05.1931; sign.1132, c. 126-127. *Questionnaire of E. Gudzowaty*, 16.09.1931).

some of the Belarusians led to a desire to self-identify as “Russians” as well as to use various kinds of mutually exclusive self-identifications (Russian-Belarusian, etc.).

2. The specifics of the specialization of the Faculty. Specificity of the specialization of the Faculty. The Orthodox Church in interwar Poland remained a ‘lump’ of the Russian Orthodox Church, with an ethnic Russian Metropolitan as its head. For those who needed a theological education to carry out their career in the structures of the PAPC, it was more advantageous to declare Russian identity than Ukrainian or Belarusian. As a result, the number of students who called themselves Russians was several times higher than the “share of Russians among the Orthodox of the Second Polish Republic.
3. Purposeful policy of the state. It was most pronounced in support of the processes of Polonization and, accordingly, encouraged (directly or indirectly) to declare students as Orthodox Poles. Successes in this field were rather modest, as the advantages that would be given to individuals who chose such self-identification were not obvious (outside the very narrow field, such as chaplaincy in the Polish Army).

Among other manifestations of state policy that had an impact on national representation and balance at the Faculty, we can note the successive steps aimed at reducing the percentage of students with a clear Ukrainian national identity among students. If in the early 1930s, Ukrainians were the main and dominant group (about half of all students) among future theologians, by the end of the decade this figure had dropped to about one third.

However, in this regard there was an unspoken coincidence of interests of the state and the leadership of the Orthodox Metropolis. After all, it was Ukrainian students who were the most active in fighting for their rights, further emphasizing the existence of nationality-based contradictions in both the Polish state and PAOC.

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Source materials

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Abstract: In the article, the data about national structure of students of Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw in the late 1920s-1930s is analyzed. The features of national self-identification of different groups of students are designated. Conclusions are made about the reasons for the disproportionate representation among future theologians of persons self-identifying as Russian and Orthodox Poles.

Keywords: Second Polish Republic, national minority, Orthodox theology, the University of Warsaw

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