

## II. A BORDERLAND CIVILIZATION?

### THE CONCEPT OF CIVILIZATIONAL BOUNDARY

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In this paper the concept of the boundary of civilizations is discussed on the example of Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. The author starts from the assumption, shared by many historians and sociologists, that civilizations are real cultural entities based on certain long-lasting patterns of symbolical order. Those patterns are closely related to respective religions like Catholicism and Orthodoxy, but they act even though people's religiosity is weak. The differences between Western Christian and Eastern Christian patterns remain important in a secularized world as well. The author analyses how these civilization differences influence both cross national and political identities in countries, situated on the boundary of civilizations. He shows, in particular, how symbolic patterns shape the identity of Catholic minority in modern Belarus and that of Orthodox minority in today's Poland.

**Keywords:** boundary of civilizations, ethnic minority, national identity, symbolic patterns, "symbolic universe", religion.

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#### Introduction: the concept of civilization

The term "civilization" refers to the widest type of cultural and political commonwealth. Each civilization is characterized by a certain scope of basic ideas and representations that remains virtually unchanged in centuries. While defining religion as "symbolic universe" we will refer to these ideas and representations as religious ones. This wide definition, forged by Alfred Schütz (Schütz 1962), is used by some contemporary sociologists, e.g. by Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger. Luckman expresses it in the following passage: "Symbolic universes are socially objectified systems of meaning referring to the world of everyday life, as well as to the realm of otherworld transcending it" (Luckmann 1996: 77).

Berger's understanding of the foregoing concept seems to be expressed in a similar way (Berger 1999). Accordingly, each civilization manifests itself both in a certain way of life and transcendence by which it is legitimized. This is the very source of its permanence as well, since any civilizational transformation brings about changes in the whole "symbolic universe". Each partial conversion – economical, political or technological – uncoordinated with the system as a whole, has serious consequences

to every aspect of civilization, and threatens with civilizational crisis, disintegration of a human community, as well as personal degradation of individuals.

According to Ferdinand Braudel, a “long duration” is the main feature of civilization. As he writes, “this resistance and acceptance, permanence and long, invisible changes bring us closer to the last definition that characterizes civilization by historical continuity and undetermined duration”. According to him, civilizations “survive political, social, economical or even ideological upheavals that are very often their in-built variations” (Braudel 1972: 302).

### Religion and civilization: the case of Eastern European border

The idea that religion is the source of civilization which is responsible for its identity and particularity is recognized by most of its theorists. This view is shared by Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Max Weber, Feliks Koneczny, Samuel Huntington to name a few. Their ideas are well-known to modern readers, so I do not consider it necessary to present them here.

However, the very concept of religion seems to be problematic. The above-mentioned term of “symbolic universe” that refers to particular but permanent features of each religious tradition, appears to be more accurate. As it is seen from this standpoint, religion, conceived as an institutionalized form of expression of meta-physical intuitions and rituals related to them, seems to be a declining, self-conscious phase of a long evolution of the “symbolic universe”. On the surface, religion as “symbolic universe” also has its history: it suffers repressions, changes, modifications and reformations: it could also disappear from the public life (like in Mongolia, China, Albany, or even in the Soviet Union). However, when the situation changes, it resurrects in the same or a slightly modified form, as a manifestation of the same “symbolic universe”, the core of given civilization. Weber in his brilliant book on the Chinese civilization considers that the concept of “religion” is unfamiliar to Chinese people and there is no equivalent to that word in the ancient Chinese language. Chinese used different terms to describe: a) a doctrine of any “intellectual school”, b) rituals, both religious and just customary.

The difference between institutional religion and “symbolic universe” becomes clearer, when we trace the process of accommodation of Christianity in many countries of Asia, Africa or Latin America. The mission of Society of Jesus in China, headed by Matteo Ricci, could serve here as a symptomatic example. Ricci knew China, its language and culture very well, he adopted Christianity to it and created “Chinese rite”. Despite a small number of Jesuits engaged in the action, the order was very successful in Christianization of the Chinese (300 thousand people were baptized). However, in 1804 the pope Clement XI banned the Chinese Christianity as unorthodox because of some Daoist elements present in it. This decision stopped Christianization of China for more than a century. In our times similar accusation of “Chinizing” of Christianity was made against famous philosopher and theologian,

Anthony de Mello. Yet one must bear in mind that Buddhism also had to accommodate to Chinese “symbolic universe” and other ideologies *nolens volens* suffered the same fate. Then Maoism was a Chinese version of the Marxism-Leninism, which was itself the Russian version of the original Marxist ideology. The strength of the Russian “symbolic universe” is proved by the fact that 70 years of dominance of “scientific atheism” did nearly no harm to the Orthodox Church in Russia.

Let us focus on a much more familiar example of the area, situated on the Polish-Ukrainian and the Polish-Belarusian border. People living there are identified mostly by their confessions, that is, by the civilizations they belong to. In this local context there are two types of such confessions/civilizations: Orthodox and Latin ones (esp. Catholicism). Speaking of religions, we do not refer here to various institutionalized churches. This remark is of great importance when we deal with Christian Orthodox confession. Orthodox religion is based on rituals and its doctrine is far less important; Orthodox people do not care too much *what* they worship, but *how* they do that. Kosacks, who set their rebellions against Polish and Lithuanian nobility, named themselves “defenders of Orthodox faith”, despite disregarding of any orthodox institution or authority. Yet one cannot say that their “love for Orthodox church” lacked sincerity.

In 1994, I set out investigation on religiosity of Ukrainians, interviewing 2,242 people. It appears that religiosity of Ukrainians is determined by their confession. 55% of Protestants regarded themselves as “deeply religious”, while only 25% of Catholics, 16% of Greek-Catholics, 8% of Kiev Orthodox and 4% Moscow Orthodox did so. When we analyze data concerning religious practice, the same model of religiosity appears. 66% of Protestants frequented service at least once a week, while 32% of Greek-Catholics and only 2% of Moscow Orthodox did so. 30% of Moscow Orthodox stated that they never go to Mass. Only 34% of Orthodox regarded themselves as believers; others declared themselves as non-believers, seekers or even atheists.

From the point of view of official religion, the term “Orthodox non-believer” and, especially, “Orthodox atheist” makes no sense. Yet sociologists consider that Orthodoxy remains the essential feature of such people’s identity.

### The problem of national and civilization identity: the Catholics in Belarus

We can compare these data with the situation of Catholics in Belarus. According to the 1999 census, 395.7 thousand of Belarusian citizens declared themselves as Polish – that makes 4% of the whole population. However, this data does not reflect the very importance of the Polish minority in Belarusian politics not only “qualitatively”, but also quantitatively. The problem is that according to a common opinion, shared also by some Polish analytics, all Belarusian Catholics are Polish, but for many reasons they do not want to declare their real nationality. Sociological survey carried out in 1997 shows that 10.4%, that is at least one million of Belarusian citizens, declared themselves as Catholics. This number increases when we add “non-believers”

or “indifferent towards religion” from Catholic families. The census brings also very interesting data concerning linguistic preferences of Belarusians. 84.9% of Belarusian Polish living in villages, speak “Belarusian” at home, 9% of them speak “Ruthenian”. Among Belarusian city dwellers, declaring themselves as Polish, 34.6% speak Belarusian at home, while 65.5% speak “Ruthenian”. Being asked what their native language is, 61% answered “Belarusian”.

As we see, ethnographers have not got on their disposal any criterion but confession. Empirical surveys confirm this hypothesis. Ann Engelking, who investigated the region of Grodno, writes: “Researcher asking people about differences between Polish and Belarusians in Belarus can hear only on similarities: *No, no, all the same but confession, the rest is the same. The same kolkhoz, the same life... Or: Now there is equality <...> There are many Belarusians and ‘Ruski’, and all we speak to them in Belarusian... We are like brothers and sisters...*” (Engelking 1999: 208).

“He cares about people, about their life. Listen, young lady, without Łukaszenka all kolkhozes would fall apart, and disorder would be, and the land wouldn’t be cultivated, and hunger would be. Thanks to him we still have kolkhoz, and something to eat, and warm place to sleep, everything is done. In Lithuania there is no kolkhoz and they live in chaos...” (Engelking 1999: 209).

“Kolkhoz must be” – for majority of Belarusians it is the universal truth. Only one from 400 interviewed people wanted kolkhozes to be cancelled. Kolkhoznicks, who each 6<sup>th</sup> January write on doors “K + M + B”, explains this inscription (which was linked by tradition with the names of Three Kings: Kacper, Melchior, Baltazar) as “Kolkhoz Must Be”. Of course, it is a joke, but also a *signum temporis*. “When kolkhoz would fall apart – we read in an interview – the people would be suffering. Man cannot live alone. He prefers to live in kolkhoz. In kolkhoz it is much better to him” (Engelking 1999: 210).

Then what happens, when these Belarusian kolkhoznicks, who consider themselves to be Polish, move to cities and become teachers, engineers or clerks? Some of them join cultural and political organizations of Polish minority and become extremely skeptical about Aleksander Łukaszenka and kolkhoz. Others change the identity and transform in Belarusian-Catholics, however the nature of their transformation is up for discussion. They interpret it as a return to their authentic identity: “we have always been Belarusian Catholics, but we had a false consciousness of being Polish kolkhoznicks”. According to this point of view, Catholicism refers to a certain ideology, like all other confessions: Orthodox, Baptist, or that of Old-believers. These Belarusian Catholics are usually extreme opponents of Łukaszenka and kolkhozes, and strong activists of opposition to the current regime.

### The case of Orthodox in Poland

The situation of Orthodox in the *Białystok* region is similar. (Being Orthodox is not tantamount to believe in Orthodox dogmas – one can be Orthodox non-believer, Orthodox atheist or even Orthodox convert (“przechrzta”), i.e. Catholic or Jew.). In the

light of data of census made by Orthodox Church, in *Białystok* in 1980, 332 500 people in Białostoczyzna (*Białystok* region) are Orthodox. Metropolitan Counsel of The Polish Orthodox Church estimates that more than 100 thousand Orthodox people in Poland live in mixed marriages. Probably, a bulk of them got married in Catholic Church, and that is why they have not been counted as Orthodox. Assuming that these data should be reduced because of demographic tendency unfavorable to the Orthodox population, we can suppose that not less than 300 thousand Orthodox people live in the district of *Białystok*. That is the number of Belarusians as well because terms “Orthodox” and “Belarus” seem to be synonymous<sup>1</sup>.

While there are 1,200 thousand people living in *Białystok* region, we can assume, that 25% of them are Orthodox, that is Belarusians. However, according to the last census, only 47,700 people from Voivodship of Podlasie declared themselves to be Belarusians. This shocking data was interpreted as a result of fear of discrimination or necessity of hiding “the true nationality”. Yet this explanation seems incredible. Most Belarusians live in relatively small communities where people know each other and the hiding of national or religious identity makes no sense. The alternative interpretation, that explains the phenomenon by a progressive assimilation into the Polish identity, is not satisfactory either. In my opinion, the reason is both more simple and more complicated. Orthodox people living in region of *Białystok* consider themselves to be the members of the Polish political commonwealth, but the “symbolic universe” they live in is still the Orthodox one. If we consider their attitude towards events like the declaration of independence of Kosovo, the NATO’s invasion of Serbia in 1999 or Anti-Russian campaign in Polish media, we find more reasons supporting my hypothesis. Also political preferences of Orthodox people, popularly known as Belarusians, cast light on the subject. In the 1991 parliamentary election, only 4,500 Belarusians voted on the Belarusian Electoral Committee, and 13 thousand supported the Orthodox Electoral Committee. Majority of Belarusian voted on SLD (or the “post-communist left”) and the situation repeated in next elections.

To summarize, the idea of “Belarusian nation” does not appeal to the Orthodox people from the *Białystok* region. I would rather name it their “anti-value”, and the nationalistic sentiments popularized by so-called “democratic” opposition in Belarus are considered to be the ideological weapon of Catholic Poland, directed against the Orthodox Belarus.

### Conclusions: the boundary of civilizations

According to classic authors like Spengler or Toynbee, each civilization is a historical phenomenon confined in space and time. However, there is another view on civilization represented by Braudel, Norbert Elias or Koneczny, defining it as a particular pattern of social and existential organization that could be actualized in different places

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<sup>1</sup> Such meaning of the concept of „Belarusian” in the Białystok region is accepted by many authors. See e. g. Mironowicz, E. 1993. *Białorusini w Polsce 1944-1949*, Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe; Sadowski, A. 1995. *Pogranicze polsko-białoruskie: Tożsamość mieszkańców*, Białystok: “Trans Humana”.

and epochs. Koneczny gives here an example of Jewish civilization, which – “like a pest” – dispersed all around the world without respecting natural, ethnical or political borders.

Looking at civilization from this angle, we have in mind a center (e.g. Washington, Moscow, Pekin) and the waves – as a picture of civilizing influences – running out of it. These influences are criss-crossed by the influences of other civilizations, and that results in new ideological and political patterns and huge problems of identity as well. The bigger split between “symbolic universe” and official national or religious ideology is the more serious difficulties we are confronted with. The Whole area of the Latin-Byzantin criss-cross – from Barents’ to Adriatic See – is fraught with problems. The Balkan conflict is the most spectacular one; yet countries like Ukraine, Belarus and others are devastated by cultural and religious tensions that are determined by the strife of civilizations.

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## CIVILIZACIJŲ RIBOS SAMPRATA

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### Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje civilizacijos ribos samprata tyrinėjama pasitelkiant lenkų ir baltarusių bei lenkų ir ukrainiečių paribio pavyzdį. Autorius remiasi prielaida, keliami daugelio istorikų ir sociologų, esą civilizacijos yra tam tikri kultūriniai dariniai, kurių pagrindą sudaro ilgalaikiai simbolinės tvarkos modeliai. Šie modeliai yra glaudžiai susiję su atitinkamomis religijomis, tokiomis kaip katalikybė ir stačiatikybė, tačiau jie turi lemiamą įtaką civilizacijoms, net jei žmonių religingumas nėra gilus. Vakarų krikščionybės ir Rytų krikščionybės modelių skirtumai išlieka svarbūs net sekuliarizuotame pasaulyje. Autorius analizuoja, kaip šie civilizacijų skirtumai veikia tautinius ir politinius tapatumus bei kaip su jais kertasi šalyse, įsikūrusiose ties civilizacijų riba. Jis parodo, kaip simboliniai modeliai formuoja katalikų mažumos tapatybę mūsų dienų Baltarusijoje ir stačiatikių mažumos tapatybę nūdienėje Lenkijoje.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** civilizacijų riba, etninė mažuma, tautinė tapatybė, simboliniai modeliai, „simbolinė visuma“, religija.

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