

Ethnicity Has Many Names: On the Diverse Acts of Identification with the Example of the Ukrainian Minority in the Romanian Region of Maramureș

Ethnicity-related studies have established themselves in the world's anthropology in the late 1960s¹ (Eriksen 1993). Despite almost half a century of its history, the topic of ethnicity has been constantly present on the pages of anthropologic texts published worldwide. Polish ethnology is no exception, although one can get an impression that issues connected with ethnic identity have recently lost some popularity in comparison with the past (see Posern-Zieliński 1995). However, ethnic studies in Poland are not an exclusive domain of ethnologic studies; this subject matter is also, or even chiefly, examined by sociologists and historians. In particular, it can be clearly seen in the context of the research of national, ethnic and migratory minorities living in Poland. For editorial reasons, an overall synthesis of recent trends and research works connected with ethnic studies, conducted by domestic ethnologists and anthropologists, would require at least a separate article. Therefore, within several paragraphs, I will only introduce several assorted and, in my opinion, most interesting studies and tendencies in the modern research of ethnicity in Polish ethnology.

The ethnicity studies in Poland can be divided, with regard to the addressed issues, into at least three groups. The first one includes those which examine the issue of ethnic identity of "aliens" living in the greatest proximity to the Poles, i.e. members of minority communities living in Poland. It is easy to see

¹ However, this does not mean that the ethnic subject matter had been previously absent in the ethnographic/ethnologic studies. In Polish ethnology, it is hard not to mention, for instance, the studies by J. Obreński (1936a, 1936b). An overview of the most important Polish studies on ethnic issues has been prepared by Posern-Zieliński (1995).

that, at least quantitatively, the predominant studies are those concerning the Roma, Lemko, Kashubian and Silesian groups².

Among the studies on the Roma from the recent decade, one should particularly mention those from the Warsaw ethnology centre. They seem to be a kind of continuation of the earlier research by Lech Mróz (2000). The continuators, in their studies, focused on the Roma family rituals (Kowarska 2005), as well as issues of the modern identity of Roma groups in Poland (Godlewska-Goska, Kopańska 2011). Lemkos, on the other hand, have been examined by Wasilewska-Klamka (2006), Trzeciecka-Demel (2013) and Pecuch (2009). The two former researchers, in their scholarly narrations, have shown the modern identity image of a group through its memory of the past. Pecuch's book, on the other hand, confronts the identities of the Lemko communities living in Eastern Ukraine and in Western Poland, i.e. outside their ethnic homeland in the Carpathians. The two other groups I have mentioned above, according to the Polish legislation, are not minorities of national or ethnic character; nevertheless, they are communities in which at least a part of ethnic elites strongly stresses the ethnic difference from the Polish identity. In case of the Kashubian group, the research is strongly dominated by historians and sociologists, often directly involved in creation of the group's identity (Warminska 2008, Obracht-Prondzyński 2002). However, the complexity of the Kashubian identity issue has also seen an attempt of deconstruction from the positions of historical anthropology (Filip 2012).

Another area of ethnic research of the Polish anthropologic community is Europe. Although some studies examine the issues of ethnic identities of Western European communities (Chwieduk 2006, Mirgos 2010-11, Petryk 2012), the Central and Eastern European ones enjoy much greater scholarly interest. Some Polish scholars have chosen the Balkans as their area of field study (Bielenin 2008, Nowicka 2011), while others work in the areas of the successor states of the USSR, including, in particular, Ukraine (Michna 2004, Halemba 2013, Lipiński 2013, Koziura 2014).

Quite a number of studies in Polish anthropological centres examining the issue of ethnicity are also made with regard to non-European contexts. Predominant in this area is, in particular, the research in the field of Asian studies concerning both East Russian and Mongolian groups (Wasilewski, Mróz, Lipiński 2011, Smyrski 2008, Szmyt 2012), as well as communities of Tibetan origin (Bloch 2011).

² Under the Polish *Act on National Minorities*, the two former groups, according to legal definitions, are defined as ethnic minorities. The act mentions the Kashubians in the context of a regional language and, therefore, does not claim this community to be a minority. Silesians, according to the Polish legislation, are not perceived as a separate ethnic or national group, although this community has developed many ethnic elite communities, and almost 850 thousand people have declared Silesian nationality in the latest Polish National Census.

The development of nationalisms in Europe has triggered a situation in which, nowadays, we believe that every human should have a determined ethnic identity, and every group should be named and precisely determined in ethnic categories. However, the social reality often turns out to be much more complex and complicated than could be assumed on the basis of official statistics or political and ideological declarations strictly defining the ethnic identities of individual groups. Looking at some communities from the viewpoint of ethnographic research³ allowing to “grasp” the nuances of everyday life of members of a group, including their habitual behaviours and everyday interactions, anthropologists have the potential to construct images of community identities, differing significantly from the official discourses and universally accepted interpretations. As Eriksen (1993) says, it is this ambiguity in determination of the issue of group identification which has become a challenge for the contemporary research of ethnicity in the field of anthropology.

In the present analysis, I make an attempt to indicate the extent of complexity and ambiguity of the ethnic identity of the Ukrainian community in the Romanian region of Maramureş. On the basis of the conducted research⁴, I conclude that the community under consideration is identified ambiguously, depending on the assumed perspective, and its title Ukrainianness is but one of possible ethnic identifications. The ambiguity of identification I have observed is revealed both at the scholarly, political and ideological level, as well as in the context of everyday life of “ordinary” inhabitants. In my opinion, such situation indicates at least two important issues. The first one is the fact that the diversity of ethnic identifications of the community under examination clearly shows that the group identity has relatively recently become subject to ideological efforts of various ethnic circles. In my opinion, the plurality of voices with regard to identification of the Maramureş communities covered by my research, present both in the field and in the existing sources, shows that any projects of ethnic identity of this group are still far from reality, remaining

³ I refer to ethnographic research consisting in long-term participating observation and many conversations (free and in-depth interviews) conducted by an anthropologist in the field, allowing him to register the everyday intimate aspects of culture of the researched people, including the issues of their identification(s).

⁴ A study financed from the science resources in 2009-2011 as a research project conducted under a supervisor grant of the KBN [State Committee for Scientific Research] (NN 109223636), under supervision of Prof. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński PhD. My eight-month field study was conducted in 2009-2010, mainly in two localities, Repdea and Remeţi, in the Maramureş county in Romania.

in the phase of implementation. As a result, the ethnicity of the group remains constantly subject to an ideological struggle between diverse communities of ethnic activists. The Ukrainian, Carpatho-Rusyn, and recently even Hutsul leaders (Yuriychuk 2011: 81) make attempts to appropriate the local identity for the ethnic identity they advocate. Secondly, the ambiguity of possible ethnic identifications advanced towards local communities creates an attractive space for activity of various circles of ethnic leaders who, taking advantage of the “benefits” of the Romanian legislation concerning the protection of national minorities, try to fulfill their own ambitions⁵.

I will begin the present analysis with several theoretical remarks acquainting the reader with the presented manner of interpretation of the phenomenon of identity. Subsequently, I will present various perspectives on the ethnicity of the community under consideration. I will mainly focus on the presentation of “official” acts of identification, connected with the policy of the Romanian state and the ideological efforts of scholarly circles, as well as activities of ethnic leaders in this area. Finally, I will present several assorted aspects of identification I have noticed in local spaces of everyday life of “ordinary” locals, which additionally make the ambiguity of the ethnic image of the group even more complicated.

Identity

Marcus (1998), discussing the requirements of the modern anthropological studies, mentions the identity as well. He points out that the classic way of perception of communities assumed their constancy and homogeneity. However, according to the author, today the phenomenon of identity should be perceived differently. A new approach should consider the fact that identifications of groups and communities are created simultaneously on several levels, at many places, by many different social actors, and in order to achieve different goals. I believe that Marcus’s views can be understood thus in modern ethnography: the questions of identity should not be perceived as a characteristic of a given community but rather as a process of creation thereof. The anthropologist terms this “new” kind of identity as *dispersed identity*. Facing the modernity, an identity ceases to be a permanent and unambiguous characteristic of a group, transforming rather into a set of processes connected with multi-level acts of identification. The processual and multi-aspect nature of the phenomenon of

⁵ In the literature analyzing the relationships between Romania and its national minorities, authors pay attention to the phenomenon of “ethno-business”, or a range of practices connected with “abuse” of the existing minority protection legislation by ethnic activists (see Gavrilu 2010, Carstocea 2011).

group identity had already been emphasized by Ardener (1992). The scholar pointed out that the issues of identification are connected with both acts of external identification and acts of self-designation by social actors. As a result, under the approach he proposes, identity is not an objective property of a given group, and an identity of any community can be considered as complex systems of acts of identification, including both external and internal designations, as well as individual and group ones.

The aforementioned concept of *dispersed identity* (Marcus 1998) seems to interact well with the view of Brubaker (1996) who claims that the identity of national minorities in Central Europe is subject to a relation of a peculiar triad of antagonizing forms of nationalisms, consisting of: the nationalism of the home country of a given minority, the nationalism of the “motherland” abroad, as well as the one created by minority elites. The Brubaker’s triad, however, does not take into account the fourth important actor, that is, “ordinary” people subject to the aforementioned nationalisms. Nevertheless, this concept is another modern voice in the area of social sciences, indicating the complexity and multi-aspect nature of the phenomenon of ethnic identity.

Looking at the issues connected with the ethnicity of the Maramureș community under my examination, I have come to a conclusion that in this case, we are dealing with multi-level and diverse acts of identification, used to achieve various goals by many individuals and smaller groups. Therefore, I claim that when looking as wide as possible at the Ukrainian national minority in the Romanian Maramureș, it is impossible to speak exclusively about one specific identity of this group. On the one hand, it should rather be considered in a specific context or social situation. On the other hand, the identifications of the community under examination should rather be understood as peculiar “systems” of opposing multi-level discourses, placing individuals and groups in social spaces and created through countless processes of identification. Therefore, the ethnic identity of local communities should be looked at from at least several levels and planes, I discuss some of them below.

Science and ideology

The issue of ethnic identity of the population of the southern slopes of the Eastern Carpathians⁶, including inhabitants of the localities under my exam-

⁶ Eastern Carpathians, according to the geographical divisions, constitute a part of the Carpathians between the Lupków Pass (Poland-Slovakia), and the Predeal Pass (Romania). I use this term in the text, however in this context, it stands for the part of the Carpathian massif between the Lupków Pass and the Prislop Pass (Romania), which, at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, used to be an area inhabited mainly by East Slavic (Rusyn) population. The area on the southern

ination in Romanian Maramureș, has been a topic of ardent discussions of various scholarly circles at least from the late 19th century. Their polemics mainly concentrate on the problems connected with the issues of history, language and ethnography of the inhabitants of this area. The ambiguous interpretations by scholars in this area became an excellent “breeding ground” for different ethnic ideologies. Nowadays, there are two predominant ethnic narrations with regard to the inhabitants of the area of my interest, attempting to “appropriate” the local identity for the purposes of the expressed ideology. The first one is connected with the pro-Ukrainian discourse, while the other one has a pro-Rusyn character, connected with the Carpatho-Rusyn movement. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the scholars and ethnic activists also revealed pro-Russian and pro-Hungarian views, but today they have already been completely marginalized.

When analyzing scholarly narrations, it should be kept in mind that, since the 19th-century awakening of nationalisms in Central Europe until the present times, scholars acting, in their opinion, under the guise of objectivity, have very often popularized specific ethnic views themselves⁷. Consequently, when examining their academic “tales”, one should constantly keep in mind that scholarly thoughts always represent views and interpretations of specific persons and communities. Moreover, through their involvement and research activity, scholars are also involved in processes connected with construction of the data of *imagined communities* (Anderson 1991) and invention of cultural traditions (Hobsbawn 1983). Scholarly “products” of historians, ethnographers or linguists often contribute to construction and support of ethnic myths constituting components of ethnic ideologies. Although Hastrup (1996) emphasizes the fact that history is a selective way of narration about the culture, I think, nevertheless, that her view can also be extended, without major hindrances, into linguistics or classic ethnography. This selectivity can be clearly noticed when analyzing the available sources on the ethnic identity of inhabitants of the southern slopes of the Eastern Carpathians. When researching a significant diversity of interpretations of the past, the language and ethnography, as

side of the main Carpathian watershed in the Eastern Carpathians used to have many names in the literature of the past: Subcarpathian Rus, Subcarpathia, Carpathian Ruthenia, Transcarpathian Ruthenia, Transcarpathian Ukraine, Transcarpathia, Kárpátalja in Hungarian, Karpatenrussland and Transkarpatien in German (Eberhardt 2011: 27). On the pages of the present text, I will use the term “Carpathian Ruthenia”, or the former area of the Kingdom of Hungary inhabited by East Slavic population. Nowadays, the area of the historical Carpathian Ruthenia is divided between Slovakia (Prešov Region), Ukraine (Zakarpattia Oblast – formerly known as the Subcarpathian Rus) and Romania (northern part of the Maramureș county).

⁷ An excellent modern example of such a scholar and ethnic activist in the context under examination is R. P. Magocsi (see Hann 1995) who is sometimes perceived and described as the main ideologist of the Carpatho-Rusyn movement.

presented by scholarly circles connected with various ethnic ideologies, we can acquire a peculiar cognitive “frustration” due to which a cautious reader will draw a conclusion that he is unable to answer unambiguously to the question “who are the inhabitants of Ukrainian villages in Romanian Maramureș?” Moreover, whereas becoming acquainted with the existing sources that can make someone convinced about the ambiguity of the ethnic identity of a group, each of these sources “claims” to be objective, marginalizing and discrediting or deliberately remaining silent about the voices of its scholarly and ideological opponents.

Interpretational differences can be seen very clearly in the area of studies of the group’s past and language. The scholars’ focus on the history should not be surprising, since common histories are among the key elements used to create a common ethnicity (Eriksen 1993: 71) or reinforcing the existing identities (Herzfeld 2001). However, it is worth remembering that every interpretation of the past still creates a specific viewpoint (Hastrup 1996). A detailed discussion of individual directions of interpretation of the past would require a separate text⁸, but an example of a different approach and different explanations of the past are studied by Mogocsi (2006) and Тиво́дар (2010). Diverse interpretations of the past focus on various past periods and events. The plurality of approaches applies to various issues, including those connected with political affiliation of the area in early Middle Ages, but also with interpretation of more recent events, like the incorporation of most of the Carpathian Ruthenia into Soviet Ukraine after World War II⁹. What is perceived by the Ukrainian community as an inducement to advance claims of close contacts between the circles of Ukrainian intelligentsia and activists from Galicia and the southern slopes of the Eastern Carpathians, and therefore serves the purpose of creation of the idea of Ukrainian community across the Carpathian ridges, is a proof of the autonomic aspirations of local elites to the other party. In other words, the pro-Ukrainian interpretations argue for unbroken continuity and close cultural contacts between inhabitants of today’s Transcarpathia, but Maramureș as well, and the Ukrainian “motherland”. The pro-Rusyn narrations, on the other hand, aim at the creation of an image emphasizing the peculiarity and distinctness of the culture of inhabitants of the area under discussion from the Ukrainians from Galicia and Dnieper Ukraine.

⁸ An analysis of various approaches to the past of the inhabitants of the southern slopes of the Eastern Carpathians is presented, among others, by Mogocsi (1978).

⁹ Pro-Ukrainian scholars perceive the 1945 incorporation of the area under discussion into Soviet Ukraine as a kind of “fulfillment of perennial dreams of the Ukrainian nation”. On the other hand, intellectuals from the Rusyn communities see it as a tragic event which had hindered the development of the Rusyn culture and language and enabled the process of Ukrainization (see Kuzio 2005, Марочій 2004).

Scholarly narrations on the cultural community or a lack thereof can only be noticed when analyzing linguistic discussions on the status of the language of the Carpathian Ruthenia inhabitants. The great emphasis put by researchers and ethnic elites on the issue of language, as well as the clear presence of such disputes in the context under discussion, should not be surprising, since, as Billig puts it (1995), the ideas of languages are a climax construct of nationalism, working excellently in construction of imagined communities. Moreover, both in the past and today, many researchers have been convinced that language is one of those cultural characteristics on the basis of which one can speak objectively about the ethnic separateness or community of specific groups. Such views foster the emergence of a belief that the language of every person can be determined and named exactly and unambiguously. However, when we deal with a multitude of linguistic classifications towards a language used by local communities, situations when ambiguity of linguistic divisions may be generated by diverse acts of identification, attributing different ethnic identities to groups, are probable (see Midka-Zawadzka 2007).

Unquestionably, within the wider Maramureş context, the issues of language in scholarly discussions remain ambiguous. This phenomenon has its origin as early as in the 19th century, the period of development of national literary languages (see Kamusella 2009). Magocsi (1978), analyzing the linguistic situation in this territory in the late 19th century, mentioned as much as five language proposals advanced by the ethnic elite circles of the time, striving to create a language standard and impose it on other inhabitants. Today, the linguistic discourse features two main views concerning the affiliation of ethnolects used by the inhabitants of the southern slopes of the Eastern Carpathians. The first, predominant one treats the local speeches as subdialects of Ukrainian (Hannan 2009: 31–32)¹⁰. The other stance of linguists defines the local ethnolects as subdialects of Rusyn language, different from Ukrainian. The status of Rusyn language itself is not entirely clear and universally accepted, but it is a fact that it has been recognized as a separate language in Slovakia, where its literary form has also been developed (Magocsi 1996), and the linguist circles write increasingly more often on the Rusyn language as well (see Марочій 2004). As with history, so in the area of linguist discussions, linguists involved in ethnic projects use their findings to either create an image of the language community of the population across the main Carpathian watershed, or construct ideas according to which the inhabitants of Carpathian Ruthenia use ethnolects constituting the Rusyn language, separate from Ukrainian.

¹⁰ The development and establishment of this view among Ukrainian linguists have been hugely influenced by studies by Панкевич (1937, 1938).

It should be kept in mind that scholarly narrations become important not only in the field of research but also politics, legitimizing actions of both local ethnic leaders and state administration “working” with a given ethnic community.

Officially in Romania

The Romanian legislation, just as the science, perceives the community under my examination ambiguously, since it simultaneously recognizes the existence of both Ukrainian and Rusyn ethnic minority. The Romanian administration seems not to pay much attention to the fact that in narrations of both scholars and ethnic activists, the inhabitants of the same localities in Maramureş¹¹ are called either Ukrainians or Rusyns.

If we look at both categories in the historical aspect, it will turn out that until World War I, the ancestors of the inhabitants of the localities of my interest had been defined in Hungarian censuses as Rusyns. The category “Ukrainian” had only appeared in Romanian censuses in the inter-war period, yet it was used concurrently with the name of Rusyns, constituting the same category in the census. Such situation could have been caused by a different degree of self-awareness of Ukrainian local communities in Romania, because although in the context of inter-war Bukovina, one can speak about the Ukrainian national identity (see Livezeanu 1995: 49–87), in Maramureş it was rather a vestigial phenomenon which was only beginning to appear in the social reality¹². The dissemination of the term “Ukrainian”¹³ and initiation, in the Maramureş context, of the project of the Ukrainian ethnic identity in Maramureş should rather, in my opinion, be connected with the late 1940s¹⁴.

¹¹ Looking at the Maramureş judeţ from the west, the following localities and communes are described as Ukrainian/Rusyn: Remeţi, Bocicoiu Mare commune with the villages: Bocicoiu Mare, Tisa, Crăciuneşti, Lunca la Tisa, Rona de Sus commune with the localities: Rona de Sus, Coştiui, commune Bistra: Bistra, Valea Vişelului, Crasna, and the communes from the Ruscova River valley: Ruscova, Repedea and Poienile de Sub Munte.

¹² The fact that the Ukrainian identity was a rather new creation which did not enjoy much interest among the local communities can be evidenced by the fact that in the inter-war period, there were two attempts in Maramureş to organize Ukrainian political parties, but in both cases they failed to win the favour of the local population and ceased to exist very quickly (Pavliuk, Zhukovsky 1993).

¹³ The local Ukrainian folklorist and regionalist recalls that the name “Ukrainian” had not functioned among the locals until the end of World War II and only appeared in Maramureş in 1944 (Бевка 2006).

¹⁴ First, at the turn of 1944 and 1945, Ukrainian communists from Transcarpathia made strenuous efforts to have Maramureş incorporated into Soviet Ukraine (see Стигалин 2006, Sălăgean 2002: 126–129). Secondly, already after the war, Romania, including Maramureş, saw an appearance

However, returning to the modern times, it should be noted that although Romania is sometimes perceived as one of the European countries with a relatively well developed minority protection system (Protsyk 2010: 4, Horváth, Scacco 2001: 269), something which strikes in the very beginning when one looks at the ethnic minority issues in this country is a lack of an unambiguous national minority definition in the Romanian legislation (Ram 2009: 183, Gavrilu 2010: 3–4). Admittedly, there is a definition in the Romanian electoral law, according to which, a national minority can only be a group with a representative in the Council of National Minorities¹⁵ (Gavrilu 2010: 5), but in order to have such representative in this body, it must first bring a representative into the Romanian parliament¹⁶. As a result, non-Romanian ethnic communities which cannot win a deputy mandate for their representatives are not treated as minorities.

Looking at the relations of ethnic elites representing both the Ukrainian and the Rusyn minority, one can draw a conclusion that leaders of these communities take advantage of their function mainly in aspirations to and fulfillment of other needs than those connected with protection of the rights and culture of their group. Instrumental utilization of the ethnic minority

of many circles of Ukrainian intelligentsia, fleeing from northern Bukovina which had been incorporated into the USSR (Yuriychuk 2011). These circles were directly responsible for the establishment and spread of Ukrainian elementary and secondary education in Maramureş. The common development of Ukrainian-language education, initiated by the Bukovinian refugees, proved to be crucial in the process of establishment of local Ukrainian elites (see Petrovai 2007).

¹⁵ 1993 saw the establishment of the Council for National Minorities. It was to consist of representatives of all minority organizations. In 2001, it was renamed to the Council of National Minorities, and since then it has only consisted of representatives of these minority organizations which have managed to introduce their representatives to the Chamber of Deputies (Gavrilu 2010: 4). The main goal of the Council is to create a platform for dialogue between minority representatives and the authorities, both on the local and national level (Ram 2009: 182, Horvath, Scacco 2001: 259).

¹⁶ According to Article 59.3 of the Romanian Constitution, every minority has the right to have a deputy in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the Romanian parliament). A minority can only be officially represented in relations with the state by one non-government organization. According to the Electoral Act, minority associations can run in elections like parties. Until 2008, they had been subject to a 5% electoral threshold which was nevertheless different from that which applied to political parties. In order to be elected to the Chamber of Deputies, a candidate of a minority organization had to gain 5% of the average vote required by a Romanian candidate. After the amendments in the Electoral Law of 2008, this threshold has been increased to 10% (Gavrilu 2010: 4–5). Thanks to such construction of legal regulations, after the 2004 parliamentary election, eighteen representatives from nineteen minorities inhabiting Romania gained seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Czechs and Slovaks have a joint organization) (Ram 2009: 182, 191). A minority organization, functioning as an association rather than a political party, can field candidates for both national and local elections (Horváth, Scacco 2001: 258). For further reading on the representation of minorities in the Romanian parliament, see O. Protsyk (2010).

status by minority elites in Romania is known under the already mentioned term “ethno-business”. Through the ethnicity they nominally represent, the most active ethnic activists, headed by the group leader, are able to pursue their own interests and ambitions connected with the access to the resources of power, prestige and finance. The Romanian minority policy allows for an excellent space for such practices, beginning from the aforementioned guaranteed seat for the group leader in the Romanian parliament, through a number of positions for other activists in the state administration at the central and local level, to budgetary grants for minority associations¹⁷ (see Mohácsék 2009). The redistribution of budgetary resources is mainly the responsibility of the organization leaders and their closest associates. It is them who decide which cultural or educational initiatives will be subsidized and which ones will not. Gavrilu (2010) shows that activists, having resources, are able to develop a system securing their own interests. I could also observe similar practices among Ukrainian activists who were only giving support to the initiatives coordinated by their supporters.

Moreover, I believe that the Romanian minority protection system has, in a sense, impacted the emergence in Romania of the subject matter connected with the Carpatho-Rusyn movement. The cited study by Gavrilu (2010) claims that the Romanian legislation is clearly conducive to establishment of “new” ethnicities, which is evidenced, among others, by the Rusyn organization (Uniunea Culturală a Rutenilor din România)¹⁸.

Conducting research in Maramureş, I have also witnessed the process of emergence of a Hutsul project which had originated as a result of a conflict inside an environment of UUR activists. The sources of the disagreement between a part of the local activists and the central leadership were clearly connected with the issue of redistribution of multi-million grants from the central budget. The Maramureş activists of the Ukrainian organization, disregarded by the main decision-makers of the UUR in the decision process, decided to make attempts in order to establish a new ethnic association, intended to concentrate local activists around the Hutsul idea. The creation of the organization was intended to enable fielding of Hutsul candidates in local and national elections,

¹⁷ For example, their size within 14 years, only for the Ukrainian organization (Romanian: Uniunea Ucrainenilor din România, UUR) alone, has increased by more than 100%: from 509 000 lei in 1994 to 5 360 000 lei in 2008. Curiously, the amounts of budgetary grants for minority organizations in 2009 were more than ten times higher than grants for political parties.

¹⁸ As early as in the 1990s, R. P. Magocsi (1992), who had already been a prominent leader of the Carpathian Rusyn movement, did not mention Rusyns in Romania. This community has only organized in 2000, establishing the aforementioned organization. Curiously, its leader Gheorghe Firczak, before he became a deputy of the Rusyn organization, had run in the 1996 parliamentary election as a candidate of one of the Hungarian parties (Gavrilu 2010:7).

and therefore, to create the possibility to gain the profits to which minority organizations in Romania are entitled.

Unquestionably, establishment of new ethnic initiatives would be a much more difficult process, if not for the ambiguity of the ethnicity of local inhabitants.

Everyday life

Many times during the field studies in Maramureş, I was able to observe everyday practices of “ordinary” inhabitants of Ukrainian villages. My participation in the everyday life of the people under my examination allowed me to notice a range of behaviours and declarations; from them emerged an image indicating a large extent of complexity, ambiguity and contextuality of the ethnic identity of members of local communities. These issues are visible on many levels, yet below I will only present, very briefly, the problems connected with acts of self-identification and with language practices of “ordinary” inhabitants of Maramureş villages¹⁹.

In the light of the 2002 Romanian census (*Recensământul... 2003*), a vast majority of inhabitants of the localities under consideration declare themselves as Ukrainians and call their mother tongue Ukrainian. When looking at the results of the census, the problem of ethnicity of the analyzed community seems to be nonexistent; if the locals declare themselves in the census as Ukrainians, it may seem that they are Ukrainians indeed. However, anthropologists (Ardener 1992, Herzfeld 1997) point out that censuses of all sorts are very often unable to comprehend and describe the local manners of defining of the social world, which often use different concepts than those assumed by people constructing the census categories. My experience in the field also shows that the Romanian state statistics fail to notice the local dynamics as well as cultural and identity-related complexity, and therefore have a limited ability to comprehend and name the local identification practices.

Here, without a deeper analysis of the problem, I can only indicate the complexity of the issue of locally occurring ethnonyms. Although the self-designations used most frequently in statements of “ordinary” people were *Ruski*²⁰ and *Ukrainets* [Ukrainian], there were several other ethnonyms present

¹⁹ Other everyday spaces in which I was able to notice the complexity and contextuality of the ethnic identity of the locals were connected with mass migration, internal religious relations of the community, as well as relations between the locality and the Romanian and Ukrainian (from Ukraine) neighbours. Unfortunately, they are impossible to be discussed here.

²⁰ The term *Ruski* is often translated into English as *Russian* or *Ruthenian*. However, I would like to emphasize that the local residents used it as a self-determination – an ethnonym. They also used

in the field, making the terminology issues even more difficult. Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors have actually spoken about being Ukrainian during our meetings. However, their utterances, such as *we, Ukrainians...*, *I am a Ukrainian*, did not end with such statements. The “ordinary” inhabitants, in contrast to ethnic activists, “softened” the previously used ethnic category in further narration, often speaking: *Ukrainians, but not entirely pure*. Therefore, on the one hand, my interlocutors stressed that their Ukrainianness differed from the identity of the Ukrainians in the neighbouring country of Ukraine, and on the other hand, such statements suggested that the interlocutors themselves were not entirely convinced to use this category. Just as many inhabitants of the localities under examination, with whom I had an opportunity to speak, used the other aforementioned self-designation. In the Ukrainian literature, the term *Ruski-Rusyn* is treated very often as a historic synonym of the ethnonym “Ukrainian”. In Maramureş, it is unquestionably older than the term *Ukrainets*, which is evidenced by frequent statements recalling the memories of parents and grandparents using this name universally as their self-designation. In my opinion, it is also evidenced by the context of use of this name by the people I have talked with; in other words, the term *Ruski* often appeared spontaneously, which would indicate that this name is rooted more firmly in the local culture, in contrast to the newer *Ukrainets*. Often, in the statements of my interlocutors, it coexisted in a sense with the term *Ukrainets*, according to the interlocutors’ expressions: *we are Rusyns but Ukrainians...* This term, however, was to indirectly indicate the separateness of the local identity from the Ukrainianness postulated by Ukrainian elites.

A complicated image of ethnic identity of a group also emerges from the observations in the sphere of language. As mentioned before, regardless of the Ukrainian language being declared in censuses by most inhabitants, a picture of trilingualism emerges from my research; standard Ukrainian seems to be least important element here. Much more important, and therefore used more commonly, are the remaining languages: Romanian and *ruska mowa* (*Ruska Speech*). The presence of the former is justified by the Romanian-language education system and the common access to Romanian-language radio and television channels. On the other hand, the term *ruska mowa* is used by “ordinary” people for the local ethnolect they essentially use exclusively in family and neighbour contacts within the local community. An important fact is that the *ruska mowa* differs quite significantly from the Ukrainian standard and

this adjective to indicate local ethnolect they practiced. The term *Ruski* in the Maramureş reality of the “ordinary” people does not have the connotation of an ethnic or national significance, and it should rather be perceived as in some sense a synonym of locality and the emphasis of the difference from the neighbouring Romanian and Ukrainian from Ukraine.

is mastered by the speakers in the local social environment, not at school. The elites identify the local language as Ukrainian, which may be treated as an attempt to ideologize the local ethnolect, yet the “ordinary” people often emphasize its separateness and even if they define their language as Ukrainian, they mostly stress its alleged impurity and mixed character. The emergence of both terms and similar ones is an additional argument evidencing the fact that language issues in the community under consideration are a field of ideological struggle (see Bilaniuk 2005). Ukrainization, advanced by ethnic elites in the name of protection and preservation of the Ukrainian culture and identity of local communities, is still an ongoing process which, in my opinion, has no chances in its present shape to be finally and positively fulfilled. This is evidenced by behaviours and habits of “ordinary” inhabitants, not involved in ideological games. For example, on the one hand, a vast majority of school-children participates in optional Ukrainian classes, but on the other hand, the use of the standard language by the local society is mostly limited to the area of education and partially religion. The languages predominant in everyday life, due to their usefulness, are *ruska mowa* and Romanian.

To sum up, although the idea of ethnic nations in Central and Eastern Europe, initiated in the 19th century and largely fulfilled in the following century, causes us to think commonly that today all of us have an unambiguously defined ethnic identity, the example of the Ukrainian community in Maramureş, as presented above, shows that processes of appropriation of the identity of groups with a strong local character for the sake of a given ethnicity are not accomplished processes. In my opinion, the multidimensional plurality of voices concerning the ethnic identity of the group officially known as the Ukrainian national minority, living in several localities in Romanian Maramureş, indicates the fact that in our continent we can still meet groups whose identity is still subject to ideological endeavours of external ideologists and local ethnic activists.

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