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JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY IN KRAKOW
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UNIVERSITY
of
GLASGOW

Projecting the Polish Nation: Feelings of Polish Nationhood Among *Pole's Card* Holders from Belarus

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PLVS RATIO QVAM VIS

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores feelings of national belonging among *Pole's Card* holders from Belarus. It compares the diasporic stance of the Polish state with findings garnered from in-depth interviews with *Pole's Card* holders. The *Pole's Card* is a Polish co-ethnic policy that facilitates the process of migration to Poland for descendants of Polish citizens in the former Soviet Union, also granting other benefits. The *Card* requires applicants to declare their belonging to the Polish nation. This work finds that the Polish state exaggerates the existence of a Polish diaspora in Belarus, most likely for discursive domestic political goals. Meanwhile, most *Pole's Card* holders interviewed claimed that better opportunities for work and education were the primary reasons for receiving the *Card*. Most participants did not see themselves as belonging to the Polish nation, although many expressed their respect towards Poland, and some claimed a qualified sense of belonging to the Polish nation thanks to their roots and the historically multi-ethnic nature of Poland. A minority of respondents felt that they genuinely belonged to the Polish nation. This thesis uses the history of ethnic identity and nationalism in the inter-war Eastern *Kresy*, the Soviet Union, and modern Belarus to contextualise the *Pole's Card,* referring to theories of nationalism and diaspora.

Keywords: *Pole's Card,* Polish nationalism, diaspora, Belarus, national identity

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I will begin this dissertation by quoting a Belarusian children's song:

> *Зверы, што ходзяць у пустыні, ведаюць норы свае,*
> *Птушкі, што лётаюць у паветры, ведаюць гнёзды свае,*
> *Рыбы, што плаваюць у рэках і марах, чуюць віры свае,*
> *Пчолы што лётаюць ля хлопцаў і дзяўчат, бароняць вуллі свае.*
>
> *Так і чалавек: дзе нарадзіўся, любіць старонку сваю,*
> .
>
> *The beasts who wander the desert know their burrows*
> *The birds who fly in the winds know their nests*
> *The fish who swim in rivers and dreams feel their currents*
> *The bees who fly for the boys and girls defend their hive.*
>
> *Just so with man: where he was born, he loves his home.*

The song praises the order of the world: each beast has his den, each bird his nest, each person a home, and each person, presumably a nation. And if not a nation, then at least each person can lay claim to a piece of land "where he belongs." In the song, the fact that each person has a homeland is just as natural as birds returning to their nest: this is the unquestionable order of the universe. But in today's context, these lyrics are somewhat more ambiguous. Is the song simply wishful thinking? Unfortunately, where home is, to whom a land belongs to, and of whom a nation consists are questions which for many people are more complicated than a beast's relationship to its den. Although casting doubt on a person's homeland is perhaps an unfamiliar theme in the poetics of traditional societies, it is a major question for 21st century Europeans. This has especially been true in Central-Eastern Europe, given its heritage as a liminal periphery of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Profound changes in political geography and the ethnic mosaic of local societies beginning after the First World War left many people "in the wrong place." Those who drew boundaries in distant capitals increasingly attempted to homogenise the region, uprooting communities and forcing human beings who had previously defined themselves only as “local” to align themselves with one nation and one language. This is a process which continues to this day. When a neighbouring state says: “you belong here, with us”, the easy notion of “home is where I’m from” is complicated. How individuals and communities react to this “call home”, however, is varied: perhaps this is a felicitous opportunity to seek fortunes where the winds are gentler, perhaps it is a long-awaited opportunity to repatriate, or perhaps it is an act of aggression against a neighbouring state. This depends upon the actor’s perspective.

This thesis seeks to examine an iteration of this modern question by exploring feelings of belonging among recipients of the *Pole’s Card,* also known as the *Pole’s Charter* or *Card of the Pole* (in Polish *Karta Polaka*). The *Pole’s Card* is an initiative by the Polish government, and specifically the national-conservative PiS Party, to grant certain descendants of Polish citizens a document asserting their belonging to the Polish nation. These descendants, hailing mostly from Belarus and Ukraine but scattered around more distant parts of the former Soviet Union as well, are given the right to migrate to Poland on very favourable terms. Upon arrival, they are also granted a range of other privileges to welcome them home. From the point of view of the Polish government, this is a concrete measure taken to right historical wrongs; the shifting borders of Central and Eastern Europe between and during the two World Wars had left millions of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union. With the *Pole’s Card*, their descendants are finally being given the right to return to the lands of their ancestors, where they belong if not geographically, then at least spiritually.

This thesis will address the following question: how is this sense of belonging experienced by the recipients of the *Pole*’s *Card,* especially in contrast with the stance of the Polish state? What does being a member of the Polish nation mean to them? How does the Polish government’s vision of Polish nationhood, as reflected in the conditions for obtaining a *Pole’s Card* and their statements regarding it, compare with how individuals experience and negotiate nationhood? Are these people really members of one “imagined community”? Why did they apply for a *Pole’s Card* in the first place? This thesis will seek to answer these questions empirically by using data collected from twenty-seven interviews from Belarusian recipients of the *Pole’s Card.* Thus, this paper is an ethnographic response to a geopolitical question. This thesis focuses on Belarusians, as they are the largest group of *Pole's Card* recipients, by analysing collected interviews. This particular group is unique, as Belarus has experience nationhood in the 21st Century in a very different way than Ukraine, for example. Indeed, the experience of nation in Belarus has been significantly different than in any other country in Europe. Interviewees were asked a series of questions related to their attitudes towards the documents they signed and the process itself, their views on national identity and language usage, and motivations for emigration (or non-emigration) to Poland. Thus, this thesis explores one facet of the triadic relationship described by Brubaker: that of the nationalising state, national minority, and external national "homeland" (Brubaker 1996) – it explores the relationship between the national minority ("Poles" in Belarus) and the external homeland (neighbouring Poland). This thesis will illuminate how diasporas are constructed by external homelands and how national minorities appropriate, reject, or take advantage of the identities offered to them by states.

In answering these questions, this thesis hopes to add to the conversation about how individuals relate to national categories in modern Central and Eastern Europe. By referring to the nation as a category, I mean that it is a device used by institutions (here states) to organise individuals. How do concepts such as "nationhood" affect concrete choices made by members of putative ethnic minorities? Much has been written about what the nation means, and the fate of the nation-state in the 21st century (Hobsbawm 1992, Gellner 1983, Smith 1991, Anderson 1991). This thesis will root the theoretical conversation in lived experience and regional history, opting for a ground-up approach. The thesis will also be relevant as a case study of how governments perceive "co-ethnics" and how "co-ethnics" themselves feel about nationhood – it will fill in the gap between the rhetoric of external homelands and the feelings of the national minorities. Likewise, this thesis will relate how scholars define nations to how the notion is used in practice by governments and individuals. These questions provide a convenient way of discussing national identity, a notoriously amorphous concept. National identity is a concept which is not always capable of provoking complex and engaging responses from interviewees unless they can relate such abstractions to everyday choices and behaviour. Therefore, this thesis uses the *Pole's Card* as a jumping off point: recipients are asked to reflect on a concrete choice they made and what their decision meant to them. This research is valuable because it provides an empirical case study capable of illustrating various theories of nationalism.

Coming into my research, my hypothesis was that I would be able to tackle several facile assumptions regarding the *Pole's Card* and show that lived experience is always more complicated. The first assumption is arguably that of the Polish government – that these are people who have maintained a sense of Polishness and fostered Polish traditions despite decades of harsh Soviet and Belarusian assimilation policies: they are categorically Poles. This, of course, is a rather rosy view of the "Polishness" of inter-war Poland itself, given the multi-ethnic nature of the *Kresy* and their descendants. It also displays an essentialist view of the Polish nation, providing proof of Benedict Anderson's insight regarding the frequent contradiction between "the 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence" (Anderson 1991: 2). According to PiS's agenda, national identities are almost genetic in their immutability, and individuals cannot negotiate between multiple identities. However, I wished to demonstrate that identity is more of a process of "bricolage" as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it (Lévi-Strauss 2010). Thus, I hoped that respondents would provide a variety of answers and reflect critically upon what it means to belong to a nation.

The second assumption this thesis hoped to debunk is one held, in the author's personal experience, by many Belarusians: that *Pole's Card* recipients are opportunistic economic migrants willing to sign any paper which will get them a free Schengen visa. Although this may be the case for some (even many) *Card* holders, I expected that this view overstates the ostensible homogeneity of Belarus and white-washes individual experiences and attitudes towards Polish language and culture. It also ignores how individuals construct their own sense of self-understanding vis-à-vis nationhood regardless of their childhood experience of "culture" and diaspora. Here, I hoped to find a mix of motivations: both having to do with opportunities in Poland but also a shared memory and values, thereby demonstrating how a sense of national belonging can be constructed through a process of negotiation with personal experience, history, and the state.

CHAPTER II: ORGANISATION

This thesis will begin by describing in detail the nature of the *Pole's Card*: the advantages it bestows and the conditions for receiving one, as well as how many people have taken advantage of the *Card* so far. I will also relate the law on the *Pole's Card* to similar policies elsewhere in the region. I will then go on to explain the history of nationalism and ethnic diversity in the *Kresy*, the Polish term for its former Eastern territories and the provenance of most *Pole's Card* holders, as well as the history of nationalism in the Soviet Union and independent Belarus. This will illuminate the history of those "Poles" who ended up on the Soviet side of the border and what became of them in the new nation-state of Belarus, a country with a highly peculiar take on the idea of the nation. I will then move on to discuss the political repercussions of the "unmixing of peoples" (Brubaker 2009) experienced by Central and Eastern Europe on the ethnic politics of Poland and Belarus today. To ground the historical sections of this thesis in theory, I will analyse the opinions of the major theorists of nationalism: Ernst Gellner, Anthony Smith, and Benedict Anderson. The *Pole's Card* will also be placed in the context of "new nationalism," a term proposed by Mary Kaldor (Kaldor 2004) to explain the new ways in which national sentiments are playing out on the European political stage. Evidence of this "new nationalism" will be provided by analysis of statements given by the author of the *Pole's Card* law. After summarising the relevance of the theoretical, historical, and political contexts of the *Pole's Card*, I will turn to the second portion of my thesis. In this portion, after having discussed methodology and ethics, I will present responses collected from my interviews and thereby analyse answers to the questions I have laid out: how Belarusian *Pole's Card* holders feel about their belonging to the Polish nation. I will thus demonstrate how individuals relate to national categories offered to them. Data will be organised by theme: important issues which continue to come up will be discussed with anonymous quotes for support, immediately followed by analysis. Analysis of data will be followed by my conclusions, which seek to extrapolate information about how national minorities and migrants relate to the category of "nation." Methodology will not be presented at the beginning of the thesis, as it is necessary to link methodology of data collection with the results of my interviews. Thus, this thesis has two main sections: the first will consist of vital historical and theoretical background which explains the context in which the *Pole's Card* emerged, while the second section will consist of presentation and analysis of individual reactions to the phenomenon of kin-state nationalism.

CHAPTER III: THE POLE'S CARD

THE *POLE'S CARD*: BENEFITS AND REQUIREMENTS

As the wording and presentation of the conditions and benefits of the *Pole's Card* are key to this thesis, they will be provided in full, as taken from the website of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs[1] and the information portal *migrant.info.pl*[2]. All information referred to here can be found on these two webpages in English, Russian, and Polish. The conditions are as follows:

> The Pole's Card might be issued to a person who, at the time of application, is a national of a state formerly belonging to the Soviet Union (USSR), or is a stateless person in one of these countries and jointly satisfies the following requirements:
>
> 1. shows their connection with the Polish nation and state by at least basic knowledge of the Polish language, which the given alien sees as their mother tongue, and by knowledge of and cultivation of Polish traditions and customs;
> 2. in the presence of the Polish consul or voivode, or an employee designated by any of them, makes a written declaration on belonging to the Polish nation;
> 3. demonstrates that at least one parent or grandparent, or two great-grandparents, are or were of Polish nationality, or were Polish citizens, **or** presents a certificate from an authorized organization of Poles living abroad in the country of the alien's residence (list of such organizations is available here->) confirming active involvement of the foreigner in question in activities promoting the Polish language and culture or otherwise assisting the Polish national minority for the period of at least 3 last years
> 4. declares that neither the alien him- or her-self, nor their ascendants have repatriated themselves or have been repatriated from the territory of the Republic of Poland or the Polish People's Republic, on the basis of repatriation agreements concluded in the years 1944-1957 by the Republic of Poland or the Polish People's Republic with the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics onto the territory of one of the countries that were party to these agreements.
>
> The Pole's Card may also be granted to a person whose Polish descent has been validly certified in accordance with the provisions of the Act of 9 November 2000 on Repatriation.

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[1] http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/polish_diaspora/card_of_the_pole/

[2] http://www.migrant.info.pl/The_Poles_Card.html

Recipients of the *Pole's Card* are eligible for a variety of benefits. These include the rights to:

1. receive, free of charge, a national visa permitting multiple crossings of the Polish borders;
2. submit at a Polish consulate, free of charge, an application for granting of a Polish citizenship by the President of the Republic of Poland;
3. Benefit from aid offered by the Polish consul – within the limits of competencies granted to the latter – in the event of threat to life or safety;
4. take up legal work on the Polish territory without the requirement to possess a work permit;
5. carry out business activities in Poland on the same terms as Polish citizens;
6. access the free Polish education system at primary, secondary and university level on the same terms as Polish citizens, while also being able to apply for scholarships and other assistance available to aliens learning and studying in Poland;
7. in emergencies use the free health care provided in Poland on the same terms as Polish citizens;
8. enjoy a 37-per cent concession on railway travel on the Polish territory;
9. visit national museums in Poland free of charge;
10. have priority when applying for funding from the Polish state budget or the local authorities budget in Poland intended to support Poles abroad;
11. apply free of charge for a permit to settle on the Polish territory;
12. after having been granted a permit to settle, obtain – for a period no longer than 9 months – financial assistance (provision comes into force on 01.01.2017) intended for the foreigner and their closest family members residing with them in Poland.

Moreover, as of 2016, *Pole's Card* holders residing in Poland have the right to apply for nine months of financial assistance, the amount of which is adjustable depending on marital status and number of children[3]. This amendment is intended to make the experience of migration and assimilation easier for repatriates. The *Card* is valid for ten years, after which a prolongation must be sought. Children can be granted a *Pole's Card* if both parents are holders; if only one parent is a holder, the second parent must sign a consent form. This means that that the *Card* could be an attractive "insurance policy" for people in Belarus who may not want to emigrate to Poland, but want to ensure their children have educational and employment opportunities outside Belarus.

---

[3] http://www.polskieradio.pl/78/1227/Artykul/1711780,Pomoc-finansowa-dla-posiadaczy-Karty-Polaka

Pole's Card holders are also guaranteed an easier route to Polish citizenship. According to a new law, *Pole's Card* holders who have resided in Poland for one year are now automatically eligible for Polish citizenship.[4] This would necessitate a choice of allegiance, however, as neither Belarus or Ukraine recognise dual citizenship by naturalisation. The *Pole's Card*, on the other hand, grants many of the same rights as citizenship and does not force this choice.

Applicants may be denied a *Pole's Card* "for reasons of national defence, national security or protection of the public order in Poland; [or if] the applicant has acted or acts against the vital interests of Poland, in particular its national independence and sovereignty, or has participated or participates in breaches of human rights." Likewise, the *Pole's Card* can be taken away if "its holder behaves in a manner derogatory to the dignity of the Republic of Poland or Polish citizens." Other reasons for denial of the *Card* are more mundane, such as if the applicant does not fulfil the requirements or is a criminal. The clause denying the *Card* to those who have breached human rights is an interesting one, as this would presumably limit access to certain members of the Belarusian government. As it turns out, the *Pole's Card* proved to be a popular document for medium-level Belarusian civil servants and bureaucrats, causing a minor scandal in Belarus and leading Lukashenka to ban government workers from possessing a *Card*. According to the Belarusian oppositional newspaper *Charter97*, however, applications continue unabated despite the ban.[5] A similar affair took place in Lithuania when a presidential candidate, along with several members of the Lithuanian parliament, the *Seijmas,* were revealed to be *Card* holders.[6]

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process itself is relatively simple: a person wishing to prove their Polishness must complete an application form and provide a document proving their "belonging to the Polish nation", i.e., a document proving that at least one great-grandparent resided on Polish territory. Applicants must also prove their familiarity with the Polish language. This can be accomplished either through documentary evidence or at the interview with the consul. As my respondents reported, for many, finding a document proving their Polish roots is the most difficult part of the application. Thus, services have sprung up in Belarus which search for evidence of Polish roots for applicants in the archives.[7] Documents which can prove that an applicant is descended from a Pole include: "Polish identity documents; civil status certificates or their copies; baptism certificates, school leaving certificates; documents attesting to having served in Polish military formations…a certificate from an organization of Poles living abroad confirming active involvement in activities promoting Polish language and culture or otherwise assisting the Polish national minority," and many others. Moreover, the Soviet Union listed ethnicity (*natsional'nost')* on passports: therefore, if an applicant's mother or father had been registered as Poles by Soviet authorities, a copy of their passport would suffice as evidence of Polishness as far as the consulate is concerned. Once applicants submit the necessary documents: "the consul or voivode interviews the applicant, conversing in Polish about Poland, its history, culture and customs and traditions. The approximate duration of the interview is 15-20 minutes. In the case of having successfully passed the interview stage, the consul or voivode present the applicant with a declaration of belonging to the Polish nation and a declaration on neither the applicant nor their ascendants have repatriated themselves for or have been repatriated from the Polish territory to be signed."

---

[4] http://www.radiopolsha.pl/6/136/Artykul/246939/

[5] https://charter97.org/ru/news/2013/2/19/65574/

[6] https://www.15min.lt/en/article/politics/group-of-lithuanian-mps-want-to-ban-pole-s-card-holders-from-running-for-parliament-526-209074 and http://media.efhr.eu/2014/04/10/juozas-bernatonis-poles-card-problem/

Just as services have sprung up claiming they can find Polish roots, websites can easily be found on the Russian-language internet which provide a compendium of different questions the consul could ask, in Polish with Russian translations.[8] Answers are provided and questions are ranked by difficult and popularity. Browsing the above-cited website reveals that questions range from the complicated, such as "When and where did King Władysław Warneńczyk die" to simpler ones, such as "What does the Polish flag look like". Courses on "Polish culture and traditions" also offer their services, and advertisements on the Russian-language social media network *vk.com* (or *vkontakte*) can easily be found.

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[7] See for example: https://vizavsem.by/zapros-v-arhivy-o-nalichii-polskih-kornej-dlya-karty-polyaka.html?utm_source=kartapolaka&utm_medium=main_banner&utm_campaign=KP

[8] For example: http://kartapolaka.by/biblioteka/vopotv?start=3

According to most interviewees, the most difficult portion of the application process is simply registering for an interview at the consulate. Because the programme is so popular in Belarus, the waitlist for interviews is extremely long, and applicants may have to wait months before they succeed in registering for an appointment with the consul. Likewise, merely connecting to the consulate by phone is difficult, as the line is nearly constantly busy. A few applicants recounted that they had purchased several telephones and called the consulate for hours at a time using two different phones. Some interviewees reported rumours that certain phone companies were more likely to connect to the consulate more quickly.

NUMBERS

According to available sources from the Belarusian and Polish media, as of mid-July 2016, around 75,000 Belarusians had received a *Pole's Card*.[9] Likewise, Belsat, a Belarusian-language media source funded by the Polish government, estimates that as many as 100,000 *Pole's Cards* will have been issued by 2018.[10] Thus, Belarusians topped the list of *Card* holders – with Ukrainians coming in second at 70,000. As of 2016, around 170,000 cards had been issued in total.[11] According to Polish Ambassador to Belarus Konrad Pawlik in an interview with Belarusian radio, "Around 13% of *Pole's Card* holders do not use the card. These are mostly elderly people for whom the card is of symbolic value."[12] The ambassador also confirmed that the demand for *Pole's Cards* is only growing. In all, the top three origin countries for new permanent residents of Poland were Ukraine, Germany, and Belarus, according to data from the Polish government.[13]

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[9] http://s13.ru/archives/157148/

[10] http://belsat.eu/in-focus/100-000-asobau-z-kartayu-palyaka-belarusy-raspavyali-na-voshta-yana-im/

[11] It bears noting that although more Belarusians than Ukrainians have *Pole's Cards,* the total number of Ukrainian immigrants to Poland is much higher than Belarusians.

[12] https://people.onliner.by/2016/06/15/karta-polyaka/

[13] https://emn.gov.pl/esm/aktualnosci/13512,Migracje-do-Polski-w-2015-roku-glownie-tendencje.html/

According to a 2016 report prepared by the Polish Diplomatic Service, which called the *Pole's Card* programme a "priority" for its diplomacy agenda in the East, the programme remains hugely popular, meaning that the average waiting time for a qualifying interview was several months (Ministerstvo Spraw Zagranicznych 2016). Interestingly, the report also noted that interest was growing towards the *Pole's Card* among people who had not previously felt strong ties with Poland. Incidentally, this is reflected in the growing number of "ethnic Poles" in the Hrodna Region of Belarus: according to scholars, a growing number of people are choosing to identify themselves as Poles thanks to the *Pole's Card* benefits (Rudnik 2017)[14]. The Polish diplomatic service also noticed an uptick in the number of falsified documents confirming Polish descent, although these remain at a low level. According to the report, in 2015 the consulates issuing the most *Pole's Cards* were Hrodna (6,543), Minsk (3,863), L'viv (3,528), Brest (2013), Vinnitsa (1642), and Luck (1416). Three of the top six cities (Hrodna, Minsk, and Brest) are in Belarus. A particularly noticeable spike in interest can be noted in Hrodna (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2016). According to available data from this year gathered by *TUT.by*, Belarus's largest news portal, as many as 31.3% of Belarusians would consider moving to another country (Rudnik 2017 b). Meanwhile, Polish newspapers claim that the number of applicants is growing rapidly as paperwork and bureaucracy for receiving a permanent residence permit are being simplified and more financial aid is being offered to migrants upon arrival.[15]

A necessary caveat to these statistics is that the size of the "Polish minority" in Belarus remains difficult to estimate. According to a 1999 survey on ethnicity in Belarus (the latest available) conducted by Belstat, Belarus's official statistical agency, there were at the time 396,000 self-reported Poles in Belarus, of whom 16.5% considered Polish to be their native language and 4.7% regularly spoke Polish at home. Thus, about 3,300 people continue to speak Polish at home, although this number has surely diminished over the past eighteen years.[16] However, as certain interviewees for this study recalled, the census did not provide the possibility of claiming multiple nationalities or belonging to multiple "ethnic groups." One respondent remembers having to choose her national identity as a teenager: at the time, she defined herself simply as a Belarusian and her mother tongue as Russian. Now, she identifies as Polish-Belarusian and slightly resents having to pick between the two. This phenomenon of fuzzy boundaries for national minorities is not unique to Belarus. The counting of diasporas always involves some degree of reification: as Brubaker points out: "ancestry is surely a poor proxy for membership in a diaspora. Enumerations…suggest that discussions of diaspora opportunistically combine elements of strong and weak definitions. Strong definitions are used to emphasize the distinctiveness of diaspora as a social form; weak definitions, to emphasize numbers (and thereby the import of the phenomena" (Brubaker 2005: 11). He insists that the fact that diasporas "are treated as 'bona fide actual entities' and cast as unitary actors... are perceived as possessing countable, quantifiable memberships" is problematic. (ibid 10). As we will see later, this proposition holds true for the Polish government as well: it is in its interests to expand and reify the Polish diaspora.

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[15] http://thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/322184,Record-number-of-ethnic-Poles-repatriating-from-%E2%80%98the-East%E2%80%99-daily/

KIN-STATE POLICIES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT

The *Pole's Card* is hardly an isolated phenomenon in Central Europe, and is therefore more easily understood when placed in a larger regional context. Following the fall of the iron curtain, many countries in Central-Eastern Europe began to enact various "co-ethnic" or "kin-state" policies, in which nations attempted to protect the rights, promote the culture, or encourage immigration back to the homeland of their respective diasporas either in neighbouring countries or more distant corners of the former Soviet Union. Various co-ethnic policies were passed into law by countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Germany, Croatia, Slovakia, and others (Fowler 2002, Shevel 2010, Schüpbach 2009). Perhaps the most widely discussed co-ethnic policy in Central and Eastern Europe has been the 2001 Hungarian "identity law," in which the Hungarian state sought to extend certain rights and privileges to Hungarian communities residing in neighbouring states (Fowler 2002).

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[16] http://www.belstat.gov.by/informatsiya-dlya-respondenta/perepis-naseleniya/perepis-naseleniya-1999-goda/tablichnye-dannye/raspredelenie-naseleniya-respubliki-belarus-po-natsionalnostyam-i-yazykam-v-1999-godu/index.php?sphrase_id=260329/

In seeking to characterise the rapidly spreading phenomenon of such identity cards, which grant rights normally enjoyed only by citizens, Brigid Fowler explores the nature of the superficially similar Hungarian law and its implications for our understanding of national belonging. She makes several important observations. Most relevantly, Fowler notes the Hungarian states actively promulgates a post-modern version of nationhood, in which: “states are no longer fully sovereign within their frontiers; those frontiers are more porous; and trans-state phenomena challenge states’ position as the sole actors within the international system. Minority rights can override the norm of equal treatment associated with ‘modern’ citizenship; and citizenship need not in any case be individuals’ only route to rights, political participation and identity” (Fowler 2002: 187). Reacting to Soysal’s conception of de-territorialised citizenship (Soysal 1996), she writes that Central European states are “fuzzing” the concept of citizenship and promoting a post-national divorce of citizenship and territory, in which the nation and the state are not necessarily congruent, and citizenship (or fuzzy citizenship, as identity cards do not necessarily grant citizenship automatically) is based on cultural belonging, language, and choice rather than existing borders. In her own words: “conceptual separation of state and nation in Central and Eastern Europe opens the way at least implicitly to kin-state relationships which challenge ‘modern’ principles of both territoriality and citizenship, and which admit ‘post-modern’ notions of multiple identities, [and] non-citizenship relationships between states and individuals....” (Fowler 2002: 230). This is certainly a fascinating insight about how the concept of citizenship and national belonging is evolving in Central-Eastern Europe, and is an apt characterisation of the *Pole’s Card.*

However, Fowler’s characterisation of kin-state politics, while analytically useful from a legal point of view, falls short in one important aspect. Fowler understates the point to which kin-states themselves construct a national minority in neighbouring states via kin-state polices; these co-ethnics, ostensibly in need of protection, are only members of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) to the extent that the kin-state presumes them to be so. However, whether this feeling is mutual is largely ignored by scholarship on kin-state politics, and it is an issue which this dissertation will examine later, when empirical results are discussed. Thus, while it may be less ambiguous to speak of the

Hungarian minority in Romania, the extent to which one can speak of a "Polish minority" in Belarus, per the requirements of the *Pole's Card,* is much less cut and dried. The same can probably be said for Germany's *aussiedler* (or re-settlers) policy, in which descendants of ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union were provided preferential terms for migrating back to Germany, even though their level of Germany fluency and cultural awareness may have been low and they may only have maintained a tenuous blood relationship to Germany (Schüpbach 2009, Takle 2011). Therefore, in the Polish case, there needs to be more of a focus on the extent to which the Polish state (and perhaps other states with institutionalised identity cards) actively constructs a diaspora for its own domestic (and perhaps geopolitical) nation-rebuilding purposes. The extent to which kin-state policies are a response to real demand (by which I mean a demand based on feelings of kinship) from co-ethnics should not be taken for granted. As Brubaker puts it: "The state is a powerful identifier, not because it can create 'identities' in the strong sense…but because it has the material and symbolic resources to impose these categories." (Brubaker 2009: 16). Thus, Fowler's thesis places too much focus on states and too little on co-ethnics themselves, who may have less agency in the process of developing policy.

Nevertheless, the Polish state's claims to the loyalties of the "Polish minority" in Belarus does not come from thin air. To understand why and according to what historical phenomena the Polish state is constructing this diaspora, it is important to understand the history of Belarus and the Eastern *Kresy,* the historical multi-ethnic buffer region between the Polish heartland and the Russian Empire. It is to this history that this paper now turns.

CHAPTER IV: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE *KRESY*

The fate of the Poles in the East has not been a simple one; to understand the phenomenon of the *Pole's Card,* it is crucial to understand their history: how Poles ended up in the former Soviet Union, who these Polish citizens were ethnically and linguistically, and what historical material and national memory PiS was drawing upon to draft the law. Understanding the history of the region is crucial because, as Raphael Samuel puts it in his work *Theatres of Memory*: "Memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force" (Samuel 1994). In other words, how the history of Poland is remembered by politicians and ethno-national entrepreneurs is highly important for the implementation of concrete political policies today.

The complex relationship between the Polish state and its trans-national kin has deep roots, further complicated by the ethno-sociological makeup of the provinces of Eastern Poland (the *Kresy,* or borderlands, whence most *Card* recipients hail) during the inter-war period of the Second Polish Republic. After years of national humiliation under the yolks of the Russian, Hapsburg, and Prussian empires, a new Polish Republic finally emerged in the wake of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. However, the lands that were to become Poland were hardly exclusively Polish. The new leaders of the Second Republic inherited large German-speaking swathes of territory to the West, a significant Jewish population – both rural and urban – and a large area to the East of the Polish heartland where the local population comprised a mixture of Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, Lithuanians, Tatars, Russians, and other ethnic groups (Mach 2007), some of whom, such as the residents of the isolated wetlands region of Polesie, defined themselves simply as local (Brubaker 2009, Vermeersch 2010).

To survey its new purview, the Polish government between the world wars conducted two censuses, one in 1921[17] and one ten years later in 1931[18], both of which are available online in the public domain. Interestingly, the first census asked the population about ethnic belonging while the second took stock of native language. According to the first census, in 1921 Poland was 69% Polish, 15% Ruthenian (which included both Ukrainians and Rusyns), 8% Jewish, 4% Belarusian, and 3% German. Meanwhile, the 1931 census listed the population of Poland as being 70% Polish speaking, 10% Ukrainian speaking, 3% Ruthenian speaking, 8% Hebrew or Yiddish speaking, 3% Belarusian speaking, and 2% German speaking. The fact that the second census replaced the nationality question with a mother tongue question angered some groups, as many Ukrainians and Jews were multilingual and many Jews considered their ethnic identity to be Polish (Brubaker 1996). The Eastern *Kresy,* meanwhile, although less densely populated, were especially diverse: according to the 1931 census, the population of the Nowogrodek Voivodship, for example, was 53% Polish, 39% Belarusian, 7% Yiddish, and 1% Russian. Meanwhile, the Polesie Voivodship was 63% "Other" (or “Tutejsi”, meaning local), 14% Polish, 10% Yiddish, 6% Belarusian, and 5% Ukrainian. The Nowogrodek and Polesie Voivodships now comprise the modern-day Hrodna and Brest Provinces of Belarus, respectively. Religiously, the region would not only have been Catholic, but also Orthodox, Uniate, and Jewish (Snyder 2008). Thus, the new government of Poland ran into a dilemma which Brubaker characterises thus: “Widely dispersed ethno- cultural nations, as well as those that overlap with other ethno-cultural nations in inextricably intermixed frontier ‘shatter zones,’ cannot be neatly ‘territorialized,’ cannot easily acquire their own territorial states” (Brubaker 1996: 35). Poland’s new leaders were at once jubilant at a newly liberated “Poland for Poles,” but simultaneously had to deal with a hugely diverse country (Brykczynski 2014). This would force them to face the question of what “Polishness” was to mean. Several different answers to this question were mooted.

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[17] http://statlibr.stat.gov.pl/exlibris/aleph/a22_1/apache_media/81QB7CFELH8SBCE3HAX9HCEJA8X337.pdf

[18] https://web.archive.org/web/20140317212240/http://statlibr.stat.gov.pl/exlibris/aleph/a18_1/apache_media/VUNVGMLANSCQQFGYHCN3VDLK12A9U5.pdf

The first, a version of Polishness espoused by Jozef Pilsudski, a war hero and founding father of the Second Polish Republic, envisioned a more civic and pluralistic model, which sought to make Poland a *home of nations* (Davies 2001, Brykczynski 2014). Although citizens of the Polish republic were expected to speak the Polish language and adhere to Polish values, a much larger degree of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity was discursively tolerated. It was thus possible for a Polish Jew of the time to be rather a “Jewish Pole”: a proud Polish patriot who spoke Yiddish at home but Polish when he participated in the republic’s public life (Brubaker 1996, Brykczynski 2014, Davies 2001). In contrast, the ND (Endecja) faction, led by the right-wing politician Roman Dmowski, maintained that the non-Polish residents of Poland ought to be Polonised, Catholicised, re-educated to be proud Polish patriots, and ethnic and religious differences should be stamped out (ibid). This view especially threatened the Jewish and German communities, who were considered too different to become Polish. Belarusians and Ukrainians to the East, meanwhile, were largely considered to be latent Poles anyways; according to Dmowski’s disciples, they simply spoke a peasant dialect and adhered to the wrong religion. Assimilation was thus anticipated to be a simpler process (Brubaker

1996). This second view eventually won out and eventually became the official nationalities policy of interwar Poland. However, rather than turning Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Rusyns into Poles, the Polish government's policies of assimilation only served to exacerbate ethnic divisions and breed resentment among Ukrainians and Belarusians (ibid). This would serve to sharpen boundaries between ethnic groups in a region where notions of nationhood had been historically nebulous.

It is very difficult to ascertain the degree of boundary maintenance existing between various ethnic and linguistic communities before and during the Second Polish Republic; this is a subject which needs more research in historical archives. Religious differences would perhaps have been sharper, but these often geographically overlapped linguistic and ethnic divisions. Thus, there is a strong Belarusian Catholic community in Belarus and a small Polish and Belarusian Orthodox community in Eastern Poland. This historically fuzzy nature of boundary maintenance continues to this day and makes the characterisation of the "Poles" in the East as a cut and dried "diaspora" problematic.

Moreover, the proximity of the Polish, Belarusian, and Russian languages means that the relationship between the three can be characterised as what linguists call a "dialect continuum", meaning a range of languages "spoken across some geographical area such that each differs only slightly from its neighbours, but the differences accumulate over distance so that widely separated varieties are not mutually intelligible" (Bloomfield 1933). Thus, the dialects of Polish spoken in Eastern Poland and the Western dialects of Belarusian would most likely have been mutually intelligible, once again with very fuzzy boundaries. Likewise, Eastern dialects of Belarusian in Eastern Belarus and Western Russia also existed in a relationship of continuum. Polyglossic multilingualism was common in the region, and especially rural communities would have had very limited access to Belarusian high culture or Polish culture which would have given them a clear sense of linguistic identity. Industrialisation, often taken to be a key factor in the rise of nationalism, was limited in Eastern Poland/ Western Belarus (Gellner 1983). Several of my own respondents claimed that their grandparents or even parents spoke a dialect "somewhere in between" Polish and Belarusian rather than "literary Polish" or "literal Belarusian." The irrelevance of the national idea (be it Polish, Belarusian, or Russian) to certain segments of the population is also reflected by the number of people who claimed merely to be "local" in the above-mentioned censuses, especially in Polesie/ modern Hrodna.

Thus, it is important to remember that those applying for the *Pole's Card* could easily be descended from Polish citizens who were not ethnic Poles and who could have had a more than ambiguous relationship towards the Polish state as an ethno-national nation-building entity. Although it is tempting to conclude that the *Pole's Card* is aiming at a more "civic" interpretation of Polishness, more in the tradition of Pilsudski's conception of Polish citizenship (Brykczynski 2014, Davies 2005), political rhetoric surrounding the law on the *Pole's Card*, to be discussed later, makes this hypothesis seem unlikely. After all, descendants of repatriates (ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians who were sent to the Soviet Union according to a population swap scheme) are ineligible, and many topics summarised by the compendium of questions asked by the consulate focus on specifically Catholic traditions and a very ethnic interpretation of nationhood. There is a focus on blood and descent rather than civic Polish values. This interpretation of citizenship is well in line with PiS's platform (Fox and Vermeersch 2010), and the Polish government's conception of citizenship in general, although as scholars have pointed out, the division between ethnic and civic nationalism is often more real in practice than in theory, as evidenced by debates surrounding the wording of the Polish constitution, which mixes ethnic and civic understandings of nationhood due to necessary political compromises (Zubrzycki 2001).

Nevertheless, it is the descendants of these Polish citizens, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual, which the inventors of the *Pole's Card* are inviting back to Poland. Regardless of the ambiguous "Polishness" of the region, the two western-most regions of the modern Belarusian state once formed part of Polish territory. This, according to PiS, is why the *Pole's Card* is necessary moral compensation. In the end, this multi-ethnic region, home to so many ethnic and linguistic groups, would be radically transformed by the Second World War and the massive loss of life in the region, including the near extirpation of the local Jewish community. The Soviet Union's victory would mean that two Eastern Polish provinces, Nowogrodek and Polesie, would be transferred to the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (the BSSR). This would have profound consequences for the region, including for the Polish community there.

NATIONAL BELONGING IN THE SOVIET UNION

The role of national movements, especially those of small nations, was highly particular in the Soviet Union. Under Lenin, a policy of *korenizatsiya* meant that communism was presented through the lens of national awakening (Grigor Suny 1993, Slezkine 1996). Small national groups which had been oppressed by larger empires, such as the Belarusians, were "awakened nationally" and encouraged to be resentful of bourgeois imperialists, such as Poles (the Soviet empire, of course, didn't count). This led to a formulation widely referred to as "national in form, socialist/ Soviet in content" (ibid). According to this theory, communism was the only platform by which small-country nationalism could resist capitalist imperialism. Although this policy did not directly affect the provinces of now Western Belarus, which were still a part of Poland during Lenin's regime, they are nevertheless important to understand, as this discourse affected the course of nationhood in Belarus in general. Thus, under Lenin in eastern Belarus, a national communist awakening was encouraged: poetry burgeoned and Belarusian became more widely taught in schools and used on an administrative level. This linguistic revival would continue to a much lesser degree under the leadership of Masherau, a highly charismatic president of the Byelorussian SSSR, later in the 20th century (Marples 1999).

What's more, the Soviet policy of "passport ethnicity" would reify boundaries between groups, and the Soviet education system meant more people who have access to education and thus a "high literary culture," which, if Gellner is taken at his word, would sharpen senses of nationhood even further (Gellner 1983). This came at the expense of the Polish community in Western Belarus and role of Polish language and culture there, favouring the socialist-directed revival of Belarusian, which would later be more or less replaced by Russian (Rudnik 2016). Thus, the Soviet Union's approach would lead to a certain conflict: as Brubaker points out: "Far from ruthlessly suppressing nationhood, the Soviet regime pervasively institutionalized it. The regime repressed nationalism, of course; but at the same time…it went further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories. In doing so it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism" (Brubaker 2011: 17).

In contrast to Lenin's policy of *korenizatsiya*, and more relevantly for the western provinces of Belarus, which would join the Soviet Union only after WWII, Stalin implemented a wide-spread policy of Russification throughout the Soviet Union. Moreover, repression increased, and many ethnic Poles from the new Western-most provinces of Belarus and the Soviet Unions were deported to Kazakhstan, had their land taken away, and were forced to speak Belarusian or Russian (Iglicka 1998). The Catholic Church, a pillar of Polish national identity, was far more limited than in Communist Poland, and Polish language was forbidden (ibid). Thus, those parts of the Eastern *Kresy* which ended up in Belarus, initially a highly diverse ethnic "shatter ground", experienced sweeping national homogenisation: first Belarusisation, which sharpened national differences in favour of Belarusian culture, then Russification, which tried to efface them. This meant that by the time Lukashenka came to power, the Polish community was far smaller than it had been between the wars, and the use of Polish language was extremely limited. This decline would continue throughout Lukashenka's regime.

NATIONAL BELONGING IN INDEPENDENT BELARUS

When Lukashenka came to power in 1994, no one knew quite what to expect. He was a simple collective farm boss who spoke in a dialect which mixes elements of Russian and Belarusian, called *transyanka.* Although many thought newfound independence for Belarus would bring about another national awakening for Belarusians and more minority rights for the Polish minority, a process which was just starting to take off during the early 1990s, this proved not to be the case. Lukashenka instituted a new wave of Russification, and the percent of Belarusian speakers diminished dramatically (Bekus 2013). According to Ostrogorski Centre/*Belarus Digest*, a London-based Belarusian think-tank: "…in 1999, 85.6% of over 8,000 Belarusians surveyed considered Belarusian their mother tongue, and 41.3% of them said they used Belarusian at home. In addition, Belarusian was considered a mother tongue by 67.1% of Poles who live on the Belarusian territory, 57.6% of whom spoke Belarusian at home."[19] Currently, only about 10% of Belarusians use Belarusian in their day-to-day life.[20] This did not bode well for the Polish community either. Although ethnic Poles managed to unite in the late 1980s and found a

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[19] http://belarusdigest.com/myth/do-belarusians-actually-speak-belarusian-372

[20] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/28/-sp-russian-belarus-reclaims-language-belarusian

Union of Poles to promote their language and culture and defend their cultural rights, this attempt was sabotaged by the Belarusian government, which refused to recognise an elected leader of the Union, instead appointing its own. This led to a schism within the Union of Poles, with one group reporting to the Belarusian government (often accused of doing the bidding of security services) and separate, independent one recognised by the government of Poland. The independent Union still faces political persecution in Belarus and has trouble conforming with Belarusian laws on registration of political organisations. The Belarusian government has also put pressure on Polish priests, decreasing the length of their visas and deporting them for failing to use Belarusian or Russian in their mass (Rudnik 2017). On the other hand, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of socialist regimes in the Warsaw Pact countries, the Polish economy, standard of living, and level of democracy quickly outpaced that of Belarus, rapidly turning the country into a desirable destination for migrants.

The most interesting aspect of post-independence rhetoric on nationhood in Belarus, however, is perhaps its absence. Although many newly independent countries experienced a national revival, including a re-evaluation of the nation's history and a new emphasis placed on patriotism, such as in Ukraine or the Baltic States (Snyder 2008), this is categorically untrue of Belarus. Besides smothering the Belarusian language, Lukashenka pointedly avoids any discourse that differentiates Belarusians too much from Russians (although this is changing in the post-Crimean Eastern European context). While the Belarusian opposition draws its nation-building narratives from the Old Belarusian-speaking Grand Duchy of Lithuania and appropriates aspects of the history of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth (Bekus 2010, Bekus 2008, Ioffe 2003), Lukashenka's national narrative seems to be almost exclusively built on the role of Belarusian partisans in World War II, as well as Belarus's "brotherhood" with its Russian neighbour (ibid). Thus, while neighbouring countries were experiencing a veritable boom in nationalist rhetoric, for better or for worse, there were very few state-led narratives around which Belarusians could build a sense of nationhood. This has led many scholars to name Belarus a "state without a nation," and a "de-nationalised state" (Manaev et al 2011, Marples 1999). Meanwhile, other scholars wondered if a unique brand of "Eastern civic nationalism" is developing in Belarus (Buhr 2011). In this way, Belarus is often seen as a form of national-identity vacuum, with many oppositional activists, who support the revival of

Belarusian language and culture, lamenting the lack of "national awareness" in the country (Bekus 2010). Any form of "nationalism," be it Belarusian, Polish, or even Russian, is treated with great suspicion by the Belarusian authorities (ibid). The fact that Belarus is not in any meaningful sense of the term a "nationalising state", as Brubaker puts it, has interesting implications for how individuals negotiate a sense of nationhood, especially when they are offered one by neighbouring states at very affordable rates. I hypothesise that the fact that nationalist discourse is so conspicuously absent in Belarus should contribute to more ambivalent feelings towards nationhood among national minorities (and *Pole's Card* holders). This process may lead a high degree of ambiguity regarding feelings of national belonging among *Pole's Card* recipients.

Now that we have examined the ethnic history of Poland and Belarus in the 20th century, this thesis will turn to theoretical approaches to nationalism to shed light on the phenomenon of the *Pole's Card* from an analytical perspective.

THEORIES OF NATIONALISM

Of those scholars who have tried to define the idea of the nation and trace its historical origins, three names stand out especially: Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, and Benedict Anderson. All three, to a greater or lesser extent, are constructivists, meaning that they do not believe the idea of the nation as such to be an eternal entity which has existed since time immemorial. Rather, nations and nationalism came about thanks to important changes in society, technology, and government at some point in Europe. Smith believes nations have their roots in "patriae," some form of proto-national community, while Gellner is takes a more wholly constructivist view. Although this paper does not aim to "take sides" per se, or seriously criticize the foundational works of the field of nationalism studies, it is nevertheless crucial to understand how social scientists define the nation, and under what circumstances national feelings come about, before comparing these theories to how the Polish state and recipients of the *Pole's Card* feel about the matter or discussing the salience of the nation in present-day Europe. Brubaker, whose insistence that the nation should not be used as an analytical category, preferring terms such as "nationalising stances" can also bring clarity about how theories of nationalism can be employed to understand the phenomenon of the *Pole's Card*.

Usefully for this thesis, Gellner starts his treatise on nationalism by naming ways in which the “nationalist sentiment” can be violated. The first of these, goes like this: “the political boundary of a given state can fail to include all the members of the appropriate nation” (Gellner 1983 1). As proven by Lech Kaczynski’s letter introducing the *Pole’s Card,* which will be discussed later, this is obviously the case for the Polish government and one of the reasons behind the introduction of the *Card*. The PiS’s party’s “nationalist sentiments” are being violated, thus necessitating a programme which brings the Polish state (and the ensuing citizenship rights) closer to its nation abroad, in a schema somewhat resembling trans-national citizenship. It cannot reclaim the land it lost, but it can fish for Poles. But what is this nation beyond the borders? Who are these “co-ethnics”? Ernst Gellner lays out a concrete definition of the nation: “1) Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and associations and ways of behaving and communicating. 2) Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category recognize certain mutual rights to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members.” (ibid 7) These conditions are later summarised by Gellner as “will and culture” (ibid 53).

According to this formulation for nationhood, *Pole’s Card* holders in Belarus can hardly be said to be “Poles” according to the first point. The number of Belarusian Poles who continue to speak Polish at home is vanishingly small, as mentioned earlier. Although Polish is widely used in Catholic Church services in Belarus, this is one of the only remaining holdouts of the Polish language. Whether *Card* holders share a “system of ideas and associations and ways of behaving” with Poles in Poland is slightly dubious, both due to the ambiguous nature of the Polishness of the *Kresy*, and the importance of existing in different (very closed) states for seventy or so years has on systems of ideas and ways of behaving. However, this question is best examined empirically, which is the ultimate goal of this thesis.

Gellner's second condition, meanwhile, is more forgiving of the Polish state's attempt to extend the nation beyond its borders, or construct a diaspora. Despite indubitable differences in culture, the Polish state recognises these people as Poles, and in signing an official document declaring their Polishness, these people are recognising themselves as Poles as well, at least on paper. Therefore, if, according to Gellner, "nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities," here at least, nations are the artefacts of certain peoples' desire for a better life and certain states' desire, and as Benedict Andersen would put it, "to fill oblivion with a national narrative" (Anderson 115). This formulation is on one hand closer then to a "new-world" view of citizenship, in which nationhood is acquirable, and on the other hand a new iteration of "diaspora nationhood" which has sprung up since the 1990s all over Central and Eastern Europe.

Smith has perhaps a more demanding notion of nationhood. Per his schema, "a nation can therefore be defined as *a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members*" (Smith 1991: 14). The fact that his definition of a nation rests so heavily on "common legal rights" for all members seems to closely link the nation with the state. This is much more exigent for the Polish state's conception of the Polish nation. Poles and "Polonia" no longer share a common territory, and they certainly do not share a common culture, economy, or legal rights. Although they may sure common myths and historical memories, these must also diverge at some point, and there is also the problem that members of one nation (even within one state) can interpret historical memory in vastly different ways. The role of communism in Polish history, for example, may be viewed very differently by a left-wing liberal Pole in Poland, a PiS parliamentarian, and a *Pole's Card* holder with one ethnically Belarusian grandmother from historically Polish territory.

Smith also places great importance on a historic land, "one where terrain and people have exerted mutual, and beneficial, influence over several generations. The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where 'our' sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought. All this makes the homeland unique" (Smith 1990: 19). It may well be the case that an emotional connection to geography is highly important to many people, but this seems to be less true in a highly mobile 21st context, especially when co-ethnic repatriation programmes are being discussed.

What's more, if a home*land* were so important, why would Poles in Belarus, who had lived on the territories of Brest or Hrodna Regions for generations, leave it for Polish lands? It would seem that mere geography is not enough, and that for diasporic Poles returning to their homeland, political boundaries of a state are just as important.

Likewise, Smith's idea of the *patria* is problematic in the Polish context. According to Smith, the *patria* is a community of laws and institutions with a single political will. How can the Polish nation have sustained itself throughout so many years under three different empires with palpably different laws and political wills? Although Smith admits that his formulations of the state and the nation largely overlap, with the nation being more about the link between the political community and cultural memory, and the state being more about simple administrative institutions, this is nevertheless a highly disappointing definition for individuals and governments who take a nationalist or diasporic stance.

Importantly, whether recipients of the *Pole's Card* in Belarus can be said to objectively belong to one nation with Poles in Poland according to the criteria laid out by Smith and Gellner does not appear to matter. Whether *Pole's Card* holders are co-nationals with Poles is largely irrelevant, as they are being treated as such by the laws of the Polish state: they are being offered many of the same rights as Polish citizens (under a largely ethnic understanding of citizenship) and offered the category of "Polish" should they chose to take it up. This shows the power of nationhood as an institutional category. First of all, this demonstrates that the state still plays a dominant role in determining the content of its nation, and secondly, it demonstrates that it is more useful to think of nationhood not as a thing in the world, but as a stance or project. *Pole's Card* holders may or may not be part of the Polish nation according to theoretical definitions of the concept. However, in a practical sense they now are, much as new immigrants in the United States or Canada are part of an American or Canadian nation. Moreover, the extent to which *Pole's Card* holders feel Polish has much to do with their own sense of cultural memory, rather than objective social and economic linkages. This fact also muddies the idea that the Polish state's conception of Polish nationhood is inherently ethnic: it may be on paper (although even here things are unclear) but in practice the dichotomy seems largely moot.

Keeping in mind the history of the Eastern *Kresy* can also explain why the area is such a liminal zone as far as identification goes, why national identities are so easily imposed by states and taken up by its residents. Gellner characterises pre-nationalist agricultural communities as "small peasant communities generally liv[ing] inward-turned lives, tied to the locality by economic need if not by political prescription. Even if the population of a given area starts from the same linguistic base-line – which very often is not the case – a kind of culture drift soon engenders dialectal and other differences. No-one, or almost no-one, has an interest in promoting cultural homogeneity at this social level. The state is interested in extracting taxes, maintaining the peace, and not much else, and has no interest in promoting lateral communication between its subject communities." (Gellner 1983 11) He further notes that: "almost everything in [agro-literate society] militates against the definition of political units in terms of cultural boundaries…. neither of the two potential partners, culture and power, destined for each other according to nationalist theory, has much inclination for the other in the conditions prevailing in the agrarian age" (ibid).

This characterisation is true to a large extent of the Eastern *Kresy* between the World Wars and before. The regions of modern-day Belarus were highly ethnically diverse, largely rural, desperately poor, and barely industrialised. This was the "B" Poland which had not gone through the same industrial changes which had occurred in those parts of Poland belonging to the German and Austro-Hungarian empire. The Russian empire, and later the Polish Second Republic, largely left this community of backwards Belarusian peasants, Jewish merchants, and Polish burghers to their own devices. Attempts to Polonise the region did begin during the Second Polish Republic (Davies 2005) but were soon interrupted by the German invasion of the area and then the imposition of communism, which had its own highly particular relationship to nationalism. Therefore, the process of "becoming national", which took place all over Europe, simply came too late region of what is present-day Belarus. Attempts to spread a national (re)awakening amongst the Belarusian-speaking peasants by local urbanites – per Hroch's (Hroch 2000) formulation of small-country nationalism and Gellner's parable) were at their inchoate stages when the Russian Revolution and then Second World War broke out and thus immediately frustrated, much to the chagrin of the budding Belarusian-speaking intelligentsia in the region. Likewise, the spread of Polish nationalism also began to thin out rapidly East of Lublin and Bialystok along, where lands were less industrialised (Brubaker 2009).

Second-Republic Eastern Poland was exactly the "Ruritania" (a rural land dominated by a foreign empire too eventually experience a national awakening in the late 19th Century) described in Gellner's fable: "Ruritanians had previously thought and felt in terms of family unit and village, at most in terms of a valley, and perhaps on occasion in terms of religion. But now, swept into the melting pot of an early industrial development, they had no valley and no village: and sometimes no family. But there were other impoverished and exploited individuals, and a lot of them spoke dialects recognizably similar, while most of the better-off spoke something quite alien; and so the concept of the Ruritanian nation was born of this contrast, with some encouragement from those journalists and teachers" (Gellner 1983 62). However, although the setting was similar, the process was interrupted in Belarus. Polish nationalism certainly did exist in among Polish-speaking city dwellers and perhaps even some villagers, and this is certain the group of people the *Pole's Card* aims to provide with "moral compensation," however over the course of the 20th century after WWII, these Poles were largely assimilated into the largely a-national, originally rural population of the newly formed Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Decades of Belarusisation (an iteration of Lenin's policy of *korenizatsia*) and later Russification did much to erase the boundaries between "Poles" and all the other groups which inhabited this amorphous geographical area.

Thus, in the end, Benedict Anderson's pithy formulation of nationhood as an "imagined community," being the most generous, perhaps best explains the relationship between the Polish state and *Pole's Card* recipients. However, as important as the roots of nationalism in Europe are, it is equally important to understand the ways in which nationalist movements continue to be salient in today's Europe.

NEW NATIONALISM

As certain scholars, such as Suvarierol and Kandor, have pointed out, globalisation, migration, and other factors have led to a return to a "new nationalism," understood in a strictly cultural sense, leading nation-states to place a "renewed emphasis on the building blocks of national identity and to look back to a glorious pre-globalisation period of the nation with a taken- for-granted cultural homogeneity" (Kaldor 2004 in Suvarierol 2012). This set of circumstances leads Suvarierol to propose the term "nation freezing" which she defines as: "activities of the nation-state to reconstruct national identity through a new nationalist discourse that defines the elements of this 'national culture' as if it was (ever) unitary and static." (Suvarierol 2012: 212). She proposes three main conditions for state policies to qualify as partaking in "nation freezing": "the existing diversity and societal change are ignored; 'the nation' and 'the national identity' are fixed as homogenous and stable entities; and the national community is (discursively) closed for additions and trans formations." (ibid).

In developing her theoretical framework, Suvarierol examines cases only in Western Europe, where "nation freezing" is ostensibly a response to migration and globalisation. The three countries she examines, France, the UK, and the Netherlands, are situated in a region where civic nationalism, in which the nation is defined by its adherence to certain values, has been historically prevalent and citizenship laws are at least partially rooted in *jus soli*. However, I find the concept of nation freezing to be a useful analytical tool in post-communist Europe as well, where nationhood has a more ethnic odour, although its mechanisms function in different ways and are a response to a different historical and ethnic context. In Central and Eastern Europe, nationalism was largely pushed to the side or appropriated by communist authorities, resulting in nation- "rebuilding" projects, in which a return towards ethnic nationalism is understood as a sign of sovereignty from "anti-national" communist hegemons, such as in Poland. Thus, it can certainly be said that Eastern Europe also is experiencing a rise of "new nationalism", a return to the "glorious pre-globalisation period of nation building", albeit in an alternative way compared to Western Europe. Nation Freezing is a part of this. Nation freezing is an expedient strategy for any state advocating an "ethnic" conception of nationhood, as is revealed by ways in which Central and Eastern European countries seek to define the nation in co-ethnic policies: her thesis on nation freezing certainly fits the *Pole's Card.* Diversity (in the Eastern *Kresy* during the inter-war period) and societal change (the experience of Poles in the East during the Soviet Union and independent Belarus) are ignored, the nation is certainly seen as fixed (especially given PiS's usual attitude towards migration). Whether the national community is closed for additions is largely moot here, as *Pole's Card* recipients are framed as and treated like Poles.

Now that this thesis has covered the historical and theoretical background most important for understanding the *Pole's Card,* it will now move to explore the central theme of this thesis: the relationship between the Polish government's attitude towards Polish nationhood and the attitude of *Pole's Card* recipients. First, I will analyse several statements of PiS party politicians regarding the *Card,* these statements provide ample evidence to support Suvarierol's thesis and demonstrate the importance of "nation freezing" for states today. This section will be somewhat briefer, as English or Russian-language versions of such statements are hard to come by. Next, I will present my data and analyse the responses of interviewees.

CHAPTER V: THE *POLE'S CARD* AND THE POLISH GOVERNMENT'S DIASPORIC STANCE

In 2007, around when the law on the *Pole's Card* came into force, the Polish government released a booklet in Polish and Russian entitled *Karta Polaka: Nowe uprawnenia dla Polaków na Wschodzie* (The Pole's Card: New rights for Poles in the East).[21] The booklet set forth the purpose of the *Card* and explained its advantage and requirements. Complete with colour photographs representing notable aspects of Polish culture, including architecture, an orchestra, and John Paul II, the booklet also provided facts about Poland and an overview of the Polish diaspora, otherwise known as Polonia. However, perhaps most notable is the introduction by Lech Kaczynski, the former president of Poland whose Law and Justice Party (PiS) government had written the law (Fox and Vermeersch 2010). This introductory note is very helpful in understanding the Polish state's (or at least the PiS party's) view of the status and culture of Poles abroad. According to my translation from the Russian, the introduction reads as follows:

> *Respected Ladies and Gentlemen, Poles!*
>
> *With great pride, satisfaction, and also great emotion, I have signed one of the most important documents to be prepared by the government of the Republic of Poland: The Law on the* Pole's Card*. Thanks to this law, the Polish government is paying a great debt owed to the several million compatriots, who – mostly by no fault of their own – due to the post-War shift in boundaries to the West– ended up outside the borders of their homeland. Despite the most difficult circumstances: a ban on Polish language, a lack of churches for prayers, the threat of prison or job loss, as well as the harsh pressure for the purposes of Sovietisation, those who inhabited the former Soviet Union remained Polish patriots, held on to the traditions of their fathers, looked after the graves of their ancestors, and maintained their language – at least in prayer. And they survived! And today they are part of the proud Polish nation. I know*

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[21] http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/f321bc6a-39b9-4750-be4d-cb4063b14cfe

> *what it means to be a victim of unfair historical decisions. On 1 September 1939, my parents settled in a newly bought house in the city of Brest. After only three weeks, the town was overtaken by the criminal Soviet army, and my parents – fleeing the pillaging – returned to their native Warsaw and bore out the German occupation there. Part of my family is from the territory of the former Eastern borderlands of Poland and for this reason the fate of my compatriots in the East – those who never forsook their motherland, but ceased to be her citizen because of the change in borders – are especially dear to my heart [….] for long years you have carried the white eagle in your heart. Now the Polish government will return to you a document with an eagle. Be proud of it! Poland is waiting for you!*

In a similar vein, in an interview with Belsat, Konrad Pawlik, the current Polish ambassador to Belarus, stated: "We exclusively consider the *Pole's Card* to be a moral responsibility, moral compensation."[22] We must, of course, bear in mind that PiS, the author of the law, is a national conservative party for whom the myth of the long-suffering Polish nation, ever victimised by history's capricious resolve to separate the Polish state from the Polish nation, is particularly important: as Fox and Vermeersch point out: "nationalists… aspire to realise the symbolic reunification of the nation across state borders" (2010: 341) and use a "revert to nationalism" to distinguish themselves from other right wing parties (ibid). It took PiS several attempts before the law was finally passed, as other parties feared it would jeopardize their good standing with the European Union (ibid) a lesson they had drawn from problems faced by Hungary when it passed a similar law (Fox and Vermeersch 2010, Fowler 2002). It is not the purpose of this thesis to determine the political expediency of the law: whether this was an issue important for PiS's electorate or whether it was more of a pet-project for the Kaczynski twins. However, the fact that the idea of the Polish nation is essentialised, so typical for any champion of nationalism (Anderson 1996), is obvious both in the wording of the law and in Lech Kaczynksi's misty-eyed introduction. This letter is directly in line with Brubaker's insight that "nationalism can be understood as a form of remedial political action. It addresses an allegedly deficient or 'pathological' condition and proposes to remedy it" (Brubaker 1996: 79). Likewise, this introduction is easily related to the long-standing theoretical debate surrounding ethnic and civic versions of nationalism. As scholars have pointed out, Poland has taken a more "ethnic" route to understanding nationhood, which is also reflected in its constitution (Zubrzycki 2001), and which has clearly influenced the discourse in this text. Nevertheless, this dichotomy is often more real in theory than it is in practice: as proved by the tension in the constitution between an ethnic understanding of nationhood and a Polish nationhood based more on civic values (ibid). Likewise, although the *Pole's Card* clearly aims at "ethnic nationalism," the reality on the ground is more ambiguous.

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[22] http://belsat.eu/in-focus/100-000-asobau-z-kartayu-palyaka-belarusy-raspavyali-na-voshta-yana-im/

As this thesis has mentioned earlier, it is a bit of a stretch of the imagination that the brave and patriotic Poles described by Kaczynski's letter, who have held on to Polish culture despite Soviet oppression, really match the modern-day recipients of the *Pole's Card*: it is rather an appeal to correct a perceived discrepancy between the borders of the Polish state and the Polish nation. This discrepancy is rendered especially vivid by the rather vague conditions put forth in the *Pole's Card* law. After all, according to the law, applicants must only be one-eighth Polish. What's more, the level of Polish language knowledge required to apply (approximately A2 based on the European standardised framework) is easy achieved by Russian speakers, and even more easily achieved by Belarusian speakers.

The disconnect between the Polish government's view on the "realness" of the Polish community in Belarus and those who eventually acquire a *Pole's Card* is further cast into doubt given the difference in the economic situation between Belarus and Poland, along with the advantages (free education, financial aid in settling in) for recipients. The GDP of Poland per capita is almost twice that of Belarus[23] and Poland enjoys a much higher quality of living. Although the unemployment rate in Belarus is officially very low, this is partially because the government makes it very difficult not to have a job, going as far as to tax unemployment.[24] Thus, rather than encouraging Poles to return home, perhaps the *Pole's Card* policy is simply attracting ordinary Belarusian migrants in search of a better life. In other words, there are significant push and pull factors influencing the decisions of those Belarusians who decide to take up Polish nationhood and emigrate to Poland which do not have to do with a heart-felt connection to an external national homeland. There is, of course, a very good possibility that PiS is aware of the discrepancy between the patriotic rhetoric of the *Pole's Card* and the lived experience of its recipients. After all, Poland could do with migrants: the country's workforce is ageing, partially due to the large-scale emigration of Poles further west.[25] Younger migrants eager to work would be a boon for the Polish state. However, PiS has based much of its platform around notions such as "Poland for Poles" and hostility towards migration, as evidenced by the party's staunch opposition to accepting refugees despite potentially serious consequences from the EU. Thus, the *Pole's Card* can be seen as a way to attract a young migrant population to Poland without triggering "migrant paranoia" among PiS's voting base. According to this schema, *Pole's Card* recipients are not migrants at all; they are Poles returning home. The Polish economy benefits and PiS can continue with its anti-immigrant rhetoric.

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[23] https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/index.aspx

[24] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/16/belarus-fine-unemployed-social-parasite-law

This attitude towards the "Polish diaspora" in the former Soviet Union is best captured by Brubaker's conceptualisation of the triadic nexus linking 'national minorities', the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national 'homelands' to which they belong, or can be construed as belonging, "by ethno-cultural affinity though not by legal citizenship" (Brubaker 1996: 4). According to Brubaker's conception, "homeland nationalisms assert states' rights – indeed their obligations – to monitor the conditions, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights, and protect the interests of 'their' ethno-national kin in other states. Such claims are typically made when the ethno-national kin in question are seen as threated by nationalising (and thereby, from the point of view of the ethno-nationalising kind, de-nationalising) policies and practices of the state in which they live." Meanwhile, "a state becomes an external national 'homeland' when cultural or political elites construe certain residents and citizens of other states as co-nationals, as fellow members of a single trans-border nation, and when they assert that this shared nationhood makes the state responsible, in some sense, not only for its own citizens but also for ethnic co-nationals who live in other states and possess other citizenships" (ibid: 5). The *Pole's Card* law is a virtually perfect example of this tendency: here we see the Polish state construing a certain segment of the Belarusian population as (potentially) Polish. The Pole's government does not need to ask how "authentically Polish" the recipients of the *Pole's Card* are, as the need to reunite the Polish nation is more discursive than based on a real need.

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[25] http://zielonagora.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/zg/ASSETS_III_d_Szaltys_prezentacja.pdf

Likewise, Brubaker cautions against the reification of the relationship between the kin-state and the national minority: "'National minority,' like 'external national homeland' or 'nationalizing state,' designates a political stance, not an ethno-demographic fact…. Although national minority and homeland nationalisms both define themselves in opposition to the 'nationalizing' nationalisms of the state in which the minorities live, they are not necessarily harmoniously aligned" (Brubaker 1996: 5). This insight goes a long way in explaining why the Polish state's view of Polonia does not have to align with the stance of diasporic Poles themselves: PiS is taking a political, discursive stance which has more to do with their own narrative on Polish nationhood than the demands of the minority itself. Brubaker is equally sceptical about the concept of "diasporas": Thus, as Brubaker points out, just as nationalism is an act… "diaspora" is more of a stance: according to Brubaker, the normally proposed conditions for the existence of a diaspora are: "dispersion in space…orientation to a 'homeland'… third, boundary-maintenance. (Brubaker 2005: 5) Brubaker defines "homeland orientation" as: "maintaining a collective memory or myth about the homeland; second, 'regarding the ancestral homeland as the true, ideal home and as the place to which one would (or should) eventually return'; third, being collectively 'committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and to its safety and prosperity'; and fourth, 'continu[ing] to relate, personally or vicariously', to the homeland, in a way that significantly shapes one's identity and solidarity (Safran 1991, pp. 83 /84)." (ibid), while boundary maintenance involves "…deliberate resistance to assimilation through self-enforced endogamy or other forms of self-segregation" (ibid: 6). Thus, it is hard to characterise recipients of *Pole's Cards* as a diaspora. However, this inconsistency is cleared up when we remember that just as nationalism designates a political stance, diaspora is an equally constructed concept. It doesn't matter so much how "objectively real" the Polish diaspora is in Belarus as much as the fact that the Polish government is taking a "diasporic stance" and constructing one. It is thus possible to speak of the Polish state "projecting the Polish nation" This has real-world consequences for those Belarusians who are eligible for diasporic Polishness.

Meanwhile, the mutual antagonism between the Polish and Belarusian states' views on the Polish minority is illustrated by the debate over the Union of Poles in Belarus. In 1988, members of the Polish community mobilised and formed a Union of Poles, which sought to promote Polish-language education and Polish culture, founding Polish homes in several Belarusian cities. However, in 2005, the Belarusian authorities disputed the results of elections for the leadership of the union. This led to a split: the Polish government supported, and continues to communicate with, one candidate, while the Belarusian authorities recognise the more pro-regime faction, which the Polish government claims to be infiltrated by the KGB (Rudnik 2017). This, along with scandals caused by *Pole's Card* holding Belarusian bureaucrats, illustrate how such claims by one state upon nationals of another state can cause diplomatic antagonism between two countries

Thus, as proved by Lech Kaczynski's letter introducing the *Pole's Card,* the Polish state, and specifically PiS, reify and simplify the meaning of Polish nationality, extending it to descendants of former Polish citizens, for discursive political purposes. It is in their interest to treat *Pole's Card* holders as bona fide co-ethnics as this lends credence to their nation-oriented worldview: the integrity of the Polish nation must be redressed. For PiS, Polish nationhood is immutable and genetically transferable – a loss of Polish cultural traditions is treated as a tragedy which must be rectified. Irrespective of whether *Pole's Card* Poles still identify with Polish culture, they have the transformative possibility to learn and "return to the fold."

CHAPTER VI: THE POLISH NATION AND *POLE'S CARD* HOLDERS

Although the stance of PiS regarding who is eligible for Polish nationhood may be somewhat glib, how individual *Pole's Card* holders relate to the concept is much more diverse. Thus, I will now turn to the empirical results of my study to determine how *Pole's Card* owners relate the Polish nation and their formal belonging to it. I will begin by discussing my methodology; here I will also describe ethical issues and challenges posed. I will then address and analyse the issues brought up during interviews, arranged topically and supported by direct quotes from interviewees. In this section, I will also refer to theory on issues of identity, social location, groupness, and self-understanding (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

Both in conducting my interviews and reporting my findings, I have tried to avoid using the term "identity" (Russian *identichnost'* or *tozhdestvenost'*) in favour of terms such as feelings of belonging to a nation, or simply asking participants to describe how they relate to the Polish nation. Primarily, I have taken this decision because of the ambiguous nature of the term "identity" in modern discourse, and the fact that it is possible that the Russian word *identichnost'* has different connotations than in English. As Brubaker puts it: "`Identity,'…tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)" (Brubaker and Copper 200 1). Brubaker and Cooper maintain that soft understandings of identity, which highlight their multiple and fluid nature, are useless analytically, while "hard understandings," much loved by politicians, essentialise how people relate to the category of "nation" (ibid). In many ways, this thesis underscores the gap between these two understandings: as PiS's rhetoric implies a hard understanding of "identity" (in this case national identity), while individual understandings of the concept among my participants were more ambivalent. Notably, however, neither the Polish government's documents nor (most) individuals I interviewed used the term. This is partially because the discourse I analysed was not originally in English, but also because the term is not one which is a primary reference point for how either individuals or the Polish government think about national belonging. Thus, while "identity" may be a "category of practice" in the English-speak world according to Brubaker and Cooper (meaning that it is used in a folk or vernacular sense) the same is not necessarily true in the microcosm of Polish-Belarusians which I studied.

For analytical purposes, Brubaker and Cooper propose three clusters of concepts to do the work usually assigned to the term identity. The first, "identification and categorisation," highlights the role of the state, for example, to categorise putative groups. In Brubaker's words: "The state is thus a powerful 'identifier' not because it can create 'identities' in the strong sense, in general, it cannot, but because it has the material and symbolic resources to impose the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers, and doctors must work and to which non-state actors must refer" (ibid 16). As we see, the Polish state uses "Polishness" in much the same way. Next, Brubaker and Cooper propose "self-understanding and social location" which refers to: "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how… one is prepared to act. As a dispositional term, it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sens pratique*, the practical sense, at once cognitive and emotional, that persons have of themselves and their social world" (ibid 17). This notion of "self-understanding" is important to understand how people relate to nationhood, and many interviewees recounted their experiences be speaking of Polishness in a highly personal and individual way. Finally, Brubaker and Cooper propose: "commonality, connectedness, and groupness," meaning: "…the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders" (ibid 19).

These terms are useful for this thesis methodologically. Clearly, the Polish state's position is one of an "identifier:" it seeks to project the Polish nation outside the current borders of the Polish state in a way which has practical and legal consequences for individuals. Individuals, meanwhile, take their now officialised belonging to the "Polish nation" and make of it what they will in terms of *self-understanding*. Legally, they are members of the Polish nation as the *Pole's Card* legislation has categorised them as such. What implications this has for their personal sense of self-understanding is what this thesis sets out to discover. Meanwhile, feelings of *groupness* among ostensible Polish-Belarusians seem largely irrelevant, as the category "*Pole's Card* holder" is far too large a net to capture only members of the bounded group of the "Polish minority" in Belarus, despite the Polish government's views. Moreover, this thesis would like to suggest that just as Brubaker points to the fact that the varied meanings of the word "identity" render it useless analytically, the word, "nation", while practically ubiquitous, is also highly contingent on context and can be perceived extremely differently by the state and individuals. Therefore, this thesis will not explore "identity." It also understands that the category "nation" is often only a practical and legal one. It's salience among *Pole's Card* holders will therefore be analysed using Brubaker's terms.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

To gather data on individual *Pole's Card* holders' attitudes towards Polish nationhood, I opted to use in-depth, semi-structured Skype interviews. This bottom-up approach is a necessary counterpoint to theorising about nationalism or analysing state discourse, as it allows the researcher to study how the individual takes theoretical categories, reified by the state, and adapts them to every-day life and practical needs. This method was chosen because from below, we can "study the micropolitics of categories, the ways in which the categorised appropriate, internalise, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them" (Dominguez 1986). Although here categories are both imposed and offered, they are nevertheless "up for grabs" by their targets. Moreover, gathering interviews rather than surveys or questionnaires was useful, as it allowed me to question and probe interviewees on their responses to my questions directly, as well as pick up on relevant and useful issues it would not have occurred to me to ask about. Because of the individual nature of the questions asked, semi-structured interviews are more useful in capturing the sometimes ambiguous and complex nature of responses.

I gathered 27 interviews from predominately younger, educated Belarusians with *Pole's Cards.* All interviewees had received a *Pole's Card* between 2006, when the law on the *Pole's Card* was passed into law, and 2017. Importantly, not all *Card* holders had used the *Card* to migrate to Poland; some had chosen either to remain in Belarus or return there after having resided in Poland for some time. This has important implications for understanding both the motivations of recipients to apply for a *Card* and their relationship to Polish nationhood, as will be discussed later. Moreover, the fact that I gathered interviews from recipients in both Poland and Belarus makes this survey more reflective of the situation in general: many people with *Pole's Cards* do not intend to, or cannot, use it to move to Poland. They nevertheless have their own motivations for applying for one and have their own relationship to the category of "Polish nation."

I have organised my findings by sorting responses to the question "What does it mean to you to belong to the 'Polish Nation'" into several generalised clusters. Although motivations for receiving a *Pole's Card* will be also be addressed, most secondary questions, such those relating to respondents' contacts with Polish culture growing up or their linguistic ability, will be presented as context for responses to my main research question. Thus, respondents' personal experiences, biographies, and family histories will be used to shed light on why individuals relate to the Polish nation in one way or another. With this in mind, I will now proceed to describe my sample.

Age: All participants were at least 21 years of age and most were not older than 33, although one participant was 39. I do not know if this age range is representative of *Pole's Cards* holders in general. However, gathering information from young people has several advantages. First, younger people are presumably more mobile and thus more willing both to migrate and to change their attitudes towards national categories. Second, younger people have been more subject to the national policy of independent Belarus, rather than the Soviet Union, and thus provide better insight into how this policy, relatively empty of nationalising discourse, effects perceptions of nationhood. As I have mentioned before, Belarus's unique attitude towards nation building makes this case study particularly unique. Nevertheless, the fact that I was unable to gather a representative sampling when it comes to age is a limitation to this study. Thus, any results should be taken to reflect only the attitudes of a predominately younger group of Belarusians.

Language: Interviews were conducted in Russian, a language which all respondents knew at a native level. I am fluent in Russian as well (I have a degree in Russian language, work as a translator, and have lived in Belarus and Russia for several years). Thus, the choice of Russian posed no communication problems. Whether correspondents felt Russian to be their native language is a different issue, having to do with diverse interpretations of the word "native," as I will discuss later. Almost all interviewees grew up speaking Russian in the home from childhood, although some interviewees said they spoke Belarusian at home or a mix between Belarusian and Russian. Studies show that the Polish minority (as defined by the Belarusian census) are slightly more likely to use Belarusian language at home than the average citizen of Belarus (Rudnik 2017). This has to do with the fact that use of Belarusian language is more common in the west of the country, namely in the two regions which belonged to Poland during the inter-war years. No correspondents claimed to grow up speaking Polish at home, although some claimed exposure to Polish language and culture through grandparents or at church.

Gender: Unfortunately, the sample I collected is highly-skewed towards females; males are thus under-represented in this study. This may have an effect on my results: men and women may have different views on national identity due to the politics of sexual citizenship. It could be that women relate to the nation differently than men as nationalism was largely created in and for a male-dominated environment.

Higher Education: All correspondents possess some form of higher education or were working towards higher education in Poland. It is difficult to determine the extent to which this is a limitation for my results, as there are no publically available statistics on what proportion of Belarusian *Pole's Card* owners possess higher education or are students. It is possible that Polish consuls are more likely to grant *Pole's Cards* to people with higher education or those who intend to study in Poland. Indeed, some people I interviewed suspected to be the case: several interviewees believed that they had an easier time with the application process for this reason. Moreover, a very large proportion of Belarusians possess some form of higher education. This is because Belarus largely inherited the educational policy of the Soviet Union, which prioritized educating the population, and because students in Belarus are exempt from otherwise compulsory military service, providing motivation to seek higher education in some form. According to Belstat[26], around 83% of Belarusians possess some form of higher education. This number is higher than many Western countries.[27]

Geographic Distribution: Most interviewees came either from Minsk Region, Hrodna (Grodno) Region, or Brest Region. This is logical, as Minsk is by far the largest city in Belarus and attracts many migrants from the regions. The latter two regions correspond with the formerly Polish voivodships of Nowogrodek and Polesie, where most members of the Polish diaspora (as defined per Pole's Card requirements) originate. Only one interviewee came from the south-eastern Belarusian region of Homiel.

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[26] http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_7187/
[27] http://netherlands.mfa.gov.by/docs/belarus_2013_1_eng-32689.pdf

Those *Card* holders who had chosen to migrate to Poland were highly geographically dispersed. Interviewees resided or had resided in Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk, Rzeszow, Bydgosc, Wroclaw, and other cities.

METHOD OF GATHING PARTICIPANTS

Because of the geographical dispersion of *Pole's Card* holders, I initially relied on my own network within Belarus to find interviewees. Most of my acquaintances in Belarus knew someone or knew someone who knew someone with a *Pole's Card.* From there, I relied on the snowball technique to find more respondents: in other words, I asked interviewees if they would be willing to recommend any acquaintances to me. This approach proved moderately effective, and many respondents sent me additional names. Initially, I assumed that the geographical dispersion of *Pole's Card* holders would be an obstacle to finding enough respondents for even a qualitative study. However, the snow ball technique proved adequate to resolving this issue.

ETHICS

Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and asked to give oral consent to participate in the study. Names of respondents will not be stored and transcripts of interviews will be destroyed after I submit my thesis. Before beginning my research, I made sure to submit my proposal to the University of Glasgow's ethics committee. This study should not place any participants at risk in any way. Participants who displayed interest will be sent a Russian language summary of my findings.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Interviews were conducted over Skype and most interviews lasted around twenty minutes. After introducing my research aims and asking for consent, interviewees were asked a series of questions, with some variations. I also probed interviewees about their respondents and may have asked additional questions based on their responses:

First, I asked for factual and biographical information such as participants' age, where they were from and where they currently resided, when they received a *Pole's Card*, when and if they moved to Poland, which language they spoke at home, when they started learning Polish, and at what level they speak Polish now. Most answers to these questions have been discussed already, as I have outlined my sample. Next, I moved on to questions about their relation to Poland the Polish culture: which members of their family were Poles (or how they proved Polish descent) and what kinds of connections they had with Polish language and culture in childhood. Asking questions about family history proved fruitful, as it often prompted recipients to bring up the multi-cultural nature of the *Kresy* as well as how individuals experienced nationhood in the Soviet Union. I then questioned participants about their motivation for receiving a *Pole's Card,* and/ or moving to Poland, as well as what the process of applying was like for them, i.e.: what kinds of questions were asked at the consulate interview, how they prepared for it, and how difficult it was for them. Finally, I got to the heart of my research interest, and asked them what it meant to them to sign a document stating they belonged to the Polish nation, whether this requirement had given them any pause, and how they would characterise their own nationhood, as well as whether they felt that belonging to a nation was important to them. Likewise, I asked them whether they considered the Polish language to be their native language, as the law on the *Pole's Card* requires of them, and what a "native language" means to them.

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

MOTIVATIONS

Interviewees brought up several reasons for applying for a *Pole's Card.* These included: better opportunities for work and education (a reason named by all of them); works requirements, as one respondent claimed her job had required her to get Schengen visas (one person), and a *Pole's Card* was the cheapest way for to do this; as an insurance policy, in case the economic situation got worse in Belarus / to provide more opportunities to their children (seven people); because they felt a connection with Polish culture (to some degree, around a third); because they wanted to reconnect with relatives (two); as a confirmation of their identity (one person); because they wanted to travel more easily (about a quarter); and because they didn't like the political situation in their country (four people). Many respondents combined several of these reasons. Notably, seeking better opportunities or education in Poland was mentioned as a reason for applying for the *Pole's Card* by all respondents and as a primary reason by all but one. However, this did not exclude secondary motivations, and as we will see, perceptions of belonging to the

Polish Nation sometimes changed after participants received a *Card*. A cursory overview of the motivations for applying for the *Card* listed by participants can lead us to conclude that although feelings of groupness are important for some, *Card* owners seeking better opportunities for work and education remained the most important motivational factor for most respondents.

EXPOSURE TO POLISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.

Most respondents claimed that they had little contact with Polish language and contact in childhood. Some respondents, who mentioned that their grandparents had spoken Polish, claimed to remember hearing them speak Polish (or a Polish-Belarusian interlanguage) among themselves, but had not learned it until adulthood. Likewise, certain respondents remember Polish books and magazines being present in the home. Many respondents remember becoming acquainted with Polish language in (Catholic) church, as mass in some congregations is conducted in Polish rather than Belarusian. Notably, many respondents also recalled that they were familiar with "Polish culture," important for the interview with the consul, through church attendance: many questions on Polish culture relate to Polish Catholic religious holidays and practices. Certain respondents claimed they had always had a fondness for Polish culture and thus had tried to take courses or travel to Poland frequently. One respondent recalled being given Polish lessons as a child as part of the Polish community. Thus, in general, exposure to the Polish language was very limited among my respondents. Likewise, knowledge of Polish culture existed, but this was more due to childhood memories from older generations or church, rather than a feeling of "group boundedness" vis-à-vis the "Belarusian majority".

By far the greater part of respondents reported that they had started learning Polish "from scratch" once they made the decision to apply for a *Pole's Card*. Thus, many participants were able to attain the requisite level of Poland by studying the language intensively for several months (or in one case, two weeks) before their Polish language interview. Several respondents reported that they had hired Polish tutors specifically for the purpose of passing the interview. These tutors also taught them "Polish culture" so they would be better prepared for such questions at the consul interview. Although it is tempting to regard this fact cynically, several respondents were quite enthusiastic about learning about Polish culture either because "it's objectively interesting", "I like learning about other cultures", or "it's an opportunity to learn more about your roots." It may thus be concluded that although group-boundedness may be weak among *Pole's Card* holders, many feel very positively about Polish becoming part of the Polish nation. Few respondents claimed to have struggled with the questions about Polish culture or language during the consular interview. Only one respondent, who had received the *Card* in 2008, claimed that the consul had asked difficult questions. With this overview in mind, I will now analyse more individual responses to the question of how my respondents felt about their belonging to the Polish Nation.

VIEWS ON POLISH NATIONHOOD

I. *"I am Polish, we are victims of shifting borders."*

Only one respondent felt unambiguously Polish. This was a person who was born and raised in Brest Region, very close to the Polish border. He was also the only person I interviewed who was a member of the Polish Union in Belarus (that which supported the faction not supported by the Belarusian government). He had chosen to remain in Belarus and had applied for a *Pole's Card* because it granted him the opportunity to visit Poland more conveniently and find his [long-lost] Polish relatives. He also asserted the importance of having a document which officially recognised his national identity. "Even though I do not plan to move to Polish at the moment, I think the Polish government should recognise Poles abroad. I have a great connection to Poland… Western Belarus is historically a part of Poland." Although he had moved in his adolescence to Minsk, he remembered that his grandparents were native Polish speakers, he insisted that they spoke proper Polish, rather than the Polish-Belarusian dialect spoken by other Poles from the same region. Although his parents spoke Polish less well, his grandparents usually kept Polish books in their home, and he had a lot of contact with Polish language and culture because he regularly attended Polish-medium (Catholic) church services. He expressed pride at being Polish, which seemed to come at the expense of also being a patriotic Belarusian. In his words: "Belarus is an artificial country. The West should be part of Poland and the East is more Russian…They don't have their own culture there [in the East] they are just Russians. But in Brest and Hrodna regions we are more Western because of Polish influence… it is sad that so many people have lost touch with their roots…. We are Polish here. Some speak Belarusian but this is really artificial…it's a mixture of Polish and Russian that was created artificially by the Belarusian intelligentsia." He also emphasised that his ancestors had been *szlachty* (Polish land owners) whose descendants had suffered in the Soviet era and who had had to hide their culture. Nevertheless, he insisted, “we continued going to Polish church services, even when it was not allowed, and we are Polish Catholics.” At the same time, he admitted that such people are very few. He actively supported the teaching of Polish language in schools in order to revive the Polish heritage of Western Belarus. Later in the interview, he went on to divulge his views on the geopolitical prospects of the region: he maintained that Western Ukraine and Belarus should join Poland as they are culturally closer to that country (and Europe), and Eastern Belarus and Ukraine would inevitably join Russia. Based on my own experience in Belarus, as well as the responses of other interviewees, it is highly unlikely that this opinion is widely shared in Belarus.

This respondent’s views on Polish nationhood set him apart from other participants. First, even other respondents who felt “Polish” were nevertheless somewhat more respectful towards Belarusian nationhood. Although several other respondents mentioned that they thought literary Belarusian was “artificial,” in some way, most were not so dismissive of Belarusian patriots. Notably, this participant was the only one felt unambiguously Polish, making him the ideal “catch” for the *Pole’s Card* policy. Indeed, his loyalty to Poland goes much farther than the intentions of even PiS. His attitudes on history and nationhood matched to some extent with the views of the Polish state, although they were somewhat more radical. This is important: it is easy for the academic to claim that states reify the nation and individual attitudes are more complicated. However, for every politician with a nationalising stance, there are surely a hundred of his constituents listening and agreeing. This single response proves that although the Polish state’s attitude towards Eastern Poles is perhaps not based on the demands of a unified “Polish community” in Belarus, there is nevertheless an audience, however small, who hold very similar views and see themselves as members of a bounded group of Poles. Thus, any conclusion that the Polish state is effectively “constructing a diaspora” must be qualified; to some small extent, this diaspora does in fact seem to exist among *Pole’s Card* holders, even if their status as co-nationals do not necessary fit Smith or Gellner’s criteria.

II. *“I am a citizen of the Rzeczpospolita or Litva/ I am a Litvin(ka)”*

Two interviewees categorised their sense of national belonging as either “Litvins” or “citizens of the binational Rzeczpospolita”. They brought up the fact that although they might not necessarily identify with the modern state of Poland, they identified with a more historical meaning of Poland, less based on ethnic identity and more open to modern Belarusians. One of these interviewees state that she actively defines herself as a Litvin, which encompasses both Belarusian and Polish elements. Litva is the modern Russian and Belarusian-language word for Lithuania. However, it also refers to many of the (now Belarusian) territories once belonging to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later the Lithuanian/ Belarusian parts of the Rzeczpospolita. Thus, the "Litvin" designation is sometimes used by Belarusians who want to stress the Belarusian nature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Old Belarusian was used as a lingua franca of the administration (Bekus 2013). Likewise, the history and Belarusian quiddity of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is an important aspect of oppositional nation building in modern Belarus, an essential part of the unofficial national narrative for many Belarusians (Bekus 2008, 2010). Thus, as one respondent stated: "Litva should be the real name for Belarus, the name 'Belarus'… is a symbol of russification." Thus, she identified both as a Litvinka (as a Belarusian), and a Pole, because of her roots. However, these two categories were not in conflict due to the historical connections between Poland and "Litva". In her own words: "there has always been a connection between Poland and Belarus. Litva was an important part of Poland. We share a common history." This interviewee somewhat resented having to choose between the two (as the Belarusian census had made her do), but she nevertheless claimed to feel Polish because of her roots and the hardships her ancestors had experienced during communist-era repressions. Moreover, she felt that the modern Belarusian state, given its negligence of Belarusian history and its geopolitical proximity to Russia, did not represent the historical Belarusian polity. This respondent went on to claim that: "I feel much more at home in Poland than in Belarus, I have an easier time relating to people."

The second interviewee did not explicitly refer to the notion of "Litva," but rather the Rczeczpospolita. According to her, although Poland is the modern scion of the Rczeczpospolita, historically the polity included many nations. Thus, for her it was possible to be simultaneously Polish and Belarusian. She reported that having to sign a document declaring herself to be part of the Polish had given her pause, as she felt more Belarusian and did not have many authentic connections with Polish culture. However, she justified this to herself by evoking the bi-national history of the Rzeczpospolita, which would allow her to simultaneously claim a Belarusian and Polish identity.

These two responses are interesting for several reasons. First, they are both in line with Pilsudski's original conception of Polish nationalism: that the new Polish nation should accommodate multiple ethnic and religious iterations. Fascinatingly, both respondents formulated an opinion on Polish nationhood without explicitly referring to Pilsudski. In the first case, the respondent reached her conclusion based on her own reading of history and her relationship to historical memory. In the second case, the respondent used history as a justification for an action she felt slightly uncomfortable with. Either way, it is interesting that a conception of Polish nationalism as old (and perhaps politically moot) as Pilsudski's should still resonate with descendants of the multi-ethnic Polish citizens his philosophy intended to address. This shows that the *Pole's Card*, despite its narrowly ethnic conception, can nevertheless be adapted to suit the personal/national narratives of individuals with a broader idea of what it means to be Polish. Both of these respondents had been living in Poland for around half a decade.

III. "*I am of mixed origin, and my ancestors are of mixed origin. Poland was once more diverse*"

Five interviewees highlighted the diversity of their own roots. This set also overlapped to some degree with other groupings, especially numbers V and VI. They had had no problems identifying themselves as Polish for the sake of receiving a *Pole's Card*. As one 25-year old female respondent, who worked in a call centre in Krakow, stated: "I have Polish roots so technically it's true. But I also have Tatar, Jewish, and Lithuanian roots as well. So I wouldn't have a problem officially declaring myself as a Lithuanian either." She brought up the highly ethnically mixed history of the region stating that: "my great-grandmother spoke Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian, and one of my great-grandfathers spoke Yiddish. Back then everyone just lived together, it wasn't so important. For me I think it's not so important either. I don't think it matters that much." Thus, she claimed that she didn't feel like she was being disingenuous in calling herself Polish on paper, but she was nevertheless hesitant to describe herself as Polish in a non-official environment.

Another respondent to highlight the mixed nature of his ancestry came from a small "historically-Polish" village near the town of Astraviec in Hrodna Region. According to him, many older people in his native village spoke Polish, although this was "slowly going away.". Nevertheless, he highlighted that that: "what people spoke here wasn't really Polish, definitely not like literary Polish spoken in Poland now. It's kind of a mixture between Polish and Belarusian. Now, in Belarus we have a language called '*transyanka'*, which is a mixture between Belarusian and Russian. Well, what people here speak is sort of a *transyanka* between Polish and Belarusian. It really isn't either. There were a lot of mixings and I think Belarusian is more just a dialect of Polish." He stated that modern Belarusian was not a real language- it is an artificial mixture between Polish and Russian which did not resemble the "true" Belarusian spoken both in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or in some Belarusian villages. Thus, he also claimed that what belonging to the Polish nation meant to him was broader than belonging to today's Polish nation state. This respondent had worked in Poland for some time, but had returned to Belarus for family reasons.

For another respondent, "blood" was the most important factor in determining Polishness. As she said: "We didn't really speak Polish at home or know much about Polish culture, but I definitely have Polish blood, among other roots. So of course I can say that I'm a Pole. Based on mentality I guess I'm more Belarusian." Several other interviewees brought up the multi-lingual and ethnically mixed nature of their ancestors but did not know enough about their family history, or did not assign this fact enough importance, to go into much detail. Most other respondents in this category resided and worked in Poland and claimed to have emigrated in search of better living conditions and higher salaries.

The views of this set of respondents closely resembled those of the previous grouping. These people were cognisant of their multi-ethnic backgrounds and the multi-ethnic history of the area. Nevertheless, history, memory, and Polish nationhood were less important for them. People in this group usually focused on the economic opportunities available in Poland and had less to say about "national identity." Insights to be gleaned from this grouping imply that although nationality, place of residence, family history, and national memory are important for many people, they are not necessary the primary categories individuals use to organise their lives and weave a personal narrative about themselves and their past. This people of this group benefit from policies which resulted from nationalising rhetoric, but are themselves less concerned with the values of national-conservative politicians. Humans of the 21st century, after all, are a mobile bunch, and more and more people are willing to uproot in search of better opportunities.

Thus, they are able to take up national categories proposed by states when it is in their interests, without paying over much attention to the spirit of the law. This is perhaps the case for many migrants the world over, for whom the words of a “pledge of allegiance” upon taking up a new citizenship do not necessarily become essential parts of that person’s self-identification.

IV. *“The Pole’s Card made me aware of my own Polishness”*

Two respondents claimed that the process of applying for a *Pole’s Card* had caused them to think about their Polish roots and re-evaluate how they felt about their own feelings of national belonging.

As one respondent, a businesswoman living in Minsk, responded: “I applied for a *Pole’s Card* for completely practical reasons…the company I worked for kept messing up my visa applications so I decided to get a *Card* because it made travelling to Europe easier.” However, after receiving a *Card,* she began travelling extensively throughout Poland and came to love its culture and history. She admitted that she had few connections with Polish culture in childhood: “All my ancestors are Poles from Western Belarus, but really they are more ‘Soviet people,’ unfortunately they didn’t really care about their national identity.” She claimed that she had never given much thought to her *natsional’nost’* (ethnicity)*,* but now she is truly proud to call herself Polish. She claimed that she had many plans to visit Poland and see every castle in the country. She lamented the fact that “Belarus doesn’t have any historical heritage” or landmarks, complaining that the National Library in Minsk “doesn’t count” (The National Library is an ungainly and artistically controversial building built in the 21st century in the outskirts of Minsk; it is often derided as an eyesore).

Moreover, she claimed that her character was far more Polish, and a lot of things began to make sense about her own personality once she started travelling around Poland. “My mentality is much closer to Polish people, I’m more careful with money, more pragmatic – Belarusians all live in debt. You can see how many nice cars there are in Minsk. Do you think people can afford them? I’m also more severe like Polish people…. If you go to Poland you can see that it’s just two completely different worlds…people respect their country and history there” She also added that she was annoyed by Belarusian Poles who did not think about their roots. Nevertheless, she had chosen to remain in Belarus, as she had a relatively good job there and she wasn't sure she could be successful in Poland as she doesn't really speak Polish (although "I understand everything").

Similarly, a second respondent, a PhD candidate in Warsaw, claimed that she had not really thought about her "roots" too much until receiving a *Card.* She had chosen to apply for one because she had studied Polish ("I liked languages,") thought Polish culture was interesting, and wanted to live in the European Union. Moreover, "there were good opportunities to study there."

However, she claimed that when she moved to Poland, a lot about her personality began to make more sense, much as the earlier respondent claimed. She claimed to have a "dual identity, and there are two parts to my mentality, a Belarusian and a Polish one…. Belarusians are very reserved and shy, while Poles are more outgoing and assertive about their identity." Likewise, she claimed that there is more gender equity in relationships in Poland: "it's more possible in Poland to be a woman and have a good career, to not just be a 'man's helper." Now, the respondent claims that she places a great deal of importance on roots, national identity, and history. She brought up that Poles guard their traditions and are proud of their history, which is not the case in Belarus. What's more, this respondent stated that she had converted from Orthodox Christianity to Catholicism; she thus connected her faith with Poland and her sense of national groupness.

This smaller group of respondents bring attention to two insights. First, it is noteworthy both individuals complained about the lack of "respect for history" in Belarus. Both lauded Poland's respect for its history and traditions, lamenting the fact that Belarusian nation-building hinged so heavily on WWII history and its partnership with Russia. Thus, it seems that Belarus's lack of overt nationalising rhetoric, or the absence of ethnocultural content in the official discourse, as well as its lack of statehood or sovereignty for much of its history, contributed to individuals seeking to connect their sense of national self-understanding to a neighbouring country to which they a had genetic connection. In this way, the *Pole's Card* can be seen as a form of soft power for the Polish state, as it is essentially earning "converts" and increasing its popularity in a strategically important region. This group of individuals shows that to a small extent, a state's power to offer up national categories can affect individuals' sense of social location. Discovering roots in a different country can thus have profound effects on how individuals see themselves, their personality, and their values, almost like converting to a religion. This insight serves as an interesting counterpoint to Brubaker's observation that nationalising states tend to sharpen boundaries between nationalising states and national minorities. Here, it seems that even a perceived dearth of nationalising discourse can lead individuals seek their fortunes elsewhere and realign themselves with their ostensible "kin-state". Nevertheless, there are two sides to this coin: the first respondent in this grouping, although she coveted Poland's respect for its culture, admitted that her parents were "Soviet creatures," thus showing the power of the process of Soviet cultural homogeneity to "de-nationalise" minorities.

V. *"I have always admired Poland and liked Polish culture and history"*

Five respondents claimed that although they didn't really feel "Polish", they had great affection for Polish culture, history, traditions, music, food, etc… Most of these respondents brought up the fact that unlike Belarus, Poland guards its heritage and is proud of its history. They said it was a pity that most Belarusians didn't value their history or culture. Several blamed this on the "tolerant" nature of the Belarusian national character. As one respondent stated, "Belarusians just get used to and adjust to everything. We are very tolerant. Poles fight for what they believe in and are patriotic." Which aspects of Polish culture were particularly appealing to this group of respondents varied widely. One respondent talked at length about the superiority of Polish food, and how his grandparents had been talented cooks who prepared traditional Polish dishes. Another respondent, a music producer and metal musician in Minsk, said that he had a great love for the Polish metal scene. He said his metal music draws a lot from traditional pagan culture and patriotism, and that the Polish metal scene was the best in Eastern Europe. He had even brought this up at the interview with the consul when he was asked about Polish music. Although he did not plan to move to Poland because he had found a good job in Minsk, he was nevertheless very proud of his Polish roots. Likewise, he claimed that he viewed Polish as his native (*rodnoi*) language, although he spoke it poorly, because of his love for Polish culture. However, it is worth noting that the Russian word *rodnoi* can mean both "native," as in "native language/ *rodnoi jazyk*" and "dear to my heart." Thus, the meaning of "*rodnoi"* is ambiguous.

Likewise, a different respondent claimed to "really like Poland" and Polish culture, but didn't want to claim to be Polish. For her, it was enough that she express admiration for her Western neighbour without paying too much attention to issues of groupness. In her own words: “I wouldn’t really say I’m Polish, but I think it’s a really beautiful language. Krakow is one of my favourite cities, and I have a lot of Polish friends. So I’m really proud that I have Polish roots.” Most respondents in this group were hesitant to identify themselves as Polish, but nevertheless felt proud to have some Polish heritage and liked aspects of Polish culture. This grouping, like the previous, proves that the *Pole’s Card* provides the Polish state with a certain degree of soft power in Belarus. It also illustrates how, as in group III, national identities are not always the most salient forms of social location. Both this group and the previous display similarities to what Herbert Gans described as “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979). Gans used this term to describe the way in which Americans appropriated the symbols or traditions of their old-world ancestors, such as with Irish-Americans and St. Patrick’s Day. Heritage is important to people, but only to a limited extent.

VI. *“I like Poland fine, but this is just a formality, why not”*

By far the most common reaction to my question about what Polish nationhood meant to my respondents was that “it’s just a formality.” Ten people gave some version of this response. Most respondents in this group had very similar motivations and stories. They were also perhaps more reticent about their motivations than other groups with stronger opinions about the *Card*. They had applied for a *Pole’s Card* because there were more “opportunities in Poland,” either for work or education. Likewise, several respondents who had chosen to remain in Belarus stated that for them it was an “insurance policy,” in case they ever felt like leaving, or wanted to give their children more opportunities. They did not feel Polish in any way. As one respondent said: “yes, I have some Polish roots, but it would be a lie to say I’m Polish. I’m Belarusian. I signed the document because I wanted to move here, it would be pretentious to say otherwise.” Most respondents expressed this sentiment in one way or another. Most people in this group had not given too much thought to family history or ethnic identity. For them, signing a paper declaring ethnic identity was simply a “means to an end.” They did not feel particularly strongly about Poland, although many were soon set to become Polish citizens and liked Poland. As one respondent said, a programmer living in Wroclaw, “I’m not really Polish, but I think my children will be, and I don’t have a problem with that, we have Polish roots after all.”

Several mentioned that they would like to try living in other countries as well. As one girl said: “Poland is ok, but I’d really like to move to Austria or the Czech Republic. Maybe Spain. I feel like a citizen of the world, I want to live in as many countries as possible.” As another respondent said: “for Belarusians Schengen visas are very expensive, and it’s hard to make enough money to travel a lot in Europe. But now I can go wherever I want to. I don’t feel so strongly attached to Poland or Polish culture, who knows, maybe I will move somewhere else, but I’m very glad about the opportunities to travel.” As another respondent from Minsk and living in Warsaw said: “I really love Poland. I like my job and I have many Polish friends. I like Polish culture, I think there are a few similarities with Belarusian culture. But still… I was pretty cynical when I said I was Polish. I’m Belarusian and I speak Russian. I think the way I was raised, culturally I’m much closer to Russia, although I don’t like Putin. Belarusians say they’re more European than Russians but I think this is stupid. When you come here to [Poland] it’s obvious that the mentality is completely different [than in Belarus].”

Another man, who had chosen to remain in Belarus for family reasons, said: “I don’t feel Polish at all. I had one Polish grandmother but she spoke *trasyanka.* However, I think countries in the EU take better care of their citizens. I think Belarus should move closer to the EU instead of Russia. Here the government doesn’t care about the people. I have a good job here though, and my wife [who also has a *Card*] wants to stay, but I think I owe it to my children… there is better education in Poland. More chances to make a good life. I don’t really care that I signed a paper saying I’m Polish. People are just looking for a better life. I’m not a nationalist.”

The fact that this grouping was the most prevalent indicates several things. First, it shows that despite the historically and theoretically interesting nature of the law on the *Pole’s Card*, most people using it are garden-variety Belarusian immigrants. Secondly, despite my suggestion that a lack of nationalising discourse might in some cases leave potential national minorities unsatisfied, it is more likely that the unique “un-national” situation in Belarus has led to many people feeling indifferent towards their own nationhood. Likewise, it is interesting that one respondent claimed he was not a “nationalist” (I do not use this word in my interviews as it has a very offensive connotation in Russian), when I asked him about his feelings of belonging to the Polish nation. This suggests that for some in Belarus, any overt display of national pride or patriotism can be taken as "nationalism," which is perhaps a result of official Belarusian discourse, which avoids the topic of national identity. For many in this category, economic opportunities far outweighed the importance of belonging to a nation-state, thus providing evidence for Brubaker's previously mentioned claim that when a nation state embarks on a nation (re)building process and takes a more nationalising stance, group boundaries between the state's titular majority and a national minority are sharpened. It should follow that the opposite is also true. To validate this claim, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study among *Pole's Card* holders from Ukraine, where nationalising rhetoric is far more prevalent. In Belarus, however, it seems that people are willing to take on the passport-nationality of a different country for primarily practical reasons, and the Polish state's rhetoric regarding moral compensation and welcoming back long-lost kin is less relevant.

The size of this group also proves that the perception mentioned in my introduction, that the *Pole's Card* is for people who want to move West and don't care about "being Polish", proved to some extent to be true. Thus, my hypothesis that attitudes towards Polish nationhood would probably be varied and not monolithically "practical," proved to be true to a much smaller extent than expected.

VII. *"I think I can 'become' Polish, like the American system"*

One respondent, a programmer in Gdansk, brought up the fact that one can "become Polish." In his own words: "I like the American take on citizenship. I think that if you migrate somewhere, it's your duty to adapt… I didn't feel Polish in Belarus, but now I feel a bit more Polish because I have lived here several years and I speak the language well. I've gotten used to the culture. For me, Belarus is still important, I still feel Belarusian culturally and have ties to it… but now I'm Polish too. I think I can be a Polish-Belarusian." He stated that he was not treated like a stranger, that people treated him like "one of their own."

This was perhaps among the most pragmatic responses, a maybe the most realistic assessment of how many migrants adapt to new countries in the end. For this respondent, acquiring a *Pole's Card* was little different than gaining permanent residence in Poland through a different channel. This view also highlights that regardless of the ethnic/civic dichotomy in citizenship discourse, individuals will nevertheless mix the two conceptions in their own way, making sense of an ethnic or civic sense of nationhood as long as they are permitted by states to do so and regardless of certain political parties' official positions.

VIII. *"Obviously, I'm not Polish. I signed what I needed to emigrate."*

Three respondents more assertively rejected the idea of being Polish, displaying distaste for the concept of the nation. As one woman, an art student in Warsaw stated: "of course I'm not Polish. It's obvious that no one [who has a *Card*] is. I did what I had to for my education. This is one of the best [university] programmes [in my field] in Europe. Anyone who claims they're Polish because they have a *Pole's Card* is stupid. I don't like nationalism at all. Why should it matter if I'm Belarusian or Polish or what? For me this is not important at all."

As another respondent, an interpreter living in Warsaw, claimed: "Objectively, I'm just Belarusian. Even my ancestors, who were supposedly Polish, were really of Jewish and Belarusian origin. But I grew up in a Belarusian context. I'm not Polish and I don't like the idea of nationalism at all. I think for people of our generation this is becoming less and less important. Thinking about what nation you are is just a way for governments to divide people…. I came here because I didn't like the political situation in Belarus, there is no hope for change there. In Poland, things are getting worse too, but it's still better than there…. I didn't like signing the declaration [of Polish nationhood] … because I think the whole idea is stupid. I just did it to leave Belarus. Who knows, maybe I'll move somewhere else." For this respondent, the human rights and standard of living guaranteed by the European Union were far more important than moving to Poland. She brought up several times that the *Pole's Card* initiative was from PiS, a party she felt was pushing Poland in a non-European direction.

A third respondent, who had not yet moved to Poland but was planning to very soon, was also very dismissive of the idea of being Polish: "I really hate borders and countries. For me it should not be important at all where you're from…it's not important to me at all, I don't discriminate at all." However, this respondent had received a *Pole's Card* this year and aimed to become a Polish citizen as soon as possible. For him, it was more important that becoming a Polish citizen meant that he would be an EU citizen and he could then move to another country. This respondent was gay, and this was a major motivation for leaving Belarus: "Belarusians are really homophobic… there is no hope to lead a normal life there, everyone is in the closet…I have always wanted to leave, I never felt comfortable in Belarus." Although he acknowledged that Poland also was also a relatively conservative country when it comes to LGBT rights, he maintained that the situation was not comparable to Belarus or Russia. Moreover, he said that he planned to move somewhere other than Poland once he became a Polish citizen, and was thus learning German.

This grouping represents the opposite end of the spectrum from the first, comprising the ardent Polish patriot. In the end, this last group highlights the fact that despite statistics claiming that such and such a number of ethnic Poles reside in Belarus, or so many Poles have returned to Poland from Belarus, the truth is more complex. For many, nationhood and belonging are deeply personal parts of self-identification, for others, they are biographical details which can be overcome. The presence in this study of individuals who reject all forms of national identifications is evidence of how easy it is to exaggerate the sharpness of national and ethnic boundaries.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to ascertain views on Polish nationhood among Belarusian recipients of the *Pole's Card,* a document affirming the carrier's belonging to the Polish nation and subsequently granting them rights similar to those of Polish citizens. In doing so, it explored the gap between the discourse of the "external homeland" (here the Polish state) and a "national minority," here ostensible Belarusian Poles, as characterised by Brubaker's triadic relationship. The Polish state, and specifically the PiS Party, the author of the law on the *Pole's Card*, exhibited an essentialist, primordialist, and static understanding of Polish nationhood. They sought to define the Polish nation by tracing its borders and deciding who is in and who is out. As a party in power (currently and at the time), they had the political authority to codify this understanding into law. This strategy is a textbook example of Suvarierol's conception of *nation freezing*, in which political actors attempt to freeze the definition of the nation for domestic political reasons, is in line with a general Europe-wide trend in "new nationalism." As a national conservative party, PiS's development of the *Pole's Card* and Lech Kaczynski's commentary on it are in line with its strategy to frame the Polish nation as "besieged" and "incomplete," presumably in order to mobilise voters. This appeal to the deficiency of the state of the nation has propelled them to power and allowed them to act as "categorisers and identifiers," determining who can and cannot access "Polish nationhood." Hence, compatriots in Belarus and Ukraine are in, refugees are out. According to my data, only one respondent (in Group I) shared this view of Polish nationhood, although several respondents maintained that they valued their Polish heritage and several had apparently "converted" to Polishness. Thus, my first hypothesis, that feelings of national belonging to Poland among *Pole's Card* holders would be much less prevalent than PiS would like to believe, proved to be correct. It is clear that the Polish state is exaggerating the realness of the Polish diaspora in Belarus.

In contrast, how *Pole's Card* holders perceived the Polish nation was more diverse. Most respondents felt ambivalently towards their own Polishness; although many respected Polish culture, they nevertheless reported that they had applied for a *Pole's Card* for the opportunities for work, education, and travel that it granted; most did not feel that they really belonged to the Polish nation, although by Polish law, they now are. These respondents largely did not have qualms about signing the declaration on Polish nationhood, pointing to the diversity of their roots or the formerly multicultural nature of Western Belarus. Thus, the most common attitude towards belonging to the Polish nation could be summarised as simply "why not?" Given the multinational nature of the *Kresy*, the Soviet Union's policy towards *natsional'nost'*/ ethnicity, and independent Belarus's highly particular relationship to nationhood, this is unsurprising. Moreover, it exhibits continuity between the fluidity of the concept of the nation in inter-war Eastern Poland and modern day Belarus. Because of the size of the "net" cast by the *Pole's Card* and the history of the region, I found little evidence of feelings of "bounded groupness," making it difficult to detect the presence of a "Belarusian-Polish" community in Belarus, although this phenomenon may exist in small Polish-speaking Belarusian border towns. For a minority of respondents, Polish nationhood was an important aspect of self-understanding. These respondents highlighted the importance of roots, family, and history in explaining their own position in the world, who they are. They felt that being Polish, or at least part Polish, was an important part of their personal narratives, explaining their personalities or values. Nevertheless, these respondents rarely felt Polish to the exclusion of feeling Belarusian. Meanwhile, a smaller minority of respondents were dismissive of the idea of the nation altogether, claiming it was completely irrelevant to how they understand themselves. Defining themselves as Polish on an official document was a means to an end: “Polish” was nothing more than an empty signifier, meaningful to bureaucrats but not to them. Still others believed that although they had never been Polish before, they could become Polish by residing in Poland for a significant length of time. Thereby, my second hypothesis, that feelings of Polishness among *Card* holders would be more complex than many in Belarus assume, also proved correct to some degree, although it must be said that for most people, better opportunities were the underlying pull factor.

Using empirical studies and seeking to understand individuals’ experience can help shed light on theoretical dichotomies. This thesis highlights the discrepancy between the meaning and expediency of nationhood for the Polish state and “external compatriots,” a diaspora largely constructed discursively by the Polish state. In extending Polish nationhood beyond the boundaries of modern Poland and to descendants of ostensible Poles, the Polish state has offered a category which acts as a vessel: it is a category with many practical benefits, and many people use it to improve their lives and seek opportunities. Nevertheless, the “content” of this vessel, self-understanding *vis-à-vis* nationhood, can mean all sorts of things depending on the individual. For some, belonging to the Polish nation, family history, Belarusian connections to the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, etc., is personally important. For others, “Polish nationhood” is relatively meaningless. The *Pole’s Card* has allowed individuals to participate *as citizens* of the Polish nation, and hence (once they gain citizenship) of the European Union. Individuals were willing to take up the civic rights of a country regardless of the wide range of “national identities” such individuals represented.

These insights cast doubt upon the practical usefulness of many theoretical understandings of nationhood. First, the theoretical definitions of the nation outlined early in the thesis seem inapplicable to this case study, even though Central and Eastern Europe is often taken to be the most fertile ground for nationalist movements. According to Gellner or Smith’s definitions, *Pole’s Card* owners and Poles in Poland simply are not members of one nation. What’s more, the Polish state is most likely aware of this fact, making the whole business a bit of a publicly popular illusion. The only definition capacious enough to accommodate these two groups of people is Benedict Anderson’s formulation of the “imagined community.” This, however, raises the question: “imagined by whom and as what.” What the Polish nation means is clearly imagined differently by a range of actors and individuals. Importantly, whether the *Pole’s Card* is really attracting

Polish nationals is largely unimportant: whether *Pole's Card* holders are theoretically Polish nationals is irrelevant because according to the Polish state, they are; they are treated as such in almost every arena in which the state impinges upon personal life.

It is tempting to conclude that *Pole's Card* holders are members of the Polish nation according to a more "civic" conception of nationhood, as opposed to an ethnic one. While the Polish state (or more precisely PiS legislation) brought the law on the *Pole's Card* into force as an explicitly ethnic project, it has civic implications for *Pole's Card* owners. However, if this is the case, what civic values is this nationhood based around? Knowledge of Polish history trivia, some recipes, and Christmas traditions? This thesis is proof of the fact that such dichotomies are practically inadequate. Moreover, *Pole's Card* holders understand their belonging to the Polish nation in a range of ways which fall along the ethnic-civic spectrum. For some, roots and traditions are paramount to self-understanding and national belonging. This desire for continuity with ancestry is perhaps exacerbated by the "ethnic deficiency" of Belarusian nationalism, which downplays pre-Soviet history, the Belarusian language, and national identity in favour of a national narrative built entirely on socialist legacies and the roles of Belarusian partisans in WWII fighting fascists. For others, this ethnic content is wholly unimportant: either people can become Polish by residing in Poland long enough, or national belonging boils down exclusively to the civic rights of access to a job market, education, and the European Union.

My findings also highlight the contingent nature of the individual's sense of self *vis-à-vis* the nation and the state's power to categorise and define the nation, according to two of Brubaker's re-workings of the term "identity." Although a Belarusian with Polish roots may use their ancestry as an important component to understanding their place in the world, it is the state which has the power to transform these self-understandings into concrete civic rights as quasi-citizens of Poland. What's more, this power to define may change individuals' self-understanding of national identity. This is the case for those individuals who became interested in their Polish roots and Polish culture after they received a *Pole's Card*. On the other hand, this thesis also shows that the state's powers as a categoriser of nationals is limited: in a democracy, the state is not monolithic and various political actors may choose to define the Polish nation in different ways, leading to a highly contested and ambiguous definition of the Polish nation which individuals can take-on wholly or partially in a process of *bricolage*. Individual's use of nationhood as a strategy of personal self-understanding is visible even among politicians. After all, the state is composed of individuals who perceive the nation in a certain way: as an elected official, Lech Kaczynski ostensibly spoke for the nation when he extended Polish nationhood to descendants of Polish citizens, but he incorporated his own family history of being uprooted by the war to justify his policy. He was elected by a majority of the Polish people, but cannot represent individual attitudes. Instead, he aligns himself with a group of like-minded people and uses his own experience to inform his view on Polish nationhood and hence, government policy.

The diversity of opinions I obtained is what has made this research interesting. I presuppose that that the ambivalence experienced by most respondents towards the category of "Polish nation" is explainable by a combination of the advantages conferred by the *Pole's Card*, the fact that the Polish state cast "too wide a net", and the particularly multi-national character of the *Kresy.* However, the Belarusian state's anti-ethnonational discourse is an equally important factor. Thus, it would be interesting to extend this study to Ukrainian recipients of the *Pole's Card*. Unlike Belarus, Ukraine can unambiguously by characterised as a nationalising state, and definitions of the Ukrainian nation are being negotiated hotly both in the public sphere and the battle field. Therefore, it would be fruitful to see whether national categories are perceived as having sharper dividing lines among Ukrainian *Pole's Card* holders, or whether it is Belarus's modern quiddity which makes responses so ambiguous.

Today, the landscape of European nationalism contains many actors, in government and the public sphere, who seek to redefine the "nation" and determine who has rights to membership. When such agents gain political power, they can make decisions which determine the course of people's lives. Many such categorising agents, as states, choose to force people into a nation, define it for them, and fit them into boundaries. However, individuals to continue negotiate the meaning of nationhood for themselves independently. The nation as a personally significant group is important for some, and less important for others. As people in Europe become more mobile, more likely to live within a state whose nation they do not share (Bauman 2004, Parekh 2006). Thus, the concept of nationhood itself is losing salience. Despite a resurgence of “new-nationalism,” the role of nationhood in individuals’ lives is morphing from a crucial means of navigating the world, with a nationless man being an aberration, to a facet of a personal narrative. Gradually, as this thesis demonstrates, the state’s status as a representative of a nation is being divorced from the civic rights it confers. People move where they can forge the best lives for themselves: the repercussions this has for a national self-understanding is increasingly relegated to the personal sphere.

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