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Shared Language, Different Faiths, Hybrid Identity. The Polish Tatar Community in Interwar Poland*

Wspólny język, różne wyznania, hybrydowa tożsamość. Społeczność polskich Tatarów w międzywojennej Polsce

Abstract: The Polish Tatar community, with its unique century-long tradition of intercommunal interaction with the Polish Catholic majority, presents a fascinating case study. Linguistically assimilated to Polish, the local Tatars, predominantly Sunni Muslims, were well-integrated (mainly into the Polish army) during the interwar period. In the 1920s, several hundred North Caucasian, Kazan, Crimean Tatar and Azeri political emigrants, backed by the Polish government for their anti-Soviet activity, brought a New dynamic to Poland's Islamic discourses. These emigrants, advocating for closer Polish relations with the Muslim world, diversified the discourses on confessional solidarity. This study delves into the two journals published in interwar Poland by Polish Muslims: *Rocznik Tatarski* [Tatar Annual], issued by Polish Tatar lawyer Leon Kryczyński (1887–1939), and *Przegląd Islamski* [Islamic Review], published by the North Caucasian emigrant, Vassan Girei Dzhabagiev (1882–1961).

In a testament to their resilience, the leading intellectuals of the Polish Tatar community advanced the community's interests and stressed the narrative of continuous loyalty vis-a-vis Polish authorities during the partitions of Poland and after the restoration of Poland's independence in 1918. While Warsaw boosted Polish nationalism and attempted to forge ideas of Polishness and Polish citizenship, the Polish Muslim and Tatar community's indifference towards creating political autonomy or advancing a separatist agenda reflected the *Realpolitik*-influenced approach of the community's leadership. The linguistic assimilation of Polish Tatars to the Polish language and the understanding of the importance of this issue among the community leaders are additional important explanations for Tatars' indifference with regard to creating their own nation-state.

Abstrakt: Polska społeczność tatarska, ze swoją wyjątkową stuletnią tradycją współżycia z polską katolicką większością, stanowi fascynujące studium przypadku. Językowo zasymilowani z językiem polskim, miejscowi Tatarzy, w większości sunniccy muzułmanie, w okresie międzywojennym byli dobrze zintegrowani ze społeczeństwem polskim (głównie z polską armią). W latach dwudziestych XX wieku kilkuset północnokaukaskich, kazańskich, krymskich i azerskich emigrantów politycznych, wspieranych przez polski

* I would very much like to thank my colleagues Liliya Berezhnaya, Catherine Helen Gibson, and Irina Paert for interesting and important comments on my article.

rząd za ich antysowiecką działalność, wniosło nową dynamikę do polskich dyskursów islamskich. Emigranci ci, opowiadając się za bliższymi relacjami Polski ze światem muzułmańskim, zdywersyfikowali dyskurs na temat solidarności wyznaniowej. Niniejsze studium poświęcone jest dwóm czasopismom publikowanym w międzywojennej Polsce przez polskich muzułmanów: „Rocznikowi Tatarskiemu", wydawanemu przez polskiego prawnika tatarskiego pochodzenia Leona Kryczyńskiego (1887–1939), oraz „Przeglądowi Islamskiemu", wydawanego przez północnokaukaskiego emigranta Wassana Gireja Dżabagiewa (1882–1961).

Wiodący intelektualiści polskiej społeczności tatarskiej promowali interesy tatarskiej społeczności i podkreślali stałą lojalność swoich ziomków wobec władz polskich podczas rozbiorów Polski i po odzyskaniu niepodległości w 1918 r. Podczas gdy Warszawa wzmacniała polski nacjonalizm i próbowała kształtować idee polskości i polskiego obywatelstwa, obojętność polskiej społeczności muzułmańskiej i tatarskiej wobec tworzenia autonomii politycznej lub promowania programu separatystycznego odzwierciedlała podejście kierownictwa społeczności inspirowane *Realpolitik*. Asymilacja językowa polskich Tatarów i zrozumienie znaczenia tej kwestii wśród przywódców społeczności są kolejnymi ważnymi czynnikami wyjaśniającymi brak aspiracji Tatarów do tworzenia własnego państwa narodowego.

Keywords: Polish Tatars, Lithuanian Tatars, Vilnius, Islam, identity, interwar period

Słowa kluczowe: Tatarzy polscy, Tatarzy litewscy, Wilno, islam, tożsamość, dwudziestolecie międzywojenne

The Polish Tatar community has a century-long tradition of inter-communal interaction with the Polish Catholic majority, as well as with other ethnic and confessional groups on Polish territory. Local Tatars, predominantly Sunni Muslims, had been linguistically assimilated as Polish speakers and were well integrated into Polish society – especially the Polish army – during the interwar period. During the 1920s, several hundred North Caucasian, Kazan, Crimean Tatar, and Azeri political emigrants moved to Poland, where the government backed their anti-Soviet activity within the framework of the Warsaw-designed "Promethean" programme. These emigrants diversified Poland's Islamic discourses on confessional solidarity and Poland's relations with the Muslim world, becoming strong advocates for better relations. Polish Tatars cooperated with these emigrants and the Polish authorities, attempting to forge strong ties between Poland and the Muslim world. This article focuses on the issue of political and national indifference through an analysis of two journals published in interwar Poland by the Polish Muslim community: the interwar journal *Rocznik Tatarski* [Tatar Annual] issued by Polish Tatar lawyer Leon Kryczyński and the journal *Przegląd Islamski* [Islamic Review] published by North Caucasian emigrant Vassan Girei Dzhabagiev (Wassan Girej Dżabagi).

The first part of the article presents a theoretical reflection on national indifference as an approach and its application to the imperial and post-imperial context of Eastern Europe. I will then sketch the development of the Polish Tatar community and its institutional infrastructure in interwar Poland. In the third part, I analyse the discourses in the aforementioned journals through the lens of national indifference. I argue that the response of national indifference was generated by specific historical reasons and was shaped by political realism, current circumstances, and the multilayered identity of the community's members. Additionally, indifference towards the political aspirations of the community was used as an as

Theoretical Reflections on Indifference as a Historical Approach

In 2010, Tara Zahra published a pathbreaking article on national non-communities and proposed an analytical category of national indifference.[1] The many case studies in her article and the resulting monograph touched upon both the history of the Habsburg Monarchy and France in the 19th century, Czech nationalism, and German nationalist mobilisation.[2] Zahra's critique of dominant historiographical trends that search for evidence of nationalist mobilisation in the past urges us to rethink social processes not only in Central and Eastern Europe but also across Eurasia and the Middle East in the 20th century. The national indifference approach invites us not only to listen to 'unheard' voices but also to rethink firm classifications, seemingly 'exact' definitions, and popular generalisations of intellectual discourses and trends attributed to entire populations living in a particular area. Doing so requires critical reading of the sources and rethinking the categories inside our historian's toolkit to understand the motivations of actors and their *Sprechakte* in the past. For example, during the last Soviet census at the height of perestroika in 1989, most ethnic Kazakhs declared Kazakh their first language. However, half of them were much more fluent in Russian than in their supposed mother tongue of Kazakh.[3] Even if the percentage was

[1] T. Zahra, *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*, „Slavic Review", 2010, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 93–119, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0037677900016715 (accessed: 5 May 2024).

[2] T. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900–1948*, Ithaca 2008.

[3] W. Fierman, *Language and Identity in Kazakhstan: Formulations in Policy Documents 1987–1997*, „Communist and Post-Communist Studies", 1998, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 171–186,

close to correct, we could consider the naming of one or another language as someone's mother tongue as an emotional bond which does not always correspond with actual language competence. Additionally, the census took place three years after the infamous "Alma-Ata events" of 1986, when Kazakh students overtly opposed the appointment of the ethnic Russian politician Kolbin at the post of the First Secretary of the local Communist Party.[4] It is quite possible that the participants' behaviour, particularly of ethnic Kazakhs, was influenced by these dynamics.

Rethinking ethnic and linguistic affiliations in the late Soviet period, the concept of the "mother tongue" as the language an individual supposedly knows best should be seen as much more blurred. Derived initially from West Europe, mainly from French and German contexts and experiences, the notions of the state language (*Staatssprache*) and official language (*langue officielle*) were topics of intensive reflection during state-building processes in Eastern Europe in 1918, when the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other republics were founded on the ruins of the Habsburg, Tsarist and Ottoman Empires. Zahra pointed out that competence in several languages was quite common in the territories between Germany and Russia in the 19th century. In Western Europe and the US, where "the canonical works of nationalism theory"[5] (in Zahra's description) were written, there was a more or less unprecedented continuity and stability of state and official language regulations. Up to 1918, most pupils in Germany and France were educated in their native languages at all levels of the educational system, including higher education. In these societies, the unity of mother tongue, school instruction, and sources of information is historically rooted. The situation in Central and Eastern Europe was different; until 1918, for instance, most Poles were educated in Russian or German.

International scholarship has delivered rich accounts of ethnic diversity in Eastern Europe but often approaches language-related issues from a Western European tradition rather than adapting their approach to the East European context, which was (and is) much more fluid with regard to questions of language, language shift, and citizenship change. Despite numerous interesting and important issues addressed by Zahra's critics, notably Alexei

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https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0967067X98000051 (accessed: 5 May 2024).

[4] Ch. Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Le monde musulman soviétique d'Asie Centrale après Alma-Ata (décembre 1986)*, „Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique", 1991, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 117–121, https://www.persee.fr/doc/cmr_0008-0160_1991_num_32_1_2267 (accessed: 5 May 2024).

[5] T. Zahra, *Imagined Noncommunities…*, p. 96.

Miller,[6] national indifference should not be perceived as a (mere) metaphor, as Miller proposed, but as an analytical notion. This dimension can help diversify researchers' perspectives. To be sure, Zahra examined conditions in Bohemia and Moravia Zahra in her renowned book *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands*.[7] However, neither Austro-Hungary nor the territories that became Czechoslovakia in 1918 constituted a case study that was completely unique and incomparable with the situation in the western, southwestern, and southern provinces of the Russian Empire.

Zahra's critique of international scholars' focus on nationalist discourses, party programs, and newspaper debates can also be straightforwardly applied to numerous studies of Soviet history, particularly from the late 1980s. Studying the nationalities issue in the Soviet Union, scholars concentrated on the role of Russian as a dominant language of 'oppressors' and the cultivation of non-Russian national languages as a reaction to Russification. The categories of 'oppressive' and 'oppressed' cultures ignored or neglected numerous hybrid forms. The theory of national indifference – or, at the minimum, a broader perspective focusing on multilayered hybrid forms of identities and cultural production in the imperial, post-imperial, and semi-imperial contexts – is needed to understand the multilingual identities of Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. The dichotomy (which emerged during the Cold War) of cultural oppression versus weak or strong resistance is less helpful for understanding the phenomena of the texts 'not produced in the alleged mother tongue'. The approach of national (or any other kind) indifference is, therefore, helpful in overcoming the dichotomies assumed by historians, allowing us to understand better the complex history of Eastern Europe and other regions. It also helps us to pay attention to various kinds of indifferences, such as dispassionate attitudes towards one's alleged mother (and father) tongue and varying degrees of attachment and emotional engagement towards the religions of the societal majority, the faith of one's 'own' community, or the faiths 'inherited' from different parental sides in case of intermarriages.[8]

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[6] A. Miller, *'National Indifference' as a Political Strategy?*, „Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History", 2019, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 63–72, doi:10.1353/kri.2019.0003 (accessed: 1 Sept. 2021).

[7] T. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls…*, *passim*.

[8] For more on Polish-Tatar intermarriage, see Ł. Węda, *Małżeństwa tatarskie w parafii muzułmańskiej w Studziance w świetle zachowanych akt metrykalnych z lat 1798–1911*, „Nurt SVD", 2017, no. 2, pp. 241–256, https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/480642 (accessed: 5 May 2024).

The history of interwar Poland is an interesting example for critical study, informed by theories of national and religious indifference, of the historiography of the Polish nation-state and for the study of Polish Tatars as an intertwined ethno-confessional group. Numerous narratives on interwar Poland have focused on Piłsudski's authoritarianism, the rivalry between Piłsudski's entourage and the National Democrats around Roman Dmowski, or Warsaw's policy towards ethnic minorities, particularly Ukrainians. Primarily due to their small numbers, Polish Tatars have been excluded both from broader research projects on interwar Poland and from studies on interwar Lithuania and Belarus. The pathbreaking studies of Russian Muslims published in the last decade have touched mainly on the Tatar communities of the Volga region, Crimea, and Turkic communities of the Caucasus and Central Asia.[9] Biographical studies have been devoted mostly to activists from Russian-ruled Caucasia, such as Ahmet Ağaoğlu[10] or the Crimean Tatar reformer Ismail Gasprinski.[11] The Polish Tatar community, which was deeply entangled with those of Kazan and Crimea, as well as with the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (1918–1920) and Soviet Azerbaijan, has either been left aside or only mentioned on the margins.

Polish Tatars

The Tatar minority in Polish lands constitutes an example of centuries-long religious coexistence and intercultural interaction of a Muslim minority within a predominantly Christian society.[12] The emergence of the Tatar community

[9] V. Adam, *Rußlandmuslime in Istanbul am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges: die Berichterstattung osmanischer Periodika über Rußland und Zentralasien*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/32998; E. Kane, *Russian Hajj. Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*, Ithaca 2020.

[10] A. Holly Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey*, London 2002.

[11] E.J. Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gaspirali and Muslim Modernism in Russia, 1878–1914*, PhD dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle 1973.

[12] L. Bohdanowicz, *The Muslims in Poland. Their Origin, History, and Cultural Life*, „Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society", 1942, vol. 74, no. 3–4, pp. 163–180, doi:10.1017/S0035869X00097896 (accessed: 2 Sept. 2021); J. Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794–1944, Zbiór szkiców z aneksami źródłowymi*, Pułtusk 1998; A. Cieslik, M. Verkuyten, *National, Ethnic and Religious Identities: Hybridity and the Case of the Polish Tatars*, „National Identities", 2006, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 77–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/14608940600703650 (accessed: 5 May 2024); A.S. Nalborczyk, P. Borecki, *Relations between Islam and the state in Poland: The legal position of Polish Muslims*, „Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations", 2011, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 343–359; A.S. Nalborczyk, *Community Life: Cultural Memory and the Construction of a Contemporary Muslim Tatar identity in Poland*, in: *Contested*

dates back to the 14th–15th centuries, interwoven with the Mongol invasion into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Mainly preoccupied with trade, and later also with military service, the ancestors of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars moved to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the Crimean Khanate and established smaller settlements in Kaunas, near Minsk, Grodno, and in Vilnius. Polish Tatars remained Sunni Muslims but lost the Turkic language their ancestors spoke after arriving in Polish lands. The Muslim identity of the community's members was reflected in their name and surname conventions. Even though the community as a whole used Slavic languages, predominantly Polish, for intracommunal communication, the community tried to preserve its ethnic distinction by stressing its belonging to the Tatar minority, even after having lost linguistic competence in the Tatar language in the 16th century.[13]

After the Polish-Lithuanian state was partitioned by Prussia, Russia, and the Habsburg monarchy at the end of the 18th century, Tatar settlements were located in the Russia-controlled part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The integration into the Russian Empire had multiple effects on the Tatar community. On the one hand, along with other Polish speakers, they were challenged by Russian authorities' practices such as Russification. On the other hand, the new imperial context eased intra-imperial communication with the Russian Empire's other Muslim provinces, such as Crimea (which fell under Russian control at the same time), the Caucasus, and Central Asia.[14] St Petersburg became an important higher education centre for Polish elites throughout the 19th century. There, Polish Tatars could meet other Tatars not only from Bakhchisarai but also from Kazan and Astrakhan.[15]

In 1917–1918, when the Baltic states and Poland were proclaimed, the Polish Tatar community was challenged by these state-building processes which had emerged in the former imperial territories. Minsk became part of Soviet Belarus, Kaunas found itself under Lithuanian authority, and Vilnius was claimed by Lithuanians but occupied by the Polish Army and finally integrated

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Memories and the Demands of the Past: History Cultures in the Modern Muslim World, ed. C. Raudvere, London 2017, pp. 149–177.

[13] More on that see S. Szapszal, *O zatraceniu języka ojczystego przez Tatarów w Polsce*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 1, pp. 34–48; А.И. Дубинский, *Заметки о языке литовских татар*, „Вопросы языкознания", 1972, no. 1, pp. 82–88; Г. Мишкинене, *Очерк истории и культуры литовских татар*, „Диаспоры", 2005, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 40–61 (at p. 44).

[14] J. Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Wileńszczyznie w okresie międzywojennym. Wyznawcy islamu w otoczeniu chrześciańskim jako grupa o dwuszczeblowej świadomości narodowej*, „Rocznik Stowarzyszenia Naukowców Polaków Litwy", 2015, vol. 15, pp. 96–121.

[15] Д.М. Усманова, *Контакты волго-уральских и польско-литовских татар в первой трети XX в.: культурно-религиозные и общественно-политические связи в мусульманской умме России*, „Lietuvos istorijos studijos", 2014, vol. 11, pp. 81–98.

into the Polish state in the early 1920s. The intracommunal communication that had somehow functioned within one imperial context was interrupted and radically damaged. In 1920–1921, the war between Poland and Soviet Russia took place, and the relations between Lithuania and Poland remained strained during the entire interwar period. Local Tatar communities had to cope with different political regimes which had different policies towards ethnic and religious minorities. In Soviet Belarus, stringent atheism was praised, and Muslim clergy, like their Christian and Jewish counterparts, were persecuted.

The predominantly Catholic Republic of Poland treated its Tatar Muslim minority differently. The 8,000-strong Tatar community was privileged, and this factor likely played an important role in forging national indifference among Polish Tatars. Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewicz proposed the notion of a two-layered national identity (*dwuszczeblowa świadomość narodowa*)[16] to describe the self-image of Polish Tatars. The Lithuanian historian Ramūnas Janušauskas wrote about multiple 'identities' of Polish Tatars and argued that these identities derived from the fact that the community had been living throughout the 20th century spread out across Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus and were involved in the nation-building and state-building process in those three countries.[17] However, Tatar cultural identity, particularly in the interwar period, emerged within the (post-)imperial context and was thus much more entangled, intertwined, and multilayered. According to a census conducted in December 1919 in and around Vilnius, 49.3 per cent of Muslims identified themselves as Tatar, 38 per cent as Poles, 4.6 per cent – Belarusian, 3.9 per cent – Russian, 0.5 per cent – Lithuanian, and 0.3 per cent saw themselves as locals (Polish: *tutejsi*).[18] This kind of survey was obviously framed by the practices of 'nation-builders' who sought to study societies in the post-imperial borderlands in a particular way. It is worth mentioning that this area was brought under Polish control in the spring of 1919, literally half a year before the census was realised. Bożena Łazowska writes that the Germans who had controlled the territory during the First World War had already conducted two censuses in 1916 and 1918, and the local population was afraid that the census and its findings would result in expropriation, taxation and even political persecution.[19] Łazowska quoted the report on the census published by Eugeniusz

[16] J. Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Wileńszczyznie…*, p. 96.

[17] R. Janušauskas, *The Identities of the Polish Tatars*, „Polish Sociological Review", 1998, vol. 124, no. 4, pp. 395–409.

[18] Quoted after J. Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Wileńszczyznie…*, p. 98.

[19] B. Łazowska, *Spis ludności na ziemiach wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w 1919 r.*, „Wiadomości Statystyczne", 2019, vol. 64, no. 10, pp. 63–76 (at p. 66).

Romer in 1920, who was involved in the conduct of the census of 1919 and belonged to the milieu of Polish activists in the eastern provinces.[20] For Polish or Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, the challenge was especially strong. Historians should be much more intensively preoccupied with studying the circumstances under which these kinds of surveys were conducted.[21] The mood in a city like greater Vilnius shaped the communal concerns of Polish Tatars and, thus, their census responses. This kind of survey and census also gave expression to a multilayered or a "two-layered national identity". Was a Polish Tatar who identified himself with 'Polishness' less Polish than his neighbour who saw himself primarily as a Tatar or Belarusian?

Interwar Poland was a multiethnic state with numerous ethnic, linguistic, and confessional minorities. Polish was not the mother tongue for millions of mostly Orthodox Ukrainians and Belarusians in eastern rural areas and for the Jewish urban population across Poland. The National Democratic Party, led by the Polish politician and intellectual Roman Dmowski, was antisemitic and promoted the idea of large-scale cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities. The Peasants' Party, headed by Wincenty Witos, also propagated antisemitic views.[22] The former Socialists and Social Democrats around the Polish military chief Joseph Piłsudski promoted a more integrationist approach towards ethnic minorities within Poland and advocated the so-called 'Promethean' concept towards Poland's East European neighbour countries.[23] Piłsudski and his entourage desired a close alliance with the non-Russian nations of the former Tsarist Empire – particularly Ukrainians, Caucasians and Tatars – to take a strong stance against Soviet Russia. Piłsudski signed an agreement with Ukraine's leader, Symon Petliura, allowing the Polish Army to enter Kyiv in 1920 and maintain contacts with Crimean Tatar leader Cafer Seydahmet.[24] However, the Bolsheviks reoccupied the formerly Tsarist-ruled territories and then moved on to take independent Ukraine and the Caucasus. Petliura and Seydahmet became political emigrants. Piłsudski dominated Polish politics until his official withdrawal from Warsaw in 1923 and then again after his comeback in May 1926. Prometheanism became the unofficial strategy of Poland

[20] E. Romer, *Spis ludności na terenach administrowanych przez Zarząd Cywilny Ziem Wschodnich (grudzień 1919)*, Lwów–Warszawa 1920.

[21] See more in B. Łazowska, *Spis ludności…*, pp. 63–76.

[22] See more in P. Brykczynski, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*, Madison 2016.

[23] See more in Z. Gasimov, *Warschau gegen Moskau. Prometheistische Aktivitäten zwischen Polen, Frankreich und der Türkei 1918–1939*, Stuttgart 2022.

[24] Cafer Seydahmet Kırımer, *Moje wspomnienie z rozmowy z Marszałkiem Józefem Piłsudskim*, „Niepodległość", 1950, vol. 2, pp. 41–50.

towards the Soviet Union, and the Polish General Staff and Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to use financial and moral inducements to support political emigration from Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazan, and even Central Asia to Warsaw, Istanbul, and Paris. Poland established and financed numerous anti-Soviet journals and books published in those languages and even a Ukrainian news agency, Ofinor, which operated in Geneva and Rome. Unlike the National Democrats and Dmowski, Piłsudski and his entourage backed a new "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth": a Polish-dominated poly-ethnic, multicultural and multi-confessional empire. Polish diplomats and senior intelligence officers close to Piłsudski, dreaming of a broader anti-Moscow coalition, promoted the idea of Poland's close cooperation with Hungary, Romania, particularly with Turkey. From the point of view of all political parties in Poland, the 8,000-strong Polish Tatar minority was not a menacing factor for Poland's postcolonial state- and nation-building. The fact that Polish Tatars spoke Polish as their intercommunal language and that Polish had become this ethnic minority's mother tongue contributed to the positive image of Polish Tatars across Polish political parties.

Polish Tatar Community-Building

Before the turmoil of the First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917, Polish Tatar intellectuals were active in different supra-ethnic political movements in the western provinces of the Russian Empire as well as in the imperial capital. In 1907, in St Petersburg, an Association of Polish Tatar Academicians[25] was set up. Its activity was illegal. The brothers Olgierd and Leon Najman Mirza-Kryczyński (1887–1939), as well as Helena Bajraszewska (1892–1965), were the co-founders of the very first organisation of Polish Tatars. Compared to the literacy rates among the Empire's various Muslim communities, the Polish Tatars left North Caucasians, Azeris, Central Asians, and even Crimean and Kazan Tatars far behind. In 1917–1718, when the Crimean Tatar Republic, the North Caucasian Republic of Gortsy, and the Republic of Azerbaijan were set up, Polish Tatar specialists were invited to take high-ranking positions in these

[25] This title "Association of Polish Tatar Academicians" is quoted after the article written by Leon Kryczyński in 1932, see: L. Najman-Mirza Kryczyński, *Tatarzy polscy a wschód muzułmański*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 2, pp. 1–130 (at p. 75.) The community scholar of the Polish Tatars, Aleksander Miśkiewicz, gives the association's name as the Associations of Polish Muslim Academicians (Koło Akademików Muzułmanów Polskich), see: A. Miśkiewicz, *Działalność społeczno-kulturalna polskich Tatarów w wieku XX – do roku 1989*, „Rocznik Tatarów Polskich", 2020, Seria 2, vol. 7 (21), pp. 43–81 (at p. 45).

new states. By 1917, the aforementioned brothers Leon and Olgierd Kryczyński already played an important role within the Polish Tatar community in the Russian capital. Born in 1884 and 1887, Olgierd and Leon were graduates of the Law Faculty of St Petersburg University. In 1918, they moved to Crimea, where the Tatars proclaimed their own state. A former imperial general of Polish Tatar background, Maciej Sulejman Sulkiewicz, became Crimea's Minister of Defence as well as Minister of Interior. Alexander Achmatowicz became Crimea's Minister of Justice. Along with many other well-educated Polish Tatars, Leon and Olgierd moved immediately to the Crimea: Leon became the head of the presidential desk office and his bother Olgierd became the chief executor of the city of Simferopol.[26] Crimean Tatar statehood was extremely short-lived. The peninsula was occupied by Denikin's Army shortly after the withdrawal of the German troops, then by the Bolsheviks, and then by the forces of the anti-Soviet Admiral Vrangel. The entire Crimean Tatar establishment fled for Switzerland and Turkey in 1918, and many Polish Tatars who had held high-ranking positions within governmental institutions in Crimea moved to Baku and joined the elites of the Azerbaijani People's Republic. Maciej Sulkiewicz became the country's Head of General Staff. Olgierd Kryczyński was promoted to Deputy Minister of Justice, and his brother Leon headed the government's desk office. In 1920, the Republic of Azerbaijan was occupied by the Red Army, and Bolsheviks executed Maciej Sulkiewicz in Baku. Leon and Olgierd moved to Vilnius, where many of their relatives lived. The geography of Polish Tatar dissemination in the (post-)imperial context comprised not only Crimea and Azerbaijan but also the Volga region of Russia. Sulejman Bogdanowicz worked for the authorities in Kazan and moved to Vilnius after the end of the Polish-Soviet war in 1921, as did many other Polish Tatars.[27]

Vassan Girei Dzhabagiev was originally from an Ingush family. Born in 1882 in a small village named Nasyr-kort in the Russian Caucasus, he belonged to the same generation as Leon and Olgierd Kryczynski. He attended a Russian school in Vladikavkaz and then studied agriculture at the Polytechnical University of Derpt (Tartu) and in Jena, Germany. After graduation, he moved to St Petersburg and returned to the Caucasus in 1917. Dzhabagiev actively participated in state-building processes in the North Caucasus after the fall of the Romanov dynasty. He joined the government of the Caucasian

[26] R. Buliński, *Tatarzy litewscy – elita Krymu, Azerbejdżanu i Polski,* https://jpilsudski.org/artykuly-publicystyka-felietony/felietony/item/2379-tatarzy-litewscy-elita-krymu-azerbejdzanu-i-polski (accessed: 5 May 2024).

[27] Д. Усманова, *Архивно-следственное дело Шарифа Айдарова (1940 г.) как источник по религиозно-национальной истории татарской общины г. Вильно в межвоенный период,* „Litteraria Copernicana", 2020, vol. 133, no. 1, pp. 155–169 (at p. 167).

Republic of Gortsy and became the country's Minister of Finance. After the occupation of the republic by the Red Army, Dzhabagiev fled to France. In 1924, he decided to move to Poland. There were two reasons for his move, the first of which was the Promethean project backed by the Polish authorities. Further, his wife, the aforementioned activist Helena Bajraszewska, was of Polish Tatar origin and had relatives in Vilnius.

In 1924–1925, Poland's Muslim community consisted mainly of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, mostly residents of greater Vilnius. Warsaw attracted Caucasian, Tatar, and other Muslims, mostly intellectuals, who moved to Poland in the framework of anti-Soviet Promethean activity. The Kryczyńskis were active in their community's cultural and religious life in Vilnius, and Dzhabagiev joined the newspaper *Kurier Warszawski*. He also took part in the political and Oriental studies meetings at the key Prometheanist institution, Insytut Wschodni (Oriental Institute), as well as at the Oriental Studies Department of the University of Warsaw. Dzhabagiev, or in Polish version Dżabagi, was particularly active in promoting the construction of a mosque in the Polish capital.

In May 1926, Piłsudski successfully seized power in Warsaw. His 'men of trust',[28] mostly high-ranking military personnel, intelligence officers, and diplomats, could now pursue the Promethean project with official state backing. The same year, a French-language journal *Prométhée* was set up in Paris and began producing anti-Soviet publications. Polish authorities financed numerous Azeri, Georgian, Ukrainian, and Tatar newspapers and periodicals and initiated the establishment of the Instytut Wschodni [Oriental Institute] as a research and public lecture facility. They also sponsored the monthly *Wschód* in 1930, published from downtown Warsaw. Under these circumstances, the closely linked Polish Tatar and Polish Muslim communities profited considerably from the political course of Piłsudski and his entourage. In the following two sections, we will consider the two most prominent Polish Islamic journals, *Przegląd Islamski* [Islamic Review] and *Rocznik Tatarski* [Tatar Annual]. The focus will be on the articulation of the national indifference of Polish Tatars. I argue that national indifference took the form of overall loyalty of the Polish Tatar community towards the Polish State and its authorities, and was intended to achieve communal goals regarding the development of Muslim education and, religious infrastructure and financial opportunities. Presenting their own communal past and present devoid of any national(ist) mobilisation and instead using intercommunal ethnic

[28] T. Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War. A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine*, New Haven–London 2005, p. 8.

terms, Polish Tatars stressed the contribution of their community to the protection of Poland, thereby aligning their beliefs and sympathies with the ethnic nationalism of the majority society.

Przegląd Islamski

In early 1930, the first issue of the journal *Przegląd Islamski* was published in Warsaw. Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev was the journal's founder and editor-in-chief. In the first issue, the editor's greeting included information on the journal's expected audience: "This journal will address Tatars and other Polish Muslims as well as those Poles interested in life and new movements within the entire world of Islam".[29] In the same text, the editor announced that:

> *Przegląd Islamski* is a press organ edited by a Muslim and intended primarily for Muslims. It will consider everything from the point of view of Islam […]. One of its goals is to deepen understanding of Islam and life in Muslim countries within Polish society and to bolster the friendship which has long interwoven Polish people and Islam.[30]

Married to the Polish Tatar intellectual and polyglot Helena Bajraszewska, Dzhabagiev was aware of the ethnic structure of the Polish Muslim community and addressed it separately. However, the focus of the journal was much more broadly defined and, it was also tasked with covering the Muslim world and faith-related issues. Dzhabagiev pursued his own interests, and by promotion of supra-ethnic Muslim concerns, he (a non-Tatar with poor knowledge of Polish) could use his new position in Warsaw to forge contacts as an intermediary both with Polish politicians and with diplomats from Near Eastern countries. The core ideas of the editor's introduction were taken up in the following article authored by Dzhabagiev under the title 'Polish Muslims'. He wrote about Poland's "deep sympathy towards Islam and Muslim countries" during the 18th century, when only "two powers in the world, namely the Pope and the Caliph of Islam, did not recognise acts of violence committed [against Poland] by Russia, Germany and Austria, i.e., by leading Christian powers".[31] Interestingly, Dzhabagiev described the Ottoman Sultan by his religious role as a Caliph and mentioned him in the same context as the Pope, the moral

[29] "Od redakcji", "Przegląd Islamski", 1930, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1.
[30] *Ibidem*.
[31] W. Girej-Dżabagi, *Muślimowie polscy*, „Przegląd Islamski", 1930, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 3–7 (at p. 3).

authority par excellence in the predominantly Catholic society of interwar Poland. The term 'Caliph' had a pejorative connotation within Polish discourse, unlike the designation 'Ottoman Sultan', for example.[32] By stressing the argument that all three powers that divided Polish lands in the late 18th century were predominantly Christian, Dzhabagiev attempted to invite the readership to think about the Polish-Muslim relationship in supra-confessional terms and, at the same time, to rethink the historical context of Poland's relationship with its Christian neighbour countries. Dzhabagiev pointed to another source of supposed Polish-Muslim friendship by focusing on the core group within the Polish Muslim community, namely, the "Lithuanian Tatars who arrived 500 years ago [...] built a 7–8,000-strong community, and serve as intermediaries between Poland and Muslim world".[33] Dzhabagiev also elucidated the main aspects of Tatar history in Polish lands from the point of view of inter-communal cooperation. He mentioned Tatar's participation in the uprising of Tadeusz Kościuszko in 1794 against Russia and Prussia and the Dąbrowski's Legion on the French side during the Napoleonic wars against Russia at the start of the 18th century. Dzhabagiev proudly recorded that a Tatar infantry battalion participated in the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920–1921. He thus constructed a certain narrative continuity of Tatar 'war-proven' loyalty to the Polish state and nation, and its contribution to the defence of the Polish nation-state.

Having described the contributions of the Tatar minority to Polish security, Dzhabagiev pointed out that Polish Muslims have been in contact with Muslim cultural centres across the world. By spreading the message of how well the Muslim community in Poland was treated, these emissaries contributed to improving the image of Poland abroad, building connections with the Near East, and acting as intermediaries for Polish-Near-Eastern ties. In this context, Dzhabagiev described greeting cards from the Grand Mufti of Palestine, Amin Effendi al-Husseini, which the Polish Muslim community had recently obtained. These highlighted the role of the Polish Muslim community in promoting international contacts, which would benefit the Polish economy overall.

Dzhabagiev then moved on to discuss the most important milestones in the institutionalisation of Muslim life in Poland. Strikingly, he described these developments using Christian terminology familiar to a Polish audience.

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[32] In Polish nationalistic discourses, the narrative on Jan Sobieski's decisive victory over Ottoman troops was traditionally depicted as Polish sacrifice and protection of European civilization.

[33] W. Girej-Dżabagi, *Muślimowie polscy...*, p. 3.

In 1925, according to Dzhabagiev, the Polish Muslims achieved the "autocephaly of the Church" (*autokefalia Kościoła*). Headed by the German-educated Orientalist Mufti Jakob Szynkiewicz,[34] the Muslim "Church" was represented by 19 parishes.[35] Concluding his article positively and optimistically, Dzhabagiev formulated the wish of the community to erect a mosque in Warsaw and informed his readers about the Warsaw Mosque Construction Committee, which had been set up in May 1928. Another aspiration of the community was to establish a higher education course for training Muslim clergy, Najwyższe Kolegium Muzułmańskie. It is worth mentioning that until the 19th century, Warsaw had remained a "periphery of the settlement map of Muslims"[36] in Poland; there were already numerous mosques in Vilnius, Novogrudok (Polish: Nowogródek), and other places.

Both Kryczyński brothers reacted positively to the establishment of the *Przegląd Islamski*. Leon Kryczyński wrote an article for the journal about the establishment of the Tatar People's Museum [Tatarskie Muzeum Narodowe] in Vilnius in May 1929 and about the work of twenty delegations of the Association for Culture and Education of the Tatars of the Republic of Poland [Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy] across the country. Olgierd Kryczyński published a legal analysis of the statute regulating the relationship between the Polish authorities and the Muslim community in Poland. Trained as a lawyer at St Petersburg University, the author commented on three aspects of the official letter sent by the Muslim community to the Poland's Minister of Religion that were of particular importance. Contrary to the life-long appointments of Catholic archbishops, Kryczyński argued that the Muslim community should not be led by a Mufti on a life-long basis but for a minimum five-year term. He wrote that the concept of a life-long appointment to the leading position "contradicts Islam".[37] He repeatedly stressed the importance of establishing the Najwyższe Kolegium Muzułmańskie. While the wish to set up a theological higher education institution arose from within the Polish Tatar community, the issue of the Mufti's legal status and related debates were driven by the Polish authorities' policy of institutionalisation of interconfessional relations.

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[34] More on Szynkiewicz see S. Chazbijewicz, *Jakuba Szynkiewicza postać tragiczna*, „Przegląd Tatarski", 2011, vol. 2, pp. 8–11.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

[36] A. Piotrowski, *Na meczet była już Ochota*, „Polityka", 7 Sept. 2010, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1505280,1,na-meczet-byla-juz-ochota.read (accessed: 5 May 2024).

[37] O. Kryczyński, *Statut o stosunku państwa do gminy muzułmańskiej w Polsce*, „Przegląd Islamski", 1930, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 7–8 (at p. 7).

Rocznik Tatarski

When the fourth issue of *Przegląd Islamski*, containing the articles of the Kryczyńki brothers, was published at the end of 1930, both were already planning a journal devoted primarily to the concerns of the Polish Tatar community. A year and a half later, in 1932, a hundred copies of the *Rocznik Tatarski* [Tatar Annual] were published in Polish-occupied Vilnius. The yearbook was more than 300 pages long; its full title was *A Scientific, Literary and Social Journal Devoted to the History, Culture and Life of Tatars in Poland*. Based and issued in Vilnius, the journal's title, designations of its editorial staff, and general description were published in Polish as well as in Turkish and French. Leon Kryczyński was editor-in-chief, and the editorial team consisted of Konstanty and Alexander Achmatowicz, Olgierd Kryczyński (all from Vilnius), Dawid Janowicz-Czainski from Słonim, and Sulejman Murza-Murzicz from Novogrudok. All were Polish Tatars. Interestingly, they saw themselves as the heirs of the aforementioned Polish Lithuanian Tatar organisation active between 1900 and the 1910s in St Petersburg. This was the first leading organisation in the community's push toward infrastructural self-organisation and was mentioned alongside the Związek Tatarów Polski, Litwy, Bialorusi i Ukrainy (Union of Tatars of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine). This latter group was set up by Aleksander Achmatowicz in Petrograd in 1917.[38] A by-product of the political and nationalist party-building of those years, the organisational evolution from the Association of Polish Tatar Academicians to the organisation founded by Achmatowicz mirrors developments in thinking about national aspirations within the territories inhabited by Polish Tatars. Polish Tatars did not necessarily form similar movements, but they did try to keep up to date with these developments. This topic, the nexus between the national movement and the Lithuanian Tatars, was a central theme in the article by Olgierd Kryczyński.[39]

Olgierd Kryczyński's article followed the editor's note. It was designed as a manifesto of Tatar's political, cultural, and religious identity, as well as the Tatars' place and role in Poland. Naming the local Tatar community as "Lithuanian Tatars" and situating them in this part of Polish territory, so-called 'Litwa Środkowa' (Central Lithuania), the author, at the very beginning of the article, a rhetorical and even polemical question: "Do Lithuanian Tatars have a future?"[40]

[38] *Od redakcji*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 1, pp. XVII–XX.
[39] See O. Najman-Mirza Kryczyński, *Ruch nacjonalistyczny a Tatarzy litewscy*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 1, pp. 5–20.
[40] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

Before Kryczyński answered this question, he shared his reflections on European intellectual pessimism mirrored in the writings of Oswald Spengler, the Russian Eurasianists (mostly Prince Trubetskoi and the Russian exiles in Poland) Dmitri Merezhkovskii, and the Italian liberal thinker Wilhelm (Guglielmo) Ferrero. According to Kryczyńki, European civilisation was stuck in a profound moral and spiritual crisis that had been accurately described by the aforementioned European intellectuals and gave rise to the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Along with the European crisis, "Asia was aware of its moral superiority towards Europe".[41] Kryczyński, quoted *ex oriente lux,* pointed out with fascination the example of Mahatma Gandhi's resistance in India as a symbol of Asian spiritual superiority. According to him, the alleged crisis of European civilisation after the Great War was one of that war's major consequences. Another was the "idea of self-determination of peoples".[42] Kryczyński argued that "the highest target of each people is not the creation of its own state but only the maintenance of its own culture".[43] Echoing the Turkish intellectual Ziya Gökalp,[44] Kryczyński differentiated between *kultura* (culture) and *cywilizacja* (civilisation), perceiving the latter as representing all cultures together. According to Kryczyński, culture is the sum of values shaped by a people which address their deepest concerns. His own concern – and according to him, the main concern of the entire Polish Tatar community – was the blossoming of Polish Tatar local culture. Being Polish-speakers of Muslim faith, Kryczyński promoted the idea of the establishment of special museums and libraries containing Polish Tatar medieval books. Although these were mostly in Arabic script and thus unreadable for most representatives of the community, they still held enormous symbolic value. Kryczyński promoted the idea of the cultural development of his community within the Polish state and national context and portrayed this as an important aspect both for the community's future as well as for the well-being of the entire country. While developing the idea of the Polish Tatar contribution to the Polish state, its raison d'état and culture, Kryczyński saw Poland's mission as an intermediary between war-torn Europe, Asia, and Islamic societies.

[41] *Ibidem,* p. 6.
[42] *Ibidem,* p. 7.
[43] *Ibidem,* p. 8.
[44] See Z. Gökalp, *Hars ve medeniyet,* Istanbul 2016.

Intermediary

Poland's tiny Muslim and Tatar community advocated for closer Polish ties with the Islamic world, offered itself as a cultural intermediary, and was perceived as such by Warsaw authorities. During this process, specific reciprocal dynamics between the Polish state and the ethno-confessional group of Polish Tatars impacted each other and served the purposes of both groups. In April 1928, the King of Afghanistan Amanullah paid a visit to Poland and the Polish Tatar community was actively engaged in the preparation and realisation of this visit. Both the Mufti Dr Szynkiewicz and representatives of Tatar intelligentsia, like Aleksander Achmatowicz and Leon Kryczyński, participated in the soirée in the residence of the Polish President Mościcki.[45] *Przegląd Islamski* published the lecture delivered by the Deputy Director of the Eastern Department at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Edward Raczyński, in November 1930 at the Instytut Wschodni. In Raczyński's speech, he described the positive image of Poland in Eastern countries and the editorial team of the journal added that "Polish Tatars, despite their small number […], can be important factor in the issue of Poland's rapprochement with the Muslim Orient".[46]

Beyond that, the aforementioned representatives of the Tatar community applied strategies of confessional diplomacy which were backed by the Polish authorities. Leon Kryczyński, for instance, took part in the International Geographical Conference in Cairo in April 1925 and was granted a special award by the Egyptian King Fuad I. In the following years, Mufti Szynkiewicz and the Imam of Warsaw, Isfandjar Fazli, went on pilgrimage to Mecca, and Olgierd Kryczyński travelled on behalf of the Polish Tatar community to Palestine, Syria, and Turkey. In Jerusalem, he met the aforementioned Mufti al-Husseini, and in Ankara, he paid a visit to Prime-Minister Ismet Pasha (Inönü).[47] The voyage lasted two months, and the Polish authorities appear to have covered the costs. In the mid-1930s, Mustafa Aleksandrowicz and Ali Woronowicz were sent to the renowned Al-Azhar University in Cairo to obtain an education in Islamic Studies.

In the interwar period, Poland was still creating its own distinct school of Oriental studies and was training diplomats to learn Near Eastern languages and become aware of local customs and religions. Given the lack of Polish

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[45] *Z okazji przyjazdu do Polski Jego Królewskiej Mości Króla Afganistanu Amanullaha*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 1, pp. 324–325.

[46] *Zainteresowanie Polski światem arabskim*, „Przegląd Islamski", 1930, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 12–13.

[47] *Podróż Olgierda Najmana-Mirzy-Kryczyńskiego do Palestyny, Syrji i Turcji*, „Rocznik Tatarski", 1932, vol. 1, pp. 326 ff.

specialists – and the absence of any prospect of Tatar separatism – Warsaw addressed the community's concerns and instrumentalised it for the diplomatic promotion of Poland in the Middle East. In return, the leading representatives of the community benefited from tactics of the political and ethnic "indifference".

Conclusion

While advancing their own community's interests, the leading intellectuals of the Polish Tatar community stressed the narrative of continuous loyalty to Polish authorities both during the partitions and after the restoration of independence in November 1918. Polish Tatars based in interwar Vilnius denounced the very idea of separation from the Polish state, the establishment of a nation-state, or even merely achieving autonomy within Poland. Several articles discussed above stressed the linguistic assimilation of the Tatar community and its broad use of Polish in intracommunal communication. The Lithuanian scholar of Islam, Egdūnas Račius, analysed official letters written by representatives of the Tatar community residing in interwar Lithuania addressed to the Lithuanian state authorities. He wrote that "the leadership of the Tatar congregations routinely claimed to be loyal citizens of the Lithuanian state and the nation".[48] According to Račius, "Financial support from the state, as evident from many of the surviving documents, must have also played an important role in the Tatars' public rhetoric, especially around the time of the construction of a new mosque in Kaunas in the 1930s".[49] As the Lithuanian case shows, the Tatars' invocation of loyalty, continuity and exclusiveness seems to be a transboundary phenomenon. To meet the concerns of the community's everyday life, its leadership backed political indifference and overtly condemned the very idea of separation. In Poland and Lithuania, as in other countries of the region, the drive toward state- and nation-building in the interwar period was strongly challenged by ethnic separatism. While Poland perceived nationalist mobilization among the Germans in Danzig and Ukrainian as a threat to the country's territorial integrity, Polish forces captured Vilnius and managed to preserve sovereignty by thwarting the Red Army attack on Warsaw. Well aware of the fears in Polish

[48] E. Račius, *Muslims of Interwar Lithuania: The Predicament of a Torn Autochthonous Ethno-Confessional Community*, in: *Muslims in Interwar Europe*, ed. B. Agai, U. Ryad, M. Dajid, Leiden 2016, pp. 178–204 (at p. 187).

[49] *Ibidem*.

society and among elites of losing non-Polish borderlands, the Polish Tatar community in Poland, as in neighbouring Lithuania, tried to communicate its concerns and improve its community's financial situation by active articulation of the community's commitment to the nation's culture, language, and particularly to the state's integrity. This strategy of communication with the majority of the host country was intended to ease fears of ethnic separatism within Polish society and portray Tatars as Poland's most loyal minority.

In a multiethnic and multi-confessional society, ethnic and religious communities compete for access to financial and material resources from state authorities. While Warsaw supported Polish nationalism and attempted to forge ideas of Polishness and Polish citizenship, bargaining strategies developed within this special framework. The actively indifferent approach of the Polish Muslim and Tatar community towards any kind of political autonomy-building or separatism reflected the *Realpolitik*-driven mentality of the community's leadership. At the same time, the linguistic assimilation of Polish Tatars to the Polish language and the understanding and acceptance of this phenomenon among community leaders are additional important elements that explain Tatars' indifference with regard to establishing their own nation-state.

The language issue also helps explain Tatars' indifferent approach towards political mobilisation and nation-state aspirations. Polish Tatars shared the same cultural legacy and language as Polish Catholics. Language was a dominant issue during the period of ethnicisation of political debates and blossoming nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the Polish Tatar community was not radicalised because it had lost its ancestral language four centuries ago. The oldest sacral writings of the Polish Tatar community preserved in mosques and private collections throughout Poland and Lithuania were written in Arabic script but in Slavic languages, generally Belarusian or Polish. The number of Turkic words in explanatory texts and even of Arabic words in the liturgical literature gradually diminished from the seventeenth to the 19th century. They were replaced by Polish and Belarusian words and concepts. This process was not a part of Polonization 'from above' but of a language shift due to geographic isolation from territories densely populated by speakers of Turkic or Semitic languages. According to the Polish Slavist Iwona Radziszewska, the widespread use of Belarusian and Polish in ecclesiastical and clerical texts by Polish Tatars caused a certain "sacralisation of Slavic languages".[50] The acquisition of Polish, the language

[50] I. Radziszewska, *Język ksiąg religijnych Tatarów litewsko-polskich funkcjonujących w środowisku muzułmanów polskich*, „Linguistica Copernicana", 2009, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 261–271 (at p. 265).

of the surrounding population, by Polish Tatars was not associated with force, and forged a positive perception of Polishness within the Tatar community. Even aside from the financial interests of the community, the loyalty of the Muslim Tatar Polish speakers towards the Polish state can be read as a strong emotional bond and unambiguous and conscious self-identification with Poland, even its linguistic nationalism. Despite their Tatar ethnicity and the fact that the community had lost their Turkic language, the majority of Polish Tatars "cherished their 'Slavicity'"[51] (*Słowiańszczyzną obłaskawieni*), as Polish Tatar contemporary historian Ali Miśkiewicz observed, and they felt solidarity with Polishness and the Polish state during the interwar period. These multiple dimensions of the articulation of Polish Tatar identity, which might be perceived as a form of indifference, are crucial for understanding the political and cultural behaviour of a minority communities' asymmetrical bond with the linguistic, ethnic, and religious majority within their host country.

The bilateral dimension of the contacts between a minority and the majority mirrors only one aspect of the multilayered relationships emerging in a multiethnic and multi-confessional society such as interwar Poland. 8,000 Polish Tatars observed Warsaw's 'pacification' actions against Ukrainian organisations and the Polish-Ukrainian clashes in Volhynia and other places in Eastern Poland, as well as overtly anti-Jewish discourses among activists of the National Democrats and Peasants' Parties. Unlike Ukrainians and Jews, neither Islam nor Tatars played any significant role in Polish public debates in the interwar period. Further, there was no public discussion on the integration and acculturation of the Polish Tatar community into broader Polish society. In fact, the Polish Tatar community profited from interwar Poland's 'affirmative action' policies, obtaining civic freedom and support that was denied during the Tsarist period.

It is worth mentioning that Polish Tatar intellectuals and political activists such as the Kryczyński brothers interacted in a transboundary, intra- and inter-imperial, and transcultural context. As transnational actors, they played a prominent role in building an attitude of national indifference. This approach may be regarded as an essential intellectual contribution of these transnational actors. They drew on their awareness not only of the distinctive features of the Polish Tatar community (such as Sunni Islam and Tatar ethnic origin) but also the many elements of shared culture, most notably the Polish language and literature, which helped foster a strong bond between the Polish state, the majority society, and the Tatar community itself.

[51] J. Kamocki, A. Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy słowiańszczyzną obłaskawieni*, Kraków 2004.

A theoretical focus on indifference helps us to critically re-appraise our scholarly understanding of ethnicity- and state-related categories with regard to groups such as the Polish Tatar community. On 14 November 2012, during his speech at the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz described his community by saying, "We are Poles of Tatar background" [Jesteśmy Polakami pochodzenia tatarskiego], while other speakers at the same event portrayed the same community as Lithuanian Tatars [Tatarzy litewscy].[52] These designations may challenge scholars, particularly those with a narrow focus on national classifications. For the community itself, however, these notions are not at all contradictory and, in fact, complementary.

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[52] J. Wierzba, *Tatarzy w Muzeum Niepodległości w Warszawie*, „Przegląd Tatarski", 2013, no. 1, pp. 1–2.