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The Role of Religion in Creating and Maintaining Ethnic Identity—The Example of the Kashubs in Poland

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Abstract: After 1945, the Republic of Poland appeared to be an ethnic monolith. However, this was (is) not the case for the Kashubians, who now live in northern Poland on the Baltic Sea. Presently, Kashubians do not have official status; they are not considered an ethnic or national minority. They create their own identity around language, origin, inhabited territory, and religion. The latter serves to maintain a sense of community—to legitimise the Kashubian language, the axial value of Kashubian ethnic identity. Kashubian religiosity is frequently emphasized in the public space. The objective of this article is to analyse the role of the Catholic religion in building the ethnic identity of Kashubians and legitimizing constructed traditions by the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association. The main purpose of the article is to show the process of ethnicisation of religions. This ethnic non-governmental organisation is aspiring to represent the Kashubian community in the public space in Poland. The results from studies conducted among members of this organization, which concern their views on the link between religious and secular events organised by the Association, will also be presented.



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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to show the role of the Catholic religion—understood as a system of “meanings” or a cultural system—in shaping the identities of an ethnic minority—the Kashubs, a community living in northern Poland. I focus on the ethnicisation of religion, which, regarding the Kashubs, means the use of the Kashubish language or other elements of Kashubian culture in religious rites.

This analysis reviews the role of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association (hereinafter: the Association, KPA), an organisation of ethnic nature that undertakes numerous activities aimed at protecting and creating the ethnic identity of this community; it is an organization that aspires to represent the Kashubian community in the social space.

Research on the identity of the Kashubian community was initiated in the 1980s by sociologists (cf. [Latoszek 1990](#); [Synak 1998](#); [Mazurek 2010, 2014](#)). There are relatively few studies on the role of religion in creating/maintaining Kashubian identity (cf. [Perszon 2015](#); [Lewandowska and Organek 2018](#); [Organek 2016](#)). It is worth mentioning that historical studies are much richer, although available mainly in Polish ([Szultka 2000](#); [Borzyszkowski 2000, 2019](#); [Labuda 2000, 2006](#)). This article presents the relationship between ethnicity and religion, then demonstrates the role of (Catholic) religion in creating and maintaining the ethnic identity of the Kashubs, with emphasis on the activities undertaken by the Association (pertaining to the Kashubians—a ‘long-term community’ living in northern Poland).

2. The Relationship between Ethnicity and Religion

Religion, especially in its social dimension (to which I will mainly refer in this text), very often plays a fundamental role in shaping and defining the ethnic/national dimension

of identity; moreover, it is one of the oldest and most rudimentary sources of collective identity (cf. Brass 1991; Calvillo and Bailey 2015; Fenton 2007; Smith 2009a, 2009b). It is also a factor (often the only one, especially in the absence of phylogenetic or linguistic differences) that makes it possible to distinguish one community from another; however, religion is not an epiphenomenon in regard to the Kashubians. There is no single definition of religion generally accepted in social sciences (or of ethnicity). The relationship between religion and ethnicity, in the process of shaping and maintaining Kashubian identity, is discussed in this article. It also seems that religion and ethnicity are factors that differentiate people the most today (apart from differences in socioeconomic status, which is often determined both by belonging to a specific ethnic group, or due to professed religion).

The relationship between religion and ethnicity can be considered in the context of the relationship between these concepts in a specific community or between individual communities, also taking into account the spatial and historical context (cf. Mazurek 2015), especially when the perspective of long duration (French *longue durée*) is taken into consideration (cf. Wrzosek 1992). Both ethnicity and religion are common and universal, generally they do not appear separately. The link between ethnicity and religion is also institutional, it preserves and stabilises each culture, which is particularly visible in the case of the Kashubian community, which will be presented further in the text.

The concept of ethnicity ubiquitously and obviously appeared in the second half of the previous century; three years later, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan published *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, in which the term meant: “(...) (1) the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group; (2) ethnic pride” (Glazer and Moynihan 1975, p. 1).

Ethnicity can be defined as a kind of bond that binds a given community occupying a specific territory (to which it often claims a right), which emphasizes its social character. Today, ethnicity is sometimes considered contextual, because specific ethnic features, such as language, customs, traditions, and religion are revealed in certain situations (this will be discussed later in the article). Ethnicity can be treated as “[...] a loose, labile repertoire of signs by means of which relations are constructed and communicated; through which a collective consciousness of cultural likeness is rendered sensible; with reference to which shared sentiment is made substantial” (Commaroff and Commaroff 2011, p. 52).

As Brass (1991) indicates, ethnicity is a term that explains why and how certain ethnic categories, at a given historical time and place, develop into self-aware communities (and sometimes claim a greater share of a country’s resources, or seek to own their own state).

Along with the concept of ethnicity comes the question of ethnic minorities, which are not necessarily numerical minorities in a specific area¹. Minorities can be defined as groups with smaller influences on culture, values, or institutions. According to Thomas Eriksen, we can consider them a community that “(...) is less numerous than the rest of the population in society, which is not a politically dominant group and which is reproduced as a category or ethnic group” (Eriksen 2013, p. 182). It should be noted that minorities are a (social) construct created in a specific historical time, in a specific situation, for a specific reason—the result of ‘one and no other’ (i.e., discretionary or not) state policy.

Religion professed by members of a given community is often the basic determinant of its ethnicity, and it is this religion that distinguishes one social group from another. In this case, religion is a manifestation of culture and becomes a bond that binds a given community and distinguishes it from another (Geertz 2005, pp. 111, 113; 1966; cf. Boskovic 2002).

According to Clifford Geertz, religion is (1) a system of symbols that (2) establishes powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods, and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz 2005, p. 112). Thus, Geertz emphasizes the cultural aspect of religion, and for him, culture is a model of meanings passed from generation to generation, which are exemplified in inherited symbolic concepts: “(...) by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz 2005, p. 111).

3. The Kashubs—An Ethnic Minority in Poland: In the Past and Now

The name Kashubia appeared thanks to the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries who travelled to Prussia; by informing Rome about their activities, they spread this name (Labuda 2006, p. 38). In the bull of Pope Gregory IX, the name *dux Cassubie* appeared in reference to Bogusław, and the name of the country “Kashubia” appeared in 1238. The terms Kashubs and Kashubia can also be found in the *Chronicle of Greater Poland* from the 13th century; they also appear in the pages of the *Yearbook of the Polish Kingdom* by Jan Długosz (cited in: Labuda 2006, p. 39). The Kashubs are therefore a ‘long-term community’.

It is difficult to clearly define who the Kashubs are (cf. Mazurek 2010, p. 43), due to the lack of an unambiguous definition of the status within the group, and the lack of an unequivocal legal status (as already mentioned and which will be discussed later). In the scientific literature, the Kashubs are defined in various ways: from a regional ethnic community (cf. Labuda 1990, p. 11), an ethnic group (cf. Obracht-Prondzyński 2002, p. 315), an indigenous ethnic group (Latoszek 1990, p. 43), a regional cultural and ethnic community (Synak 1990, p. 191), a small nation (Jabłoński 2006, p. 5), or an ethnic minority (Mazurek 2010). The older approaches are closer to ‘treating’ the Kashubs, in terms of ethnographic groups, and the analyses made after 2000, in turn, consider them in minority categories—this is the result of identity processes taking place in recent years in this community.

The official status of the Kashubs is regulated by the Act of 6 January, 2005, on national and ethnic minorities and the regional language², which defines the Kashubs as a community using the regional Kashubian language.

Two general censuses carried out after 1989 were important (from the point of view of the Kashubs and other minorities in Poland). The first national census was taken in 2002 and the other one in 2011 (hereinafter: the 2002 and 2011 census). They revealed interesting data about the number of people of non-Polish origin who were citizens of Poland; this applies not only to the Kashubian community but also to Karaim, Tatar, Lemko, Jewish, Armenian, and Roma). In the 2002 national census, 52,665 people indicated that they used the Kashubian language in everyday contacts, and 5062 declared Kashubian nationality. The first national census was widely criticised by minority circles because of the impossibility to declare a complex/double identity (i.e., of being both Kashubian and Polish, for example). The aforementioned national census, which was a metaphorical turning point in the process of establishing the status of the Kashubs in light of the law, introduced the concept of the Kashubian nation into public discourse.

In the national census of 2011, it was possible to declare a complex national identity, thanks to which, people of Kashubian (but also another) origin did not have to make identity choices. The data showed that 232,547 people declared Kashubian identity, including 215,784 declarations of Polish–Kashubian nationality, and 16,377 “only Kashubian”. Moreover, 108,140 people declared that they spoke the Kashubian language at home. Moreover, 13,799 people declared the Kashubian language as their mother tongue³. The results of the 2002 census validated the Kashubs as a separate category of description and discourse (the same happened with Silesians in Poland); the Kashubs became a numerical minority, appearing as a category of “self-description” (legally); however, they did (do) not have the status of a minority or a nation (despite such declarations in both 2002 and 2011 censuses). However, thanks to the 2005 act on national and ethnic minorities, Kashubian attained the legal status of a regional language.

The Kashubs, despite the lack of an official minority status, are an ethnic minority. They claim a specific area—a geographical territory called Kashubia; they have a separate language, and the Kashubian culture is different from the dominant culture. Ethnic minorities are (may be) cultural minorities. Cultural features—mainly the language or religion, and elements of material or non-material culture—distinguish the minority group from the majority group. In regard to the Kashubs, the main features are language, as well as the combination of values characteristic of Protestantism with the Catholic religion. It seems that, as a result of the influence of dominating German culture in the past, values

referred to as Protestant (work ethic for example) have been incorporated into Kashubian identity. This was confirmed in many studies (cf. [Synak 1998](#); [Mazurek 2010](#)). A similar situation could be observed in Latin America where the historical dominance of Catholic Christianity has been significantly influenced by Protestantism.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important elements of Kashubian identity is the Kashubian language, which, in communist times, was reduced to a rural, poor language, which one should be ashamed of; the Polish language became a synonym of the language of social advancement (cf. [Synak 2000](#), pp. 505–49). The polonisation processes ousted the Kashubian language from public and private spaces. It was only in 2005 that the Kashubian language was officially recognised as a language, which in itself was a political act, acknowledging the cultural distinctness of the Kashubian community, a community that after 1945 had to endlessly prove its Polishness.

The Kashubs, in a way, chose this Polishness by not converting to Protestantism when the area of Kashubia was within the borders of the German state. Nowadays, Kashubia occupies a very small part of the historical territory of Kashubia, which is decreasing as a result of centuries-long assimilation processes caused by the dominant positions of German culture (in terms of politics, economy, and culture).

For several centuries, two countries existed in Pomerania: with centres in Szczecin and Gdańsk. The Kashubs originally inhabited the entire Pomerania from Szczecin to Gdańsk, but over time, they moved eastward as a result of successive Germanisation. This process began around the 12th century and lasted until 1945.

The socioeconomic processes taking place in these areas were completely different, which influenced the situation of the Kashubs. In the early Middle Ages, the main centre of Kashubian Pomerania in the west was Szczecin, where the Gryffin dynasty ruled for several centuries. In the 12th century, Duke Wartislaw was forced to recognise the sovereignty of Polish prince Boleslaw III Wrymouth, under the patronage of whom Otto, the bishop of Bamberg, together with the armed forces, Christianised these areas. In 1181, Bogislaw I paid tribute to German Emperor Frederick Redbeard. In turn, Gdańsk Pomerania (under the will of Boleslaw III Wrymouth), in 1138, became a part of the senior district, in which Polish Piasts ruled with the help of governors, who, over time, created the House of Sobieslaw, independent from the 13th century. The most important among them for the Kashubs was Swietopelk II the Great (reigning in the years 1220–1266), who rejected the Piast suzerainty and gave Gdańsk city rights. His son, Mestwin II, due to the threat from Brandenburg and Teutonic Knights, as well as due to the lack of a male heir, in 1282, concluded an agreement in Kępno with the Duke of Greater Poland Przemyslaw II, who, after his death, united Gdańsk Pomerania with Greater Poland. The eastern part of Kashubia was falling under the influence of Poland and Catholicism, while the western part—of Germany ([Melchert 1999](#); [Labuda 2006](#)).

The Reformation, which permanently divided the Kashubian community, was an important event in the Kashubian community, as well as in the whole of Europe. At that time, the Kashubs mainly used the Kashubian language in private spaces and work; however, Polish was used in the Catholic Church, which had a decisive influence on the fate of this community. In the sixteenth century, a religious division began in the Kashubian community, which meant that Kashubian evangelicals underwent almost complete Germanisation by the end of the nineteenth century. The conversion to Protestantism was tantamount to taking German nationality ([Szultka 2000](#)).

However, it should be emphasized that the adoption of German culture (and conversion to Protestantism) during the Reformation did not only concern the Evangelical population. The process of assimilation was caused, first of all, by the attractiveness of this culture compared to the native one, and its adoption was treated as socioeconomic as well as cultural advancement. Secondly, one should be aware of the weak or negligible ties with Polish culture at that time. Moreover, Gdańsk Pomerania was beyond the reach of the Polish Enlightenment reforms, and Western Pomerania was not within Polish borders until 1945. The Reformation proceeded differently in the area inhabited by the

Kashubs: the western and central parts of Pomerania were more quickly being influenced by Protestantism and Germanisation. Gdańsk Pomerania together with Eastern Pomerania (belonging to Poland since 1466) remained Catholic and Kashubian. The Reformation did not play a large role in the case of the Kashubs, did not contribute to the development of literature in the national language, and the institution of the church itself occasionally introduced it to the liturgy, during sermons or in songs (Szultka 2001, p. 19).

After the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the Duchy of West Pomerania was divided between Sweden and Brandenburg. As a result of the Third Northern War, Sweden lost these territories to the Kingdom of Prussia (formed from former Brandenburg and the Duchy of Prussia). After the first partition of Poland, the territories inhabited by the Kashubs came under the rule of Prussia. In 1772, the awareness of nationality was not developed, some of the Kashubian nobility from Central Pomerania were Germanised, and some joined the Polish national liberation movement (cf. Borzyszkowski 2000). It was then that two attitudes that still exist today began to develop: the sense of belonging to the Polish nation and to the Kashubian nation, as reflected in the results of the censuses.

Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the Kashubian elite recognise the conversion of the Kashubs to Protestantism as a factor threatening their identity. Paradoxically, the reverse effect of the Germanisation of the Kashubs, taking place from the 1860s by the school and the church, as well as by conscription to the army, was the awakening of a national feeling among them; contrary to the assumptions of Bismarck's policy, the Germanisation process of the (Catholic) Kashubs slowed down (cf. Borzyszkowski 2000).

As already mentioned, the choice of Catholicism or Protestantism in the case of the Kashubs is related to the issue of nationality. It is even assumed that the Kashubs chose Polishness due to the fact that, in the 19th century, Catholic priests (coming from the Kashubian milieu) in the areas inhabited by the Kashubs used the Kashubian and Polish languages.

After World War I, the Kashubs and Kashubia lay within the borders of three countries: the reborn Polish state, Germany, and in the Free City of Gdańsk (Maczulis 1994). The connection of the Kashubian identity with Polishness was greatly influenced by World War II, during which the Kashubs already suffered severe losses at the beginning of the war. It was then that the underground organisation Kashubian Griffin (later, Pomeranian Griffin) was established, which was associated with the Polish Home Army, which was an expression of the joining of Kashubian and Polish forces in the fight against the Third Reich (cf. Chrzanowski et al. 2005). After World War II, for the first time in a long time, the Kashubs found themselves within the borders of one country: Poland; thus, they started to undergo systematic "Polonisation".

It appears that, presently, the Kashubs who are entangled in proving their loyalty to the Polish state (while denying their Germanness) emphasize the fact that they are more Catholic than Poles, which is related to the stereotype of a Pole–Catholic, which developed during the national liberation movement of Poles in the nineteenth century.

4. "Our FAITH—Kashubian Faith"—Religion as an Essential Component of Kashubian Identity

In addition to the Kashubian language, origin, and inhabited territory (Mazurek 2010)—religion (Synak 1998; Organek 2016; Perszon 2015; Lewandowska and Organek 2018; Mazurek 2015) is one of the core values for the Kashubs. One should be aware about the unreflective religiosity of the peasant community (e.g., in the 19th century); the Kashubs, for the most part, are of "peasant origin", i.e., on the Hel Peninsula—their occupation was fishing, and few Kashubians lived in cities. The Kashubian townspeople were depicted in the novel *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1999 (a writer of German–Kashubian origin, born in the Free City of Gdańsk). The bourgeois element in the Kashubian culture is interesting because it was greatly influenced by Protestantism, which is the Kashubian ethos: the cult of work, respect for property, and very high restraint in showing feelings. It could be said that the Kashubs are, to a large

extent, Catholics with Protestant values, which has been confirmed in research (Mazurek 2010, 2014, 2015).

The religiosity of the Kashubs is predominantly folk religiosity, intertwined with local beliefs and myths; at the same time, it is one of the elements they refer to when constructing and maintaining their identity (cf. Perszon 2015). The concept of folk religion is quite well rooted in religious science and is often opposed to the institutionalised religion. The term of religion is very often understood as the religion of elites institutionalised by the authorities, in opposition to folk religion (Pyysiäinen 2004).

Folk religiosity in Poland (or more broadly in Central Europe) has not been thoroughly studied thus far (Bukraba-Rylska 2013, pp. 509–10). A model has been adopted that stresses superficiality of faith coexisting with pagan relics, emphasising the observance of rituals and, above all, the community aspect of the rites, which, in the case of minorities using religiosity to forge and maintain their identity, is extremely important.

In case of the Kashubs, folk Catholicism is permeated with ethnic elements. Therefore, it is difficult to use the phrase folk religion in relation to Kashubs, because scholars often use this term to refer to the religiosity of the marginalised part of society (cf. Drake 2020). In Saami, for example, folk religion means—as Rydving emphasizes—not fully accepting the ingredients of the diversified religious world of Christianity (Rydving 2004, p. 143). In Saami, when Christianity had become their religion: “(...) the indigenous elements still adhered to were called “folk religion” in opposition to the official forms of Christianity” (Rydving 2004, p. 144). In Kashubia, therefore, you can find local cults, places of pilgrimage, and rituals that function mainly within the Kashubian community (or are a kind of a tourist attraction), and which are manifestations of bond-forming religious forms. The most spectacular example is the Kashubian custom of bowing feretories, heavy two-sided paintings of saints. The bowing of feretories, sometimes called a dance, takes place during pilgrimages to local places of worship in Kashubia (to Sianów, Swarzewo, Wiele, Kościerzyna or Matemblewo), to the accompaniment of an orchestra, images of saints in heavy wooden frames prostrate before the passed local shrines, altars or crosses, or joining pilgrimage groups⁴.

Sensualism, direct contact with the object of worship, not distinguishing “the being of what is represented from what represents” is typical for Kashubian religiosity (Tokarska-Bakir 2000, p. 48), which is expressed, inter alia, in the cult of images or figures that are supposed to work miracles, and which especially concern the images of the Virgin Mary. Thus, in Kashubia, we have three Madonnas who are the destination of Kashubian pilgrimages. Two of them come from the 15th century: Our Lady of Swarzewo, whose cult was recorded in the 16th century, and Our Lady of Sianów, Queen of Kashubia. Our Lady of Swarzewo—the Queen of the Polish Sea and the Protector of Kashubian Fishermen—was originally located in the Catholic church on Hel, but when the inhabitants converted to Protestantism in 1580, she was removed from the church and moved to Swarzewo, in the place where she was found; a chapel was built in 1775. The Kashubs pilgrimage there twice a year (in July and September). Moreover, at this time, pilgrimages take place to Sianów, where there is a linden wood figurine of Our Lady of Sianów, Queen of Kashubia (Ostrowska and Trojanowska 1978).

In the case of the Kashubs, places of worship are often also group symbols. For instance, Kalwaria Wejherowska (Wejrowskô Kalwarëjô), which consists of 26 chapels, funded by the founder of Wejherowo, Jakub Wejher, built in the years 1649–1655 on three hills: Mount Olives, Mount Zion, and Mount Kalwaria (Ostrowska and Trojanowska 1978).

Kashubian pilgrimages⁵ play a very important role: they not only strengthen religiosity, but above all emphasize, maintain, and shape the sense of community of the Kashubs on the basis of (Catholic) religion.

The majority of research (e.g., Mazurek 2010) and the 2011 census indicate that the Kashubs are predominantly people with double Kashubian–Polish or Polish–Kashubian identity. Depending on the situation, a given identity is contextually triggered and becomes dominant. Putting on or changing into a Kashubian costume activates Kashubian identity,

which is often (if not only) associated with participation in religious events. Therefore, pilgrimages are, in a way, events that activate Kashubian identity, and the act of putting on/changing into a Kashubian costume constitutes the rite of passage, which Arnold van Gennep described as: "(...) the rites that accompany every change of place, status, social position and age" (Turner 2004, p. 240). During religious events, ethnic identity is activated, which, at the same time, emphasizes the connection with Polishness due to participation in Catholic rituals. Therefore, there is a double bond and a specific meta-message: we are the Kashubs, but through Catholicism, we stand on the side of Poland, which means loyalty to the state in which the Kashubs currently reside.

The Kashubian nature of religious rites can be found not only during pilgrimages, but also during Christmas and Easter. During Christmas, carolling (visiting houses) is combined with elements of Kashubian songs. Regional specificity can also be seen during Easter, when pagan customs are intertwined with Catholicism, during the ritual bath at dawn on Easter Sunday, or the blessing of fire. In Kashubia, Wet Monday had its version: people did not pour water on each other, as in other parts of Poland, but they were spanked with juniper branches on their legs (which is supposed to ensure happiness in love); moreover, blessed catkins of birch were eaten to ensure health (this custom is not practiced anymore) (Maczulis 2018).

For Kashubia and the Kashubs, empty nights are characteristic, i.e., all-night vigils, singing, prayers for the souls of the deceased, and family, friends, and acquaintances praying the rosary next to the deceased. The empty night began the day before the funeral and ended when the deceased was taken out of the house. Interestingly, the eyes of the deceased were taped, because it was believed that the eyes of the deceased could kill. A rosary or a prayer book was placed in the hands of the deceased, windows were opened so that the soul could get out of the body, mirrors were covered, and the clock was stopped. Adults were buried in coffins painted black, and children in coffins painted yellow (more about funeral customs: (Perszon 2019).

Presently, empty nights are held at funeral homes and last until midnight (the day before the funeral). However, when the deceased is important to the community, this rite is held in the church. An example may be the empty night when Pope John Paul II died, in the sanctuary of Our Lady of Sianów. Moreover, when the president of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz, was tragically murdered in January 2019, the empty night was held in the church of St. John in Gdańsk.

Kashubian religiosity is therefore characterised by the features typical for folk Catholicism (Bukraba-Rylska 2013; Piwowarski 1983). In it, we can point to naive sensualism, passion for sumptuous rituals, fairly significant conformism, traditionalism, the need for mass manifestation of religious experiences, which is emphasized by the importance of collective participation in rituals and rites performed cyclically, with a relatively low level of religious awareness. At the same time, people attending all of these rituals and rites often wear Kashubian costumes, which stresses the relationship between ethnicity and religiosity. Father Perszon, a Kashubian theologian, speaks directly about Kashubian folk theology, in which the ritual dimension, often emphasising ethnicity, dominates over the church rite (Perszon 2011, pp. 43–44).

Catholicism has become a resource for the Kashubians thanks to which they create their identity. This process has not found opposition among the church hierarchy. It seems that, in a situation in which the general Polish society is becoming more secularised, a community that builds its identity, thanks to religion, becomes a resource for the institutions of the Catholic Church. There is no visible tension between the Kashubian folk religion, which seems to be populist and devotional, and the hierarchical religion of Catholicism (the latter being liturgical and rubrical).

The ethnicised Catholic religion emphasizes the ethnic or national character of the Kashubians. Catholicism became an integral part of Kashubian ethnic identity in the nineteenth century, and today it is used to sustain this identity. This process is not unique in Central or Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Zenderowski 2010, 2011). At the same time,

the fact that Kashubians are Catholics (and not Protestants) are characterised by cultural closeness with Poles, which means that they are not a minority threatening the state in any way.

5. The Kashubian Language in the Catholic Church

The Kashubian language is the greatest symbolic value for Kashubian identity and is a ritual trigger of ethnic identity (Mazurek 2009a, 2010, 2017). It is also one of the main elements of the Kashubs ethnicising activities undertaken by community leaders. Nowadays, all Kashubs are Polish-speaking, and only a few know the language sufficiently to use it in everyday communication. Therefore, the Kashubs very often start a conversation in the Kashubian language, and then when the interlocutor answers in this language (thus confirming his ethnicity), they switch to Polish, it is also common to encrust the statements with words or simple sentences spoken in Kashubian (cf. Mazurek 2010, pp. 151–53).

It cannot be unequivocally stated that the Kashubian language was used in the Catholic Church by clergymen at the time when this area was within the borders of the German state, due to the lack of reliable sources confirming this fact (Treder 2002, p. 115). Only fragments of sermons in Kashubian during the indulgence ceremonies in Kalwaria in Wejherowo in the interwar period were documented (Manthey 1997).

After World War II, Father Franciszek Grucza played a very important role in promoting the Kashubian language in the church. However, it was not until the 1980s that holy masses with elements of the Kashubian language began to be celebrated. In 1993, Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski formally settled the issue of the Kashubian language in the liturgy (Treder 2005). In the 1990s, the Bible was translated into Kashubian by Franciszek Grucza and Eugeniusz Gołabek, and church songs, sermons, and lectionaries were also translated. The words of Pope John Paul II addressed to the Kashubs during his pilgrimage to Poland, in Gdynia in 1987 were undoubtedly a milestone: “I cannot fail to address today in a special way the descendants of Proto-Slavic, Lechite Pomerania, the Kashubs, so dear to all of us, who have retained their ethnic identity and their speech with the Slavic core.” And then: “(...) Dear Kashubian Brothers and Sisters! Guard these values and heritage that make up your identity” (Jan Paweł II 1987). The Pope continued this theme during his next pilgrimage to Poland in 1999, when almost 1400 people dressed in Kashubian costumes came to Sopot on 80 cutters and boats to meet John Paul II, who addressed the Kashubs with a greeting: “(...) the Kashubian people, the eternal hosts of this Pomeranian land. (...) Always stick with God!” (Dołowy-Rybińska 2011, p. 481).

As already mentioned, in communist times, the Kashubian language was denied the language statues and deprecated. After 1989⁶, the Kashubian community made numerous attempts to revitalise the Kashubian language, and above all, actions were taken to raise the prestige of the language both among the Kashubs themselves and the social environment. One measure was to include it in religious ceremonies. This endeavour, undertaken on the initiative of Kashubian leaders, especially those belonging to the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, turned out to be very effective.

6. The Process of Ethnicisation of Religion by the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association

As previously mentioned, the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association is an ethnic non-governmental organisation aspiring to represent the Kashubian community. October 1956⁷ was a year hope for everyone in communist Poland. Due to a departure from Stalinism, changes and understanding of the specificity of Kashubia and Kashubians were expected.

The Association founding meeting took place in Gdynia on 28 October, 1956, and on 2 December, the first Congress, attended by 150 people, was held in Gdańsk. The Association branches currently cover primarily northern Poland (mainly the Pomeranian Voivodeship). The organization itself is interesting because it mainly gathers people of Kashubian origin, and is one of the main actors in the public space of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Members of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association perform a number of

functions in the administration of the local government, implementing the ideas of organic work for the benefit of their community, based on existing capabilities.

On the one hand, the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association is a non-governmental organisation that arranges festivals, pilgrimages, or congresses, and on the other hand, it is a quasi-political party, being a real political force in the region (more: [Mazurek 2010](#)). The Kashubian-Pomeranian Association undertakes activities aimed at representing the Kashubians, but also strives to ethnicise this group.

At this point, it should be emphasized that although this organization undertakes activities aimed at defining and implementing political goals ([Turner 2017](#)), an example may be lobbying in order to give the Kashubian language the status of a regional language. It avoids being referred to as a party. However, if we treat the affirmation of Kashubian identity in the public space as an expression of the freedom of cultural minorities, to have their own culture different from the dominant culture, then the activities of the Association are activities of a political nature ([Arendt 2007](#)).

The Association is an institution that attempts to set the criteria of Kashubianness (mainly based on language). It emphasizes social advancement and the achieved status of its members. It is a process aimed at inhibiting the rejection of the ethnic identification of its members. The most famous member of the organization is Donald Tusk (President of European Council 2014–2019, Prime Minister of Poland 2007–2014). Among the members of the Association, one can find many ministers from various political groups, such as Eugeniusz Wittbrodt (Minister of National Education 2000–2001), or Jarosław Sellin (State Secretary, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage–2005–2007, State Secretary, Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport–since 2015).

In April 2021, the organisation had 70 branches and 6573 members. The number of branches and members of the organisation has varied over time (for comparison, in 2017 this number was 6411, and in 2006–4100)⁸.

Since its inception, the Association has developed its activities very dynamically, already in the first year of the organisation's operation, 10 branches were established. Despite the lack of legitimacy of this organisation to represent the Kashubs (such legitimization in the case of the Lusatians in Germany is Domowina), the members of the organisation undertake a number of actions that, in a way, legitimise such treatment of the Association, which has been particularly visible after 1989.

Representatives of the Parliamentary Committee for National and Ethnic Minorities, established in 1989, met with representatives of the Kashubian community in Gdańsk and Wieżycza in March 1990. The activists presented their postulates (mainly concerning learning in the Kashubian language, and teaching this language at every stage of education in Poland)⁹.

Thomas Eriksen aptly noted that if "(...) ethnicity is to have a personal meaning, it must provide the individual with something that he considers valuable" ([Eriksen 2013](#), p. 58). The Association ensures that the Kashubs belong to a specific (Kashubian) community, while at the same time, uses religious rituals to strengthen this bond, to emphasize their importance. Participation in rituals and rites in Kashubian costumes strengthens the emotional bond with the community, the sacred layer overlaps the profane—at the same time bonding Kashubianness with religiousness, strengthening the existing Kashubian-Catholic self-stereotype (cf. [Mazurek 2010](#), p. 284).

One of the most important events in the life of the Kashubian community was the pilgrimage to the Holy Land organised by the Association in 2000, during which a plaque with the text of Our Father in Kashubian was installed in the Church of the Pater Noster among other plaques in various languages¹⁰. This significantly increased the prestige of the Kashubian language, both among the Kashubs and in public spaces. It was around the language that the Kashubian identity began to be created at the beginning of the 21st century, which is favoured by the Act on national and ethnic minorities and the regional language, Kashubian, introduced in 2005. The Kashubian language is protected, but the Kashubian minority is not, which officially—despite declarations of belonging to this

minority or the Kashubian nation during population censuses—does not officially exist in Poland¹¹.

An example of maintaining the Kashubian identity with the use of religious rites is Kashubian Congress, organised every year by the Association—one of the most important events in the life of the community. The first one took place on 19 June, 1999, in Chojnice. The exception was the year 2020, in which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the sanitary restrictions enforced in Poland at that time, the Congress was cancelled.

Every Kashubian Congress begins with a solemn march to a Catholic church and a holy mass. For example, the 19th Kashubian Congress in Rumia, which took place on 1 July, 2017, began with a mass at the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians. The Catholic clergy, often originating from the Kashubian environment, was (and is) actively involved in the development and promotion of the Kashubian region, an example of which is the fact that 2007 was announced by the Association as the Year of Father Janusz St. Pasierb and was inaugurated with a Holy Mass in the church of St. Joseph in Tczew. Among the guests, there was also Primate senior archbishop Henryk Muszyński, who knew Father Pasierb personally. Primate senior archbishop Henryk Muszyński (an honorary member of the Kashubian Institute) also took part in the Kashubian Unity Day¹² in Kościerzyna on 17 March 2013, where he celebrated the Holy Mass. The Primate also took part in 18th Kashubian Congress in Wdzydze, where, together with Bishop Wiesław Śmigiel, he celebrated the mass inaugurating the Congress. There are many examples of the participation of the highest hierarchs of the Catholic Church in Poland in the Association's events.

The events organised by the Association are not only inaugurated by the Catholic clergy, but very often the organisation itself initiates events that can be described as religious.

7. Materials and Results

The study carried out in 2019/2020 was a continuation of research conducted in 2006/2007 among members of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association. It was interrupted by the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of restrictions related to it.

Questionnaires were sent to individual branches of the KPA (drawn from among 70 branches numbering 6573 people at the time of the survey) with a request to be filled in, and questionnaires were also distributed in November 2019 at the General Meeting of the organization.

A similar method was used in 2006/2007. The questionnaires were sent back to the main office of the KPA; 6.2% of the organization's members were surveyed in 2019/2020. In addition, qualitative studies were carried out, the results of which are not used in this article¹³. At this point, it should be noted that numbers of both branches and members vary over time. The number of members means the persons who have paid their member fees. Usually, 15–20 branches are very active. Members of some branches meet 1–3 times a year, and others, even several times a month. In addition, the activity of the squad is variable over time. Meetings are sometimes very formalised, sometimes they have the character of informal social gatherings. At this point, it should be noted that during the time of the greatest sanitary restrictions (March–May 2020), the activity almost froze. However, it quickly moved to the network. Thus, the branch in Gdańsk has held board meetings on the internet since April 2020 (data received directly from the president of the branch Wojciech's Konkel).

The survey was conducted among the leaders of the Kashubian environment, the most active members of this community. This has its drawbacks, because their views and opinions are not necessarily representative for all Kashubians. However, it also has advantages, because they belong to an organization that creates policies towards and among Kashubians. It is thanks to the activities of the KPA that Kashubian identity is concentrated in relation to language and activities related to it, and religion is used to

create it. These are the actions of the Association that determine the direction in which the community is heading. Therefore, it seems reasonable to examine the members of the organization, because they are opinion formers.

The results of the research conducted among the members of the Association clearly indicate that the link between the sacred and the profane, which is the use of religious elements for the ethnicisation of the Kashubs, is approved by the members of the organisation. This study started in June 2019 and ended with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak due to the introduced restrictions¹⁴. Questions about religion and religiosity were among many questions the respondents were asked. First, the respondents were asked whether: “(Catholic) religion is very important for the Kashubs”. A total of 46.9% of the surveyed members of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association agreed with this opinion, 17.9% rather agreed. Only 8.9% of people taking part in the study could not make up their minds. For this formulation, the mean was $x = 3.34$, $N = 403$. Thus, more than half of the respondents confirmed, in their declarations, the importance of Catholicism for the Kashubs.

Due to the fact that pilgrimages are important to the life of the organisation and support both faith and a sense of community, the respondents were also asked whether “the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association should organise pilgrimages”. Almost half of the respondents gave a positive answer (20.8% of the respondents rather agreed and 24.3% of the respondents agreed). However, it is worth mentioning here that nearly one fifth (19.4%) had a problem with responding to this statement (hard to say). It should be noted that, apart from a religious event, pilgrimages are social events, an opportunity for the members of the branch to spend time together.

As already mentioned, Kashubian religiosity is frequently emphasized in the public space without often specifically indicating what it means; it is one of the group’s self-stereotypes that I have presented in previous research.

It turns out that the Kashubs more often describe themselves as religious people than the ethnic Poles. The analysis of variance showed a significant difference in approval for this statement between people of other ethnic origins than Kashubian and the Kashubs ($F(1,292) = 15.68$, $p < 0.0001$). In addition, the latter consider themselves Catholics more often than they are considered to be—the analysis of variance showed a significant difference: $F(1,292) = 33.68$, $p < 0.001$) (Mazurek 2010, p. 283).

The answers of the respondents confirmed the results obtained over 10 years ago (Mazurek 2010, p. 283–285), which proves the stability of this belief (and the stereotype functioning in the society), although a slight downward trend can be noticed, which can be explained by the increasing secularisation, which does not omit the Kashubs. The statement: “The Kashubs are more religious than others” was confirmed by 20.1% of the respondents, 22.6% of the respondents rather agreed, at the same time 24.3% said that “it is difficult to agree with this opinion”. The remaining people had a negative attitude towards this statement (they disagreed and rather disagreed with this opinion).

As pointed out above, the religious setting of the events is one of the ritual elements in the life of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association. An example can be the meetings of the General Councils of the KPA—for instance, the 21st meeting of the General Council of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, which took place on 13 June, 2021, in Chmielno, began with a Holy Mass in the church of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul at 11 a.m. The surveyed members of the organisation were asked to respond to the statement that “The Association should participate in religious ceremonies”. More than half of the respondents approved of this formulation (31.8% agreed, 23.8% rather agreed). As a result of the combination of the sacred sphere (religious ceremonies) with the profane sphere (activities of the organisation) certain events take on the character of a ritual, which in a way legitimises the institution of the Association and ensures the celebration of the sense of community. The participation of priests celebrating masses in the Kashubian language seems to ‘raise the rank’ of the event in the eyes of the recipients. Most of these rituals and events create cyclical events that constitute a tradition devised to build group (Kashubian) identification.

8. Conclusions

Culture plays a very important role in shaping the identity of each group; events are also important, especially those of a cyclical nature, indicating the continuity of a given community. These events, invented traditions, to use Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, are those that have been invented from scratch (quite recently in retrospect) as well as those whose origins are lost in the darkness of history. The main goal of invented traditions is primarily to instil in people values and norms of behaviour through their cyclical nature, which is a manifestation of the continuation of the past (Hobsbawm 2008, pp. 9–24).

Traditions related to religiosity have also been invented. In regard to Kashubian ethnicity, it is impossible not to notice that there is very strong ethnicisation of religious rituals, among which, Kashubian pilgrimages and masses inaugurating important events in the life of the organisation deserve special attention.

Kashubian pilgrimages play a very important role: their aim is not only to strengthen religiosity, but above all, they emphasize, maintain, and shape the sense of community and separateness of the Kashubs on the basis of (Catholic) religion. This is a very interesting phenomenon, because, in general, the Kashubs are predominantly Catholics, and they are distinguished from Polish Catholics by the fact that the mass is celebrated in the Kashubian language, and the Kashubs themselves have put on Kashubian costumes. Interestingly, we often hear about this separateness of faith from leaders who emphasize the Polishness of the Kashubs. It can therefore be concluded that they feel separateness, but for the sake of security and out of a sense of loyalty towards the Polish state, they prefer to find something more secure that will not be threatening. Stressing greater religiosity seems to be just that, the more so, as collective identities are particularly strong when they are based on cultural elements, such as language or religion (Smith 2007, p. 33). At the same time, places of religious worship that are the destination of pilgrimages are group symbols—through annual repetitions, the link between ethnic identity and participation in religious rituals is consolidated in the collective consciousness.

When a given community does not have (or has a poor) repertoire of traditions, then by creating new ones—so that they have the power to bind the community together—it uses what the community considers to be a value. It seems that the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, creating new traditions, such as Kashubian Congresses, or annual pilgrimages to places of worship important to the Kashubs, or Kashubian Unity Days, uses Catholic rituals to raise their significance and make them solemn. It is important for the members of the Association as well as for other Kashubs because it uses religion that in itself is important for these people. At the same time, endeavours made since the 1990s to introduce the Kashubian language to the Catholic Church, which can be considered effective, have allowed the Kashubs to participate in religious ceremonies conducted in their language.

It is also interesting that the Kashubian language officially has the status of a regional language in Polish legislation (in municipalities where, during censuses, more than 20% of the population declared that it was their language of communication is the official language), education in the Kashubian language at every level is possible (at the University of Gdańsk, there is a major in Kashubian ethno-philology), masses are celebrated in the Catholic church in this language, at the same time, the Kashubs themselves as a community do not have a recognised status (although they declare belonging to the Kashubian nation, or a dual Kashubian–Polish/Polish–Kashubian identity).

The area of life related to religion, which is regarded as one of the greatest values for this community, is an area in which the Kashubian language, as the pivotal value of ethnic identity, is freely and legally used. Therefore, it seems that the activities of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association in building enclaves for Kashubian culture are very effective.

The process of the ethnicisation of religion, in regard to Kashubs, means the use of the Kashubian language or other elements of Kashubian culture in the religious rites. The Kashubian identity is based on the language, origin, inhabited territory (Kashubia), and religion. The Kashubs can communicate in this language, learning Kashubian and

in Kashubian, they can live in Kashubia without any obstacles (the Kashubs were not affected by the resettlement action after World War II, as were Germans, Lusatians, or Lemkos); they can participate in religious practices, which are performed in Kashubian. People from individual branches of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association very often officially participate in these practices (a colour party with a flag takes part, the colour party members are dressed in Kashubian costumes). In this context, analysing a number of KPA activities, this organisation can be considered a revitalising body (cf. Eriksen 2013, p. 205). The Kashubs do not differ phylogenetically from people of Polish (or German) origin; therefore, they look for enclaves that would contextually build the boundaries of the group. It seems that the language, which is an effective communication barrier used in the church, effectively builds a community in which there is a double bond: based on religious experiences and belonging to an ethnic/national minority.

Undoubtedly, it is interesting that the actions taken by the Kashubians are invisible to the rest of society. This is probably due to the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association emphasizing a double Polish-Kashubian/Kashubian-Polish identity in public space, especially during the campaign for completing the national census. This period is a time of mobilization of resources because representatives of minorities want to manifest their presence. This translates into subsidies for education obtained from the state.

In Poland, the national census takes place every 10 years, and is an opportunity to manifest the presence of ethnic, national, and religious minorities in the public space. This public manifestation of the Polishness of the Kashubians seems to be an action that indicates the loyalty of the Kashubians to the state and ensures the possibility of achieving their goals. A similar role is played by Catholicism, pointing to the Polishness of the community.

This Kashubs example could indicate how to hold and create a sense of community using available resources. At the same time, it shows how to build separateness, to not provoke conflict with the dominant majority. Poles are mostly Catholics; relying on Catholicism when creating separateness does not seem to be perceived as threatening. On the contrary, it builds the image that Kashubians are just the same as Polish—they only speak a different language.

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Notes

- ¹ In Europe, the best-known examples are Croats (mostly Catholics), Serbs (mostly Orthodox), or Bosnians (mainly Muslims), who spoke one language—Serbo-Croatian—until the break-up of Yugoslavia. Nowadays, in regard to creating nations of newly created countries, actions are also taken to promote linguistic distinctiveness (while Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Montenegrin are derived from one dialect) (Greenberg 2001, 2004, 2008).
- ² Journal of Laws of 31 January 2005.
- ³ All the figures come from the data published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS).
- ⁴ Interested readers can refer to websites where the organisers themselves post videos showing this ritual: (141) the bow of feretories in Kalwaria Wejherowska—YouTube or: (141) aerobics with a holy painting (feretron dance)—YouTube.
- ⁵ I have already written about the role of pilgrimages in [Anonymous 2015]. Details omitted for double-blind reviewing.
- ⁶ 1989 is considered a symbolic date of the systemic transformation and the fall of communism in Poland.
- ⁷ October 1956 (Polish October, Polish thaw, Gomułka's thaw) means change in the politics in Poland in the second half of 1956. It was a less dramatic revolution than the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, but it initiated changes throughout the Eastern Bloc, including the USSR.
- ⁸ All data on the number of branches and their members in individual years come from the data obtained directly at the Head Office of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association by the author.
- ⁹ At this point, it can be noted that the Association's activists very often performed high state functions (e.g., Donald Tusk—Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland (2007–2014), President of the Council of Europe (2014–2019), Edmund Wittbrodt—Minister of National Education in 2000–2001).

- 10 The above-mentioned pilgrimages to Swarzewo, Sianów, and Matemblewo, or to Kalwaria Wejherowska, are often organised by local branches of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association.
- 11 As an aside, however, it should be added that in 2011, Kaszëbskô Jednota—a Polish association of people of Kashubian nationality—was officially registered in the court.
- 12 The Kashubian Unity Day is another newly created Kashubian holiday aimed at the ethnicisation of the community.
- 13 The study is the basis for a monograph in which a comparison during the Association will be presented. The expected date of publication of the work is 2022. The first study was described in: In Search of Identity. The Kashubian-Pomeranian Association in the eyes of a sociologist (Mazurek 2009b).
- 14 403 members of the KPA took part in the survey, the results will be published in a monograph in 2022.

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