9. Religion, Language and Traditions in Everyday Life

9.1 Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that nationalism or the identification with a nation is historically linked to religion. Indeed, national identity is generally defined by objective and subjective characteristics like language, territory, religion, tradition, legal rights, a common economy, historical memory and myths. Barth’s (1969:14,15) concept of ethnic categories, which serve as “socially relevant distinctions” made up of “overt signals or signs” and “basic value orientations”, also include religion as a possible key characteristic for the boundary maintenance of national groups. For instance, within the spectrum of national identity characteristics, religion may be pivotal for symbolism, common myths and history. As a consequence, religion has considerable potential for mobilization and the creation of group identity. Sherkat and Ellison (1999:369), for example, have paid attention to the role of religion for social movement theory since it provides “organizational and symbolic resources, leadership, a premobilized constituency embedded in dense social networks, and as an indigenous source of funding”. The impact of this kind of imagined community on national identity became evident in Poland where the role of the Catholic Church contributed to the protection of Polish national identity not only during the communist years but also over the past two hundred years amid partition and occupation by Prussia, Russia and Austria. Another example that shows the link between religion and nationalism are the national groups of former Yugoslavia where religious differences provided concrete factors for the distinctions of national group identity (see Partos 1997).

Within these cases, the argument of Krejci and Velmsky (1981) explains why religion varies in importance across nations. They argue that only in cases where religion acts as a substitute for other characteristics does it become salient for national identity – thus, when important attributes of identity, such as language or territory are missed in the nation-building process or when the frameworks of ethnos or nation coincide with the religious history and tradition. Similarly, Smith (1991:25) mentions that “traumatic developments [that] disturb the basic patterning of the cultural elements that make up the sense of community, shared memories and notions of collective destiny of given cultural units of population” may change the outstanding features of national identity. War, occupation, exile, immigration, and religious conversion
form the kind of traumatic developments that forge the role of religion for national consciousness and group cohesion (see Rieffer 2003). In sum, the existing literature on nationalism and religion underlines the geopolitical and historical factors in line with struggles for power and the experience of threat as the main enhancer of the religion’s importance for national identity. Accordingly, members of the Ukrainian minority in Poland consider their religious belonging to the Greek Catholic Church not only as a cultural attribute of their Ukrainianness but first and foremost as the main distinctive feature for their national identity within a predominantly Roman Catholic country, in addition to language. In this chapter I will draw on the role of religion in the minority’s everyday life. The Julian calendar with its different dates for holidays, the tserkva with its Ukrainian liturgy as well as the religious community itself and the question of mixed marriages are striking features of national identity and collective attitudes that shape the minority’s integration into networks and society in general. At the same time, the clash of religion, modernity and globalization bears generational differences in attitudes, lifestyles and traditions. Taking into consideration the distanced reference to the Ukrainian state, it becomes obvious that it is religion rather than nation or nation-state that serves as a primary marker of group difference in everyday life. A closer look at the role of religion in creating and maintaining difference, the way it is practiced and the kinds of identity narratives that underpin it, will show how far political and social opportunity structures have an impact on it. Moreover, the present chapter will demonstrate how interlaced religion and language are in the generational constructions of national difference and similarity. First however, a short historical overview will illustrate the national role of the Greek Catholic Church for Ukrainians.

### 9.2 The Greek Catholic Tradition

With regard to minorities in Poland and their confession, there are only three religions in Poland that have a national or “ethnic” character: the Old Believers’ Church for Russians, Judaism as representative for Jews and the Greek Catholic Church for Ukrainians. The majority of the German, Lithuanian and Slovak minority groups, as well as the Roma, are members of the Roman Catholic Church and thus are part of the ninety-eight percent of the Roman Catholic population in Poland (see Łodziński 1999). Hence, the Ukrainian minority differs not only with regard to its national provenience from the majority but above all with regard to its Greek-Catholic denomination.

The Greek Catholic Church – also called the Uniate Church – was established in 1596 by the Union of Brest-Litovsk in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which included Ukraine and Belarus. It accepts the papal authority in Rome, is thus Roman in doctrine, but remained Eastern in practice. Throughout the centuries of Latinization