
Neighbors: About the Multiculturalization of the Polish Past

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This article discusses the problem of neighborly coexistence in religiously and ethnically diverse settings. It tackles some widespread assumptions regarding the importance of religious/ethnic factors in shaping neighborly relations as well as the question of broader sociopolitical contexts and their impact on neighborly coexistence. In so doing, it argues against those approaches that place “neighborhood” at the center of debates on the breakdown of societal coexistence and use it as a tool of explanation of interethnic and interreligious conflicts. More specifically, the article engages critically with the way the idea of “neighborhood” is used in debates on Polish history. It argues that the idea of past harmony and peaceful coexistence in “multicultural” settings reinforces the image of the Polish society as tolerant and diversity-friendly and stresses that the harmonious neighborly coexistence was brought to an end by “outsiders.” As a result, not only does it serve the dominant group rather than minorities, but it precludes the understanding of the dynamics of ethnic/religious pluralism. The article therefore suggests that the studies of diversity in Poland should pay closer attention to the context of the dominant—Polish *and* Catholic—culture in which the diversity has been accommodated. Striving to address this problem, it presents some findings from an ethnographic study of a multireligious and multiethnic neighborhood in rural Poland and provides some comparative insights.

Keywords: *neighborhood; multiculturalism; Poland; religious and ethnic diversity*

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“Neighborly coexistence is exemplary today, if only religious, political or financial matters didn’t come into play”.

(Passage from a school chronicle, 1936)

Introduction

I suppose that if a person unfamiliar with the meaning of the word “neighbor” entered the library of a social science institute, she or he might come to the conclusion that this notion refers to a brutal tribe. Browsing through the bookshelves, she or he could find a collection of essays on “neighbors at war,”¹ works that attempt to answer the question “why neighbors kill,”² and those that explore whether “good fences make good neighbors.”³ She or he could see that neighbors are often described as “enemies,”⁴ “betrayers,” and even “monsters.”⁵ Furthermore, she or he might be puzzled to realize that the book entitled “Love thy neighbor” is in a fact “a story of war.”⁶ Meanwhile, for somebody who not only knows but gathers a set of connotations around the notion of “neighbor” and “neighborhood”—such as “closeness,” “help,” “friendship,” or “respect”—the titles cited above may appear contradictions in terms. Arguably, provoking such an effect is the intention of the authors who, by choosing such titles, ask this question: how is it possible that people who live, work together, socialize with one another, interact on an everyday basis, and form one community are able to turn against each other? By posing this question, they also ask about the possibility of an undisturbed, peaceful, and invulnerable interethnic and/or interreligious coexistence, as it is mixed neighborhood that is at the heart of the matter in their works.

My article does not aim to answer this query, but to challenge certain preconceived notions of “neighbors” and the very meaningfulness of the question “why do *neighbors* kill.” As researchers tackling the question of neighborly conflicts demonstrate, the attempts to comprehend them mean taking into account manifold factors—spanned between structural and individual ones—and different scholarly tools—historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, to name but a few. And still, even by engaging with different kinds of scholarship and attempting to study the problem from different perspectives, it is hard to find a satisfactory answer. Therefore, I would like to pose two different questions, which, I trust, may encourage us to rethink both above-mentioned connotations of “neighborhood” and to challenge the prominence of the problem “why do *neighbors* kill.”

The first question is whether the studies of religiously/ethnically diverse neighborhoods do not overestimate the importance of religious/ethnic factors, or, to put it differently, whether analyzed neighborly conflicts are indeed of a religious/ethnic nature. I mean here much more than the recognition of the fact that religious/ethnic categorizations may relate to, or cover up, class or political divisions. It goes without saying that the latter factors operate in conjunction with the former.

What I want to highlight, following Cornelia Sorabji,⁷ is that no matter whether it is mixed or homogenous, the neighborhood always involves both “pros” and “cons” and is a source of friendliness and benefits as well as irritation and tribulations. And thus, it is important to acknowledge that the status of “neighbor” is one of many different identity components that enter into play in people’s interactions. The second question regards the problem of broader sociopolitical contexts and their potential impact on neighborly relations. Referring once again to Sorabji,⁸ I would like to point out a widespread inclination to charge the neighborhood with “the responsibility of explaining the causation, maintenance or reversal of complex, multifaceted phenomena,” such as ethnoreligious violence and conflicts. Importantly, while discussing this aspect, I aim to highlight both the pitfall of neglecting broader contexts and “outside” influences and the risk of overemphasizing them and excluding different “grassroots” responses to them. In other words, both these questions address a fundamental problem: is it really the *neighborhood* that we are and should be talking about when attempting to comprehend the breakup of societal coexistence, the dynamics of ethnic cleansing, or human indifference towards others’ harm?

My wish to address these queries was inspired by two different circumstances. The first was a year-long experience of fieldwork in a multireligious and multiethnic rural community in southern Poland, in which the question of neighborly relations had a prominent place. Through all its stages, I could recognize the complex nature of neighborhood, in the main the very narrow line between “a good neighbor” and “a member of a rival group”. At the same time, I reckoned that it was I as a researcher who was puzzled by the contradictions I observed. The local inhabitants considered them to be a “given”, a constant element of the local social system, and, more precisely, of the present-day system, as their narratives of the past brought a less nuanced, highly idealized, view of neighborly coexistence. All these observations led me to inquire as to the local dynamics of pluralism, in and beyond the studied area. To my surprise, I realized that not only memoirs or popular science books but also many scholarly works tend to reproduce the view of “lost paradise” and past “harmony,” echoing the words of my informants. Thus, the second circumstance is the process of becoming familiar with the literature on the subject and the recognition of its political usage today, which, in my view, translates into what I describe as “multiculturalization” of the past and precludes the understanding of the dynamics of ethnic/religious pluralism. In this article, I strive to bring these two experiences together, putting my research findings in dialogue with different accounts on past and present mixed neighborhoods. I believe that such an approach enables us to trace some patterns in the discourse about neighborhood (the grassroots, political and scholarly ones) as well as to recognize that past and present observations can be mutually enriching.

The argument goes as follows. First, I set a historical background for the discussion on pluralism in Poland, engaging critically with the idea of the past (as well as

present) “multiculturalism.” In the main, I argue that studies of diversity in Poland do not pay close attention to the context of the dominant—Polish *and* Catholic—culture in which the diversity has been accommodated. Then, I discuss some approaches to neighborhood that have been very influential in shaping the way neighborhood and neighborly relations are studied. I highlight a set of key issues that are, in my view, crucial for understanding the dynamics of neighborly relations. Finally, I present findings from my ethnographic study of a mixed neighborhood in rural Poland.

Multiculturalizing the Polish past

The Republic of Poland today constitutes one of the most homogenous political entities in Europe: 98 percent of inhabitants define themselves as ethnic Poles and 95 percent declare their belonging to the Catholic Church.⁹ These numbers are the outcome of a series of occurrences in the twentieth century, in particular the Second World War, which made of Poland a “crushingly homogenous” country.¹⁰ The Holocaust, ethnic cleanings, and relocations of borders, which brought about the expulsion of nonethnic Poles and “repatriation” (or rather: “im-patriation”) of Poles from the former Polish eastern borderlands, set in motion the process by which Polish society was cleansed of “foreign” elements. Nazi and Soviet policies found a peculiar continuation in the communist Poland, the authorities of which strove to assimilate all the remaining national and ethnic minorities, rewrote the history of the so-called recovered territories, and, by means of the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign, forced the last Holocaust survivors to leave Poland. Both a cause and a result of all these processes was the use of an ethnic defensive ideology as a means of legitimization of the communist power.¹¹ As for the confessional aspect, apart from the aforementioned historical occurrences, the growing number of Roman Catholics can be explained by means of two, at first glance contradictory, tendencies. The first was the fact that joining the Catholic Church was perceived as an act of resistance against the communist authorities.¹² The second was the fact that the communist state’s fight against the Church was in the long run a lost battle. As a matter of fact, the communist authorities had no choice but to abandon the politics of atheization and find a way of coexistence with the Catholic Church.¹³

The watershed of 1989, with its promise of pluralization and freedom of expression, did not lead to a profound transformation of the religious-national landscape. Quite the contrary, it can be argued that the close relations between Church and state authorities, which resulted in a vast number of laws that were Church-friendly and prioritized Catholics, consolidated the idea of “Pole-Catholic.” Undoubtedly, a significant change was the new legislation that guaranteed religious, ethnic, and national minorities equal rights in Poland as well as obliging the state to support minorities’ initiatives. Still, although important at the symbolical level, these acts

have so far not led to a dramatic change in terms of minorities' visibility and activity in the public sphere.¹⁴ Their presence continues to be limited to folkloristic representations (something that also characterized the times of People's Poland) and tends to be instrumentalized in political battles. Besides, despite the debates on "diversity ante portam," Poland has not yet experienced the phenomenon of mass immigration. The presence of Chinese workers, Vietnamese restaurant owners, and Ukrainian housekeepers is noticed and commented upon, yet this is usually done as a sort of journalistic curiosity. In other words, the presence of neither "old" nor "new" minorities has led to a profound discussion on the Polish-Catholic model or to a more inclusive understanding of "Polishness" highlighting its civic rather than ethnic dimension.

However, present-day homogenous Poland has found a different way of participating in the debate on multiculturalism, namely, by celebrating its past diversity. As mentioned above, ethnic and religious homogeneity is a fairly recent phenomenon in Poland. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (known also as the First Polish Republic) was inhabited by c. 40 percent ethnic Poles and c. 50 percent Roman Catholics.¹⁵ This fact was the result of expansionist policies, which brought under Polish rule a number of ethnically and religiously diverse territories, as well as of the political system—"noble democracy"—in which "Polishness" was defined in civic terms and which made religious tolerance one of its cornerstones. The Second Republic, which came into being after over one hundred years of partitions, was also a highly diverse state: Poles and Roman Catholics made up c. 69 and 62 percent of the population, respectively.¹⁶

It is noticeable that the two republics constitute a significant contrast to today's state. What is even more important, however, is the reading of those times in the political and scholarly discourse. The fact that the two republics came to an end because of foreign powers (partitions in the first case, the war in the second) constitutes the basis for a narrative that highlights the role of outside factors in destroying the tradition of "Polish tolerance" and "multicultural coexistence" and involves a very selective reading of history. In the case of the First Republic, it translates into a tendency to focus on the—undoubtedly groundbreaking—guarantees of religious freedom, but hardly ever on the question to what extent they were actually observed *and* who possessed such rights.¹⁷ Similar observations can be made with regard to the Second Republic, which also tends to be presented from the point of view of elites at the time; the importance of this factor is even greater considering that ethnic, religious, and class background tended to collide then. Further, such an approach underestimates the profound inequalities and discriminatory policies that characterized interwar Poland. As many scholars demonstrate, interethnic conflicts in the Second Republic were as tense as at any time before and brought about so many tensions that the war brought an opportunity to "resolve them for good."¹⁸ Nonetheless, the First and Second Polish Republics were nominated the "predecessors" of present-day (and future?) multicultural Poland. According to many social

scientists studying multiculturalism in Poland, “the experience of multiculturalism is, in fact, behind us and constitutes a solid element of the collective imaginary, which comes to light today.”¹⁹ Even the recently acknowledged minorities’ rights are perceived as “the positive historical legacy of the First Republic where many nationalities lived peacefully side by side.”²⁰

I discussed elsewhere the very problem of defining *both* past and present Poland as a multicultural society,²¹ arguing that rather than promoting diversity and pluralism, the concept of multiculturalism leads to a further reinforcement of the Polish-Catholic culture as the dominant one. A detailed discussion of this problem goes beyond the scope of this article. What I want to stress here is the fact that the way the Polish experience of diversity is narrated does not permit us to comprehend the dynamics of two parallel historical phenomena: the increasing importance of the idea of the Polish-Catholic connection and the decreasing religious and ethnic heterogeneity. The understanding of these processes demands a change in point of view: instead of highlighting the role of “outside factors” and “big history” looking more closely at certain endemic developments. It is such a perspective that brings Antonina Kloskowska to recognize that the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was “a sociologically very interesting example of cultural polymorphism, but subordinated to the dominant Polish culture, and not only the Polish state,”²² where nonethnic Poles recognized a hierarchical arrangement of ethnic and national elements, exemplified in the expression “gente Ruthenes, natione Polonus.” This opinion may well apply to interwar Poland, in which, given the context of nineteenth-century national awaking, modernization, and nation-states, the means of transmitting a dominant national culture were even more powerful and widespread, as were the means of excluding “unwanted” groups and individuals. Furthermore, it invites us to broaden the scholarly work on the Polish national identity, which tends to highlight the role of the period of partitions and the communist era in developing the link between nationhood and confession or that between the nation and the Church. What is lacking is a more careful consideration of the long-term processes of the formation of the “Polish-Catholic” bond and its establishment as a *norm*. Finally, it makes us consider the interaction of different factors—such as religion, ethnicity, and class background—in shaping social relations.

The reason why I speak about these aspects in the context of neighborhood results from the fact that the above-mentioned narratives on Polish “multicultural” pasts bring along the view of “multicultural neighborhoods” in which people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds happily lived together. As mentioned above, the possibility of “the ever after” was destroyed by “outside forces” which brought an end to the ethnically and religiously mixed towns and villages. Such a view usually regards the period of interwar Poland and depicts the situation in the eastern or southeastern borderlands of Poland at the time. And it is usually the representative of the then dominant group—Poles—that presents such a view. Although this tendency is visible first and foremost on the pages of memoirs and diaries,²³ which have

in recent times gained astonishing popularity, many scholarly works reproduce this view instead of attempting to deconstruct it.²⁴ A very similar process is observable at the level of politics, especially in the activities of regional authorities.²⁵ Arguably, one of the products of an idealized view of interethnic and interreligious relations in interwar Poland is precisely the inability to answer the question with which I started my article, namely, How is it possible that people who live and work together, socialize with one another, interact on an everyday basis, and form one community are able to turn against each other?

I want to repeat here that I am far from claiming that there is *one* answer to this question. For the difficulty in resolving this query lies not only in the manifold factors that enter into play and profound differences between different plural contexts, but in the fact that this question inevitably touches upon the most fundamental questions on human nature. And, no matter whether we are more inclined to accept the idea of the “banality of evil”²⁶ or the “ordinariness of good,”²⁷ it would be hard to establish why, in a moment of trial, some neighbors betray and others help, some show respect and others turn their backs? What is possible, however, is a recognition of some patterns in neighborly relations and factors that shape them. And what is not only possible but also extremely important is the recognition that the inability to answer the question about the breakup of neighborly relations results from the fact that, at least in some contexts, the very assumptions made in the question is wrong. For before asking why people who were close neighbors ended up hurting, expelling, or even murdering each other, it is important to ask whether they indeed lived together and what “closeness” and “neighborhood” meant to them (this is not to say that if they did not live together their crime is “more understandable” but to question the moral weight put on neighborhood). Bearing all these issues in mind, in the following I propose to rethink the idea of religiously and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Although I am drawing on scholarly observations from different multireligious and multiethnic settings, the main point of reference for me is the scholarly contributions on the areas close to my own research site. I thus refer to the studies on Poles, Ukrainians, and/or Jews, who used to live “together and apart” in many Galician settings, where interethnic communities shifted into “communities of genocide.”²⁸

Rethinking (Multicultural) Neighborhood

Religious, Ethnic (or) Neighborhood?

As mentioned in the introduction, the study of neighborly relations constitutes a very important topic within social anthropology and other social sciences. I have also pointed out that the studies of mixed neighborhoods often translate into the studies of conflicts and the main reason behind conducting such studies is the question of whether and in what way interethnic/interreligious coexistence is possible. In

other words, they are based on a premise that suggests the likeliness of conflicts in such contexts. Despite the fact that this premise can be supported by ample evidence, it is worth asking whether putting neighborly relations in such a framework—seeing in the ethnoreligious aspect the main cause of conflicts—does not constitute a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

This leads to the first point, that is, the necessity to pay attention to the “neighborhood” itself, and not only to its “multireligious” or “multiethnic” character. This means referring to the grassroots meaning of neighborhood, focusing on the physical proximity and the practices of mutual respect and cooperation that have evolved around them, regardless of people’s religious and ethnic identity. This problem has been discussed in detail by Sorabji in reference to a Bosnian community she studied.²⁹ In her work, the anthropologist warns against confusing two different meanings of “neighborhood”: a metaphorical and often politicized one and a grassroots understanding.³⁰ One of the effects of such a collision is the perception of neighborhood as “a determining force able either to prevent or create a war, or to rebuild multi-ethnicity in its wake.”³¹ She thus challenges the often romanticized view of mixed neighborhoods. Discussing the Bosnian concept of *komsiluk*, she argues that it refers to physical neighbors and their relations of different sorts—obligations, expectations, habits—which can be both enjoyed and detested, regardless of ethnic identity.³² Similar observations are made by Marcin Lubaś in his account on a Muslim–Orthodox neighborhood in Macedonia.³³ Lubaś argues against those scholars who treat mixed neighborhoods as a special kind of neighborly relations, without recognizing that these also fall into rules and norms governing any neighborly relationship.³⁴

Yet another problem with highlighting ethnic factors lies in the fact that historical-anthropological studies of mixed neighborhoods often deal with the contexts in which the process of formation of ethnic identifications has not been complete. This is the case with many settings in the former Polish eastern borderlands.³⁵ For instance, accounts on Polish–Ukrainian conflicts during and after the Second World War highlight the role of religion (namely, the way people made the sign of the cross) in defining people as Ukrainian or Polish. This is not to say that religion cannot be a weapon in intracommunal struggles³⁶ but to highlight the problem of certain ways of “coding” social relations. Besides, it is important to ask whether it is at all meaningful to speak about a “complete process of identity formation.” Avoiding the risk of essentialization, anthropologists tend to reject the idea of identities—ethnic, religious, cultural—as fixed and given.³⁷

Still, the most important issue—especially in the reference to the way past diversity is nowadays spoken of—is the overlooking of the class factor. This shortcoming can be reflected in attempts to understand both positive and negative neighborly relations. In terms of the former, while highlighting the friendship among people from different religious and ethnic communities, it is important to bear in mind that it is usually the class background that has been a unifying factor. Unsurprisingly,

many scholars highlight the close relations between the Jewish and Polish liberal intelligentsia³⁸ or between the Jewish and Polish working class.³⁹ As for the latter, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many “ethnoreligious” conflicts in fact meant the conflicts between manors and peasants, owners and dependents. Again, Polish–Ukrainian relations in the first decades of the twentieth century offer ample evidence.⁴⁰ Furthermore, somewhere in between these two poles, there must be room for “symbiotic” relations between different ethnoreligious groups, the coexistence of which was simply “functional” because of their different class backgrounds and professions.⁴¹ Hence, it is crucial to pay attention to neighborhood itself and at the same time realize how ethnic and religious factors can be mobilized and assigned, or coact with other factors (such as class background or economic factors). All these bring about conflicting foundations of neighborly coexistence, which I discuss in the next section.

Contradictory Patterns of Neighborly Coexistence

The following overview highlights some recurrent patterns in the discourse of neighborhood. Before discussing it in detail, I would like to emphasize that I am far from claiming that these observations can be easily generalized in different contexts of neighborly relations. There are long-term and newly established neighborhoods, not to mention that the understanding of “long-term” and “new” may differ substantially. Because of their location, some neighborhoods became the subject of nationalist discourses and policies much earlier than those in which such policies and discourses never seem to have made an impact.⁴² The list of possible differentiating factors is long; it includes not only different structural and ideological factors but also individual ones, such as the presence (or lack thereof) of “brokers” or “mediators” whose role in maintaining neighborly coexistence has been invaluable.⁴³ Hence, on the one hand, one must be careful with transposing observations between different research contexts. On the other hand, notwithstanding this variety, the accounts on mixed neighborhoods (and their breakup) are often strikingly similar. As Klaus Roth observes,⁴⁴ the fact that social coexistence is a competence developed over a long period of time, resulting in a “habitus,” does not make it less fragile.

The first set of patterns I would like to discuss is the opposition “inside/outside,” manifested in the discussions on the grassroots practices and rules vis-à-vis broader influences, in the main state and other institutions’ (such as churches, schools, mass media) policies and discourses. The problem of “external” factors opens a wide field of explanations of neighborly conflicts. What is quite common is the view of mixed neighborhoods as separate entities, untouched by “big history” yet not immune to “outsiders” influences that eventually destroy local coexistence. The most problematic aspect of such an approach is the fact that it presents local communities as objects, and not protagonists, of historical events, and deprives them of agency. Further, it dissolves the question of responsibility, ascribing the blame for committed

crimes or genocide to impersonal “politics” or “ideology.” The heated debate among scholars and in the press over the massacre in Jedwabne—the murder of Jewish inhabitants by their Polish neighbors⁴⁵—illustrates all these points well.⁴⁶ What seemed unacceptable for those who aimed to make Nazi and Soviet occupants responsible for the crime was the fact that Jedwabne—as with many other similar settings—had not been a place “outside of history” before World War II started. On the contrary, as Hanna Świdła-Zięba emphasizes,⁴⁷ the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne “did not act in a social vacuum”; the ground for the murder and other pogroms was prepared by the National Democracy movement’s ideas, propagated by priests, local elites, and newspapers.⁴⁸

Yet another example may be the scholarship on Balkan societies, which draws on Cvetana Georgieva’s work.⁴⁹ In her study of Muslim–Christian settings, Georgieva asserts that local “systems of living together” emerged “outside and irrespective of big politics and big history.”⁵⁰ In this way, she and researchers who have built on her scholarship⁵¹ do acknowledge “outside” influences, but they approach them as factors that disturb an already established system of relations. They repeat (quoting their informants) that it is the “outsiders” who antagonize people and destroy local harmony. The result is analogous to attempts to situate the studied realities “outside big history”; this time, people are shown as passive recipients of external influences and their own agency is overlooked. Hence, while acknowledging the tension between bottom-up and top-down factors, it is important to remember that it is not the interaction between the two that produces certain effects for the neighborly relations.

The second set of oppositions regards “commonalities” and “differences.” The integration of both within the system of mixed neighborhood results from the simple fact of sharing some spheres of life—such as work, education, or certain institutional settings—while keeping apart the dimension of religious life and ethnic associations. On the one hand, such a division seems to be necessary in a system in which people want to “live together and remain oneself,” yet, on the other hand, it is the failure to maintain a balance between respect for difference and a sense of mutual belonging and solidarity to create tensions within the community.⁵² Although these observations may seem obvious, I contend that the issue of respect for difference vis-à-vis recognition of commonalities should be given serious consideration. A careful consideration of the idea of respect, often seen as a basis for multicultural coexistence, reveals its double-edged character: the fact that respecting the difference also means the maintenance of intergroup boundaries. This mechanism may be particularly consequential in the situation of conflicts and ideological struggles, when those “on the other side” are easily excluded as those who do not belong to “us” but to “them.” In other words, “difference” may be transformed into “familiar otherness,”⁵³ but this mechanism can be easily reversed, too. In addition, the contextuality of “us” and “them” is strictly related to the tension between “closeness” and “distance”, observed in many accounts on neighborly violence. On the last pages of his second book about Jedwabne, Jan T. Gross recalls the way Jews addressed their Polish acquaintances, begging them to

save their lives. Quoting affectionate forms of Polish names, he asks how is it possible that the moments when Poles and Jews lived together suddenly ceased to matter.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, other participants in the debate on the Jedwabne massacre would inquire as to what “being neighbors” actually meant for Poles and Jews, and whether it referred to something more than physical proximity.⁵⁵

This leads to the last point, namely, internally contradictory statements about the shape of local relations. Noticeably, people praise the respect and friendship that supposedly reign in the local community, but the moment a conflict occurs, they claim that they “have always known it” or “have always expected that.” In other words, local knowledge seems to be able to accommodate two opposite (at least in observers’ eyes) convictions: “we are like a family” and “there is ‘us’ and ‘them.’” Closely related to this problem is the question of idyllic narratives on the past and accounts on dramatic events that destroyed the neighborly harmony. The more dramatic the “end,” the more sentimental stories of the past tend to be. In my view, a very important outcome of this process is people’s tendency to describe those behaviors that were at best “neutral” or “proper” as “positive,” “warm,” or “close” and thus overstate the “togetherness” of past neighborly communities. In the light of what happened during and in the aftermath of ethnoreligious conflicts, “not hostile” translates into “exemplary” and physical proximity into an emotional one. Last but not least, it is important to emphasize that such idyllic accounts can easily be “re-written” or “re-told” for the purpose of current circumstances. Idealization of the past serves many different purposes, one of them being an attempt to deal with traumas: genocide, ethnic cleansing, expulsions.⁵⁶ Yet it may also perform an important political function and be employed in the process (re-)shaping present-day relations. A cogent analysis of this process is offered by Mark R. Cohen in his historical study of Jewish–Muslim relations.⁵⁷ He demonstrates that, depending on the political circumstances, either the view of “interfaith utopia” or “neo-lachrymose conception” dominated.

The history of pluralistic settings makes it evident that it was neither the “harmony” model nor “segregation” type that was the dominant one, but precisely the “coexistence” model that seems to embrace all these contradictory features.⁵⁸ In the following, I demonstrate that all these tensions are reflected in the accounts of the inhabitants of the multireligious and multiethnic region in which I carried out my ethnographic study.

Past and Present Neighborly Relations in Uście Gorlickie

In the period between April 2008 and April 2009, I carried out a year-long ethnographic fieldwork in several localities in the rural commune⁵⁹ of Uście Gorlickie. Today, the commune is inhabited by seven religious communities (Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s

Witnesses, and Buddhists)⁶⁰ and two ethnic groups, Poles and Lemko-Ukrainians. The connection between ethnic and religious identities—Roman Catholicism in the case of Poles, Orthodox/Greek Catholicism in the case of Lemko-Ukrainians—is strongly emphasized despite the presence of other religious communities.⁶¹ As a matter of fact, religion constitutes the means of perpetuating ethnic identities, and ethnic and religious categorizations tend to be used interchangeably (“a Polish church,” “a Lemko priest,” etc.).

Against the narrative that would see this region as having been “multicultural always,”⁶² it is important to clarify that the area became ethnically and religiously diverse when the rest of the country became homogenous, that is, after the Second World War. Up till then, the rural localities⁶³ in this part of the Carpathians (Lower Beskid and Bieszczady) were inhabited by the Rusyn population, and a small number of Jews and Poles. With the growth of national movements, some Rusyns came to identify themselves as Ukrainians, while others preserved their Rusyn identity, and since the early decades of the twentieth century they have been referred to as “Lemkos.”⁶⁴ Because of the events of the war, a series of brutal resettlements, and ethnic cleansing, the region was reformed almost as a *tabula rasa* in the 1950s, becoming a home for Poles (newcomers) and Lemkos (returnees) as well as a target of missionary work. The result of all these processes is the present-day ethnoreligious mosaic; minorities constitute c. 20 to 30 percent⁶⁵ of the population, which is close to the composition of the entire country in the prewar period. As to the inhabitants’ occupations, the number of people making a living from agriculture is in decline, while tourism is becoming increasingly important. As a result, the idea of “multiculturalism” has been employed as a promotional tool that is supposed to attract visitors and presents the area as unique in the homogenous Polish context. The following sections present a grassroots approach to diversity and experiences of it.

Neighborhood in Prewar Poland: About an Idyllic Past

As mentioned above, until the Second World War the area around Uście Gorlickie was inhabited nearly exclusively by the Rusyn population. National movements and the shifting policies of the Austro-Hungarian (–1918) and Polish Republic (1919–1939)⁶⁶ led to profound divisions and conflicts within the Rusyn population. The very same reasons brought about the competition over the faithful between Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, which led to the “conversion” to the Orthodox Church (from the Greek Catholic point of view) or “return to the fathers’ faith” (according to the Orthodox) of entire villages, which used to be Greek Catholic.⁶⁷ Importantly, a vast group of local people was indifferent to those occurrences; they neither identified with a nationalist camp nor assigned importance to the change of confession.⁶⁸

In the interwar period, the only “others” living in Rusyn villages were a couple of Jewish and Polish families. The oldest inhabitants recall those times as idyllic and

peaceful. They claim that Poles were fully integrated in the local community, accompanying them in religious services and marrying into Rusyn families. At the same time, they admit that there was a distance between Jews and Rusyns because of the separateness of the religious and economic spheres. They also emphasize that Jews—owners of shops, inns, and sawmills—occupied higher social position and that young Rusyn girls would work for them, especially on the day of Sabbath. However, both groups respected each other and there was a certain degree of intimacy, especially among Jewish and Rusyn children who attended one school. A very telling story in this regard for me was the account of an elderly Greek Catholic woman, Gienia. When I asked her about Jewish inhabitants of the village, she told me that one of the Jewish boys was very handsome and many girls were in love with him. The boy's father was afraid that his son would decide to marry a Christian girl, and decided to send him to Palestine. This decision saved Gienia's friend's life; the rest of his family perished in a concentration camp. Some time ago, the Jewish man visited the village of his birth. This was the part of the story Gienia was most emotional about: she was very upset that nobody had informed her about the visit. "I wanted to meet him," she exclaimed, "we were friends!"

Only a few inhabitants would mention that, although generally respected, local people made fun of their Jewish neighbors. This fact, illustrated in the following quote from an interview with a Greek Catholic couple, may account for the aforementioned shifting meanings of "neutral" and "positive"/"negative":

Teodor: Thus . . . it was rather up and down with Jews . . . such teenagers would . . . spite them and so . . . it was up and down. But still . . . they lived.

Tania: They lived. No harm was done to them.

Teodor: Nobody . . . nobody threatened them.

In general, when speaking about their Jewish neighbors, inhabitants highlight that these were very religious ("serious faith") and laborious people, and that there was a strong cooperation within their community. All these characteristics meant that they were respected by local people. They also emphasize that the day the Jews were taken to the concentration camp was terrifying, and that the people who wanted to make money out of the Jews' tragic fate (e.g., by taking over their houses) were punished with an illness or a misfortune.

Noticeably, positive comments usually apply to those Jews whom local people knew personally or whose relatives knew them. While the picture of Jews "in general" is different: speaking about *Jews*—but not about *Jewish neighbors*—local inhabitants pay attention to quite different features, or rather highlight different aspects of their commercial activities and community life. In such accounts, Jews are no longer industrious people but exploiters, while their fortunes do not appear to be an outcome of hard work but of dishonest practices. If there is any positive characteristic to mention, it is always accompanied by an expression that places it in the

“proper context”: “honest for a Jew,” “good despite being a Jew.”⁶⁹ Such differing attitudes bring to mind Rosa Lehmann’s observations about the complex correlation between “real life” and the “symbolic” representation of Jews. Analyzing interviews with the Polish inhabitants of Jaśliska, she observes that stereotypes about Jews were employed irrespective of what people said and thought about their past Jewish neighbors.⁷⁰ She also emphasizes that it was the Shoah that produced an idealized view of prewar times, widespread among both Polish and Jewish survivors.⁷¹

For Lemko-Rusyns, it was not the Holocaust and not the difficult experiences of the Second World War that had the most profound influence on local people’s remembrances but the postwar resettlements, known as “Operation Vistula.” The first wave of—in theory voluntary—resettlements (to the USSR) was carried by the Soviet occupant during the war. In 1947, the Polish communist government decided to expel the people who had remained in the area and disperse them in western and northern Poland, in order to assimilate them into Polish society. The brutality of the expulsions and of the settlement in the “recovered lands” left a profound mark on people’s memories and undoubtedly led to a further idealization of the prewar realm. Indeed, there is not much room for a more nuanced view of those times in Orthodox and Greek Catholic Lemkos’ narratives. Still, a less idyllic view of those times is presented by those people who constituted a minority at the time. This issue became clear to me when, after hours of interviews with Greek Catholic and Orthodox families who presented me with the idea of “lost paradise,” I got to know the Pentecostal community, who presented a contrasting picture of prewar times. Importantly, they did not speak exclusively about the experiences of their religious congregation but about brutal fights among Orthodox and Greek Catholics. As a matter of fact, it was due to those fights that various Protestant movements, brought to Uście via migratory routes from the United States and Canada, gained popularity among local people. A middle-aged Pentecostal pastor shared with me the memories of those times, as transmitted in his family:

[In the interwar period] there was a . . . religious war here, you know . . . Lemkos are not saints! . . . As you might know, the Catholic Church battled regularly with the Orthodox one. It was a total war. And suddenly, in the 1930s, in the midst of the Orthodox–Catholic battle, a vibrant, well-organized Protestant community sprang up, attacking both those churches. . . . So those two fighting churches had to join forces and start to battle with the Protestant one. And they speculated, and used Protestants in their own struggle. . . . It was a dirty struggle, very dirty struggle. They would stop at nothing.

Certainly, it is questionable to what extent a “total war” inspired by religious (and national) leaders’ activities affected neighborly relations. As mentioned earlier, many local inhabitants were indifferent. At the same time, however, it would be equally misleading to assume that such conflicts did not affect the everyday life of

the inhabitants. The idyllic view of past coexistence, imprinted in people's memories, is challenged not only by the minorities at the time but also by some official records, such as school chronicles. The authors of one of the school chronicles I studied frequently complained about inhabitants' political engagement and mentioned clashes over religious and ethnic background. While admitting the majority were "indifferent," they would also state spitefully that "the inhabitants . . . are mainly preoccupied with politics, which in their minds is the most important branch of science."⁷²

Summing up, the picture of neighborly relations in the prewar times turns out to be quite complex and does not permit definitive conclusions to be made. For as much as nostalgic memories can distort the picture of social relations—transforming the "neutral" into the "positive," and ignoring the less bright side of those times—one cannot take for granted their biased character or juxtapose with written sources (such as above-mentioned chronicles that, after all, were also influenced by chroniclers' views and interests).⁷³ In other words, a stubborn search for the evidence of "hidden" tensions and conflicts may be as deceiving as the insistence on past harmony. What can be said with a high degree of certainty is that the prewar realm represented the "coexistence model," characterized by partial exclusion and partial inclusion. As we have been able to observe, such a system precluded neither the development of close and intimate relations between (some) neighbors nor ambivalent attitudes and feelings towards "others." Likewise, having good memories of and respect for "dissenters" does not prevent people from making ambiguous comments about them. Besides, the presented data revealed the tension between "outside" influences and grassroots system of coexistence, which constitutes one of the leit-motifs in the discussion on neighborhood up till now.

Neighborhood in People's Poland: About True Respect

After the expulsion of Lemkos in 1947, the authorities gave abandoned lands and houses to Polish settlers. Polish and Lemko memories of those years have hardly anything in common. According to Polish inhabitants, upon seeing the poor condition of the abandoned farms, they realized that Lemkos were in fact lucky to be resettled to the "recovered lands" and become owners of well-preserved German houses. In their view, the prewar inhabitants must have been very primitive people, who lived with animals and did not know much about agriculture. Poles did their best to repair and develop the farms, but many of them had to give up and leave Uście in search of a better place to live. For the Lemkos, such a narrative is simply unacceptable. They claim that many of the houses had been robbed and destroyed before Poles settled there, and that Poles took part in the destruction of abandoned buildings as they were too lazy to collect wood in the forest. For them, the Poles who settled in Uście were "the worst sort of people"—people who had nothing and came into possession of a house only because of others' disgrace. Needless to say, opin-

ions on both sides are far from just; while many Poles seem to ignore the fact that Lemkos were treated as second-class citizens in the “recovered lands” and their life there was far from idyllic, Lemkos do not seem to recognize that among Polish settlers there were people returning from work camps in Germany or who lost everything during the war. Besides, both groups’ opinions were strongly influenced by the authorities’ propaganda and politics. Poles feared Lemkos as brutal UPA members, whereas Lemkos’ views of Poles were influenced by their hard experiences with Polish neighbors in western Poland, who also saw in them UPA supporters and acted “accordingly.”

However, more important here is the question to what extent such prejudices and stereotypes influenced Polish–Lemko relations after Lemkos began to return to Uście. In the late 1950s, the government permitted Lemkos to come back to southern Poland. There were different “return” strategies; some Lemkos got in touch with Poles who had bought their old house and proposed an exchange or payment, while others built new houses. In this way, a new neighborhood came into being. Both Poles and Lemkos admit that the beginnings of interethnic and interreligious coexistence were not easy, yet the first ones recall fewer difficulties. According to a Polish inhabitant, the relations were

very good, very good. There were no problems at all. . . . I mean, there is always a black sheep in the flock. People lived together and . . . I think that . . . when we went to school—and we went to school with Lemkos—there were no . . . no talk among us. It didn’t matter that one was a Pole, one was a Lemko, one somebody else. . . . They . . . we lived in peace and, to be honest, sometimes one could expect more help from Lemko than from a Pole, because, because they were very kind, actually they still are.

while his Lemko neighbor observes:

Well, I say, some people were good, and some were like dogs. They constantly called us Ukrainians (orig. *Ukrainicali tak aż strach*).

In general, however, the stories of conflicts and quarrels do not occupy a prominent place in people’s stories about the communist times. Instead, people highlight the fact that it was at the time of the communist hardship that they both learnt to live together and learnt about each other. Lemko and Polish children socialized in schools, while their parents helped each other in the fields. Working together, they had a chance to get to know each other’s history and religious traditions and to recognize, as they say, that in fact “they weren’t that different.” For many Poles, encounters with Lemkos (in the main Orthodox and Greek Catholics,⁷⁴ but also Pentecostals) meant for them the first contact with non-Roman Catholics. It was in those years that the basic rule of local coexistence—refrain from working during other people’s festivities—was established. Besides, people proudly recall common efforts to make life

under communism “more tolerable” and the importance of mutual help that cut across religious/ethnic divisions. Thus, it can be said that in people’s accounts on communism, memories of conflicts give way to those of common experiences. What is also hardly present in people’s accounts is the state authorities; their presence is highlighted in the context of resettlements and attempts to set Lemkos against Poles, but they are rarely recalled in the accounts on the next decades. When I inquired about this problem, people would answer that the authorities did not care about their marginal, peripheral region, and thus they were “left in peace.”

Certainly, the “degree” of neighborly relations differed: some people’s stories paint a picture of “proper” and “respectful” relations, while others go much further and recount the story of joint Christmas (celebrated twice⁷⁵) or admit that they could count on their Pole/Lemko neighbor more than on their own fellows. This fact brings to mind Sorabji’s encouragement to study the neighborhood beyond ethnic/religious lines;⁷⁶ the reason why some neighbors developed close bonds while others did not cannot be explained purely with reference to such factors. Asked why he did not become friends with a Lemko neighbor, a Pole would hardly ever say that it was because of the neighbor’s ethnic/religious belonging, stressing rather that he had a “mean character”; while a Lemko woman would say that a neighbor became her dearest friend because they shared a passion for sewing and helped each other with their children, and the fact that the neighbor was Polish was not given much attention. It is also worth adding that my analysis of the reports of the village leaders about the reasons for conflicts between neighbors does not point to ethnic or religious backgrounds being the reason for such conflicts either.

This does not mean, however, that ethnicity or religion did not matter; it is rather a question of when it mattered or—more precisely—of when people admit that it mattered. In fact, the narratives about the communist era related by the generation born in the 1940s and 1950s resemble the stories about prewar Uście told by people born in the 1920s and 1930s. The communist times are also a sort of “lost paradise”; such a view has nothing to do with the then political system or life conditions but refers to neighborly relations at the time. If there is anything that my interlocutors are unanimous about, it is precisely the conviction that in the communist times neighbors truly *respected* each other; by paying visits to each other, socializing, offering selfless help, not to mention a particular respect for others’ religious festivities and rituals. Today, neighbors are too occupied with watching TV and making money to have time for any of that. The discussion of the nostalgia for communist times and “marketization” of human relations goes beyond the scope of this paper.⁷⁷ The reason why I am bringing it up here is because it permits us to observe an important pattern: longing for past, idealized neighborly relations.

In other words, as idyllic images of the prewar realm ignore the problem of conflicts at the time, so do the nostalgic accounts of communist times and neighborly harmony. And yet, in certain contexts people express opinions that contradict, or at least problematize, the idyllic past. During my research, one such context was the

vote over double-naming,⁷⁸ which led to profound conflicts among the local inhabitants.⁷⁹ Although people's motivations and attitudes were quite complex, it was generally assumed that Lemkos were in favor of the introduction of double-naming, and Poles against it. The interviews I carried out in the period following the vote gave me a rather different picture of interethnic and interreligious coexistence under communism. People did not speak simply about neighbors, but "Poles" and "Lemkos." Lemko families "all of a sudden" recalled that their Polish neighbors *have always had* something against them. Instead of telling me about cooperation, joint work, and festivities under communism, they would tell me that Poles were planning to organize a second "Operation Vistula" in the 1980s. They would give me names of people who were in on the plot and who were supposed to take over their house. They too recalled that children were mocked at school and felt discriminated against, and not only in the first years after the Lemkos' return. In general, both Poles and Lemkos reached for stereotypes and clichés while speaking about each other.

Such "recovered" memories from a few decades ago do not eliminate the idyllic ones; both positive and negative experiences form the system of neighborhood. All this accounts for the observation that *any* neighborhood is composed of opposing features and relations, which, in my view, should not be seen in terms of dichotomies but as attributes that are permanently inscribed. Referring specifically to mixed neighborhoods, I believe that oppositional patterns result from the way in which diversity is "familiarized" and, more precisely, from "paying respect." For "respect" is a double-edged tool: it helps to maintain good, attentive relations but it also maintains awareness of diversity.

Neighborhood in Post-communist Poland: About the Power of the Norm

Arguably, the latest stage in the development of neighborly relations in Uście is the most difficult to study and analyze. Although I have argued that one should not approach the prewar rural realms as regions "outside of big history"—as these were the regions deeply shaped by conflicting policies, national and religious ideologies—there is no doubt that various political discourses and practices today have more direct influence and access to people's life. For this reason, studying present-day neighborly relations means not only observing how two neighbors interact or listen to what they say about each other but inquiring about the manifold sources of their opinions and stances. Throughout my research, I was able to realize that television constitutes a particularly important, and generally trusted, source of information. This fact often contributes, in my view, to the widening of the gap between media representation and one's own experiences; at the same time, by taking into account the influence of mass media, it is also possible to realize a dramatic discrepancy between theory and practice when it comes to minority rights.

In order to comprehend this problem, it is important to recall that the transformation of 1989, apart from complex changes within the economic-political system, entailed the promises of democratization and pluralization of the public sphere. However, as has been observed earlier, the vast majority of the new policies concern “culture” (in broad terms) and do not translate into improvements in other areas, for example those of a political or economic nature.⁸⁰ Besides, all these new possibilities are limited and strongly politicized. As a result of all these processes, “Polish multiculturalism” constitutes a good candidate for a caricatured representation of multiculturalism, with its view of “cultures” as separate entities and a folkloric approach to minorities.⁸¹

What is most interesting here, however, is the impact of “liberal” discourses and policies, as well as the newly developed sphere of minority rights—important even if not always fully implemented—on neighborly relations. The inhabitants I talked to presented me with quite contradictory judgments about the most recent developments. On the one hand, minority representatives suggest that their Polish/Roman Catholic neighbors are today more tolerant and open, and they attribute this precisely to television, or to the fact that people travel more and see how diverse the world is (notably, such opinions were sometimes expressed by the same people who praised the communist era, revealing the self-contradictory nature of their account). This issue is illustrated in the following quote, in which a Pentecostal couple compares the present-day situation with the past decades:

Janka: We did have problems! We had them some time ago. They [the neighbors] called us “tomcats.” . . . Tomcats, tomcats, tomcats! And I say: what does a cat believe in? Most likely in mice!

(Laughing)

Agnieszka: When did it change?

Janka: A good few years ago.

Józef: Since democracy has come, there is more talk about religions, about different confessions, on TV and so on. This helps a lot.

Quite similar opinions were expressed by the representatives of other minority communities. Some people would add that being intolerant is simply unfashionable today, and thus people try to manifest their openness. For that reason, many were convinced that friendly attitudes are only an appearance; people do not make mean comments or insult others, yet this does not mean they do not think badly of their dissenting neighbors. It is important to point out once again that all these claims constitute a challenge for the nostalgic remembrances of communist times. If it is suggested that people do not behave or speak as badly as they used to do in the past, then the past does not result in being so idyllic.

Again, however, this is only one side of the narrative about the ongoing changes. Along with the recognition of positive developments, inhabitants tend to suggest that it was easier to live together in the times when there was no discourse about being

different and no discussions about different “cultures.” Such a view is often expressed in relation to the ethnic diversity, and not only by local Poles, but also—albeit more timidly—by Lemkos. The communist era, which they recall as a period of “sameness” and common experiences, is viewed as better, or even *safer*, for neighborly relations. Certainly, such a view does not permit the acceptance that the idealized “sameness” might have constituted a coverage of unresolved problems from the past. And such a view must be contextualized by complaints about declining sociability, growing differences in social status and changing patterns of neighborly relations *in general*.

However, the longing for the communist era invites us to take into consideration one more issue. Reflecting on the latest developments, Lemkos ask whether having a Lemko textbook or a Lemko sign under the Polish one is not too high a prize for the ruining of good neighborly relations. This kind of argument was voiced by many Lemkos after the conflict over double-naming erupted. During the vote, the majority of Polish inhabitants strongly objected to the idea of signs with Lemko names. Almost overnight, neighbors split into “Lemkos” and “Poles” and began to threaten each other with “another Operation Vistula.” Even though the conflict regarded their constitutionally guaranteed right, Lemkos expressed their sadness about the fact that “people had become divided” and that “hatred had come into the village.” They spoke, in turn, about being shocked and disappointed by their Polish neighbors’ stances and about the fact that “they had always expected it.” But above all, many of them suggested that they preferred not to enjoy equal rights, but to have good relations with their neighbors.

It is here that we get to the nub of the matter: Why is there a choice between “equal rights” and “good neighborly relations”? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to come back to the opening remarks and stress the broader context of neighborly relations as well as the discrepancy between theory and practice in the domain of minority rights. The inhabitants of Uście Gorlickie have experienced diversity for decades; they have developed a set of nonwritten rules of neighborly coexistence, juggling with commonalities and differences. They are proud to say: “First of all he is my neighbor, and then he is Orthodox, a Lemko, a Pentecostal,” emphasizing people’s sameness. And yet, the broader context in which this neighborhood functions challenges such a view. Mainstream discourses and policies promote the idea of the connection between Polishness and Catholicism as something “natural” and “normal,” and in this way an implicit hierarchy: of people and of their rights. Although local people are aware that a Pole can be a Buddhist, too, and that one can refer to oneself as a Pole *and* Lemko, the message spread by the mass media, school education, historical politics, as well as a variety of state and regional authorities, propagates the idea of “Polish–Catholic” as a norm. The best exemplification of this was the active participation of Roman Catholic priests in the campaign against double-naming as well as the narrative—spread by local Polish elites (such as teachers and priests)—about the obligation to defend the Polish–Catholic territory.⁸²

Fundamental to the understanding of the powerfulness of the Polish–Catholic norm is the fact that it is often promoted under the name of pluralism or by the “least suspicious” channels.⁸³ Crucially, one of the most powerful tools in the promotion of the “Polish–Catholic” norm is precisely the discourse of multiculturalism. By promoting multiculturalism, the local government in Uście Gorlickie (as with many other local governments around Poland) recalls the past diversity, speaks about the Polish tradition of tolerance, dresses up minorities in folkloric costumes, and organizes ethnic festivals. In this way—consciously or not—it reinforces the idea of a dominant, “natural” Polish–Catholic culture and “other” minority cultures that constitute an addition to the local landscape. A sign bearing a Lemko name undoubtedly constitutes a useful addition to the local multiculturalism and, thus, if the inhabitants are reluctant to accept it, these are neighbors to be blamed for their inability to be “truly multicultural.”

But what about the neighbors? Is the minorities’ wish to give up their rights for the sake of good relations with neighbors—representatives of the majority—a sign of resignation or even passivity? Or is Poles’ opposition to the Lemko name an effect of “external” factors, such as the discourse on the “naturalness” of the Polish dominance? I contend that such an answer would be a simplification, for, as I have been emphasizing, it is necessary to approach the neighborhood as a sphere of different *interacting* factors. The inhabitants of Uście are very critical of the discourse of multiculturalism, which is the object of jokes and ironic comments. They do not want to be taught how to live together, and stress that they have lived together for decades and know what it means: it means “pros” and “cons,” and that these “pros” and “cons” are sometimes related to one’s ethnic/religious background and sometimes to different aspects of social life. They do strive to make local coexistence the best possible and, along with many bitter experiences, there are many things they are proud of. Perhaps it is in this light that one should interpret the nostalgia for an idyllic *past*, seeing in it the key to understanding what the *present* people wish to achieve for the local community. It is here that people’s memories of diversity and the politicized view of Poland’s multicultural past differ most dramatically.

Conclusions

One of the most moving accounts I heard during my year-long fieldwork was the story of an encounter of Lemko and Polish families in a village in the “recovered territories.” The communist state’s propaganda did much to “facilitate” Lemkos’ settlement in the area; they would tell Poles the stories of brutal UPA attacks and make them see an UPA partisan in each Lemko. Months after the arrival of Lemkos, Polish settlers continued to keep axes below their pillows, prepared for a night attack. And yet, what my informants were more eager to talk about was the story

about how, eventually, they managed to build a new community and learned to live together. Remembering the first days in western Poland, an elderly Lemko woman recalled a Polish woman who, upon seeing the Lemko newcomers, said to her fellow Poles: “but these are people like us!” (*tożto są takie same ludy jako i my*), recognizing the humanity they all shared.

Throughout my article, I have argued against attributing a “magic potency” to neighborhood and assuming that the neighborhood can prevent conflicts or explain their eruption. As many studies prove, “neighborly ties have only rarely motivated people to risk their lives to save victims of genocide: for the most part, rescuers gave as their reason a primitive sense of shared humanity, not any special connection arising from local or neighborly ties.”⁸⁴ And thus, the question “why neighbors kill” is essentially the question “why people kill” and—in one or the other way—it remains unanswered. Certainly, by scrutinizing national and religious ideologies, economic and social structure, trajectories and memories of violence, or the role of “mediators” and “brokers,” we can come close to an understanding of the dynamics of conflicts. Likewise, we can observe how the dynamics of “differences” and “commonalities” or “distance” and “closeness” both open and preclude the possibility of neighborly conflicts and violence. Yet, at the end of the day, it is hard to comprehend why the inhabitants of two neighboring, at first sight identical, localities may act in a diametrically different way.⁸⁵

What certainly does not help to comprehend the problems of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and persisting discrimination on (presumably) ethnoreligious grounds is a romanticized view of past diversity, which may serve different political functions; it is supposed to restore the community,⁸⁶ bring peace,⁸⁷ or prove the meaningfulness of the multiculturalist project.⁸⁸ In this way—let us once again reiterate—neighborhood is charged with the responsibility of explaining, resolving, or even reversing multifaceted phenomena.⁸⁹ In Poland, the image of past harmony, imprinted on the pages of memoirs, scholarly works, and tourist leaflets, constitutes a critical element of the nation’s self-portrait. It helps to reinforce the image of Polish society as tolerant and diversity-friendly and to stress that the harmonious neighborly coexistence was brought to an end by “outsiders.” This may explain why any dissenting narrative about neighbors meets considerable resistance (the case of Jan Gross’s book is but one example) as well as why the Polish-Catholic norm continues to frame the plights of religious and ethnic minorities. Perhaps what is lacking is the recognition that the opposite of utopia is not necessarily a dystopia, but the possibility of a better understanding of one’s society and history.

Notes

1. J. Halpern and D. Kideckel, *Neighbors at War: Anthropological Perspectives on Yugoslav Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

2. V. M. Esses and R. A. Vernon, eds., *Explaining the Breakdown of Ethnic Relations: Why Neighbors Kill* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

3. R. Hettlage, "Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbours? Esperienze di confine dal punto di vista di un sociologo," in *Borderline: le scienze sociali tra confini e sconfinamenti*, ed. C. Giordano (Trento, Berlin: Associazione Italo-Tedesca di Sociologia, Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 156–212.

4. E. Stover and H. Weinstein, *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

5. S. Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence," in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, ed. S. Žižek, E. L. Santner, and K. Reinhard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

6. P. Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

7. Cornelia Sorabji, "Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment and Komšilik in Sarajevo," in *On the Margins of Religion*, ed. F. Pine and J. de Pina-Cabral (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 104–7.

8. *Ibid.*, 109.

9. What I quote here are official statistics which reveal neither the complexities nor the controversies regarding the Polish national-religious landscape. As to the former, it is important to point out the dynamics of "believing" and "belonging" in Poland, namely the fact that the country has more members of the Catholic Church than people believing in God. This fact accounts for the importance of Catholicism as a cultural identity and sociopolitical identification. Regarding the controversies, it is worth recalling the criticism of the national census from 2002, which did not permit a full representation of the picture of ethnic/national identification in Poland, ignoring both the issue of "hyphenated" identities and the sensitivity of questions of ethnic/national identities in some contexts (see G. Babiński, "Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne w Polsce w świetle spisu ludności z roku 2002," *Studia Socjologiczne* 172, no. 1 [2004]: 139–52). At the same time, all this accounts for the powerfulness of the Polish-Catholic norm.

10. T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 202.

11. M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2005); cf. K. Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

12. A. Dudek and R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945-1989)* (Kraków: ZNAK, 2003), 9; M. Grabowska, "Religijność i Kościół w procesie transformacji w Polsce," in *Pierwsza dekada niepodległości. Próba socjologicznej syntezy*, ed. E. Wnuk-Lipiński and M. Ziółkowski (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2001), 174.

13. See S. P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

14. See N. Dołowy, "Możliwości rewitalizacji zagrożonych języków: między odpowiedzialnością państwa a działaniami mniejszości językowych," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 2 (2008): 209–28, for a discussion on the minority languages' visibility in the public sphere.

15. C. Kuklo, *Demografia Rzeczypospolitej przedzoborowej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2009), 222.

16. H. Chałupczak and T. Browarek, *Mniejszości narodowe w Polsce 1918-1995* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii-Skłodowskiej Curie, 1998), 21–25.

17. Observable in historical narratives on the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth is a tendency to pass over the fact that only nobles possessed any rights and the rule of "cuius regio eius religio" was vastly applied.

18. Cf. T. Snyder, 2001. "'To Resolve the Ukrainian Question Once and For All': The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943-1947," Working paper #9, http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/pubs/trwp/9_resolve.html (accessed 30 May 2013), p. 5; J. Tomaszewski, *Ojczyzna nie tylko Polaków: mniejszości narodowe w Polsce w latach 1918-1939* (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1985).

19. M. Kempny, A. Łaciak, and S. Łodziński, "Wprowadzenie. Społeczeństwo polskie na progu wielokulturowości," in *U progu wielokulturowości. Nowe oblicza społeczeństwa polskiego*, ed. M. Kempny, A. Łaciak, and S. Łodziński (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1997), 9.

20. Importantly, the problem with defining past Poland as a multicultural one does not only result from the misapplication of the category of “multiculturalism” but from the fact that framing the then ethnic and religious diversity in terms of “different cultures” is meaningless. For instance, Urszula Augustyniak emphasizes (Augustyniak, “Wielokulturowość Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego i idea tolerancji, a praktyka stosunków międzywyznaniowych w XVI-XVIII w,” in *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštijos tradicija ir tautiniai naratyvai*, ed. A. Bumblauskas and G. Potašenko [Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009], 88) that in the period of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth there was the idea of two cultures: Christian and non-Christian ones. (S. Łodziński, “Between History and Europe Europeanization of Post-1989 National Minority Policy in Poland,” *Polish Sociological Review* 168, no. 4 (2009): 555–74, 562–63.)

21. A. Pasięka, “Wielokulturowość po polsku. Polityka wielokulturowości jako mechanizm umacniania polskości,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 3 (2013), 33–59.

22. Antonina Kłowska, 2001, *National Cultures at the Grass-root Level* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 51.

23. It is worth adding that an idealized view of past relations is also detectable in many memoirs about shtetls (see A. Polonsky, “Introduction. The Shtetl: Myth and Reality,” *Polin* 17 [2004]: 3–24.

24. See, e.g., M. Golka, *Imiona wielokulturowości* (Warsaw: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, 2010); Kempny et al., “Wprowadzenie. Społeczeństwo polskie”; and S. Kowalska, ed., *Wielokulturowość w dziedzictwie kulturowym polskich społeczności regionalnych i lokalnych* (Poznań: Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza, 2011); for a critique, see D. Beauvois, “Mit ‘kresów wschodnich’ czyli jak mu położyć kres,” in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, ed. W. Wrzesiński (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994), 93–105.

25. Such activities involve, e.g., decorating towns and villages with boards informing tourists about the “multicultural past” and harmonic coexistence of different “cultures,” while the present-day situation of these “cultures” does not constitute the object of interest.

26. H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1968).

27. F. Rochat and A. Modigliani, “The Ordinary Quality of Resistance: From Milgram’s Laboratory to the Village of Le Chambon,” *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 3 (1995): 195–210.

28. I would like to emphasize that it is not my aim to present an exhaustive overview of the literature on the subject, but to highlight some key issues and recurring patterns (cf. O. Bartov, “On Eastern Galicia’s Past and Present,” *Daedalus* 2007).

29. Sorabji, “Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited.”

30. *Ibid.*, 99–100.

31. *Ibid.*, 98.

32. Sorabji, “Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited,” 105.

33. Marcin Lubaś, *Różnowiercy. Współistnienie religijne w zachodniomacedońskiej wsi* (Kraków: Nomos, 2011).

34. *Ibid.*, 237.

35. G. Hryciuk, *Przemiany narodowościowe i ludnościowe w Galicji Wschodniej i na Wołyniu w latach 1931-1948* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2005), 6.

36. Certainly, religion is an immensely powerful weapon, and its power lies in the possibility of both raising and undermining religious divisions—both done in the name of certain religious beliefs.

37. See G. Bowman, “Comments on: Hayden, R. 2002. Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans,” *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 219–20.

38. S. Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 70; Orla-Bukowska, “Maintaining Borders, Crossing Borders: Social Relationships at the Shtetl,” *Polin* 17 (2004): 171–195.

39. Tomaszewski, *Ojczyzna nie tylko Polaków*, 121.

40. Tomaszewski, *Ojczyzna nie tylko Polaków*, 57, 68.

41. R. Lehmann, *Symbiosis and Ambivalence* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001).
42. I am grateful for this observation to Anna Engelking. In her view, many mixed areas in Belarus account for the second type. Let's add that the adjacent area on the other side of the border is quite the opposite; it is characterized by long-term support for nationalist ideologies and widespread anti-Semitism (M. Kurkowska-Budzan, *Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne na Białostoczczyźnie. Analiza współczesnej symbolizacji przeszłości* [Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica," 2009], 83–85).
43. K. Roth, "Living Together or Living Side by Side? Interethnic coexistence in Multiethnic Societies," in *Negotiating Culture: Moving, Mixing and Memory in Contemporary Europe*, ed. R. Byron and U. Kockel (Berlin: LIT, 2006), 24.
44. *Ibid.*
45. J. T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
46. See P. Forecki, *Spór o Jedwabne: analiza debaty publicznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Nauk Politycznych i Dziennikarstwa Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2008).
47. A similar argument was used by many other scholars. For an overview, see Forecki, *Spór o Jedwabne*.
48. Hanna Świada-Zięba, "The Shortsightedness of the 'Cultured,'" in *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, ed. A. Polonsky and J. B. Michlic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 106.
49. Cvetana Georgieva, "Coexistence as a System in the Everyday Life of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria," *Ethnologia Balkanica* 3 (1999): 59–84.
50. *Ibid.*, 61.
51. E.g., K. Bielenin-Lenczowska, "Antropologiczna refleksja nad lokalną społecznością wieloetniczną," in *Sąsiedztwo w obliczu konfliktu. Relacje społeczne i etniczne w zachodniej Macedonii—refleksje antropologiczne*, ed. K. Bielenin-Lenczowska and K. Paczóska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2009), 9–17; M. Lubańska, *Synkretyzm a podziały religijne w bułgarskich Rodopach* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012).
52. E. Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
53. Roth, "Living Together or Living Side by Side?," 23.
54. J. T. Gross, *Wokół "Sąsiadów": polemiki i wyjaśnienia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2003).
55. See M. Kula, "Ludzie ludziom," *Rzeczpospolita*, 17–18 March 2001.
56. See e.g. I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 1994); L. Mallki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).
57. Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
58. Roth, "Living Together or Living Side by Side?"; see also Bartov, "On Eastern Galicia's Past."
59. The commune denotes here an administrative unit (*gmina*) (region—district—commune—village).
60. In this article, I relate the experiences of the first four communities.
61. Both Poles and Lemkos belong to the communities of Pentecostals, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are only Poles in the Buddhist community.
62. See B. Orłowska, "Polak—Lemek dwa bratanki (o życiu w wielokulturowym społeczeństwie—dawniej i dziś)," *Pogranicze* 17, no. 2 (2011): 115–27.
63. The situation in towns differed; these were inhabited by Jews and Poles and only a few Rusyns.
64. Some scholars claim that the name had already appeared in textbooks in the 1820s and that the Rusyn population accepted it in the early 20th century. Others argue that "politically conscious" people called themselves—depending on their outlook—either Ukrainians or Lemkos, while the rest stuck to the name "Rusyn." Aware of the controversies and disagreements regarding the ethnonym "Lemko," I decided to follow my informants' suggestion and refer to "Rusyns" when describing the period until

World War II and to “Lemkos” when speaking about the decades thereafter. I use the term “Lemko” for the sake of brevity; it is not my aim to ignore the fact that some Lemkos—among them many of my informants—consider themselves to be Ukrainians or Lemko-Ukrainians. A detailed discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this article.

65. It is impossible to come up with reliable data regarding the numerical size of different ethnic and religious communities. The data regarding the first one, gathered in the national census, diminish the actual numerical size of ethnic minorities (see Babiński, “Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne”). As for the number of religious minorities, the difficulty in presenting accurate numbers results from different ways of counting religious communities’ members. For example, the Catholic Church considers every person who has been baptized to be a Catholic, while Pentecostals do not include children in their parish statistics.

66. The Austro-Hungarian rulers supported the Ukrainian national movement, perceiving it as a counterweight to both Russian and Polish influences. The interwar Polish authorities promoted the idea of the Lemkos as an ethnographic group, separated from the Ukrainians. Such policies aimed to reinforce the locals’ attachment to the Polish state and to weaken their ties with the Ukrainians. Reinforcement of the regional identity was supposed to lead to further Polonization of the Lemkos. Hence, despite initial support for Lemko cultural and educational activities, it was replaced with nationalization policies during the 1930s: the removal of Lemko teachers, the ban on Lemko textbooks, attempts to replace Cyrillic with the Latin alphabet, and cuts to financial support. Only a decade earlier, a similar policy had been implemented against Ukrainians. The economic investments in the region’s developments depended on the results of Polonization (P. Przybylski, *Rola duchowieństwa grekokatolickiego w kształtowaniu się opcji narodowych wśród Lemków w latach 1918-1947* [Toruń: Wydawnictwo MADO, 2006], 19), and even social assistance excluded the Lemkos while supporting the Poles (ibid., 131).

67. Greek Catholicism was associated with the “Ukrainian” faction, and the Orthodox Church with the “Rusyn”/“Lemko” one. As part of their support of the Ukrainian movement, the Austro-Hungarian authorities supported the Greek Catholic Church. As for the Polish state, in the first years of the Second Republic the authorities were very favorable toward the Orthodox Church, which became an autocephaly, financially dependent on the state, and an instrument of Polish politics (J. Moklak, *Lemkowszczyzna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Historia Iagellonica,” 1997], 171). This enabled the missionary activities of the Orthodox clergy, also in the Lemko region. In 1926, the so-called “Tylava schism” took place. Because of Orthodox proselytizing and overseas (migrants) influences, the Greek Catholics who disapproved of the pro-Ukrainian views of their clergy and of tendencies towards Latinization started to convert to Orthodoxy. All in all, about 20,000 Rusyns became Orthodox (B. Horbal, “The Ukrainian insurgent army in the Lemko region,” in *The Lemko Region, 1939–1947*, ed. P. Best [New Haven, CT: Carpatho-Slavic Studies Group, 2002], 171–82). Yet the authorities soon realized that conversions to Orthodoxy could also strengthen pro-Russian sympathies among Rusyns. Hence, the wave of conversions was countered with the establishment of the Lemko Apostolic Administration, which was supposed to weaken Ukrainian influences within Greek Catholicism. Not only did the Administration pursue anti-Ukrainian policies, but in the last years of the Second Republic, it also contributed to the population’s assimilation (Przybylski, *Rola duchowieństwa grekokatolickiego*, chap. 3; Moklak, *Lemkowszczyzna w Drugiej*, 120).

68. Noteworthy is the fact that many inhabitants recall neither the religious nor the political reasons for that process, but tend to highlight different personal factors, such as dislike of a Greek Catholic priest or that the Orthodox clergy demanded smaller payments for religious services.

69. Cf. A. Pasięka, “How Pluralism Becomes Hierarchical? Debating Pluralism in Contemporary Poland,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, 43 (2013), 53–73.

70. Rosa Lehmann, *Symbiosis and ambivalence*, 170.

71. See also Redlich, *Together and apart in Brzezany*.

72. Gładyszów’s school chronicle.

73. E.g., the author of the excerpt from a chronicle quoted above was a Polish teacher who, as he himself admits, was prejudiced towards the Rusyn population. He complained of their lack of respect for the Polish state and opposed Ukrainian influences and Greek Catholic clergy.

74. The Greek Catholic Church was banned under communism. As a result, some people joined the Orthodox one, some participated in Roman Catholic services, while some tried to organize clandestine religious services.

75. Roman Catholics and Pentecostals celebrate Christmas on 25 December, and Eastern Christians on 7 January.

76. Sorabji, "Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited."

77. See A. Pasięka, "Resurrected Pigs, Dyed Foxes, and Beloved Cows: Religious Diversity and Nostalgia for Socialism in Rural Poland," *Journal of Rural Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012): 72–80; Lubaś, *Różnowiercy*, 247.

78. According to the Polish legislation (*Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz języku regionalnym*), since 2005 it has been possible to introduce geographical names in the language of a national or ethnic minority. In the case of locations where the minority constitutes more than 20 percent of the total population, the decision can be taken by the commune's council, while in cases where the minority is below this percentage—such as Uście Gorlickie—the decision needs to be preceded by so-called social consultations. In the latter case, the second name can be introduced if more than 50 percent of the inhabitants are in favor. In the commune of Uście, the inhabitants of nine villages had to decide whether to place an additional sign with the Lemko name (written in Cyrillic) under the one with the Polish name.

79. Pasięka, "Wielokulturowość po polsku."

80. Such as compensation for the forests, which until 1947 belonged to the Lemkos.

81. Pasięka, "Wielokulturowość po polsku."

82. Such expressions were used in one of the sermons before the vote as well as by some of the people I interviewed.

83. One of the most illuminating illustrations of this fact is, in my view, Irena Grudzińska-Gross's analysis of the press discourse about the "suspicious" origins of Polish intellectuals. Grudzińska-Gross, "Podejrzone pochodzenie jako kategoria polskiej kultury," in *Honor, horror i klasycey* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2012).

84. Esses and Vernon, *Explaining the breakdown*, 2.

85. A perfect exemplification of this problem may be found in a study of Volhynian crimes (G. Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do Akcji "Wisła": Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943-1947* [Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011]). Presenting the story of dozens of villages located close to each other, Grzegorz Motyka describes both those Ukrainians who killed their Polish neighbors (usually forced by UPA soldiers) and those who saved them or refused to participate in the killing.

86. Cf. Sorabji, "Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited."

87. Cf. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*.

88. Cf. Roth, "Living Together or Living Side by Side?"

89. Sorabji, "Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited."

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