Justyna Straczuk

# The Graveyard and the Table

## The Catholic-Orthodox Borderland in Poland and Belarus



PETER LANG

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The book is based on long-term ethnographic research in the Polish-Belarusian borderland. It examines the dynamics of symbolic boundaries between the Catholic and Orthodox believers in their everyday lives. By analyzing the space of local cemeteries, rituals, and attitudes related to death, eating practices, and food sharing, the author points to the changing sense of ethnic identity and the feeling of familiarity and otherness. Confessionally mixed neighborhoods and families enable different forms of religious bivalency and become a crucial factor in bridging and crossing ethnic boundaries. Socio-cultural norms and social relations shape the ethnic identity of the borderland's residents more than the institutional frames of both churches.

**The Author**

Justyna Straczuk is a professor of sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences and the author and co-author of four books and several articles on borderland issues, sociology of food and anthropology of emotions. She has conducted ethnographic research in Belarus, Lithuania and Poland for over twenty-five years.

The Graveyard and the Table

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Cover illustration: Courtesy of Justyna Straczuk.

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# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction to the English-Language Edition

Fifteen years have passed since the book first appeared in Polish in 2006. Much has changed since then, both in the theory and research methodology of the borderlands, and in the everyday life of the inhabitants of the Orthodox-Catholic borderland in Poland and Belarus.

When this book was written, Polish sociology was dominated by the research trend that conceptualized the cultural borderland as a neighborhood of ethnic groups. Each group was to be a carrier of a separate culture and the resulting separate group identity. In the first, theoretical chapter, I mainly argue against that dominant concept, which in no way corresponded to what, as an ethnographer, I was able to observe directly in the field. The inhabitants of mixed denominational villages in no way seemed to form two separate groups. On the contrary, what one could observe and deduce from numerous interviews showed that it was the local neighborhood community that remained the most important structure in everyday life. Within its framework, the boundaries that result from belonging to separate churches were constantly negated. The borderland turned out to be not so much a meeting place for separate ethnic groups, but a dynamic process of delimiting and sharing the space of everyday life.

The constructionist nature of the frontier is a fairly common concept today. When preparing the text for this English edition, I decided to retain this perhaps slightly outdated polemic. It is a record of a certain style of thinking based on the achievements of prewar Polish sociology and ethnology, including the works of Józef Obrebski, Florian Znaniecki, and Stanisław Ossowski, and on the convergent concepts put forth by individuals better-known in the West, including Fredrik Barth and Anthony Cohen. In view of the vast English-language literature on ethnicity, inspirations cited from the temporal and geographical periphery show that similar conclusions can be drawn in very different ways, derived from different premises and bearing different pedigrees and surnames. For me, however, the basis of the concept of the borderland presented here was primarily practical knowledge taken from the field, which made us look critically at contemporary theoretical positions on so-called "Ethnic relations" and to seek other theoretical justifications.

What I find most valuable about this work, however, and what prompted me to publish this book in English many years after its first edition, is its ethnographic material. Today it is basically a historical record: the research was carried

out in 1993–2001, and many of our older interlocutors are no longer alive. The record of conversations with them is a picture of the still-existent world of a traditional rural community and its proper way of thinking and acting. It is also a testimony to the diversity of human experience. The generation of the oldest interlocutors, remembering the times before the Second World War, was burdened with a special historical experience. Its members witnessed a series of traumatic changes: from feudal structures imposed by the Polish state, through revolutionary and traumatic war experiences, the aggression of the Soviet Union and related political repression and deportations, shifting borders, repatriation and separation of families, the collectivization of villages and the difficult life on collective farms, to perestroika, the advent of an independent Belarusian state, Alexander Lukashenko's victory and his rule in subsequent years. In the face of all these political and social changes, the inner world of the rural community, along with the principles of good-neighborly coexistence, remained virtually unchanged. Perhaps those traumatic experiences actually strengthened a conservative worldview and established a distance to the outside world by shaping resistance to various ideologies and leading to the continuation of life according to principles of cooperation developed over centuries. For us, the young ethnographers that we were then, our interactions with such a world and its people were an important and instructive experience. I hope that at least a part of this reality is recorded and remembered in this work.

The way we worked in the field also influenced the specific structure of this book, in which the main voice is given to the interlocutors themselves, allowing them to speak on their own behalf. It is also a kind of continuation of the Polish ethnographic school, derived from Malinowski and his predecessors, which placed special emphasis on the linguistic and semantic analysis of the respondents' statements, in an attempt to understand different ways of thinking and functioning in the world. In times marked by numerous open conflicts on the religious, ethnic and national plane, our exhibition of a part of the world in which the social norm is dominated by the constant development of principles of harmonious coexistence over and above existing differences and divisions, may constitute an important message, indeed a lesson for the future.

# Introduction

In this work, I will focus on issues related to the specific cultural and social situation of a denominational borderland, more specifically on the manifestations of cultural frontier in the everyday life of inhabitants of several villages in the Catholic-Orthodox border region shared by Poland and Belarus. When writing about this world and these people, I will deliberately use the fairly neutral term "denominational borderland" instead of other ambiguous and semantically dense terms – such as ethnic, national, or cultural borderlands – which are most often used when describing areas located on the two sides of Poland's eastern frontier. The Catholic-Orthodox border, covering an area under the shared influence of the Western and Eastern Churches, is a concrete concept that can be determined both geographically and historically. However, it is neither a specific territorial area nor its historical conditions that will be the subject of this analysis. Rather, this study is an examination of the imaginary and mental borders at work in people's minds, borders which are more symbolic than concrete and are subject to constant fluctuations, shifts and redefinitions.

Using the terms "Catholic" and "Orthodox," I also intentionally avoid national qualifiers unless they are related to the particular issues at hand. I place great emphasis on the disproportionate nature of both denominational and linguistic criteria in the national or ethnic self-determination of the local inhabitants. After all, the issues of identification – understood as Antonina Kłoskowska[1] did as national self-determination as opposed to identity that encompasses a much wider range of consciousness – are not of direct or even indirect interest in my work. Here, even religious affiliation itself is an often unstable and ambiguous distinguishing feature. Despite the clear border that exists on a map, the personal border between Catholics and Orthodox can be just as fluid. Not only in the case of a mixed denominational village or a mixed family but also in the case of individual people, denominational distinctions can become blurred, such that religious indeterminacy or religious duality becomes possible. Each inhabitant of this area, with his/her individual origin, life experience and social environment, is the carrier of a separate borderline situation, one which can only be described idiosyncratically and not systematically.

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1   See A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* (Warszawa: PWN, 1996).

The place where everyday life "unfolds" at the borderland described in this study are several villages along the Catholic-Orthodox border where field ethnographic research was carried out in Belarus in 1993–2001 and in Poland in 2001–2003. Above all, I want to show how the key institution of peasant culture – the family-neighborhood structure – "works" in borderland conditions; how the community maintains bonds along and across denominational differences resulting from kinship and close contact. Due to the strong familial and neighborhood ties which constitute rural communities, cultural differences are most often neutralized by social interaction which involves crossing denominational boundaries. The common ground here is the socially recognized and respected values of peasant culture through which denominational divisions often lose their significance.

This work is divided into three parts. In Part I, I present a short overview of important issues related to the subject of the borderland and multiculturalism. I propose a departure from the paradigm by which the borderland is studied as "a neighborhood of ethnic groups" understood as separate cultural entities "colliding" on the borderland. Instead I propose the study of the borderland culture as an organic whole together with its manifestations, defined here as situational, transitive, indistinguishable. In this part, I also discuss selected problems from the historical and social context of the terrain under examination and present the applied research method.

The second and third parts of this work are devoted to detailed analyses of two areas of cultural life – death and food – which, though they have long been the subject of anthropological examination, have not yet been described in detail in the context of borderland culture. In this regard, I focus only on those aspects of dying and eating that allow me to show how cultural differences related to these universal spheres of life – in everyday behavior, ritual observances and their material manifestations – are organized within the local community of the denominational borderland.

In Part II, I analyze the space of rural cemeteries, which exhibit some important elements of borderland reality as well as the characteristic features of peasant memory and how it has changed over the last century. A cemetery is a place that perfectly reflects the village social structure: organized in family clusters, it is at the same time an indication of the existence of denominational boundaries (divided into Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries) and the crossing of those boundaries (the burial of dissenters based not on denominational bonds but on family and local bonds, etc.). Analysis of the cemetery infrastructure – the nature of tombstones and inscriptions, the mixing of alphabets, bilingual versions of names and surnames – proves that cultural duality ("bivalence"), transitivity,

and indistinguishability are features inherent in the borderland reality and the phenomenon known here as borderland culture.

The same applies to food, which will be analyzed in Part III. Food turns out to be one of the most open, "inclusive" elements of culture because it is easy to share and exchange. As such, food is an important instrument for creating social bonds. The community of the table, being a functional element of the system of communication, allows for the marking, organization and maintenance of social relations, and it thus directly indicates the limits of familiarity and strangeness. All of the rituals, etiquette, and scenarios of eating behaviors refer directly to the values held in a given community. Food, which has always played a role in important aspects of family and rural life, also serves as indicators of extraordinary moments in time. What is important here is the distinction between daily food, the same for the entire community, and ritual food, which differentiates the behavior of Orthodox Christians and Catholics. It is at this level that symptomatic situations arise in which a dynamic aspect of the sense of community comes into view, which manifests itself depending on, or independently of, cultural differences.

A few words about the spelling of oral statements and the use of abbreviations. This work contains a large number of quotes from conversations with borderland inhabitants. Conversations conducted in Polish, Belarusian or Russian, and often a mixture of the three, were written in part phonetically, as they were heard, without the use of standard transcription and without grammatical corrections.[2] In this way, not wanting to lose any of their originality and uniqueness, I tried to keep the relatively "natural" linguistic forms of oral expression.

All quotes from the interviews are provided with brief information about the interlocutor, coded as follows: [country/locality/gender/denomination/date of birth], for example: [P.Top.k.pr.25] = [Poland/Topolany/female/Orthodox/1925]; [B.Pie.m.kat.20]=[Białoruś/Pieluńcy/male/Catholic/1920].

In the text, I also use abbreviations for the names of the most frequently quoted ethnographic sources:

[Feder., paragraph no.] – Michał Federowski, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materiały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1891* [Belarusian people in Lithuanian Ruthenia. Materials for Slavic ethnography collected in the years 1877–1891], vol. 1: *Wiara, wierzenia i przesądy ludu z okolic Wołkowyska, Słonimia, Lidy i Sokółki* [Faith,

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2    Unfortunately, in the English version it is difficult to maintain this dialectic and idiolectic differentiation, which is why all quoted statements have been translated into standard language.

beliefs and superstitions of people from the vicinity of Wołkowysk, Słonim, Lida and Sokółka] (Kraków, 1897).

[Kolb., page no.] – Oskar Kolberg, *Dzieła wszystkie* [Collected works], vol. 52: *Białoruś-Polesie* [Belarus-Polesie] (Warszawa, 1984).

[Dworak., ZR, page no.] – Stanisław Dworakowski, *Zwyczaje rodzinne w powiecie wysoko-mazowieckim* [Family customs in the Wysokie Mazowieckie poviat] (Warszawa, 1935).

[Dworak., KS, page no.] – Stanisław Dworakowski, *Kultura społeczna ludu wiejskiego na Mazowszu nad Narwią* [The social culture of the rural people in Mazovia on the Narew] (Białystok, 1964).

# Part I: Concepts, Research Problems, the Field, and Method

## The Borderland, Ethnicity, Multiculturalism

If we look at the titles of works devoted in particular to the eastern borderlands of Poland, what comes to the fore are the issues of identity and the most commonly used expression "ethnic and cultural borderland," supplemented by the more specific terms "linguistic borderland" or "denominational borderland." In the examination of these Polish borderlands, the words "ethnic" and "cultural" are practically inseparable, so intertwined with each other that they are sometimes used interchangeably. The very term "ethno-cultural" is a peculiar conceptual cluster that requires deeper analysis.

## What is Culture on the Ethnic and Cultural Borderland?

As a rule, whenever the term "ethno-cultural" is used, only the first part is defined, while the second part – cultural – is left as self-explanatory. The emphasis is placed not so much on culture itself, but on cultural differences, which is one of the basic criteria used by sociologists when determining borderlands: "Borderland has been identified and analyzed mainly on the basis of cultural differences and the processes of mutual penetration or the clash of cultures," Grzegorz Babiński wrote. "The differences most frequently taken into account involve ethnicity, language, religion and awareness of belonging to a wider community – regional or ethnic."[1] However, though an interest in cultural issues is indicated here, most authors focus their attention on the issue of ethnic identification. The concept of "cultural diversity" is usually limited to linguistic and denominational differences, which are treated very narrowly in analyses as group emblems – that is, as signs of identity for members of the surveyed communities. In borderland sociology, language and denominational are therefore described unidimensionally as if they were separate and internally homogeneous categories, satisfying the conditions of a simple equation: language and/or denomination = belonging to a specific ethnic group. In this situation, the researcher's task is most often to check the extent to which this relationship is reflected in the respondents' awareness.

Apart from the debatable matter of the assumed agreement between researcher and respondents regarding the phenomenon of ethnicity itself, about which more in a moment, the fact is that when we treat language or denomination as a one-dimensional emblem, almost an axiom of ethnic identification,

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1   G. Babiński, *Pogranicze polsko-ukraińskie. Etniczność, zróżnicowanie religijne, tożsamość* (Kraków: Nomos, 1997), 52.

then we commit reductionism in situations that are central to and characterize the borderland. An example of which is the linguistic aspect – involving bilingualism or multilingualism – which often takes on a diglossic character, where two languages are used interchangeably on a daily basis depending on the social situation,[2] or linguistic interference leading to mixed dialects, where it is often difficult to tie a given user's idiolect to only one language. In such situations, the user's language ceases to be an unambiguous ethnic determinant, unless we assume the possibility of dual or multiple ethnicity.[3] One's denomination seems to be a less complex and "troublesome" criterion, although – as will be shown later in this work – here too we see a blurring of boundaries because there are those who profess a dual faith and feel connected with two religions. On the borderland, especially if it is "transitional,"[4] "open"[5] borderland, unambiguous criteria-identifiers can be extremely unreliable.

Apart from language and religion, which are usually only indicative, Polish borderland sociology rarely mentions other cultural features, which are most often mysteriously called "custom," "cultural tradition," or "ethnic diversity"; it is not really known what lies behind these enigmatic expressions because they are almost never analyzed. Research into them is rather entrusted to ethnographers, who are supposedly "responsible" for this sphere of culture. But the voice of ethnographers on this issue has long since lost its strength. The cartographic method developed by them and popular back in the 1970s, which consisted of determining the geographical range of individual cultural elements, turned out to be useless in borderland research for at least two reasons. First – because there have always been problems with establishing the origins of these elements and assigning them to one of the interconnecting cultural areas; and second – in

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2   C. A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* (1959), no. 15; J. A. Fishman, "Bilingualism and Biculturism as Individual and Societal Phenomena," in *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival Perspectives on Language and Ethnicity* (Haga, 1985).

3   Such a proposal, based on the sociolinguistic model of bilingualism, was put forward by J. A. Fishman, who called the presented model di-ethnia, but who also stipulated that it is an extremely rare phenomenon (the examples he gave are the quite hermetic circles of American Hasidim and Amish). See J. A. Fishman, "Bilingualism…"

4   The distinction between "transitional" and "contact" borderlands (based on linguistic criteria) was introduced by J. Chlebowczyk in "Obszary pogranicza językowo-narodowego we wschodniej Europie," in *Z problemów integracji społeczno-politycznych na Górnym Śląsku*, ed. Z. Zieliński (Kraków, 1980).

5   The classification "open" and "closed" borderlands was used by A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*.

reflection on culture itself, it is not treated as a set of independent elements, but as an internally coherent system of meanings. The geographic-cartographic method for delineating "objectively" existing cultural boundaries turned out to be inappropriate also because it omitted the important factor of the participation in culture of the borderland inhabitants themselves; the analyzed "cultural elements" were supposed to function somewhat independently of those inhabitants, as if people were completely passive in their stance toward culture. Thus, ethnicity – which after all was said to be based on cultural diversity – would apply not to people themselves but only to cultural products.

Thus, in borderland research we are dealing with a situation in which, on the one hand, while attention is directed primarily toward issues of ethnic and national identification, culture is reified and treated in a "utilitarian" manner, serving to confirm or deny identity determinants; and, on the other hand, through a focus on the products of culture alone, culture is treated impersonally, without taking into account the perspective of people who actually create a given culture, and who are thus mechanically assigned to the cultural elements under examination, while the fact is that culture is not just "something" to which people belong, or merely "something" that belongs to people, but rather simultaneously activates itself in all human relationships and gives these relationships meaning. Both positions thus reduce culture to handy fetishes that are intended to validate the researcher's adopted assumptions and research methods.

## The Concept of Ethnicity in the Context of the "Cultural Distinctiveness of Ethnic Groups"

In the Polish sociological tradition, the phenomenon of ethnicity is almost always associated with the notion of an ethnic group, and the cultural borderland is most often described as a neighborhood of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are generally treated as carriers of separate cultural wholes, in fact of ethnic cultures. The boundaries of these units are most often drawn along linguistic and denominational lines, which also confirm the existence of ethnic groups in history.

The definition of an ethnic group cited by many authors, proposed by Andrzej Sadowski in the 1970s and repeated in his work from 1995, states that an ethnic group includes:

[…] all permanent forms of social integration that result from an objective historical process on the basis of language (of either an authentic or alleged origin), religion and other factors, and that are marked by a sense of separation from other communities.[6]

As we see, when distinguishing an ethnic group, certain constant cultural features – language and religion, and undefined "other factors" – come to the fore as the basic determinants of its members' sense of separateness. Language and religion are treated here as "objective" and permanently assigned properties of ethnic groups which automatically make members of an ethnic group who identify with those properties aware of their distinctiveness from others. What is extremely important here, in Sadowski's view, is that the ethnic group would be a fixed-in-time phenomenon that arose spontaneously as a result of an "objective historical process." Thus, it is not so much an imagined community as a physically existing, "natural" unit of social life.

One of the significant limitations of this type of definition is the temptation to match these "objective" cultural features to its users' sense of group belonging. The researcher usurps the right to estimate the level of ethnic self-awareness of representatives of the studied communities and to assess the level of agreement between subjective reality and "actual" reality. Thus, the researcher examines the identity of members of ethnic groups based not on their own criteria but on the researcher's own "scientific" criteria even though what has ethnic connotations for researchers may not necessarily have ethnic connotations for the research subjects.

In a heroic attempt to grasp various meanings related to ethnicity, Grzegorz Babiński formulated the following definition, significantly different than Sadowski's:

Despite all the discrepancies and controversies, ethnicity can be defined as a set of group features. These features are certainly a kind of bond, although not reducible to a primordial bond. It is also the awareness of a common origin and cultural community and – based on this awareness – a sense of "we," separating a given group from other ethnic groups and, on certain levels, from the rest of the world.[7]

What Babiński was talking about here is not so much an "objectively" existing cultural community, but rather the awareness of its existence, quite apart from the "real" state of affairs and its historical basis. Babiński believes that the most

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6    A. Sadowski, "Pojęcie grupy etnicznej w socjologii," *Studia Socjologiczne* 4 (1973), no. 4: 186, re-published in his, *Pogranicze polsko-białoruskie. Tożsamość mieszkańców*.

7    G. Babiński, "Etniczność," 194.

important feature of the ethnic group is its internal bonds, and thus it refers directly to subjective reality – to what mentally connects members of the ethnic group.

Characterizing changes in the contemporary sociological study of borderlands, Babiński mentions such factors as:

> [...] the move from a primarily geographical space to a social space delineated symbolically" and "[...] the move from the point of contact and permeation of cultural and economic differences to the point of contact for group identities demarcated above all symbolically.[8]

In the end, however, he posed a question that demonstrates his feeling of uncertainty in connection with the loss of the "material" foundation for research: "The borderland becomes more of a cultural space, directly symbolic rather than physical. So, is it still a borderland?"[9] Reality that is "only symbolic" is therefore perceived here as, to some extent, unreal.

The imaginative nature of ethnic groups is not an entirely new concept. Józef Obrębski drew attention to the conscious dimension of ethnicity long ago. Back in the 1930s, in an article entitled "Problem grup etnicznych w etnologii i jego socjologiczne ujęcie" (The Problem of Ethnic Groups in Ethnology and its Sociological Conceptualization),[10] he wrote:

> Like any social formation – and this is precisely what an ethnic group is – an ethnic group exists only insofar as it exists in the consciousness of those who belong to it, and of those who belong to other similar groups but exclude themselves from it. Like any social group, an ethnic group is an imaginary, not concrete, creation.[11]

Obrębski was critical of arguments that ethnic diversity could be determined based on "real" cultural differences. He emphasized that only those cultural elements that are relevant to members of ethnic groups are used for their self-characterization. And the most important factor here is not so much cultural as social.

> Only certain aspects of cultural distinctiveness are of significance: only those, namely, that can have a bearing on the formation of those very casual and transitory relations

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8    G. Babiński, "Pogranicza etniczne i kulturowe," 21–22.

9    Ibid., 22.

10   J. Obrębski, "Problem grup etnicznych w etnologii i jego socjologiczne ujęcie," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 4 (1936).

11   Ibid., reprinted in *Sto lat socjologii polskiej: od Supińskiego do Szczepańskiego*, ed. J. Szacki (Warszawa 1995), 689.

which occur between members of separate groups. Only those, therefore, that have their own social significance.[12]

Obrębski also drew attention to the dynamic aspect of ethnicity, to the fact that ethnic groups are not permanent and unchangeable creations: "The division into individual ethnic groups is not a static phenomenon. Ethnic diversity is in a constant state of change and fluctuation, and we may encounter different phases of this transformation in individual cases."[13]

However, what is most important in Obrębski's thinking, and what brings him closer to contemporary ethnic currents in social anthropology, is the attention he paid to the "negative" face of ethnic groups: in their self-characterization, it is not the group's own characteristics that are important, but what distinguishes that group from other groups. The awareness of being separate from others is an essential feature organizing an ethnic group.

> An ethnic group thus does not have an extensive, crystallized and integrated ethnic consciousness – that is, a set of systematized and mutually agreed on concepts that captures its own group reality in a certain imaginative scheme. […] In conceptions of an ethnic group, the image of an alien group comes to the fore constantly and invariably.[14]

This position differs, for example, from Babiński's definition of ethnicity, according to which it is primarily the inner feeling of the "we" that shapes the awareness of its difference in relation to others. For Obrębski, the most important thing is the ethnic group in relation to other groups: "[...] an ethnic group cannot be considered something independent, something to be studied in isolation from other ethnic groups."[15]

This position is close to views put forth by Frederik Barth, editor of the well-known collection of essays published under the title *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.[16] Barth was opposed to the reification of ethnic groups as social wholes with certain fixed cultural and organizational features, where ethnic cultures are seen as permanent and closed systems. He pointed out that it is not certain specific cultural features characteristic of individual ethnic groups that constitute the core of ethnicity, but rather the very ideas about these differences at work within the minds of group members. "The critical focus of investigation from

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12  J. Obrębski, "Problem grup etnicznych," 692.

13  Ibid., 696.

14  Ibid., 693.

15  Ibid., 691.

16  F. Barth, "Introduction," *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. F. Barth
     (Oslo: Universitetforlaget, 1969).

this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses."[17] Ethnic boundaries are organized around cultural difference, but the status of this difference is purely intellectual: what matters is whether group members themselves perceive a particular cultural characteristic as being different, not how it is "in reality." The postulated cultural difference is the criterion by which boundaries between groups are determined. Attention is therefore shifted from the characteristics of groups to the description of a certain social process in which what is most important is the communication of cultural differences and the ways they are socially ordered.

As for the significance of the historical and cultural background which would influence the choice of such signs of ethnic identity but not others, both Obrębski and Barth recognized that this problem was of no interest at all to researchers of ethnic phenomena. However, while Obrębski admitted that ethnicity had its cultural origins – "[…] an ethnic system considered as a historical creation could become the subject of historical research and inquiry. [...] These issues, however, are beyond the scope of the ethnologist's research, who in considering ethnic diversity at the level of phenomena of a social group may disregard historical analysis and the reconstruction of a given system"[18] – Barth treated ethnic groups as "empty vessels" that could be filled with any cultural content, arbitrarily selected emblems. Certain cultural differences may take on ethnic connotations, but they do not have to; there are no historical determinants for a sense of ethnic distinctiveness. Therefore, the history of an ethnic group is not the same as its cultural history:

> So when one traces the history of an ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of "a culture": the elements of the present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time, whereas the group has a continual organizational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit.[19]

The cultural community can be viewed as the result of a long-term social process establishing boundaries between groups, rather than a trait assigned to a group. Therefore, cultural differences often arise or intensify only as a result of establishing an intergroup boundary. The culture of a group and forms of social organization can change without violating this boundary.

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17  Ibid., 30.
18  J. Obrębski, "Problemy grup społecznych," 691.
19  Barth, "Introduction," *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 38.

The problem that emerges here is therefore the question of subjectivity in the perception of cultural difference and their dynamics, not the existence of actual and enduring cultural determinants of ethnicity. Ethnic groups are not permanent cultural units; there is no permanent division established once and for all. Such is the position of most contemporary ethnic researchers. "'Groupness' is not to be reified," Richard Jenkins wrote in *Rethinking Ethnicity*:

> […] and groups are not distinct 'things' in any positivist sense. [...] They are contingent and immanently changeable, an emergent product of interaction and of classificatory processes (the definition of 'us' and the categorization of 'them').[20]

This situational nature even influenced the inflectional paradigm of the term itself: from the adjectival form "ethnic," most often used as an attribute specifying the group, to the noun form "ethnicity," used to denote the phenomenon itself, not the permanent properties of groups. Jenkins formulated his own definition of ethnicity as an expression of the declared "differences and similarities that are recognized as significant by their members."[21] Ethnicity is thus primarily a result of social interaction; it is an on-going process of the social construction of meanings focused on cultural difference that serves to build individual and group identity.

Ethnic categories do not necessarily have to be the same constant features. A different language or denomination does not have to automatically trigger ethnic relations and vice versa: ethnic relations can also exist where language and denomination are the same. "Cultural difference between two groups is not the decisive feature of ethnicity," Thomas Eriksen wrote.

> Two distinctive, endogamous groups, say, somewhere in New Guinea, may well have widely different languages, religious beliefs and even technologies, but that does not necessarily mean that there is an ethnic relationship between them. For ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other, and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves. If these conditions are not fulfilled, there is no ethnicity, for ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group. [...] Only in so far as cultural differences are perceived as being important, and are made socially relevant, do social relationships have an ethnic element.[22]

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20  R. Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 50–51.

21  Ibid., 123.

22  T. H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London-Chicago: Pluto Press, 1993), 11–12.

## Multiculturalism on the Borderland

The borderland is often called a *tertium* zone, a zone of "something else" in relation to the adjoining areas of ethnicity, denomination and language. Various processes of "differentiation" and "commonization" take place here, which result in the formation of a specific cultural system in an area where elements of different traditions coexist together. Borderland cultures not only constitute an entirety through the mixture of various cultural features, but also often bear the hallmarks of a something transitional; they create a new, particular and comprehensive cultural system, such that it is not even possible to assign individual features to any of the contact areas.[23] "Anyone who has ever dealt with the study of phenomena associated with a borderland culture," Dorota Simonides has claimed, "faces the very real problem of not being able to define their cultural origin."[24]

Borderland phenomena so understood are commonly referred to using the term multiculturalism. In this context, there is talk of a collision, merging, interpenetration, and symbiosis of cultures. However, the multiculturalism of the borderland is a less conceptualized matter, one whose theoretical clarification has been achieved mainly on the basis of essays and fiction. This multiculturalism cannot be easily translated into a meaning of the term as used in the Western tradition, which is primarily associated with the identity politics of minority groups in multinational countries and has, in fact, little in common with cultural studies. As Wojciech Burszta writes:

> Under the English-language term multiculturalism there are three separate conceptual intuitions. On the descriptive level, it simply indicates a multiplicity of cultures, and thus it is a descriptive statement of the objective fact of cultural diversity in a given society,

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23  This brings to mind the classification that dialectologists have made when describing the phenomenon of linguistic contacts on the borderland. The proposed division between mixed and transitional dialects distinguishes – in the first case – a situation where the mixture of elements of two languages do not cause changes deep enough to reach their structural level and violate their integrity, and – in the second case – a situation in which two languages are overlapped such that we see sustainable and systemic innovations; it is then impossible to determine to which of the two languages a given dialect belongs. As a result, users of transitional dialects are actually monolingual. See E. Smułkowa, "Propozycja terminologicznego zawężenia zakresu pojęć: gwary przejściowe – gwary mieszane," *Rozprawy Slawistyczne* (1993), no. 6.

24  D. Simonides, "Archaizmy kulturowe na śląskim pograniczu," in *Pogranicze jako problem kultury*, ed. T. Smolińska (Opole, 1994), 23.

the equivalent of which in Polish is *wielokulturowość*. In the second and third sense, we should talk about "multiculturalism" either as a government policy aimed at eliminating social tensions related to the fact of multiculturalism, or as an ideology, a movement, a doctrine or even a philosophy of multiculturalism. In the latter case, it is about the activities of minority groups aimed at emancipation and the fuller participation of similar groups in the social, political and cultural life of a country.[25]

Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism is thus a reference not to specific cultural situations, but to social and political conditions for the functioning of minority groups in multiethnic communities. Culture appears here more in its ideological than its cognitive sense; it is reified as a property of an ethnic group and is not the subject of analysis. When comparing the concept of culture as used by multiculturalists and anthropologists, Terence Turner rightly argues that:

> [...] multiculturalists use the term *culture* in different ways and for different purposes than anthropologists. *Multiculturalism*, unlike anthropology, is primarily a movement for change. [...] *Culture* for multiculturalists, then, refers primarily to collective social identities engaged in struggles for social equality.

Therefore, "[...] multiculturalism remains essentially unconcerned with culture in any of its usual anthropological senses."[26]

A different concept of multiculturalism, developed in Australia and in many respects different from multiculturalism in its American or British versions, is used by Jerzy Smolicz, who qualified this general term by means of certain analytical categories. Smolicz introduced the concept of "core values"[27] – i.e. elements of culture that are perceived in a similar way and evoke similar emotional reactions among their users, and whose maintenance is necessary to maintain the cultural identity of minority groups in a multinational state. The proper functioning of such a state, the author suggests, should be based on the possibility of preserving indigenous values by individual national groups in parallel with such values that are common to the entire society. Members of a multinational community are thus in a situation marked by cultural bivalence or polyvalence,[28]

25  W. J. Burszta, *Antropologia kultury. Tematy, teorie, interpretacje* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 1998), 152.

26  T. Turner, "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology that Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of it?" in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. T. Goldberg (London–New York: Routledge, 1994), 407–408.

27  J. J. Smolicz, "Core Values and Cultural Identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4 (1981), no. 1: 75–90.

28  Of course, Smolicz makes use here of terminology introduced by A. Kłoskowska in *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*.

assimilation and a sense of connection with at least two cultural wholes, which leads either to cultural coexistence (when a dual or multiple value system is formed) or to a cultural synthesis that causes internal mixing of cultural systems and the emergence of a single intermediate form between the interacting cultures. Certain elements of these cultures can be classified according to the ease with which they are adopted by representatives of other cultures: they would be inclusive (including) and exclusive (excluding) cultural features.[29]

The concept of multiculturalism presented by Smolicz thus introduces several useful analytical categories. However, the Australian multiculturalism at the foundation of this concept is different from the borderland situation that will be discussed below. In a multinational state, one deals with clearly defined groups that refer in an obvious way to their own countries of origin, their crystallized national cultures that clash with similar groups on "new ground," in a relatively new social and cultural situation.

In the case of the borderland described here, it is difficult to talk about clear cultural differences and multiple systems of values, since we are dealing with local communities that have lived together "forever," whose members are connected by numerous relationships tied to family, neighborhood, the economy and politics. Such a community is a permanent community, and in order for its members to communicate on a daily basis, it must constitute a symbolic community, one that adheres to a common system of values, uses the same system of meanings, and creates a common local culture. After all, as Stanisław Ossowski wrote:

> […] each permanent community exerts the patterns of behavior of its members (patterns of muscular, emotional and mental reactions) – consciously or unconsciously (given the collective adherence to these patterns and rules), and all these patterns constitute this community's specific culture.[30]

Therefore, the question remains, is it really multiculturalism understood as a multiplicity of cultures? Is a denominational difference or – to some extent – a linguistic[31] difference alone an indication of the cultural distinctiveness of Orthodox Christians and Catholics?

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29  J. J. Smolicz, "Multiculturalism as an Over-Arching Framework of Values for Cultural Diversity. The Australian Experience and its Educational Implications," in *Ethnicity, Nation, Culture. Central and East European Perspectives*, eds. B. Balla, A. Sterbling (Hamburg: Kramer, 1998).

30  S. Ossowski, "Córka wielu matek," in his, *Dzieła*, vol. 3 (Waszawa: PWN, 1967).

31  To a large extent, linguistic diversity on the Catholic-Orthodox borderland is a function of religious affiliation, because it concerns primarily the sphere of the sacred. On

The fact that scholars customarily think and write about the Catholic-Orthodox borderland in Poland and Belarus as a multi-ethnic, multinational and multicultural borderland (often using all three terms in one breath) is the result of them perceiving a denominational difference as an objective and unambiguous indicator of ethnic (national, cultural) diversity. The concept of multiculturalism seems to be a derivative of the adopted paradigm, according to which it is assumed that separate denominations, languages and cultures understood in a particular way naturally evoke "ethnic relations," and ethnicity – in turn – is a phenomenon that occurs wherever we deal with a separate language, denomination or culture. But does denominational difference always have to be related to the phenomenon of ethnicity and does it always have to indicate cultural difference – both actual and declared?

Multiculturalism should be treated as an ideational being, belonging primarily to the symbolic realm. In such a case, denominational differences on the borderland "organize" multiculturalism only when they hold some meaning for those who participate in local social and cultural life. It is not about multiculturalism, the "multiplicity of cultures," in a strictly anthropological sense, understood as the total separateness of symbolic systems, the separateness of worlds of meaning, not the type of intercultural boundary that applies to the phenomenon of the cultural borderland. Therefore, when discussing multiculturalism, one should ask the question about the very nature of intercultural boundaries and the level of the description of culture (cultures?) dependent in large part on what type of group affiliation we are thinking about – national, ethnic, regional, local, estate/class, etc. In the case of the rural local communities described in this book, we regard locality and peasantness as the superior analytical category; these are factors that connect rather than differentiate the inhabitants of borderland villages. Therefore, it is only to a limited extent that we can talk about multiculturalism – that is, as a certain set of features resulting from denominational diversity, but as organizing cultural separateness? I suppose that only a few elements of the traditions of the Eastern and Western Church can serve as the basis of ethnic distinctions, and most of them can be referred to as a common cultural conglomerate.

Instead of the term "multiculturalism" and the use of the notion of culture in the plural, I would rather propose the term "borderland culture" construed not necessarily as a group of various cultural entities (ethnic cultures) in contact

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a daily basis most inhabitants speak the same language – Belarusian in Belarus and Polish in Poland.

with each other, but rather as a particular cultural system, a set of features of different origins that constitute a functional whole. Therefore, it is not so much individual cultures that come into contact on the borderland and their mutual influences that should be studied, but this particular system of borderland culture understood as a separate phenomenon. This approach to the issue of borderland multiculturalism was proposed by Antonina Kłoskowska in an article in which she wrote:

> The goal of research in the field of the anthropology and sociology of culture can be the re-creation of the entire cultural participation of people living in ethnically mixed areas, their attitude toward their own and neighboring cultural entities and toward their carriers, the clarity of one's own cultural self-definition […].[32]

This is the very goal of my work.

## Borderland Anthropology

In my analysis of the Catholic-Orthodox borderland, I adopt an anthropological perspective that emphasizes an understanding of the local world of meanings, treated as a unique cultural situation. This approach is one that allows us to take into account the above-mentioned concerns about the ways we can examine borderlands perceived as a neighborhood of ethnic groups. "Through its dependence on long-term fieldwork," Eriksen wrote:

> […] anthropology has the advantage of generating first-hand knowledge of social life at the level of everyday interaction. To a great extent, this is the focus where ethnicity is created and re-created. Ethnicity emerges and is made relevant through social situations and encounters, and through people's ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life.[33]

The key category here will be that of neighborhood, i.e. the sphere of everyday contacts in which people living next to each other communicate using the system of meanings within the framework of a jointly created culture. "Such a micro-structural neighborhood," Kłoskowska wrote elsewhere:

> […] marks the boundaries of familiarity and strangeness. It is a ground for reaching the edge of familiarity and a platform for experiencing the neighbor as the other. But it can also create opportunities to overcome strangeness and create a cultural amalgamation.[34]

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32  A. Kłoskowska, "Wielokulturowość regionów pogranicza," in *Region, regionalizm. Pojęcia i rzeczywistość*, ed. K. Handke (Warszawa: Slawistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, 1993), 99–100.

33  T. H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 1.

34  A. Kłoskowska, "Wielokulturowość regionów pogranicza," 100.

The common space of everyday life allows the individual to accustom and acclimate him/herself to otherness, so that that otherness often becomes invisible and unconscious, turning into something that is obvious and unquestionable. In this type of neighborhood, differences – linguistic and denominational – become an internal category of the world, not a border dividing two worlds. It is under such conditions that the "cultural amalgamation" at the heart of borderland culture can occur.

A proposal thus emerged to focus research interests on the everyday experience of borderland inhabitants. The adoption of such a perspective – which "distinguishes between the neighborhood of direct contacts in the regions of the ethnic borderland and the neighborhood of cultures"[35] – changes the perception of the borderland culture because it allows us to approach the problem from the inside, from the perspective of the researched subjects, i.e. the inhabitants of the borderland and the conceptual categories worked out by them referring to the world in which they live. At the level of everyday practice, most visible are nuances concerning the subjective feelings of cultural alienation and the creation and determination of symbolic boundaries between people. The entire situational nature of these phenomena, which change depending on the social context, is also revealed here. The feeling of strangeness is not an absolute value, but a relative value, experienced in particular situations. As Znaniecki puts it in his "Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych" (Studies on Antagonism toward Strangers):

> Strangers in relation to the researched individual or group are those, and only those, who that individual or group experience as strangers. Since these same people or similar people can sometimes be, but also sometimes not be, experienced as strangers, then strangeness is not an absolute trait that belongs constantly to the same person or generally to the same class of people, but a relative trait that the same man or the same a class of men, apart from its own modifications, may have under certain conditions but not under others. The issue of strangers […] is thus not about "what kind of people are strangers in reference to the signified individual or group," but rather "under what conditions are people, or people of a given class, strangers in the experience of the signified individual or group?"[36]

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35  A. Kłoskowska, "Sąsiedztwo kultur," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (1991), no. 4: 4–5.

36  F. Znaniecki, "Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych," in his, *Współczesne narody* (Warszawa: PWN, 1990), 292. First published in *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 1 (1930/1931), no. 2–4: 158–209.

Therefore, the object of analysis should not be groups or individuals, but the contexts of interactions observed up close, at the level of everyday life. "Its [ethnicity's] varying importance, or varying semantic density," Eriksen wrote, "can only be appreciated through a comparison of contexts, which takes account of differences in the meanings which are implied by those acts of communicating cultural distinctiveness which we call ethnicity."[37] We thus take into consideration certain areas of cultural life (in the case of this book, those related to food and death) which we treat as a context for the analysis of behaviors related to the perception and determination of cultural differences. By showing the meaningful contexts of behaviors related to the communication of cultural familiarity and strangeness, we might succeed in describing a borderland culture "from the inside," from the perspective of entities co-creating the everyday life of the borderland and their way of perceiving phenomena we call ethnicity. This makes it possible to demonstrate the situational nature and changeability of the feeling of cultural alienation, to relativize the very concept of ethnicity, and to present the cultural borderland not as an inventory of selected elements, but as a certain mental reality.

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37   T. H. Eriksen, "The Cultural Contexts of Ethnic Differences," *Man* 26 (1991), no. 1: 130.

# The Socio-Historical Background of Field Research

## The Mythization of the Borderland World

Several ideas and beliefs have grown up around the area containing the borderland under examination here, especially in Polish literature, which prompt us to think about the social and cultural behavior that takes place here according to ready-made patterns.

The first is the myth of the *Kresy*, a myth that is ubiquitous in the Polish consciousness. The *Kresy* (or "frontiers," Poland's traditional Eastern Borderlands which, after the Second World War, were included in parts of Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and eastern Poland) signified the edge, the end of something, the border of the known world beyond which there was practically nothing more. The term implies a one-sided perspective, something from "our" (ethnic Polish) point of view. "While the borderland is a symmetrical phenomenon," as Krzysztof Kwaśniewski wrote in the collection *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, "and a given zone is a borderland for a community inhabited on both sides, the *kresy* are asymmetrical; they are always *kresy* only for people living on one side."[38] When the term "*kresy*" is used, the emphasis is, in a way, on borders, on guarding their inviolability. As Antonina Kłoskowska wrote in the aforementioned volume: "the *kresy*, as opposed to the borderland, do not create neighborhoods."[39] In the Polish consciousness, the mythologized *kresy* were in fact supposed to constitute a cultural or even civilizational border, the last bastion of Polishness and Catholicism. The idyllic and megalomaniacal depiction of these Eastern Borderlands was inherently Polono-centric; other nations inhabiting them were a complement and colorful decoration of this image, but were not of any separate interest.

Therefore, many scholarly works on the *Kresy* focused primarily on issues related in some way to national ideologies. They have most often been dominated by a one-sided perspective – "from the Polish point of view." In linguistics, researchers have dealt with the scope and description of the local Polish dialects (in the famous publishing series "Studia nad Polszczyzną Kresową"), and in sociology and ethnology, they mainly followed the "identity of Poles in the

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38  K. Kwaśniewski, "Społeczne rozumienie relacji kresów i terytorium narodowego," in *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, ed. K. Handke (Warszawa, 1997), 63–64.

39  A. Kłoskowska, "Kresy – od pojęcia zamkniętego do otwartego sąsiedztwa," in *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, 233.

borderlands."[40] Researchers on the other side of the border, in turn, have examined issues concerning "their" areas – Belarusian, Ukrainian or Lithuanian (although until a certain time not without some complications resulting from the USSR's "anti-national" policy). This peculiar national division, not only in terms of the definition of the subject of research, but also in terms of the definition of the researchers themselves (not always entirely consciously), resulted in the fact that their descriptions were separate and individual, such that each of them presented "his" version, a completely different image of the area.[41]

The second mythologized perception of Poland's eastern borderland, which is indirectly related to the first, is the belief that all Catholics living there are Poles (in the national sense). In fact, it was the process of Polish expansion to the East, which always had the hallmarks of Catholic colonization, and which resulted in the formation of the boundary between the Eastern and Western Churches, that laid the foundation for this Polish Catholic myth, according to which the links between Catholicism and Polishness, and conversely Polishness with Catholicism, are unbreakable. "Most importantly," Zygmunt Zieliński wrote in his study of the myth of the Catholic Pole, "a *limes* naturally formed, on the eastern side of which were the Orthodox Ruthenian tribes and those who over the years, and under the influence of the Muscovite conquest, succumbed to orthodoxy, and on

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40   Although there was also a certain trend toward writing about those areas from the perspective of the "open" borderland, it was not until the 1990s that there were lively discussions about the demythologization of the *Kresy*. These discussions significantly changed the way we perceive and describe the *Kresy*, especially in academic literature. See S. Kieniewicz, "Kresy. Przemiany terminologiczne," *Przegląd Wschodni* 1 (1991); D. Beauvois, "Mit Kresów Wschodnich, czyli jak mu położyć kres," in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, ed. W. Wrzesiński (Wrocław, 1994); *Kresy – pojęcie i rzeczywistość*, ed. K. Handke.

41   A significant example is the trilingual village of Dziewieniszki (Dieveniškės) on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, where almost every year Lithuanian, Belarusian and Polish dialectologists have tested "their" dialect with the same trilingual respondents. Of course, each team obtained a completely different picture of the sociolinguistic diversity of the countryside, resulting not only from the internal dynamics of the phenomenon of multilingualism. The "researcher effect" was also important; his/her nationality prompted respondents to provide answers which, in his/her opinion, would satisfy the questioner most. But this also demonstrates the usually unwitting intentionality of research; by focusing on researching only one language, one does not notice the other languages (I owe this information to a linguist from the University of Vilnius, Prof. Krystyna Rutkowska, who is from Dziewieniszki).

the western side Catholics were subject to the Polish scepter."[42] The directions of the world were marked in terms of religion and nationality: the East is associated with Orthodoxy and "Ruthenianism" and the West with Catholicism and Polishness, which – combined with the myth of the *Kresy* – adds to the juxtaposition of wilderness and civilization. Typically, even though the Catholic-Orthodox border in the area under examination here runs latitudinally and not along the Polish-Belarusian state border, these geographical semantics do not lose their strength.

In the eastern borderland, Catholicism was therefore associated with Polishness from the very beginning. Orthodoxy no longer had such clear national connotations. As Zieliński wrote: "It would be difficult to infer a specific nationality from the Orthodox religion in these areas, especially as the nationality criteria were fluid, but there was no doubt that a Latin or a Catholic is a Pole. Here, then, one's faith was an infallible determinant, though by no means the only one, as there were also Poles of other faiths."[43] The identification of Catholicism with Polishness was later reinforced by Tsarist policy during the era of the Polish partitions in the nineteenth century. However, the myth of the Pole-Catholic (Catholic-Pole) is so vital that it can also be detected in contemporary academic works. Despite their declared knowledge about the separation of denominational and national factors, Polish researchers are sometimes unable to in fact separate them, treating Catholicism as a synonym for Polishness. For example, as Halina Rusek wrote when describing the Catholic-Orthodox border in Belarus:

> […] the Catholic religion is a catalyst for the integration of the Polish national minority there, separating its own from strangers, strengthening the Polish national identity, it is a platform for transmitting Polish cultural traditions, and therefore also a platform for the acculturalization of the young generation of Poles in Belarus. In a word, religion is the bulwark of Polishness in this region, since religious diversity is overlapped with national diversity.[44]

It is not without significance that when collecting data of various types, the ambiguity of the term "Pole" is not taken into account, which in this area is used in

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42  Z. Zieliński, "Mit Polak-katolik," in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku* (Wrocław, 1994).

43  Ibid., 109.

44  H. Rusek, "Wzory życia religijnego na pograniczach etnicznych i kulturowych," in *Religijność ludowa na pograniczach kulturowych i etnicznych* (Katowice, 1999), 175.

everyday language more often to denote denomination, not nationality (I am a Pole = I am of the "Polish faith" = I am Catholic).[45]

Considering the fact that for many inhabitants of Belarusian villages the only clearly defined identification is denominational, and that it is rather difficult to talk about a national consciousness,[46] then calling all Catholics Poles in the national sense is undoubtedly a projection of one's own conceptual schemes onto the reality under examination. Given the constant political changeability of the territories belonging to different states, national terms have usually had a relative character; they were categories imposed from outside. A particular strategy to neutralize this relativity involved the conscious isolation of oneself from any national ideologies and by defining oneself simply as "local," as related to a specific place, because attachment to the land and the fact of inhabiting these areas was the only certainty, the only contact, for "local" residents. Instead of adopting one of the national options, individuals would often cultivate an awareness of one's own separateness in relation to the neighboring central areas and their statehood, for which these areas were always peripheral.[47]

The myth of the Pole-Catholic is complemented by the conviction that these Catholics are Poles not only in the national (conscious) sense, but also in the sense of continuity of origin and historical residency (biological "blood ties"). When it comes to the nature of the settlement processes, it is completely different in the case of Podlachia and the areas around today's Białystok region – which were lands on the border, belonging sometimes to the Crown and sometimes to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – and yet again different in the case of the Grodno region. From the end of the fourteenth century, Podlachia was home to petty Masovian nobility, who were of course Catholic, and then, from the middle of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century, Orthodox Ruthenian

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45  See also A. Engelking, "'Jak katolik to Polak'. Co to znaczy? Wstępne wnioski z badań terenowych na Białorusi," in *Wschodnie pogranicze w perspektywie socjologicznej* (Białystok, 1995), 138–146.

46  For more, see A. Engelking, "Nacje to znaczy grupy religijne. O wynikach etnograficznych badań terenowych na Grodzieńszczyźnie," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (1996), no. 1: 109–139.

47  There is not enough space here for a thorough historical study on this subject, which has already been well researched by other authors. See, for example, J. Bardach, "Od narodu politycznego do narodu etnicznego," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (1993), no. 4; R. Radzik, "Ewolucja narodowa społeczności Kresów Wschodnich," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (1991), no. 2; J. Turonek, "Formowanie się sieci parafii rzymskokatolickich na Białorisi (1387–1781)," *Biełaruski Historyczny Ahlad* 2/22 (1995).

peasants.[48] Hence, the diversity of ancestry and denomination overlapped with the class (estate) differences, which contributed to the maintenance of inter-group barriers and the prohibition of mixed marriages. Another matter involves the lands between the Narew and Supraśl rivers, i.e. in the areas containing the villages of Topolany and Potoka that I studied, which began to be colonized as pristine forested areas only at the turn of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, with only Ruthenian people settling there.[49] Therefore, these areas were not marked by the division into peasant villages and petty nobility backwoods that so characterized Podlachia.

As for Belarusian territory, the majority of the Catholic population was of Lithuanian origin. The denominational border partly overlapped the border of the Baltic settlement, which for centuries had been retreating north under the pressure of Ruthenian colonization and was undergoing gradual Belarusization.[50] These processes meant that the current Catholic-Orthodox border has for centuries been a mixed population in terms of language and denomination: even after the introduction of top-down bans on mixed marriages – whether from the Catholic side (after the Christianization of Lithuania) or the Orthodox side (during the partitions) – the phenomenon of religious and linguistic conversion has always been quite common here.[51]

We can talk of Polish settlement in the areas of the former Nowogródek province only in the case of petty nobility backwoods, which unlike peasant villages, are called here "*okolice*" (environs), whose inhabitants were distinguished by a separate class (estate) and national consciousness which persists among the older generation to this day. This is also the case with the inhabitants of the Rouby backwoods, established in the second half of the seventeenth century.[52] Even today, the older generation speaks fairly good Polish, which has little in common with the language of the majority of "village Poles" whose everyday language is usually Belarusian. Despite the fact that legal and financial distinctions between the nobility and the peasants were practically abolished during the partitions as a

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48  Detailed information on this subject can be found in J. Wiśniewski, "Rozwój osad-nictwa na pograniczu polsko-rusko-litewskim od końca XIV w. do połowy XVII w.," *Acta Baltico-Slavica* (1964); his, "Zarys dziejów osadnictwa na Białostoc-czyźnie," in *Atlas gwar wschodniosłowiańskich Białostocczyzny*, vol. 1, ed. S. Glinka (Wrocław-Warszawa, 1980).

49  J. Wiśniewski, "Zarys dziejów osadnictwa na Białostocczyźnie."

50  Cf. J. Ochmański, *Litewska granica etniczna na wschodzie* (Wrocław, 1981).

51  J. Turonek, "Formowanie…"

52  J. Wiśniewski, "Zarys dziejów osadnictwa na Białostocczyźnie."

result of enfranchisement, the nobility persistently tried to emphasize their separateness based on cultural superiority. Social barriers between the village and the surrounding area were so strong here that until the Soviet times, mixed "class" marriages were extremely rare.

## Information about Localities

The most important criteria in the selection of the villages in which this research was carried out were (1) their location in the Catholic-Orthodox borderlands on both sides of the Polish-Belarusian border, and (2) a certain degree of denominational complexity. That having been said, these are not localities that – in sociological or historical terms – correspond perfectly to each other, and this choice stems from the fact that what was most important to me was not so much precisely matched demographic parameters, but rather the kind of interpersonal relationships that could be established in the field. Of greatest value for me were the interviewees themselves and the conversations I had with them, whose nature and research potential largely depended on the degree of openness and mutual trust.

The research on the Belarusian side was carried out in stages and over a relatively long period of time (in the years 1993–2001). Initially, these were student laboratory exercises conducted by Anna Engelking in a dozen or so villages of the Lida and Voranava districts of the Grodno region. An eight-member team then assembled a core body of interviews, which were used in several works,[53] including this one. Later trips took place within the scope of my own work. But I collected materials used in my particular work in the years 1999–2001 in three places that had previously turned out to be the most interesting for various

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53  See *Konteksty*, no. 3/4, which contains student articles summarizing their field exercises and selected fragments of conversations; A. Engelking, "Nacje, to znaczy grupy religijne," 109–139; his, "'Kołchoz musi być', czyli przyczynek d o portretu polaka-kołchoźnika. Uwagi etnografa na podstawie badań we wsiach Grodzieńszczyzny," *Pogranicze. Studia Społeczne*, vol. 8, special issue; *Polacy na pograniczach w perspektywie porównawczej*, ed. A. Sadowski (Białystok 1999), 199–211; D. Życzyńska-Ciołek, "Naród język i państwo w wypowiedziach mieszkańców wsi pod Lidą na Białorusi," *Etnografia Polska* 40 (1996), no. 1–2: 137–153; J. Straczuk, *Język a tożsamość człowieka w warunkach społecznej wielojęzyczności. Pogranicze polsko-litewsko-białoruskie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1998). J. Tokarska-Bakir also used this material in her *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

reasons: in the Catholic village of Papiernia, in the nobility's area of Rouby and in the denominationally mixed (mostly Orthodox) village of Radziwoniszki.

Papiernia is quite a large village (approx. 150 houses, 500 inhabitants) belonging to the Catholic parish of Wawiórka. It is a place whose socio-cultural character is in constant flux: new houses are being built on the outskirts of the old village for newcomers, mostly from other former Soviet republics, who find employment in a nearby kolkhoz, but do not come into close contact with the locals.[54] There is a primary school in the village, but it is constantly threatened with closure due to the insufficient number of students. The *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego* records the presence of 283 Catholics and 21 Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century.[55] At that time, there was a Catholic chapel and a cemetery belonging to the owners at the time, the Kostrowicki family. The chapel and cemetery are gone, only the memory of their place has been preserved. In the interwar period, there were already 426 Catholics in Papiernia, all of whom declared Polish nationality (whatever that would mean for the recorded or the recorders).[56] Even now, almost all inhabitants are Catholics who declare themselves as Polish – more in denominational terms than in national terms; aware of this fact as they are, they often use the term "inappropriate" or "impure" Pole – in contrast to the Polishness of the inhabitants of the nearby Rouby.

The nobility's area of Rouby, which celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2000, belongs to the same parish of Wawiórka and is also a town with an increasing number of inhabitants with a changing social composition. Many of them have come in the last twenty years in search of work in a prospering sovkhoz in the nearby Mały Możejków, which produces the vodka brand Pański Dom, which is both famous and popular in the region.[57] It is estimated that newcomers who have settled there since the end of the 1980s constitute about 50% of the inhabitants. According to sources,[58] in 1887 there were 124 inhabitants (all Catholics),

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54  All data on the current situation in the localities in Belarus is provided on the basis of unofficial talks with locals, because access to any official data is practically impossible.

55  *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, ed. F. Sulimierski (Warszawa, 1888).

56  *Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny RP, 1924) – data from the census of September 30, 1921 and other official sources.

57  In a way, this is a continuation of prewar regional traditions started by the former owner of Możejków, Brochocki, who had his distillery there. It is worth mentioning that the nearby Papiernia flourished as a center of the illegal production of supposedly excellent moonshine known throughout the region.

58  *Słownik geograficzny.*

and in 1921 a few more, i.e. 140,[59] which may indicate, first of all, a lower natural increase than among peasants (on average 2–3 children), and second, both the reluctance to parcel the land and the emigration of younger siblings to cities. The daily use of the Polish language and moral condemnation of people who do not comply with the principle of endogamy is typical only for the older generation. Born in the postwar era, although they know Polish much better than "village Poles" and willingly admit their nobility, they use the local Belarusian dialect on a daily basis and marry at their own discretion, including (although definitely less frequently) with Orthodox Christians. The inhabitants of Rouby differ from the inhabitants of the peasant village of Papiernia not only in terms of identity: for example, the education level of prewar inhabitants, especially men who had often completed secondary schools, or the literacy level (knowledge of canonical works of Polish literature, subscription to magazines) is higher.

The Catholic-Orthodox village of Radziwoniszki (approximately 400 inhabitants) – with its own church put back into use at the end of the 1990s and with a batiushka (priest) living there since that time – is located on the other side of the road relative to Papiernia. This road is, at the same time, the approximate dividing line between the Orthodox and Catholic parishes, a line that has not changed substantially since the fifteenth century.[60] Local Catholics constitute about 20% of the population: if they want to go to the church on the other side of the road, they have to travel a dozen or so kilometers; it is thus no wonder that most of them attend the local church. The Orthodox inhabitants have always been dominant in Radziwoniszki: the first wooden church (now made of brick) was founded in 1696.[61] In 1887, the *Słownik geograficzny* records 91 Orthodox inhabitants and 28 Catholics inhabitants.[62] The number of inhabitants and the percentage of Catholics clearly increased in the interwar period: out of 382 people, 231 were Orthodox and 151 were Catholic; interestingly, both of them declared their nationality as exclusively Polish.[63] Currently, there is a school and breeding farm in the village, belonging to the Małe Możejkowo sovkhoz, where most of the local residents work.

The research on the Polish side in the years 1999–2003 took place in an area unknown to me and had a much narrower scope; it covered only two

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59  *Skorowidz miejscowości.*

60  J. Ochmański, *Litewska granica…*; J. Turonek, "Formowanie…"

61  *Słownik geograficzny.*

62  Ibid.

63  *Skorowidz miejscowości.*

towns: Topolany and Potoka (Michałowo commune, Podlachian Voivodeship), and their selection was dictated by family- and friend-like affinity, which significantly facilitated for me – a key in ethnographic activity – the possibility to live with a local family and thus gain the trust of interlocutors who invited me into their homes (which is increasingly difficult in the Polish countryside). The number of people I talked to was smaller, the familiarity with them was smaller (during three trips I had the opportunity to return to them at most twice), and the amount of material that I collected myself, without having a body of previous conversations and data about the interlocutors, was also smaller than it was in the case on the Belarusian territory. Therefore, the comparisons of the two terrains that I make in this work do not have the same scope that can be obtained through teamwork.

Topolany is a mixed Catholic-Orthodox village, founded probably in the sixteenth century and located on Zabłudowski properties owned by the Chodkiewicz family, who settled mostly with Ruthenians in the areas of old forests. The village has an Orthodox church founded in the sixteenth century and served as a parish until the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was attached, along with the cemetery church in Piatienka, to the parish in Potoka; a separate parish in Topolany was restored in the 1940s.[64] Local Catholics belong to the parish in nearby Michałów, where there is also a Catholic cemetery. In the middle of the nineteenth century, 501 people lived here.[65] In 1915, as a result of the so-called *bieżeństwo* (which included only the Orthodox population), nearly 80% of inhabitants fled deep into Russia along with the retreating Russian army. By 1922, most of the inhabitants had returned. According to the 1921 census, there were 454 people living in Topolany, including 289 Orthodox Christians with a declared Belarusian nationality, 159 Catholics with a declared Polish nationality, and six German Evangelicals (the owners of the mill who are still remembered today).[66] As in many villages in this region, the number of inhabitants of Topolany has been gradually decreasing since the postwar years and dropped drastically in the mid-1970s (at which time the local school was also closed) as a result of migration to cities, mainly Białystok: in 1950, 615 people lived there, in 1970 – 443, and in 1995 – only 202.[67] Similar data on the decline and aging of the

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64  G. Sosna, *Bibliografia parafii prawosławnych na Białostocczyźnie*, the part on demographics (Ryboły, 1992), 111.

65  Quoted in L. Nos, *Monografia gminy Michałowo* (Białystok, 1996).

66  *Skorowidz miejscowości.*

67  L. Nos, *Monografia...*; based on registration books on the village of Topolany in the Commune Office in Michałów.

Topolany community is provided by church parish records: in 1950 there were 33 baptisms and 11 funerals; in 1970 – 11 baptisms and 17 funerals, in 1990 – 5 baptisms and 11 funerals.[68]

The village of Potoka, with a decidedly Orthodox character, is smaller than Topolany and was probably also established a bit later; in any case, the first church was founded there by the Radziwiłł family in 1707.[69] In 1809, there were 164 Orthodox Christians and one Jewish family (owners of the inn) living in Potoka. In the middle of the nineteenth century, typhus and cholera decimated the local population such that in 1866 there were only 62 inhabitants. At that time, a community primary school (*szkoła ludowa*) was in operation there, and from the 1880s until the First World War a church secondary school as well. In 1913, the old wooden Orthodox church was replaced with a brick one, which, however, was completely destroyed two years later as a result of the nearby Russian-German battles. Also in 1915, the entire population of Potoka departed for Russia and the village was burned to the ground. People gradually returned, and 123 inhabitants were recorded there in 1921 – all Orthodox of Belarusian nationality.[70] This was not the end of Potoka's dramatic fate, because in 1945 the village was once again burnt to the ground by Armia Krajowa (Polish Home Army, AK) partisans in retaliation for supporting the communist partisans. Several dozen inhabitants of Potoka then moved to the Soviet Union for good. Potoka's population, like that of Topolany, decreased year by year. In 1950, there were 286 inhabitants; in 1970 – 178; and in 1995 – 69.

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68  G. Sosna, *Bibliografia…*

69  Most of the information about Potoka comes from the monograph L. Nos, *Monografia…*, unless noted otherwise.

70  *Skorowidz miejscowości*.

## On Methodology and Field Work

> If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do. In anthropology, or anyway social anthropology, what the practitioners do is ethnography.

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C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*[71]

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Writing about my own presence in the field, I do not want to fall into excessive sentimentality and contribute to the creation of "the myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience and cosmopolitanism."[72] Field research is by no means a problem-free activity, a fact which – after the publication of Malinowski's *Diary*[73] and the discussion surrounding that book – can be, and even should be, discussed loudly and openly. My time spent especially in Belarusian villages often came with inconveniences, which often dampened my desire to work and – instead of encouraging me to reflect – caused me to want to escape. Such experiences are, however, an inseparable element of ethnographic work and – although annoying – can be cognitively valuable.

While statements quoted by me might seem to the reader like a dead text, they are for me a living matter – a record of real conversations with real people in real situations and places. While they are sensuous, acoustic-visual and concrete, they also involve – given the circumstances in which I recorded them – smells and tastes. When writing about funeral observances, eating habits or alcohol rituals, I use the effects of participant observation, relying on various experiences, often going beyond the scope of a discursive message. Compulsory alcohol consumption, the requirement to eat fatty foods on a daily basis, the inhalation of the smell of a deceased body during a night's long vigil – all of this was an inseparable part of my ethnographic experience, which meant that the field sometimes "got under my skin." In this sense, as Joanna Tokarska-Bakir put it, "I used myself as a tool," not only to get to know, but also to experience the reality I describe,[74] which I would prefer not to hide under the mask of research neutrality. One's

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71  Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Book, 1973), 5.

72  C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (Fontana Press: London, 1993), 56.

73  B. Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (New York, 1967).

74  J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Dalsze losy syna marnotrawnego. Projekt etnografii nieprzezroczystej," *Konteksty* (1995), no. 1: 21.

own emotional involvement, which cannot be lost in the name of scientific objectivity, can become an additional cognitive element, not worse than others that are more legitimated by methodological tradition.

## Establishing "Human" Relationships

Ethnography – understood here based on Anglo-Saxon literature as a method of field research, and not in the traditional way as a recording and description of the products of so-called folk culture – is not a codified record of activities and behaviors that should be carried out during field work. Rather, it is a skill that cannot be fully learned, but must be practiced. One's way of being in the field and the method by which one collects data are largely influenced by the researcher's individual predispositions, and not by some pre-established procedures.[75] Which is why textbooks dealing with the methodology of qualitative research all describe a course of action that does not correspond to reality, one that is ideally systematized but is impossible to fully implement in the field because it does not take into account important psychological and situational factors, unexpected turns of events, or pure coincidence. So instead of writing once again about the adopted methodology of qualitative research (participant observation, free-form interview, a scenario with open questions, etc.), I would rather share a few personal comments about my way of living and working in the field and my method for collecting materials.

Regardless of what is written in textbooks about getting in touch with the "natives," the most important thing, in my opinion, is the nature of the relationship that the researcher establishes with them: it is important that it is a "human" relationship, one that takes place in conditions of mutual interest and kindness, not some kind of rigid researcher-subject relationship, one that is asymmetric by nature where the former is regarded as the "expert" and the latter merely as the "subject" (or even "object") of research. Such an official type of contact is undeniably much less demanding on the researcher, because it less taxing on him/her emotionally, but it also gives much worse results: conversations become too rigid, less authentic and, to some extent, forced. A free relationship between research and his/her interlocutors can be influenced by the very manner in which conversations are carried out, which should never turn into merely impersonal "interviews." For this reason, it is sometimes worth it, for example, to suspend the collection of mere "data" and momentarily set aside the need to query information useful for one's work. In spontaneous off-topic conversations one can not

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75 "No set of rules can be devised which will produce good field relations. All that can be offered is discussion of some of the main methodological and practical considerations surrounding ethnographers' relations in the field." Martyn Hammersley, Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 2nd edition (London-New York: Routledge, 1983), 80.

only form authentic relationships and friendships, but also establish additional context in which certain issues of interest to us take on new meaning.

Establishing "human" relationships requires entering into some kind of socially accepted role, and in this regard it is difficult to consider the situation created by the classical interview as well suited. Therefore, at the very beginning, the way in which one establishes familiarity and persuades people to talk is important; the use of official cover letters and local authorities as intermediaries and references to "serious" institutions immediately place the researcher in a position of power relative to his/her interlocutor, who then turns into simply an "informant," the object of posed questions. A much better atmosphere for conversation, based on the two parties coming together voluntarily, is created when you come to your interlocutor practically "from the street." The researcher then depends completely on the favor and disfavor of his interlocutor, who decides for himself, at his own discretion, and not under the influence of subtle pressure (from offices, institutions, authorities), whether or not he wants to devote his time to the stranger.

The key issue is where the conversation takes place. Surroundings that are closest to the interlocutor are the most suitable – an apartment, a yard, a bench near the fence. One thus finds the opportunity to see (and sometimes photograph) the private environment, which by itself says a lot about a person. Family photos, household knickknacks, decor or landscape elements can also be a good excuse to give the conversation a more personal tone. In a public place – on the street, in a shop, at work – contact is treated as accidental, temporary, superficial. The same people in their private environment, in their apartment, acting as hosts, are more open and willing to speak longer. Such a conversational situation is more authentic and freer, because it is here that one enters the realm of everyday social contacts. It happens that when the ethnographer is in the host's house, his neighbor or relative appears, spontaneously joins the conversation treated as a simple chat, often marginalizing the researcher's presence.

It is equally important to return to the same interlocutors during subsequent field trips. Relationships become much closer in this way, sometimes even intimate; it is much easier to be invited home or to find accommodation. Conversations become more personal, information is obtained that strangers are hardly ever told (e.g. nicknames given to different families in the village, local gossip, and private problems). It is also good to talk about the same topics again; interlocutors already have a given problem on their minds, they have time for possible reflection, sometimes they even remember certain questions and wait for the next opportunity to expand upon stories. If you live in the hosts' house, then conversations happen spontaneously, without having to start them. Such a

presence on the part of an ethnographer is perhaps the most natural situation, prompting open conversations, although I cannot deny that it is quite exhausting for both sides, since it requires renouncing one's privacy and being "supervised" for a long time (participant observation is a double-edged sword; the ethnographer is subject to it himself). After successive visits, the relationship evolves toward arrangements that are often very close and cordial. This was the case with our long-term research in Belarus, where we were initially viewed as a group of students from Warsaw, then as "our Poles," and finally as individuals with recognizable characters and life situations. The doyenne of Polish ethnography, the prewar researcher Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, stated long ago that only an interest in the researcher's personal life signifies his sufficient acceptance in the field.[76]

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76  K. Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Społeczność wiejska* (Warszawa, 1958).

## Conversation

Regarding the way I conducted conversations, my activity as an ethnographer involved mainly listening, then asking questions. A well-prepared interview with thoughtful questions, although not without significance, was not the most important thing here. Conversations took place on their own, with prepared questions usually not being asked at all. If the questions did not arise in some way from the context of the conversation, then the exchange turned into a kind of bothersome interrogation that made it difficult for the interlocutor to develop the most important topics for himself. Therefore, as a rule, in every conversation I first asked basic questions as an opening to subsequent thematic blocks, and only then, if it turned out to be necessary, I "tugged" further on a given topic, asking more detailed questions.

One consequence of this approach is also the fact that scenario questions are asked "spontaneously" and not read from the page. It is not particularly difficult if the ethnographer is involved in the entire research process and knows the reason behind the question. Which is why ethnographic research cannot be outsourced to someone "from the outside" after a short training, as is the case with a sociological survey, because it is necessary to understand the purposefulness of each question and to ask each question skillfully, depending on what was said previously. The scenario is not a tool prepared "once and for all," but rather undergoes constant modifications as the researcher gets acquainted with the reality under examination.

It is sometimes the case that a carefully thought-out question formulated "at home" turns out to be entirely "unworkable" in the field: it is either artificial, or incomprehensible, or "out of place." Sometimes the sequence of questions or the course of questioning does not work well during a conversation; it can be too monotonous, tiring, or unnatural – a situation which is also often impossible to predict because it depends on the way a given topic functions in the minds of the interlocutors and the degree to which it is verbalized. It can also turn out that the seemingly least meaningful question, one asked only to sustain the conversation or one that is misunderstood by the interlocutor, provokes an interesting statement, in which case happenstance is often more helpful than a perfectly prepared set of questions.

However, it should be reiterated that the fewer questions asked, the better. When it comes to the quality of the collected material, the most valuable is the kind you get from good "storytellers," who can lead the topic in their own way and according to their own invention. A researcher ranks his questions into his own hierarchy and those questions are often suggestive. Sometimes the interlocutor,

wishing to give the questioner as much as possible, recalls episodes that are not of great importance to him. That is why it is crucial not to interrupt your interlocutors too often; longer narratives reveal the natural context of each issue. You should also not be afraid of silence: interlocutors often use such moments to reflect deeper on an issue, and a question asked at that point can suddenly shift their thinking to a completely different path. In any case, something that seems irrelevant during a conversation can later turn out to be highly important; you also never know how a story line used by the interlocutor will develop and what will come out of it. Sometimes you just have to "set aside" good material, letting the interlocutor "talk through" the matter, because it could be that in the next hour of the conversation an interesting topic suddenly emerges about which the ethnographer would not have thought to ask.

## Technological "Extensions"

A few words about technological aids in ethnographic work, i.e. a camera and a voice recorder, without which it is difficult to imagine field research today. The matter of a camera is obvious, because cameras have been used almost from the beginning of this type of research (see the photographic documentation of Malinowski's research on the Trobriand Islands). In the villages we visited, no one was surprised by cameras hanging around our necks. As a rule, there was no protest against being photographed. We never took photographs covertly and without prior approval.

Contrary to appearances, technological equipment need not disturb relatively smooth relations with interlocutors, as long as it is "familiar" and accepted by both parties as early as possible. Which is why we researchers always carried the dictaphone and camera out in the open, so that people would get used to their constant presence and would take into account the "risk" of being recorded on tape or film (it is important that they be aware that this "risk" will have no consequences, except for the fact that they will receive copies of photos during the next visit).[77] Sometimes interlocutors asked that we not write down statements that were too personal or too controversial (the content of such statements – curses, gossip, political views, personal stories – could become the subject of separate studies) or that they not be photographed (e.g. in "ugly" clothes) or that something around them not be photographed (e.g. an illegal still). In such cases, it is simply necessary to assume that we cannot appropriate the entire reality under observation and that "scientific goals" are no justification.

A few words more about the great advantage of recorded conversations over those taken down into notes or just "remembered." This advantage is easiest to see when the researcher transcribes recordings (although this is an extremely time-consuming task, it is always best to do it yourself). It turns out that otherwise the researcher can overlook many issues raised during a conversation; while some content is not noticed at all, other content comes to light only after a deeper linguistic analysis of texts that are the literal transcriptions of interviews. While transcribing, you have the opportunity to recall the situation surrounding the conversation and observe your own influence on its character from a distance, which is difficult to do when you are an active participant in the interaction. Repeated listening to the tapes while writing them down causes many phrases and

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77  Regarding the use of my dictaphone, it is telling that in my ten years of ethnographic practice only once have I been refused permission to record an interview.

expressions to be etched into memory, triggering further research questions and facilitating navigation through the huge body of written texts.

While I write about establishing "human relationships" in the field, I do not deny that an ethnographer's basic motivation is the desire to collect good field material and not (at least not primarily) to make new friends. However, not everything is for scientific benefit. If you are not overly serious about yourself and your scientific mission, it shouldn't be difficult or forced to establish free relationships in the field. After all, on an everyday basis we deal with people telling their stories, which is difficult to consider as a whole in terms of utility; it is also difficult to determine what is redundant in them. For storytellers, the opportunity to be heard is often a kind of therapy, and for listeners, hearing someone's story has a psychological value (the conversation is a mutually engaging relationship), but also an aesthetic one (these stories are often wonderful narratives, a specific form of spoken literature).

A problem tied to this type of approach involves an excess of material, which is often difficult to control and which requires a great deal of time to develop and organize in the analytical process. Even worse, the type of source we use here is basically inexhaustible; you can go out into the field at any time and increase the supply: repeat questions, search for more detail, and find new themes and questions. The "saturation" category that Daniel Bertaux[78] once tried to introduce into qualitative research in order to indicate when a researcher has collected enough data does not, in my opinion, exist. Just as human understanding is infinite, so is the need for further inquiry; at most one can know that time and funds are not unlimited. "Cultural analysis," as the knowledgeable Clifford Geertz put it, "is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is."[79]

In meta-anthropological reflection on the creation of literary fiction in reports from field research we find criticism of ethnographic writing when the ethnographer uses his/her authority as a field researcher to legitimize and generalize his personal view of the described reality.[80] But this phenomenon is unavoidable

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78  D. Bertaux, "L'approche biographique. Sa validité méthodologique, ses potentialités," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 69 (1980); the quoted term is from A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe*, passim.

79  Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 29.

80  See, for example, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. J. Clifford, G. E. Marcus (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1986).

given that a field researcher always speaks through the prism of his own experience and emotional involvement. Even the very selection of the material collected in the field, its ordering, trimming, shredding, and dividing into segments, is a subjective authorial creation, a specific translation of the "stream of reality into a stream of text." Therefore, the strategy that I adopted while writing this work, one that can, in my opinion, at least narrow the gap between the "given" and "created" reality, is to give the text shape such that it becomes a kind of double voice – mine and my interlocutors – that speaks both frequently and extensively, without the use of indirect speech, so that the interlocutors and I should actually be considered co-authors of this work.

# Part II: The Cemetery and Forms of Memory: The Dynamics of Denominational Borders

> If the memory of our dead is a condition of all social existence because it gives us a sense of continuity, the tomb remains a necessary institution.
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> Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*[1]

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1   P. Ariès, *The Hour of our Death* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 542.

My interest in borderland cemeteries has not been the result of previous theoretical conceptualizations. The topic came by itself, spontaneously, prompted by field work, not conceived in the privacy of a library. When visiting cemeteries as one of the most important places in the topography of the villages in which I carried out my research, I gained an impression from the very beginning of almost tangible contact with the borderland essence. Despite the official division into Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries, their denominational mixture, the immediate vicinity of Orthodox and Catholic crosses, the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, was noticeable. This peculiar "ecumenical" coexistence of symbols of both religions within the closed space of the cemetery directly pointed to certain – as Znaniecki would put it – "non-spatial values"[2] that are important in the life of local communities. Initially, only the visual aspect was prominent, followed by deeper reflection. However, when the theme of the cemetery was included in the set of questions asked to our interlocutors, it turned out to be an unexpectedly useful tool for evoking spontaneous narrative statements. A considerable field of so far unexplored issues opened up, one that was related to the entire complexity of life on the denominational frontier. After further discussions, an increasing number of ideas for further questions about the cemetery developed, so that as a result, a separate part of the scenario was created, from which a separate research topic emerged.

Conversations about the cemetery concerned particular things – a specific space, specific activities, specific events – easy to talk about and at the same time meaningful, because they were directly related to the sometimes difficult-to-verbalize theme of death and remembering. Death in traditional folk culture, as one of the most important and perhaps most important rites of passage, has been called the "organizer of culture" [3] because rituals associated with it are repeated in their own way in every important moment of the peasant community's life; it provides significant symbolic meaning, pointing to a given community's most important values. "If folk anthropology is conceivable," Roch Sulima wrote with similar conviction, "it is dying that is its basic content; it provides the most

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2   "[…] each spatial value is a component of a non-spatial value system – it has its own content and meaning." See F. Znaniecki, "Socjologiczne podstawy ekologii ludzkiej," *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny* 18 (1938), no. 1: 90.

3   Cf. J. Tokarska, J. S. Wasilewski, M. Zmysłowska, "Śmierć jako organizator kultury," *Etnografia Polska* 26 (1982), no. 1. The authors offered a structural and semiotic analysis of various rites of passage in traditional societies, showing how each of them reflects the process of ritual death and rebirth.

profound descriptions of man and suggests the most essential categories of folk humanism."[4]

Thus, it is obvious that the cemetery as a place directly related to the event of death, a place where funeral rites are celebrated, and a place for remembering the dead, is embedded in the life of the peasant community and is an integral component of the locality. People "drop by" the cemetery (especially when it is located near a village) almost every day, treating it as a visit to the deceased, an opportunity to meet neighbors or acquaintances, to pray, to "linger over" the grave. The cemetery is the focal point of ambivalent meanings. Being distant from the "ordinary" world, it is a "different" place, while it is – at the same time – constantly domesticated, developed and made similar to an "everyday" space. A multitude of activities tied to the cemetery, both ritual and secular (although it is often difficult to even introduce such a distinction), a multitude of related thoughts, ideas, and memories associated with death and rebirth (in memory), temporality and eternity, the possibility of turning back time by treating the dead as if they were alive, the living (building their own graves while alive) as if they had died – all this brings to mind the phenomenon that Foucault called "heterotopia" – the possibility of juxtaposing several spaces in different time dimensions and associated with different layers of meaning.[5]

Jacek Kolbuszewski has already pointed out the importance of cemeteries as a research topic, their semiotic nature and the possibilities they present for cultural analysis: "Such a [cemetery] space is a cultural phenomenon par excellence, and one could thus say that a cemetery is a cultural text, such that it not only gives evidence of human fate (because every grave provides some information about the person buried in it), but it also illustrates attitudes, at a given time, toward death and therefore attitudes toward life."[6]

The event of death is inextricably linked with the beginning of the formation of memory not just about the deceased individual, but also about the entire community of people who passed away earlier, the community of ancestors. Such memory is an important element of identity; it provides an image of the social past and provides a sense of common roots. At the same time, collective memory,

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4   R. Sulima, "O umieraniu," his, *Słowo i etos. Szkice o kulturze* (Kraków, 1992), 71–72.
5   M. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* (Spring 1986): 22–27.
6   J. Kolbuszewski, *Cmentarze* (Wrocław, 1996) 30. Cf. his, *Wiersze z cmentarza. O współczesnej epigrafice wierszowanej* (Wrocław, 1985); S. Sikora, "Cmentarz. Antropologia pamięci," *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* (1986), R. 40, no. 1/2.

as Halbwachs noticed long ago, [7] is a mirror of the remembering community, it points to those norms, values and patterns that are important, desirable and worth recording for a given community. In borderland cemeteries, the shape and content of the collective memory they evoke provides additional information on the self-identification of these communities. Kolbuszewski wrote: "Just as the grave is a substitute for the space materialized around the deceased during his lifetime (Roch Sulima's term), the cemetery is the substitute for the space materialized in the past around the dead in general, understood as an ethnic group, a religious group, or sometimes a different group. Hence, the denominational or national character of a given cemetery is a sign of a kind of appropriation of the area in which it is located: it is my space and (or!) ours."[8] Therefore, the cemetery's boundaries separate "one's own" community from others, confirm its separateness, and define its identity. The cemetery also most often defines the denominational affiliation of a village; it is an indication of its religious status, which is extremely important in the context of the denominational borderland.

The subject of analysis here will be six rural cemeteries: on the Polish side – the Catholic parish cemetery in Michałów [Mich/k][9] and two Orthodox cemeteries: in Michałów [Mich/p] and in Piatienka [Piat]; on the Belarusian side – Catholic parish cemetery in Wawiórka [Waw] and two Orthodox cemeteries in Radziwoniszki [Radz] and in Lebioda [Leb].

So, what do cemeteries say about the inhabitants of villages on this Orthodox-Catholic borderland? What kinds of ties, values and attitudes do they indicate? What is the significance of their denominational diversity for these communities and how is this diversity reflected in the cemetery space? When visiting cemeteries, do we learn something about the cultural reality of the borderland?

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7    Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

8    J. Kolbuszewski, "Pejzaż semiotyczny pogranicznych cmentarzy," in *Pogranicze jako problem kultury*, ed. T. Smolińska (Opole, 1994).

9    In brackets, I provide further abbreviations used to designate individual cemeteries.

## "There would be graves, and they would remember, yes…" – Or the Materiality of Memory

> Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness.
>
> W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*[10]

In the first chapter of this Part, I will deal with the relationship between peasant memory and the tombstone material and technologies used in preserving memory in the cemetery space. I will try to briefly trace the process of changes that peasant memory has undergone over the last century, and thus how the mentality and cultural specificity of the examined peasant communities have changed over the last three generations. Such an analysis will be helpful in further characterizing the rites and ritual activities related to death and remembrance of the dead, i.e. everything that is part of the social practice of remembering and, in a direct way, the sphere of religiosity with reference to issues tied to the rural religious community on the denominational borderland.

### Cemetery Boundaries – Community Boundaries?

In the terrain under discussion here, there is a clear division between Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries. There are no places here which are supposed to be "ecumenical" – i.e. places where it would be possible to perform funeral rites by either a Catholic or an Orthodox priest. The sphere of their influence is basically separate here, which does not mean, however, that all Catholics are buried exclusively by a Catholic priest and Orthodox individuals by a batiushka. I will return to this issue below.

The division into Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries indicates a clear social demarcation of inhabitants according to denominational criteria. The existence of separate cemeteries for Orthodox and Catholics especially clearly marks the boundaries between them. However, it should be emphasized that this division is institutional; it is imposed from above and reflects the administrative boundaries and the range of influence enjoyed by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches rather than the intra-group boundaries within the denominationally mixed local community. In this case, separate cemeteries would indicate the existence of

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10  Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London–New York: Routledge, 1982), 82.

formal external borders, but not necessarily symbolic ones recognized by members of these communities.

The actual location of cemeteries distinguishes Orthodox villages from Catholic ones. Catholic cemeteries are usually located near a church and are parish cemeteries, shared by several towns; such is the case with the Catholic cemeteries in Wawiórka and Michałów described here. Orthodox cemeteries usually belong to one village, although they are not always located within that village. The cemeteries in Piatienka and Lebioda are located some distance from town, in the surrounding forest. Oskar Kolberg drew attention to this fact back in the nineteenth century: "Cemeteries in Biala Rus are common in groves. Graves separated from the church, in the field, bear the name of a cemetery, and a cemetery is actually called there by the place surrounding the church, where the commoners do not dig" [Kolb., 101]. Such locations for Orthodox cemeteries are quite common in these areas to this day, both in Poland and Belarus. Our Catholic interlocutors also draw attention to the different topography of Orthodox cemeteries.

> There is a cemetery for them [the Orthodox] in every village. In every village [...] This Lebioda is a sacred site. And so: when you leave, you immediately see that it is an Orthodox village. Immediately around the village, somewhere there is cemetery. But not here [in the Catholic village] – just around the church [B. Ser.m. cat.29].

Unlike the Catholic Church, which at the beginning of the Middle Ages ordered cemeteries to be fenced in order to separate them from the everyday space and to protect their sacred character (because they often served as marketplaces or places for social meetings),[11] the Orthodox Church, divided into independent autocephaly, did not seem to have a similar type of top-down orders. Which is why today we can find unfenced Orthodox cemeteries, though they are rare.[12]

However, forest cemeteries are not something that grew out of Orthodox soil. Rather, they came from pre-Christian traditions against which the Catholic Church put up resistance, while the Orthodox Church gave its consent. According to Anna Spiss, who cited no specific sources: "On Polish lands, before the adoption of Christianity, there was a custom of burning the bodies of the dead and burying them in forests and fields. Until the eighteenth century,

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11  Cf. A. Labudda, *Liturgia pogrzebu w Polsce do wydania Rytuału Piotrkowskiego (1861). Studium historyczno-liturgiczne* (Warszawa: ATK, 1983); P. Ariès, *The Hour of our Death.*

12  The cemetery in Lebioda is unique in this respect: it is located in a forest, it has no fence, which gives the impression that the graves grow out of the trees, and the place itself lives on its own, uncontrolled by humans.

people called these pre-Christian burial places *zalniki* or *zale*, and later *kopce* and *mogiły*. In the tenth century, after the adoption of Christianity, the first cemeteries appeared in Poland, though the practice of burials in cemeteries initially met with strong resistance. People still hid their dead under trees, in the woods, at cross roads, in clearings."[13]

Even until the Second World War – as indicated by the memories of older people and by preserved sources and microtoponyms – almost every Catholic village had its own separate cemetery, including the Catholic village of Papiernia. In the school chronicle, written by local teachers based on conversations with the oldest residents, we find the following information:

> The western part of the village is called *Zakościółek*, for which we have an appropriate explanation. There used to be a chapel here where services were held. For the local Catholics, it was a holy place, in plain language they even called this chapel a church, and the place behind the church – the *Zakościółek*. The dead were buried there. To the north of the chapel, in the family tomb, the lords who lived on the estate were buried, and to the west and south of it simple peasants found their eternal rest. Until recently, when people were doing agricultural work, iron crosses, stones with inscriptions and human bones were found here.[14]

The place called *Zakościółek* is now a fallow land, one of the few undeveloped places in the densely built-up village. Also, in the neighboring Catholic parish in Pielasa, older people mention the local rural cemeteries, commonly known as *mogiłki* (little cemeteries), that until recently were active:

> Until there was a church in Pielasa, we belonged to the parish in Raduń. And we went to Raduń, went to church, whoever could. And they buried everyone there. Well, at that time there were *mogiłki* here [in Pieluńce]. There were *mogiłki* in Powłoka, there were *mogiłki* in Podzitwa. And when it was too difficult to reach this Raduń, they buried the deceased there. And when they built a church in Pielasa, they did not bury using these small *mogiłki* from that time. Already in Pielasa there was a cemetery. [B.Pow.w.cat.27]

Another type of church territorial organization, one which brings together several parish villages around one church (unlike the Orthodox community, in which almost every village has its own church), caused these local Catholic village cemeteries to gradually disappear in favor of large collective parish cemeteries. This development was probably related to an economic calculation about the costs of celebrating a funeral mass in a distant church and bringing a priest

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13  A. Spiss, "Wiejskie cmentarze w Polsce" in *Śmierć – przestrzeń – czas – tożsamość w Europie Środkowej około 1900* (Kraków, 2001), 218.

14  A photocopy of the chronicle is in my archive.

to the local cemetery from afar. Since the Middle Ages, the Church has ordered church funerals to be held, and then also a funeral mass, in the local church.[15] As long as local cemeteries existed, it was not uncommon for people to bury the deceased without the participation of a priest, as reported by, for example, Kolberg: "Very often, peasants carry out a funeral themselves without a clergyman if he lives someplace too far away" [Kolb., 309]. In any case, this was true until recently, during the communist regime in Belarus, when because of a lack of priests, people had to handle various religious services on their own.

A different type of location means that Catholic cemeteries near a parish church are unequivocally religious cemeteries: they belong to the church. Such a clear indication of the boundaries of a religious community makes it difficult for people of the Orthodox faith to cross them. The location of the Orthodox cemeteries is more indicative of their "village" affiliation: despite their religious character, they indicate more a local, territorial community. Hence, their borders are easier for Catholics to cross, especially for residents of Orthodox or mixed-denominational villages.[16]

Therefore, separate cemeteries distinguish communities not only according to denominational differences. In the past, in addition to the cemetery intended for the general population of a given village, there was also a separate cemetery nearby for people who died as a result of an epidemic (signs of epidemic cemeteries are preserved in Topolany and Potoka) or who died suddenly and prematurely: unbaptized children, suicides, drowned people. Such cemeteries,

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15  "Mass in the presence of the deceased's body did not begin to be celebrated in the West until the early Middle Ages. The East has never adopted this practice. In the High Middle Ages, this mass became a central part of funeral ceremonies. No funeral was held without a mass." (A. Labudda, *Liturgia…*, 103).

16  This open formula of "village" cemeteries, including Catholic cemeteries, was emphasized by the recently deceased Belarusian linguist, W. Werenicz, a dedicated researcher of tombstones whose work I had the opportunity to observe in the field. In an article entitled "Napisy nagrobkowe z Kojdanowskiego jako świadectwo stosunków etnicznych, społecznych i wyznaniowych na środkowej Białorusi" he writes: "The peculiarity of this region is that each village, even the smallest one, has its own separate cemetery. They are often located 100 to 500 meters apart. It was forbidden to bury dead people from other villages in their cemetery. However, you can find graves there of people who belonged to a different confession, e.g. Orthodox, but came from the same village. There is no tradition of using parish cemeteries, as is customary in northwestern Belarus." See *Język i kultura białoruska w kontakcie z sąsiadami*, eds. E. Smułkowa, A. Engelking (Warszawa, 2001), 170.

which still existed in the interwar period, began to disappear only after the Second World War, a fact probably related to the Church's more liberal policy concerning the burying of excommunicated people within the confines of the religious cemetery.[17] People who died differently, and thus without completing all the necessary ceremonial actions related to death, also had a different status for the entire village community than the other deceased buried in the denominational cemetery on "consecrated land." Which is why the cemetery for "random" people was a wild and terrible place, arousing fear among people passing by. One of our interviewees recalls:

> And on this side there used to be graves. But they buried only random people there who had drowned or hanged themselves. Oh, they buried them all. And they buried the unbaptized there. There, there. There used to be such graves. And *ordinary graves*? No… they don't bury them in ordinary ones. They don't bury ordinary people here… Here are those who hanged themselves, they take them to the shore, into a ditch, they don't bury them in a cemetery. [B.Radz.k.pr.12]

Before the war, there was one more type of cemetery, namely the burial place of local landowners. They separated themselves from the local peasants in order to mark their distinct social status. Even if there was no separate cemetery for "lords," there was always a fenced-off section within the parish collective cemetery for landowning families. When, in the postwar years, the "lords" disappeared from the social reality, that group's cemeteries quickly disappeared from the landscape, either left to themselves or intentionally "managed" by the local kolkhoz authorities. Local residents recall:

> We lived here in the village, and the Kuncewicze [the landowners] lived there on the Kurgan. They handed their property over to the plant and gave everything to the plant. And the tiny church there was on the Kurgan. There were graves there, people were buried there. They trampled everything, they also trampled the graves. [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

The local nobility also had separate "graves," those who lived in the immediate vicinity of peasant villages and always and persistently marked off their cultural and social identity.

> Our neighborhood was thrown in here. And they had their graves. And as the first Fridays were celebrated, the plots were consecrated – only the nobility, with themselves. [B.Sur.k.kat.15]

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17  As M. Lenczewski (*Liturgika* [Warszawa: CHAT, 1981]) pointed out, suicides, children and women in labor, due to the unclear posthumous status, could be denied a funeral service until the late 1960s, when the *Ordo Exsequiarum* of 1969 omitted this issue.

As I already mentioned, in the prewar years those residing in the nobility's areas tried to live in social isolation from peasant villages. Cultural mingling and mixed marriages were forbidden. The nobility's most distinguishing feature, still nurtured by the oldest generation, was the daily use of the Polish language. After the war, when both peasants and noblemen began to work together in the same kolkhoz, previously inviolable borders began to crumble. Mixed marriages appeared increasingly often, and the young generation began to use the Belarusian language on a daily basis, which gradually replaced the Polish language as the language "at home." Separate nobility's cemeteries also disappeared from the surrounding area's landscape.

As we see, a cemetery's boundaries are usually determined by a certain type of community with a specific social status (peasants, nobility), locality ("village" community) or religion (Orthodox, Catholic). They are thus an indication of the identity of the people buried there and their living descendants. They define their religious and social identification. And they have the power to include and exclude. At the same time, they are stable borders, focused on "long duration," at least three generations, given that this is the range of peasant memory.

## Collective Memory

In terms of external appearance, Catholic cemeteries do not differ much from their Orthodox counterparts. The most striking feature is the different shape of the crosses. However, Orthodox crosses, which in their full form should have three transverse beams, are extremely rare here; most often they do not have an upper *titulus* (the higher and shorter perpendicular beam), but only a *suppedaneum* (the lower oblique one). Rather, they are often identical to the Latin cross, which is simply a universal sign of the Christian faith. The second visual feature that distinguishes Orthodox and Catholic cemeteries is the alphabet used for the tombstone inscriptions: Cyrillic or Latin. That having been said, the alphabets are often mixed. We will return to this issue in the next Part of this work.

The layout and style of the tombstones along with the material used for their construction are basically the same, although in the Orthodox cemetery, especially on the Belarusian side, there are more wooden tombstones and grave markers. Unlike cemeteries in Poland, where changes took place earlier and faster, in Belarus it is still possible to trace the evolution of peasant sepulchral art that developed there over the last century – from sand graves with wooden crosses, through wooden and stone column graves with cast-iron crosses, to modern stone tombstones (or rather concrete and terrazzo). On this basis, it is

also very clear how the shape and nature of the memory of deceased ancestors has changed over the course of the last few decades. These transformations could be broadly defined as a gradual transition from a collective character to an increasingly progressive individualization of memory.

Extremely interesting in this respect is the Catholic parish cemetery in Wawiórka, especially its older part, which was used even in prewar times but which today is completely overgrown and difficult to access. Here, one can compare changes in peasant memory with changes in the memory of other social classes because there are still tombs of magnates from the second half of the nineteenth century, magnificent and monumental, with extensive inscriptions (see photo 6), along with prewar graves of the local petty nobility. The tombs of the aristocracy, although they have survived in a very good condition, no longer fulfill their original function, i.e. to remind people of the people buried in them. Because they are difficult to access, no one visits this part of the cemetery anymore to read the inscriptions written on the tombstones.[18] In the common consciousness, these graves exist as material objects, even the legend about the transport of one of the monuments has survived ("this monument stands so heavy, six pairs of oxen were needed to pull this monument" [B. Ser.m. cat.28]), but no one was able to say anything about the people buried there. On the other hand, the tombs of the local nobility, who usually could afford to fund a stone tombstone with a carved inscription, or at least a cast-iron cross with a plate and an inscription painted on it, are well-kept and renovated. Such graves have survived from the prewar times. The oldest petty nobility's grave that I have found, still cared for today, dates back to 1919. I was able to reach the granddaughter of the person buried there:

> Iron Cross? And the plate nailed? This is my grandfather and Wiktor's father. They are two natural brothers, buried there. Well, this is my grandfather Józef, my father's father. *Is it you, ma'am, who takes care of these graves?* Well, both me and Wiktor, because his father and my grandfather there were brothers. And typhus was in the nineteenth year. They must have died in the same month. [B.Rou.k.kat.31]

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18  However, writing has the power to resurrect memory even outside its social context. Therefore, I am going to disturb the natural process of social forgetfulness here by providing legible inscriptions, copied from tombstones of "lords": "RIP / Prince Kazimierz Giedrojć born 2 October 1826 died November 17 1891 / And let the eternal light shine / let him rest in eternal peace / Amen"; "Here with God / RIP / Lady Maryja / from the family Rawkowski / Szalewiczowa Chorążyna Łunińska in powiat Lidz. born in 1796 / died in 1878 on January 5"; "Pray / for Rose's Soul / from the Wejssenhoff family / Popławska / died on 15 September 1845".

The longer-term care given to nobility's graves, compared to peasant graves, is dictated not only by the fact that the material used for the tombstones was more durable. In peasant cemeteries, you can sometimes see existing, though completely neglected graves. Keeping the memory of the people buried in them ended with the death of those who knew the deceased directly. Nevertheless, it is also important to ask who remembers and how. Inhabitants of nobility's neighborhoods intentionally maintain the memory of their ancestors; they collect souvenirs, documents and pass on stories that are also easy for a researcher to extract because they exist in a form ready for presentation. The memory of the family's past and aristocratic roots is an important element of identity here; people have therefore cultivated them and strive to make them durable, which also means taking care of the graves.

It is different with peasant memory, which is much shorter and less "refined." The oldest generation (prewar) remembers only the names of their grandparents, and usually those who were known during their lifetime. If these ancestors are talked about, it is not to maintain their memory as individuals, but rather to present a certain model – a hardworking, resourceful, respected person. So it is not the memory of a specific person, but rather a personal pattern (a Halbwachsian idea and its image[19]). The memory of peasant families is also less specific; they are usually satisfied with the mere knowledge of the place, the cemetery where their ancestors rest. There is no need to take care of the graves, most of which no longer exist. Caring for graves is basically limited to the parents' graves; less often the specific burial place of the grandparents is known.

> It is on those old [graves], where my father's parents are already there, everything has already grown up there and we can no longer see anything. They are already buried there. And on the new ones, that's my mom's mother, I remember, I come and clear everything. Yes, there are monuments now, like at ours, they are also putting up fences. That's it, with me it's there and my mother, father and sister are lying together. This and the fence and the monuments. This and although I will die, they [the grandchildren] will know. And in the past, who did it? [B.Pap.k.kat.38]

It is quite clear from this statement that, in the opinion of my interlocutor, it is the "monument" itself that plays an important role in supporting memory. The material form proves the "objective" existence of memory, and it can even replace it if those who bear its main burden die. However, material support is not enough: there is also a necessary cultural pattern that uses and gives meaning to

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19  M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory…*

materiality. These two sides of memory – material and mental – constantly interact and are dependent on each other.

Peasant tombstones made of stone, which appeared *en masse* only after the Second World War, probably mark a turning point in memory that extends beyond the generation of parents themselves. This interdependence of human memory and its material support can be seen in the example of people from the prewar generation whose parents died in their childhood. The substance of memory for a grave that no longer exists is the approximate place of the burial:

> Mom, oh yes, here, when you move away from the graves, in this little corner, right there it is, it's just that there is no monument, because I couldn't pay for one. So I fenced it in so they wouldn't be trampled on, and there is no monument. And at my husband's place a monument. And dad, it's not anymore, it's been seven years [since he died], so now even I don't know where, yes, and in a place, as if I remember. But [other] people have already been buried there… [B.Fel.k.pr. 16]

> Because he [husband] was 7 years old when his mother died, and later also his father died. And yes, they buried the mother somewhere, they don't know where. But where he [the father] is buried, he is not buried there. Because one woman told me somewhere here, she says, somewhere here, but where, it is unknown. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

This "somewhere here" is the last point of reference for memory, its spatial location. It is also the last stage of remembering that characterizes traditional peasant culture, which was carried by people themselves, not material objects. Such memory quickly lost its individual character. As Thomas writes,[20] in traditional cultures, which prefer collective over individual life, the cult of ancestors (generalized and anonymous) most often took precedence over the cult of the dead (individual persons), which is why caring for individual graves was not so important. No importance was attached to long-term remembrance of specific people; it was believed that salvation was obtained collectively, so there was not even a strong need for individual prayers for the souls of loved ones. Quite quickly they merged into an anonymous community of all the dead.

The material form of this collective memory is the space of the entire cemetery, or more precisely – its part underground. The next layers of this memory are the deceased lying one on top of another, who merge into a general community of anonymous ancestors, one collective grave of "*dziady*" (forefathers, ancestors). This memory grows in depth, as it were, saturating the cemetery earth with an ever denser (literal and figurative) content:

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20  L. V. Thomas, *Trup* (Łódź, 1991).

> How many years have these graves been here – they bury one on top of the other there. Because yes, this whole family, for example, will die, after fifty years, or however many, there is no one to watch over these graves... there is no fence... The graves are so bad that only the cross is standing – the cross will fall over and everything. And nobody is watching over anything. I will, I will go, will bury him there nicely. And yes, now the batiushka [the Orthodox priest] said that my grandfather was buried in 1916. And he says: you can already put [the next dead] on top. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]
>
> There is no place here where no one is buried, one on top of the other for sure. It is not important that there may be someone buried there. The grave is gone, you can't see it, so they dig it up, they often dig up bones. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

The cemetery ground, and not the graves themselves, used to be the essence of a cemetery, its essential content, because it was the place where bones rested, a material sign on which the living community's memory "takes hold."

For the living, the remains of anonymous ancestors, not concrete individuals, were a sign of the duration of the entire rural community, of its roots in the past, of its collective identity. "Bones, and especially skulls," Thomas wrote, "participate in the active life of the group, because they ensure the temporal continuity of the lineage, kin, tribe. [...] The ancestor no longer speaks, but – through the values assigned to him – his skull continues to speak to the group: it bears witness to its origin and proves its continuity."[21] To this day, bones found in the ground are treated with respect as if they personified a real person, an anonymous ancestor. Orthodox Christians in Belarus still have the custom, during funerals, of throwing small money into the pit intended for the grave – payment for the space used by the deceased already lying there.[22]

> - They toss. They dig a hole, you bring the deceased, and then you toss kopecks right away, you pay for the space. Down there, a few kopecks here, a ruble there, and a hare [the colloquial name for Belarusian rubles with an image of a hare] there.

> - Just when you dig, you dig up a skull, a bone or something – you put everything in a pile at the edge [...]. You dig sand, dig up whatever you find there, you

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21  Ibid., 95–98.

22  Paying for a space in this area is a very old practice, confirmed by many sources. In M. Federowski we find, for example, the following information: "'For the dead we twist a coin into a rag and put it in his right hand: so that he could pay for a space, because the dead would be angry with him if he came with empty hands and he was with them for free'. Another peasant put it this way: 'If the deceased wouldn't pay up, they would chase him from the cemetery.'" [Feder., 1798].

put everything into a pile. You dug a good hole, then you dig the hole deeper, put what you dug there and fill it with sand and level it. Yes, because it can't be thrown away, it was lying there.

- She rested there, in the place where she was.

- And then you have to put down kopecks for it: you dug up a bone or something, and he was lying there, and he will haunt you. And you have to pay him so that he doesn't haunt you. [B.Radz.k.pr.38; k.pr.43]

Bones are treated here almost like relics, so the cemetery ground, which is their "container," is burdened with highly dense semantics. The underground layer of the cemetery is sometimes considered a kind of medium, a place of direct material contact between the living and the dead. For some inhabitants of Belarusian villages, the border between "this" and "that" world is by no means inviolable. By digging in the ground, you can get "to the other side" and hand over, for example, items that a deceased person might need in that world. Sometimes, interlocutors described a peculiar system of exchange taking place here.

> Only with me, when my husband died, pigs died. And it was a big pig, as much as two hundred kilograms. And then the little ones. And people advised me: when the anniversary of my husband's death comes, find what he liked best and take it to the cemetery, bury it in the sand. Well, I carried it there. And I prepared it like a purse for work. And I dug up the earth in the grave a little further away and buried the food for him. And then my animals stopped dying. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

> He [the late husband] told her that she should put a new suit on him. She didn't put it on, because she begrudged him that, she put on the old one... They said that then she took it [the new suit] to the cemetery and, they said, she buried it [B.Radz.k.pr.12]

In traditional beliefs, the special power of cemetery soil and all objects that come into contact with the grave, with the deceased's body, or with the remains, was widely accepted; they give off various spells, "make up" for certain inadequacies, and help treat all types of disease. This kind of information is provided by both ethnographic sources and our interlocutors:

> "Whoever wants to free himself from persistent fever should go to the cemetery before sunrise or immediately after sunset and throw some money on a grave" [Feder., 2478].

> The bone dust found in the cemetery, also taken in vodka on an empty stomach, is supposed to be a medicine that often relieves the most persistent fever. [Feder., 2490]

> Oh dear God give her health... she healed, that grandmother. On this older [daughter], she told me that the closest neighbor brought some soil from the graves. *She brought soil from the graves? But where did she take it?* Oh yes, as she said and as I remember. At our

place, as we call it, the porch, our stairs there [...] *The one in front of the threshold was covered with this soil from graves, right?* Yes, yes. And as she told me, that grandma, that it was so, I remembered something like that. [B.Fel.k.pr.50]

People from around here went to the fortune teller in Wołkowysk. She is dead now. She said, "Someone cast a spell on you." Their daughter got slaughtered, and the son remained, without legs. "You have three needles stuck in the house. Sand was removed from your paths and taken to the graves. I can't take it off because it was put into a grave." [B.Myt.k.pr.25]

As long as peasant memory had a decidedly collective character, as long as the short memory of a deceased individual belonged to their immediate family and local community, it functioned only in their minds; without being transferred or supported with material objects, there was no need to mark the religious identification of the deceased in a special way, because it was an integral element of the knowledge of those remembering. Therefore, in the memories of their descendants, all deceased people, regardless of religion, were jointly defined by the local character of the cemetery where they were buried.

## The Individualization of Memory

As the building materials used in cemeteries changed, and with the appearance of cast-iron crosses and concrete tombstones, the nature of memory and the methods of supporting it gradually transformed themselves. The cemetery's appearance also changed. Due to an increase in the material durability of tombstones, an increasing amount of space was needed. Memory "surfaced," and the cemetery therefore began to expand in width and length (though not in depth, as had previously been the case). It used to be that a small village cemetery was sufficient and thus remained unchanged for many years. The expansion of cemeteries, marked by increased area, is therefore yet another sign of the move from collective to individual memory. Meanings now focus on the cemetery's ground infrastructure: crosses and monuments define the cemetery's specificity, and they are the carriers of information about the people buried here and their relatives who remember them. At the same time, it becomes possible to mark religious symbolism related to a specific denomination.

Before the war, material more durable than wood was practically unavailable to the peasant. "[...] It cost a lot, a cow had to be handed over, a good cow for such a monument" [L.Ej.k.kat.22]. Which is why the oldest surviving peasant graves go back as far as a wooden cross and a sand grave can survive – i.e. about 40–50 years (photo 1). It is difficult to estimate their age, as they usually have no inscriptions or, if they do, those inscriptions were carved directly into wood

and are now illegible (photo 2). The durability of the grave corresponds to the difference in the depth of memory of the next three generations: people born before the war remember at most the names of their grandparents, but care for only the graves of their parents or spouses. The postwar generations also visit the still existing graves of their grandparents, and the youngest generation of their great-grandparents as well.

Peasant graves made of stone appeared *en masse* only after the Second World War (photo 3). They replaced the earlier sand graves with wooden straight crosses or with crosses on a wooden plinth. One of our interlocutors says:

> For as long as I remember, our cemetery was not so beautifully cared for, because people were overworked, they did not have the time to spend on this cemetery. But there were such mounds, the tombstones were overgrown with blackthorn, the crosses had come loose, wooden crosses, mostly wooden, because the oak did not need painting and was durable, it held on longer. [L.Ejsz.k.kat.22]

In this respect, the Belarusian area underwent much slower changes: many wooden graves have survived in the local cemeteries, unlike the Polish area, where they are now a rarity. In Poland, terrazzo graves are usually found; their shape, lettering, general appearance are clichéd and monotonous. On the other hand, the tombstones at the Belarusian cemeteries described here are, stylistically speaking, extremely varied. Increased innovation in dealing with the shortage of materials and funds for professional masonry work helps make each grave basically unique and individual. Handwritten inscriptions (often reproduced by someone not used to writing – photo 4) along with individual chirographic features, original lettering (photo 7) and unusual spelling ("a note from *synufs*"), non-standard abbreviations ("he requests *3 zdr. M*") lend a certain irresistible charm to these cemeteries and contribute to their originality. Unfortunately, they are slowly losing their character due to terrazzo expansion and the universality of the patterns proposed by stonemasons. Here, too, we can see cultural change taking place and the essential lack of dialogue with the pretentious aesthetics of new graves in the "post-Soviet" style (photo 5).

We see still other types of changes related to the stone tombstone. Bones had a direct connection to the materiality of the dead. The tombstone takes on symbolic functions; its connection with the deceased's body is based on close contact with the remains, but it is not them that begin to be associated with the deceased, but rather the monument itself. Now, through the tombstone, there is constant material contact with the deceased, expressed by bringing various objects to the grave (candles, flowers, ornaments and, in the case of Orthodox Christians, food and drink) and supporting the "daily life" of the dead. The entire space around

the tombstone is domesticated and made to resemble an everyday space. Thus, the tombs resemble houses – a hybrid mixture of a backyard garden and a room (e.g. tables are displayed – photo 16) – and farmsteads. The tombstone is often treated as a substitute for the body of the deceased – washed, cleaned, adorned with flowers, specially decorated and displayed on holidays; it "inhabits" a place dedicated to the deceased. In this way, the deceased is sustained as a socially living person, constantly present among the living.

Perhaps the most important influence not only on the extension of peasant memory, but also the ways in which the forms of its expression change, was the appearance of tombstone inscriptions. Tombstone writing revolutionized the way that peasant memory functioned in general, but also its ontological status. While in the past, memory and social remembering were basically synonyms, writing allowed for the objectification of knowledge about past generations and for its transfer to carriers independent of the memory stored in people's minds. Inscriptions allowed the deceased to become independent from a living family's memory, because the inscription had a chance to survive longer; it was, in itself, a message that could also be read by outsiders. Memory could last as long as the inscription was legible.

Initially, the inscriptions placed on wooden crosses did not have the same durability as those carved or forged in stone. There are many such intermediate forms in Belarus – tablets with inscriptions painted on or engraved in wood. Here, the separation between what is spoken and what is written is not yet categorical, because we find in written forms various individual elements (handwriting styles, the influences of the spoken language). In Poland, we have only professional stonework.

Inscriptions allowed for the emergence of a new phenomenon, namely the renewal of memory by entering the names of the dead whose graves ceased to exist. "Well, now we have copied our mother to her place on our monument" [P.Top.k.pr.25]. The name entered here takes over the function of the tombstone that marked a burial place (photo 13). The inscription makes memory more specific, emancipates it from its material "phantasms" (the place where the bones are located), thereby also changing the way it functions. It is the inscription (writing) itself that becomes a material form of memory. Memory takes on a more universal character; anyone can read the inscription, the inscription itself becomes evidence of a person, without the need to refer to the memories of people who knew the deceased during their lifetime. Therefore, it is possible to remember without prior knowledge, it is possible to abstract memory from a specific person in order to imagine only a given person. A person thereby reaches beyond the circle of family who remember him. Not only does the character of memory

change, but also the direction of memory: it is possible to unearth something from the past that, over the years, was already doomed to be forgotten.

Another, new folk culture form of expression was the tombstone photograph, which appeared in Belarus in the early 1970s and in Poland a bit earlier. Photography, like an inscription, strengthens the relationship between the stone and the deceased's remains, provides "objective information" (carried by the stone itself, and not necessarily by people), and allows you to imagine a given person and to give specific shape to the imagery contained in the inscriptions. Images on peasant graves are very similar to each other, as are the tombstones, inscriptions, names and surnames, the aim being to unify, not to differentiate. These are serious, posed photos, portraits that do not have much to say about individual features. Tombstone photography reflects socially acceptable forms of remembering; just like photos in family albums or frames hung on the wall, photos on the tombstone show people in specific family relationships.

The widespread availability of the tombstone in the postwar years also made it possible to erect a tombstone for oneself, while still alive. Such a tombstone not only reverses the direction of memory (it is organized and shaped when memory is still lacking), but is primarily an indicator of the future deceased's material status. For some people a tombstone becomes a necessary possession, a kind of final complement to all goods accumulated during life, the effect of one's life achievements. Only the unfinished formula of the tombstone inscription – the lack of a specific date of death – is a sign linking the future deceased with the world of the living.

> The monument has already been erected, so I am inscribed there, and the tombstone is lying there. An already prepared place. [B.Rou.k.kat.31]

> My children have already bought my grave, it's already there. And they already bought one for their grandfather, my husband's father. It was me who put up such a nice cross, and the children, my granddaughters, bought the gravestone. One granddaughter bought the old man's tombstone, and the other granddaughter bought me a present. They did it nicely, nicely. My son will come on Saturday, he will photograph what was poured over there. Such a nice garden, nice, so low. [B.Sur.k.kat.15]

Each change in the perception of death and attitude toward the dead is most often accompanied by changes in relationships among the living. Therefore, the processes of transformation of the existing forms of peasant memory of deceased ancestors described here reflect the general tendency to depart from the traditional, collective model of life toward the increasingly progressive modernization and individualization of social life. This is inherently related to the problem of changing the kinds of ties linking individuals and transforming the

character of various types of human communities, including local and religious communities.

   In the second chapter of this part, I deal with the social practice of remembering, the rites and rituals tied to burying and remembering the dead. Against this background, I will try to look at the ritual and cultural differences between Catholics and Orthodox Christians and determine how they are interpreted by borderland inhabitants, to what extent they affect the perception of the boundaries between the followers of these two religions, and how all of that affects the social life of the surveyed villages.

## "Uniformly, but we in our way and they in theirs" – Or the Relativity of Differences

> […] the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms.
>
> A. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*[23]

The cemetery space is a material record of the memory of the dead, but the static form itself – the arrangement of the tombstones, the way they are decorated, and the forms of inscriptions – acquires meaning only when used and re-created in social practice. Through repeated activities – the cleaning of graves, sweeping up around them, the bringing or planting of flowers, the prayers and rituals that create a living memory – the cemetery space gains and creates meaning. However, these activities are not autonomous and permanent; they are constantly negotiated by social practices. They are important in our understanding of how space and material objects evoke memory of the dead. It can be said that the cemetery space itself is only a correlate of memory, its "embodied" form; it helps memory persist, it is its carrier, but only when it offers a meaning read by people who have some relationship to the graves.

We have already mentioned that cemeteries, both Orthodox and Catholic, despite their denominational character, record the memory of the dead in a similar way; the way the space is organized, the entire surface infrastructure, the material used, and the forms of tombstones, are all basically similar. In this respect, one can find greater differences rather between graves of the nobility's and those of peasants. Based on the material analysis of the cemetery space, one can detect slower changes only in the technique and nature of preserved memory in Orthodox cemeteries, especially those on the Belarusian side.

Let us now consider to what extent denominational differences influence various practices related to the cemetery and the preservation of collective memory. Do differences in ritual stemming from affiliation with the two different Churches and Christian traditions define any boundaries between them in mixed denominational communities? Is Orthodox death and memory different from Catholic death and memory?

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23  Cohen, Anthony Paul, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985), 98.

## Practicalism and Metaphysics: The Traditions of the Western and Eastern Churches

Analyzing the categories of medieval folk culture, Aron Gurevich [24] states that folk Christianity constituted a particular combination of pagan social consciousness and various aspects of Christian theology. It was a kind of syncretism of local tradition with pre-Christian origins and content imposed on that tradition by the Christian faith. This primary and (as Gurevich calls it) "deep" layer of popular consciousness turned out to be extremely durable and resistant to the activities of church institutions in battle against it. Until today, in the area under discussion, both in Catholic communities and above all in Orthodox communities, folk religiosity has retained traces of "accommodative-assimilationist processes,"[25] consisting of the two-sided adaptation of Christian doctrine and earlier religious beliefs and practices.

At the beginning, when Christianity was first introduced into the region, both Churches shared a similar foundation in terms of awareness and culture. Also, the very fact of the closeness of both religions, coming from the same Christian current, meant that both Orthodoxy and Catholicism, in their missionary activities, struggled with similar problems. But they adopted different tactics toward them, according to their own particular brand of religiosity, which caused differences between the two denominations to accumulate over the centuries.

In its Christianization activity, the Orthodox Church has always been much more open to the profound content of the folk consciousness. Comparing the character of Western and Eastern Christianity, Sergiï Bulgakov is right to admit that while Catholicism "has received the gift of organization and administration,"[26] Orthodoxy insists that "[...] man must have a special capacity for immediate and superrational and supersensual conception, the capacity for intuitive perception which we rightly call 'mystic.'"[27] Therefore, as Bulgakov continues, "[...] Orthodoxy, as Eastern Christianity, compared to Western Christianity, is more beyond this world. The West is practical, the East is more contemplative."[28] In fact, the Orthodox Church maintains and fosters the traditions of the ancient

24  A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

25  This term was used by R. Tomicki in "Religijność ludowa," in *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2 (Wrocław 1981), 56.

26  S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 129.

27  S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 145.

28  Ibid., 168.

Church, without placing a clear emphasis on the ideological sphere and the need for internal and external changes and reforms. Divided into independent autocephaly, the Church has never attached much importance to such possible developments, while the Roman Church over the centuries persistently sought to clarify and unify its doctrine and codify canon law. While the Orthodox Church has had no ambition to strictly regulate the everyday life of its followers, the Catholic Church has issued generally binding edicts, orders and prohibitions, all of which meant that the religious nature of Orthodox believers is different from that of Catholics. Certain practices, which from the viewpoint of the Catholic Church are folk superstitions, fit perfectly into the Orthodox tradition, without creating a dissonance with the type of religious appropriate to the Church.

It seems that the Orthodox model of spirituality often strengthens the religious sensitivity particular to the popular consciousness. A passion for ritualism and strong sensualism,[29] and the need for more sensual than rational learning about the world, do not contradict the postulate of a mystical – direct and extra-rational – familiarity of God as proclaimed by the Orthodox Church.[30]

Orthodoxy is much more strongly rooted in ancient traditions also when it comes to remembering the dead; it is open to a more archaic type of piety. As Bulgakov admits: "In Christianity, and especially in the Orthodox Church, a special cult of the dead has emerged, in some points quite near the ideas of ancient Egypt (in general there exists a sort of 'subterranean' connection between Egyptian piety in the pagan world and Orthodox among Christians). The dead body is interred with veneration as the seed of the coming resurrection, and the very ritual of inhumation is held by certain ancient writers to be a sacrament, Prayer for the dead, periodic commemoration of the departed, establishes a connection between us and the other world. In liturgical language, every dead body is called a 'relic,' for it is capable of being glorified."[31]

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29  This is how S. Czarnowski characterized the popular religiosity of Polish Catholics, but his analysis is also relevant in the case of Orthodox peasants – on both sides of the border. See S. Czarnowski, "Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego," his, *Dzieła*, vol. 1 (Warszawa 1956).

30  Some statements about Orthodox spirituality may seem like exaggerated mental short-cuts, but this is not the place for more in-depth analyses. For interested readers, I refer to the rich literature on the subject from such well-known authors as S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Chuch*; P. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy* (Wichita: Eight Day Press, 2012); J. Klinger, *O istocie prawosławia* (Warszawa, 1983).

31  S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 181.

So, regarding attitudes toward death, the differences between Orthodox and Catholic believers are most apparent at the level of ritual, since for most of them dogma is not a subject of deeper reflection. Thus, rites tied to commemorating the dead during the liturgy are different. Their earliest form is practiced in Orthodoxy. As Lenczewski[32] informs readers: "The oldest form of prayer for the dead in the holy mass was a mention of the deceased's name. The names of more significant deceased were written on special boards – diptychs – and read out during the mass." The names of the living were also placed in the diptychs, and their common reading had the quality of a litany. According to Philippe Ariès, it was therefore a form of collective prayer: "[…] the affirmation of a collective destiny, symbolized by a long series of names, as in biblical genealogies, and the indifference to the idea of personal destiny."[33] In the Roman Catholic mass, this custom was abandoned in the early Middle Ages, while in the Orthodox liturgy, diptychs are read at almost every mass during the proskomedia.[34] The names of the deceased from a given family are written on cards or in special notebooks (photo 27), which also include the names of the living family members for whose health the priest prays in the same part of each mass. In the Catholic liturgy, this ancient form of collective prayer for the dead has been replaced by individual prayer on their behalf.

The frequency of recollection itself is also different. According to Alfons Labudda,[35] the Catholic Church was quite vigorously committed to the Christianization of all traditional rites related to the collective remembrance of the dead. Under the influence of successive church edicts, those rites changed radically. First of all, church holidays were established that coincide with the dates of pagan holidays for the dead – spring rites were replaced by Easter and autumn ones by All Saints' Day, which was later added to All Souls' Day. As a result, Catholics had only one day in the liturgical year dedicated to the remembrance of the dead. Apart from that, the dead are mentioned only individually during specially ordered masses. In the Orthodox Church, the collective remembrance of the dead and days designated for this activity are registered in the liturgical calendar. Such events are held much more often, depending on the region – from four to six times a year, which is as many times as the traditional "dziady," pre-Christian rites of worship of the dead, meticulously described in

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32  M. Lenczewski, *Liturgika*, 101.

33  P. Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, 151.

34  K. Bondaruk, *Nauka o nabożeństwach prawosławnych*; M. Lenczewski, *Liturgika*.

35  A. Labudda, *Liturgia*…

nineteenth-century sources.[36] Today, there are still many days (especially Saturdays) devoted to remembering the dead in the Orthodox ritual calendar. One of the most important is *Radunica*, celebrated around Easter (the original Slavic holiday in honor of the dead did not undergo resemantization in this case, as it did in the Catholic Church). In Poland, due to non-working holidays, an additional day for the remembrance of the dead was introduced for the Orthodox, coinciding with the Catholic All Souls' Day, which is generally welcomed:

> Well, now it is somehow unified, so everyone goes to All Souls' Day, because they usually work and there... Most of them go... they have mixed families, so they go to All Souls' Day, on November 1 they go. Also, it is as if the Orthodox got one more day when they can visit the graves. [P.Biał.k.kat.50]

Another difference involves the individual remembrance of the dead. In addition to the ordered mass a year after death, Catholics also celebrate the thirtieth day, and Orthodox Christians celebrate the fortieth day after death (in Belarus, it is also recommended to celebrate the third, sixth and ninth day). Our interlocutors often drew attention to this discrepancy, adding that the Orthodox schedule is more justified ("We say that up to 40 days... that for 40 days the human soul wanders around the house" [B.Biał.k.kat.23]). Although none of the interlocutors could explain where this difference came from, it is clearly very important; it makes a sharp distinction between Orthodox and Catholic recollection, even though the content itself, the practice related to this day, is essentially the same: "They have 40 days, and we have 30 days, and yes, it's all the same" [B.Pap.k.kat.38].

The different nature of Orthodox and Catholic religiosity is also indicated by people's behavior: some what the Orthodox Church permits is not accepted by the Catholic Church. Many traditional practices are forbidden for Catholics, such as belief in the extraordinary power of things related to the dead.

> They say that when the [deceased's] legs and hands are bound, then the ribbons are taken and tied crosswise, so when something hurts, it is very helpful. [...] And when we were in Siemaszki [at the funeral], there was a priest from Żełudek who untied one and put it in his pocket. And he says, "we have no superstitions here!" That's what he said. [B.Pap.k.kat.30]

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36 Cf. P. W. Szejn, *Materiały dlia izuczenija byta i jazyka russkago nasielenija siewierozapadnogo kraja* (Sanktpietierburg, 1902); M. Federowski, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materiały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1891*, vol. 1: *Wiara, wierzenia i przesądy ludu z okolic Wołkowyska, Słonimia, Lidy i Sokółki* (Kraków, 1897); O. Kolberg, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 52: *Białoruś-Polesie* (Warszawa, 1984).

In traditional peasant culture, death is a familiarized phenomenon, and therefore the deceased's body is not a social taboo; it is not hidden from the eyes of the living. Children also get used to seeing a corpse; there is still a vibrant custom of the night vigil for the deceased in which the entire local community participates. This custom has an archaic origin, confirmed in historical sources from both Polish, Ruthenian and Lithuanian lands,[37] and is accompanied by funeral songs. The deceased's body, having been subjected to various treatments to cover up its decay, is on display. Until recently, the popular institution still existed of a corpse "observer" who commented on the state of the body's preservation. Today, comments are still exchanged on this topic.

This familiarity with the deceased's body, the need to maintain eye contact with the deceased, is especially emphasized in Orthodox rituals. The deceased is carried to the church, and then to the cemetery in an open coffin, which is closed only just before being placed in the grave.[38] In the Orthodox funeral mass, it is customary to leave the coffin open during the entire mass, while in the Catholic liturgy, the coffin should be closed. However, Catholics also extend the moment of their final farewell to the deceased's body and – although they do not do it in the church – they open the coffin under the local cross and in the cemetery.

> *Do you also open the coffin in a cemetery?* Here they open it up and say goodbye. And then they close it. And in the case of the Ruthenians,[39] they carry it open. [...] I like it when you can look at the deceased when you open a coffin. But with us they close everything. [B.Waw.k.kat.40]

> Well, at our funerals, they take the deceased to the church, put them up, and uncover them. And they put candles on the coffin, on the side of the coffin and light them. And at your funerals you already have it covered on the bier. You also have the candles. And with us an uncovered coffin, the batiushka blesses, prays. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The situation in Poland is somewhat different. An open coffin was common here just after the war. Currently, however, this custom has almost completely disappeared, which indicates a change both in the perception of the phenomenon of

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37  W. Ivanov, W. Toporov, *Issliedowania w obłasti bałto-slowianskoj. Pogrebalnyj obriad* (Moscow, 1990).

38  Just as it was done in the ancient world, as J. Kucharski writes in his work entitled *Spocząć ze swymi przodkami* (Lublin: KUL, 1998): "Usually the deceased was carried to the grave in a bier (a kind of open coffin) so that all passersby could see him."

39  Since the terms "Ruthenian" and "Pole" are used interchangeably with the terms "Orthodox" and "Catholic" respectively, I use throughout this text those terms when referring to religion and not nationality or ethnicity.

death, its "alienation" from everyday social life and, consequently, in the ways the deceased's body is handled. Vigils alongside the corpse still happen here, though they do not extend beyond the ritual need to expose the deceased to public view, most often motivated by sanitary regulations:

> *But sometimes they carry an open coffin?* It happened, it used to be more common, but nowadays they close it up at home for good, I mean... they carry it to the church, as in our case and at the [Orthodox] church, it takes place at the church, in the church it is closed, and it is carried to the cross already closed, there in the procession and they carry it in. It used to be like this, I remember that they carried an open coffin to the cross, once upon a time, I was still little. […] There were such situations when there were some concerns from health officials, that it cannot be opened, that this cannot be opened, it was not to be open even at home. Also, as I remember, they would go to the church, they were already carrying it … in the church they would open it for a little while. But there were times when they didn't open it even in the church. For hygienic reasons. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

In terms of a difference in concept about the "other world," there is also a characteristic custom of supplying the deceased with everyday items "for the road." While Catholics put in the coffin only things directly related to the church liturgy – holy herbs, a candle, a holy image, a rosary, bread blessed on Saint Agatha Day – Orthodox Christians from Belarusian villages imagine the world of the dead in more earthly terms and also strive to satisfy the dead's purely material needs. An Orthodox Christian says:

> *What is put in the coffin?* Well, we put a cap there. Oh, we put a lot into the coffin. Both new underwear, and razors, and cologne, hats, gloves, and warm socks for him. We put in a lot of things for him, because he also asked me. [...] And a handkerchief, cigarettes, matches [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Considering the fact that the coffin remains open in an Orthodox church during the funeral, it should be assumed that the batiushka does not intentionally intervene in such cases, and thus allows practices that are not entirely Christian in content. In the priest's presence, such a situation would rather not take place, although, as Dworakowski notes, the very custom of putting various objects into the deceased's coffin was once practiced among Catholics: "Having placed the deceased in a coffin, such items as a picture, a cross and other devotional objects were also put in, along with things the deceased used throughout life, e.g. a snuffbox if the deceased took snuff and a crutch if he was crippled. A few years ago, the gravediggers, digging a hole for a grave in the cemetery, discovered a coffin in which they found a bottle of vodka" [Dworak., ZR, 148].[40]

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40  See also *Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego*, vol. 5: *Zwyczaje, obrzędy*

The most controversial difference in rituals associated with the dead is the Orthodox practice of bringing food and alcohol to the cemetery. In the pre-Christian Slavic region, this connection between death and food, common in many cultures and attested to in the most ancient texts,[41] took the form of a feast, which in the old days was called a *strawa* or, in Ruthenian, a *tryzna*, and which had both a mournful and joyful character.[42] Reverberations of this can also be found today in the prohibition on tapping glasses during a funeral, constant exhortations to behave as at a funeral (i.e. quietly and seriously) and not as at a wedding.

> No, it's a funeral, we didn't offer vodka, a little bit of wine, a very little bit, but you can't offer vodka. They used to offer it, once in a while, but now the batiushka said that you cannot. He says vodka is not suitable for such mourning dinners. And the best thing is, because when they drink vodka, there's a murmur, noise, just like at baptisms or at a wedding, because they're men, you know. And so that's it. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

Early on, the Catholic Church banned any eating rituals within the cemetery, but prewar sources from Poland still provide information about food consumption at the cemetery gate.[43] The funeral rite for Catholics is also inextricably linked to the food and drink to which it is customary to invite all those who attend a funeral.

> Refreshments took place in the past near the church, for example with the church beggar in the parish house, i.e. in the so-called hospital, often at an inn [...], where each funeral participant received a glass of vodka, herring, wheat bread or only beer, tea and a baked good. [...] Since it was the rich host who died, food was prepared for the "service" as if it were for a wedding. Often pigs or heifers were slaughtered, a few bread puddings were baked which they call here *pierogi*, vodka and beer were bought [Dworak., ZR, 156].

Until recently, it was also the practice to offer food on All Souls' Day to beggars – traditional mediators between the living and the dead. At the Catholic cemetery in Wawiórka, we also had the opportunity to meet an old lady, Maryja, who prays

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i wierzenia pogrzebowe, ed. J. Bohdanowicz (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1999).

41  The Old Testament contains texts that mention food offerings brought to the deceased [Ba 6, 26; Syr 30, 18] or to his grave." J. Kucharski, *Spocząć…* Such evidence is found in many other ancient texts: in the *Rigveda*, the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, etc. For more, see J. Kallenbach, "Tło obrzędowe 'Dziadów', Studium porównawcze," *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki* (Lwów, 1898): 222–248.

42  A. Labudda, *Liturgia…*

43  *Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego*, vol. 5.

for souls in exchange for food offered to her. However, even in Belarus this is a disappearing institution; there are no more beggars because "every old person receives a pension," so he gives gifts to the people he meets, including ethnographers. One of our interlocutors says:

> Long ago there, poor old women would come to the graves. One would offer something special for them – whether sausage or money, and they would pray for the dead souls. And now there are no such women anymore. It's like this now: you take something to the church, leave it. And it not, it's like this: we met with you, we gave you a try, met with that one there, we gave him a try, and they say it's the same for whoever prayed. There are no such old ladies anymore. Once they came here from the graves and I'm going. So, they started to offer me food and drink. This is how you have to give someone something, whatever [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The custom of eating when remembering the dead is practiced much more often among Orthodox Christians. It was also introduced into the liturgy. The faithful bring so-called *koliwo*, also known as kutia or groats, which is placed on a special table. There is generally cooked porridge, wheat or rice with honey over which *panichidas* (litanies for the dead) are performed.[44] Food is also taken to the cemetery, where it is eaten with the family and some is left on the grave. In Belarus, this custom is common still today and does not differ much from the accounts from nineteenth-century ethnographic sources, such as Szejn or Kolberg:

> On Tuesday after Low Sunday, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, Belarusian peasants gather at the graves, that is, cemeteries in the field, and sit next to their relatives' graves. [...] They spread a tablecloth on the grave, put down dishes, place vodka and honey drink there, and invite the dead to a feast [...]. You must have: honey, cottage cheese, pancakes, a kind of thick pancake made of buckwheat flour, eggs, sausage or smoked pork [Kolb., 101].

Our interlocutors describe this practice in a similar way. Perhaps only the kind of food brought is different. Indispensable now is *grażdanski* (state-owned, i.e. bought in a store) bread, pickled cucumbers, sausage or bacon and, of course, alcohol, most often home brew.

> We have a special kind of all souls' day and they go to the church, the batiushka prays, then they go to the graves. Everyone puts their own candle on the grave, and they help themselves. And there they leave whatever anyone has: sausage or a cake, sometimes a glass is poured for those who are already buried there. As if they were at a party. [B.Fel.k.pr.35]

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44  K. Bondaruk, *Nauka o nabożeństwach prawosławnych*, 157.

Eating in the cemetery and then at home happens not only on special days during the collective remembrance of all the dead, but also on anniversary days after the death of specific people. Usually something to eat and drink is left on the graves. Plates with forks and glasses stand on some graves all year round (photos 21 and 22). Often there are also benches or even tables for eating together with the family. In this way, the deceased becomes a kind of "animator" of family life, and serves as the immediate reason why relatives gather together and share food (photos 19 and 20).

> Usually, when a person has recently died, we go to him, remember his soul, come home and eat. We remember him and eat dinner. You could say: we visited a person. Although he was dead, we visited him and had dinner. [B.Radz.k.pr.42]

For Orthodox Christians on the Belarusian side, eating in a cemetery is a fairly common, natural way of cultivating the memory of the dead. Which is why it happens that they also transfer their customs to Catholic relatives:

> This is where such a man lives, when his wife died, and his wife was Polish, and he was Ruthenian, he carried vodka to his wife's grave and left some sweets there. As soon as it was All Souls' Day. [B.Hor.k.kat.30]

This sometimes leads to transferred cultural influence, as Catholics unknowingly take on these behaviors, in their purely decorative form, leaving apples or candies on their graves for decoration.

> Sometimes I see food there, they put down apples, and I see them lying on the graves. But I do not know who it is – whether it is an Orthodox buried there, because you cannot see, the cross is Polish. [B.Ser.k.kat.21]

In Poland, the custom of bringing food to the Orthodox cemetery has been significantly reduced. Relatives still meet at the graves, but it is rare to eat or drink alcohol on this occasion. Only around Easter, which is the most important Orthodox holiday for commemorating the dead, one can see Easter eggs and palms left on the graves – more decorative than ritual (photo 24).

As Czarnowski once noted,[45] the religious culture of people is not the same as their religion, therefore the ritual differences between the Eastern and Western Churches described here are interpreted in their own way and incorporated into local ritual practice. One can see that among the followers of the Orthodox Church and Catholicism, there are many convergent tendencies and behaviors – in terms of how the deceased's body is handled and in the sharing of food.

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45  S. Czarnowski, "Kultura religijna…"

However, there are certain differences – in the way food is left at the cemetery, in the frequency and timing of remembering the dead – that expose and make visible the boundaries between Catholics and Orthodox Christians.

## Structural Community – Religious Community

Researchers dealing with the phenomenon of folk religiosity agree that it is strongly connected with social life. Belonging to a particular Church is always mediated by belonging to a specific local group. To the extent that we can speak of private piety, it is always a reflection of group piety. Stefan Czarnowski admits that folk religiosity is above all:

> […] a matter of collective life, and only secondarily an individual. [...] However much our peasant takes part in the practice of worship, however much he tries to realize the role of religion in human life, the individual defined as a member of an ethnically, locally, state or class-defined community, defined as one who sees himself in his professed religion and its practices as if in a mirror, takes precedence over the individual himself.[46]

He continues:

> [...] a Polish peasant's devotion is expressed above all, often completely, in participation in the neighborhood community's worship – the local, rural, parish, or neighborly community. The spatial and temporal organization of worship is at the same time the organizational core of this community, the expression of which gives it a frame, rhythm and form.[47]

Collective forms of worship and expression of religious feelings make religion an important element of social and cultural life; it is an integral part of the everyday reality of the countryside. Therefore, various forms of social life, not necessarily directly related to the religious sphere, take on religious connotations. Religion becomes a central element of local culture. Ryszard Tomicki, who has called this phenomenon the "in-culturation" of religion, explains it as follows:

> In-culturation of religion means that religious activities become a customary pattern of behavior, combined with other, non-religious patterns of behavior, norms and values; they thereby lose their autonomy and expand their functions far beyond the area of religious needs.[48]

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46  Ibid., 90.
47  Ibid., 91.
48  R. Tomicki, "Religijność ludowa," 56.

The extension of religious functions to other social functions also lends various social norms a certain sanctity, becoming obvious and indisputable. This, of course, favors the conservative attitudes that characterize traditional peasant communities. "The point here," as Włodzimierz Pawluczuk writes, "is that in this type of community every, or almost every element of traditional ethnic culture was sanctioned as holy. Traditional customs, the traditional way of farming, of preparing and eating meals, etc., were sanctified."[49] Not only ritualistic activities, the observance of which is a condition for the prosperity and duration of the entire community, but all aspects of local life somehow belong to the religious sphere. The local community thus becomes a religious community.

Also, all relations and connections within such a community take on sacred features, defined and unchanging once and for all. Its members show the greatest attachment to predestined groups, based on ties perceived as given in advance, and therefore, first and foremost, family and neighborly ties, followed by others. The feeling of group unity is additionally strengthened by various religious rites and rituals which play an important integrative role here. Józef Obrębski, in an article on the ritual structure of a Macedonian village in the interwar period, showed that the organization of ritual activities is closely related to social structure. As he wrote, the system of holy prohibitions-*zaroki*, "[...] with all its actions, makes a sign of equality between the holy and the social, between the religious community and the village group."[50] In this way, religion contributes significantly to the maintenance of the cohesiveness of the group, of its internal divisions, of its hierarchy and the social roles assigned to individual members.

The researchers mentioned here, while describing the rural religious community, always had in mind societies that were denominationally homogeneous. Does this also apply to religiously mixed villages, whose residents belong to two different churches? Let us take a brief look at the funeral rites related to the remembrance of the dead to see what types of ties are revealed here and whether religious differences play an important role in this. In other words, is the social factor (structural community) or the denominational factor (religious community) more important in the ritual sphere, which is usually used to reveal and

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49  W. Pawluczuk, *Światopogląd jednostki w warunkach rozpadu społeczności tradycyjnej* (Warszawa, 1972), 44.

50  J. Obrębski, "Obrzędowa struktura wsi macedońskiej," *Etnografia Polska* 16 (1972), no. 1: 202. See also a new translation of this text: his, "Struktura społeczna i rytuał we wsi macedońskiej," in his, *Dzisiejsi ludzie Polesia i inne eseje* (Warszawa: Wyd. IFiS PAN, 2005).

emphasize the principles and norms important for a given community, and how do these factors manifest themselves in various cultural forms? Does it come down to cultural inter-influence, accommodation and assimilation, or do the Orthodox and Catholic traditions function separately, without influencing each other?

## Peasant Death

Funeral rites fully reveal the syncretic nature of folk religiosity. Peasant death "happens" always on two levels: it is both a secular activity, a farewell to the deceased by the temporal community, and a sacred activity, which involves efforts to include him in the holy community of all the dead. Both aspects interpenetrate and complement each other. "The folk death," Roch Sulima has written:

> […] has always been a double, two-fold death: pagan and Christian, family-neighborhood and church-related. On the one hand, it was like dying within the community, as if in the name of the community, being handed over to the ancestors, to the habitats of the first parents, establishing (renewing) contact with the afterlife, connecting this world and the afterlife in the act of dying. On the other hand, Christian content and rituals, universal in their character, and church rituals emerged here.[51]

In the circumstances of the confessional borderland, the event of death carries with it a certain ambivalence: on the one hand, it connects the entire rural community faced with the loss of one of its members, and on the other hand, it divides that community due to religious differences.

But do religious differences play an important role in this situation? It seems not particularly so, especially since the overall funeral rites used by Orthodox and Catholics are essentially similar. The main difference involves the place and type of the church funeral liturgy and the place of burial.

The basic information communicated at the time of the death of a member of the local community is the death of *one of us*, with no indication of a denominational difference. The death of a single resident causes the entire community's balance to be disturbed, so that death must be ritually recreated and confirmed. In rural funeral rites, the local community always comes to the fore and all the sacred moments important for a given community are activated. It is never an individual or intra-family event, because it always happens in front of the entire village.

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51  R. Sulima, "O umieraniu," 71.

In prewar ethnographic works on the subject of death in the countryside,[52] the ritual scenario related to death is described in detail, from the first signs of its approach to the expiatory funeral feast, which is the culmination of all the procedures surrounding the deceased to ensure a peaceful transition to the "other world." Many of the beliefs and activities described in those works can also be observed today, especially in Belarusian villages, where Fischer's monumental work seems to provide thorough instruction on the nature of the local funeral rite, Orthodox and Catholic in equal proportion. The death scenario is practically innate knowledge among people here, because it is learned from childhood and largely unreflective. People often cannot even explain the actions performed with the deceased:

> One hangs up a mirror, with some material or a towel. You hang it up. It's all a custom, they say: tomorrow things will need to be hung up so they are hung up here and there. Who knows what? It's like in the old days, it was like that. How is it …That's how they all do it. You may have to. Sure, in a way, the deceased lies there, there will be a mirror... [B.Pap.k.kat.30]

Building numerous prohibitions and orders around death, and placing it under careful social control, means that it does not exceed the limits set by its culture. Even the forms of contact between the living and the dead are strictly defined. The dead who come to their loved ones in dreams usually do it on days specially designated for their remembrance: "And now before All Saints' Day, the dead are still dreaming." [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Familiarity with the ways to ensure for oneself a good death, knowledge about the possibility of controlling this phenomenon, make peasant dying extremely peaceful; it is a natural transition from one world, the world of the living, to another, the world of deceased ancestors. Peasant death is therefore the type of "tamed death" described by Ariès,[53] which is accompanied by an attitude of familiarity, an experience that surprises no one because people prepare for it all their lives. Being prepared to die is one of the conditions for facing it in a dignified way, for overcoming it. Hence the tendency to collect death clothes, boards for a coffin, and vodka for refreshments, or to prepare a tombstone in the cemetery in advance:

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52  See in particular A. Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe ludu polskiego* (Lwów, 1921); H. Biegeleisen, *Śmierć w obrzędach i zwyczajach ludu polskiego* (Warszawa, 1930).

53  P. Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*.

And I have all the death clothes, girls. And my daughter has them too. My daughter bought shoes in preparation for death. They are sewing for her a dress that's pretty. The only thing left is to hem it and to get a belt. […] Everything is ready with us. Well, when one died here, he would lie in his white pants until they sewed a suit for him. With us it's long been this way, and my children, when they were little, yes, she also set aside stuff for the children. Always, always. And now I have everything too. And that's it, all the documents, scapulars, a rosary. And the scarf is black. And this bedspread to cover the coffin [B.Sur.k.kat.15]

[…] Now you can buy ready-made coffins, but they [used to] always prepare boards at home, if someone more or less … so that there were boards and hand-made coffins. [P.Top.k.kat.28]

There were 25 liter canisters buried! So they went and dug them up. They were buried when Kola [grandson] joined the army. They dug up this vodka for the funeral… [B.Radz.k.pr.12]

The approach of death, along with all the necessary procedures to be performed regarding the deceased, are an event for the entire rural community; everyone participates in the same way, regardless of religious differences. The death of a peasant has a deep community dimension. Death is an impetus for the gathering of all village residents, who – to a greater or lesser extent as a team – "carry through" the deceased to the other world. The obligation (and willingness) to participate in the farewell of the deceased is so obvious that all misunderstandings and antagonisms are suspended. The event of death is also the main, and often only, reason to actively participate in the rituals of the other denomination and to visit a church that is "not your own."

You did not go to [the Orthodox] church for mass, but sometimes you do, just like that, when someone invites you. It's like, all together, when it happens that someone has died, they invite one and the other. And he [the batiushka], when he notices that, he even speaks more Polish. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

We are used to both the [Orthodox] church and the [Catholic] church, it makes no difference. Little as they were, young, they flew away, to watch. We leave school, they cover the deceased, run to the [Orthodox] church to look. And we were used to it. [B.Radz.k.pr.08]

I do not go to church in Wawiórka so often anymore. I go to the [Orthodox] church. That's the same with us. Oh, when we go to Wawiórka to church it will be as deceased. The neighbors will ask, we Orthodox or Catholics, but we are already going to [the Catholic] church, or if the Polish ones go to [the Orthodox] church. As with us, yes. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

As our conversations show, all the key rites of passage that are important for village social life – baptisms, weddings, and especially funerals – also provide an impetus to cross various religious boundaries, including taking part in both Catholic and Orthodox rituals. This is an important fact, because in general one does not participate in "other" services. The second such clear boundary is the language of prayer – general and private, which usually does not change, even when one joins those from another denomination. Therefore, during the night vigil in front of the deceased, there are peculiarly "ecumenical" meetings, because "everyone prays in their own way": Catholics in Polish, Orthodox in Ruthenian.

> Well, when, for example, a Pole dies and we go, we say Orthodox prayers. And when a Polish person attends the Orthodox Church, he says prayers in Polish. Each in his own way. What's the difference? Each speaks as he knows how. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

This inevitable duality, which is generally taken for granted, is also permanently present in the village landscape. In mixed villages there is always an Orthodox and Catholic cross under which, depending on the deceased's confession, the entire local community says farewell. A eulogy is delivered in the name of the deceased under the cross, confirming all the ties within a given community, especially family ties.

> Here I am, Bronisław, who has left this miserable world. Goodbye dear family, goodbye dear daughter, goodbye to my beloved son-in-law, goodbye to my beloved son, goodbye to my daughter-in-law. And I bid farewell to the daughter who could not be here for this funeral. And I bid farewell to my granddaughters and all of you. And my little great-granddaughters.[54]

In eulogies, it is not an individual person but a representative of one family who speaks to members of other families. "I wish prosperity for your families, protection from the Mother of Jesus. Be well, all of you." Echoes of this speech can be heard in a letter sent to ethnographers, a death announcement: "In the first words of our letter, we inform Anna and her friends from the Waszkiewicz family, Alina and her family, that our mother died on December 29 [...] Goodbye with the family, Alina Waszkiewicz.[55]

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54   Recorded at a funeral in Papiernia, November 1993.
55   This is a fragment of the letter – an invitation to a funeral ceremony which A. Engelking received in January 2002 from the village of Papiernia. The letter's author is a representative of her family inviting a representative of the "family" of ethnographers to a memorial ceremony. In the friendliest village of Papiernia, we were treated as a group of "our Poles" who, having returned to the village several times, participated in some way in local life; hence our ritual inclusion, through the text of the funeral oration, in

Here, the internal structure of the rural community reveals itself: the most important thing is the family-neighborhood community, which overshadows all religious divisions. This hierarchy is fully expressed in funeral rites, and what is extremely important here is emphasis on the role of the family and local community, the community of neighboring families in the social life of the village. The importance of family and neighborhood ties and the current model of social life on which they are based are emphasized here. Death allows the current boundaries to be clearly drawn and emphasized between "your own" – that is, primarily one's own family – and one's close and more distant neighbors and friends. Through various activities, circles of familiarity spread, starting with the most important, i.e. the family circle.

It is important, for example, to choose the people who are to be invited to a mass in a Catholic church or an Orthodox church and then to the common table for a funeral. First of all, the family is invited, but also people with whom the relatives of the deceased feel connected in some way.

> *And who is invited to church?* Whomever I want. Whomever I want. *But is it only family or friends here?* Well, you know, Marysia [my neighbor], she is not ours, not from our family, where you stayed, that Marysia. She is a stranger to me, I was with them, when her sisters' husband died, I was there, I asked them, she was a stranger to me. She was there, her sister Zosia was there, and there were people that I needed, and you wouldn't ask them all, because later after church they sit at the table, they leave for the church, so they don't offer food. There were times when they did, but now they don't, and when they come from the church, then everyone goes to the table, everyone in the apartment. [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

Activities reserved exclusively for relatives demonstrate that those who participate in those activities belong to the family group of the deceased. The circle of loved ones is also determined by rules determining what relatives should not do. Kinship ties acquire special significance here, and their importance is emphasized.

> When they come, it's like this: if they are our relatives, they will only bow down, kiss the forehead, or if they are younger, and when an older one dies, an uncle or an aunt, then they will kiss the deceased's hand and forehead. They kiss their own relatives, and others – why should we kiss? We will kneel, we will say prayers, the Angelus and that's it, we are heading to the table. […] They will put the casket next to the grave, take the lid

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the community of those who were to say farewell to the deceased at the cross: "[…] I also want to thank those friends who also came here from Poland, to the deceased here under the cross of Christ […]" (November 1993).

off there, uncover it and say goodbye, the family comes, the relatives come, say goodbye. [B.Pap.k.kat.17]

Here [in the funeral picture] he was carrying a cross, his [the deceased husband's] godson, my husband's godson is carrying a cross, and here … he is also ours [from our family], he is carrying a torch. It's like that here. [B.Pap.k.kat.43]

Family and relatives do not throw sand. Only others [B.Radz.k.pr.42]

In rituals tied to death, the dependence of the deceased on his own family is revealed and the family's necessity as an institution is fully communicated. Only the family can ensure the deceased's proper transition to the "other world;" the larger the family, the more distinguished and worthier the funeral.

The coffin at the cross, like when, like someone's large family, they carry the deceased, lead them away, and put him on these tables […] And if those who don't have so much family, then by car. [B.Pap.k.kat.35]

And he too went to confession, and they buried him, and the singers sang in the night. And then they brought the batiushka from the church with the singers and the choir. And they carried him to the cemetery. His grandchildren took him from the hut and the coffin was taken to the cemetery. No one outside the family was carrying it! And they made a grave, the grandchildren – Kola with Siergiej. They did not buy, because the boards were wet, heavy ones, and they took them – we had such – dry boards. [...] And this cross was done by Siergiej. [B.Radz.k.pr.12]

Participation in the rituals of death gives a sacred dimension to relations among the people who participate in them. If the role of a family-neighborhood community is highlighted, it takes on a sacred character, confirmed not only in the earthly world order, but in the eternal world order. When praying for the deceased, the names of those who previously passed away are also recalled, and the genealogy of the family and its history are repeated: "Later, this candle goes out and they recommend prayers for the ancestors of the deceased: for the mother, sisters who died, and for grandfathers, great-grandfathers" [B.Kras.m.kat.25]. Here, the deceased is a link between the current family and its ancestors; he confirms the continuity of the family, becomes a "tool" for the activation of family memory. Death is an impulse for the revival of memory.

Mentioning the names of deceased ancestors during funeral rites mythologizes the family's past and lends it a different status. On the sacred level, the family must be one, it is an inseparable whole, which is why the presence of all family members at the funeral and their collective participation in religious ceremonies is so important.

They buried my dad here, all us children attended, all the daughters, my brother. Forty days, all the grandchildren. Everyone, every single grandchild. At confession. After my grandfather, everyone went to confession. [B.Radz.k.pr.38]

It was the priest who said that he had never seen such a family – 11 months, 11 masses and all children at confession, at the Blessed Sacrament [B.Sur.k.kat.15]

Each member of the family, through their presence, expresses not only respect for the deceased, a willingness to participate in bringing him to the "other world," but also finds his place in the community of the living and the dead and is inscribed in a certain genealogical order. In the commemorative portraits of the family gathered around the coffin containing the body of the deceased, images of those who could not attend the funeral are sometimes stuck on later.[56] A similar procedure can also be seen in the previously quoted fragment from a funeral speech: "[...] I say goodbye for the daughter who could not attend this funeral." This simple operation prevents the absent from being excluded from the community, giving reality the form it should have. After all, what is important here, as in any ritual, is completeness.

Another important feature of the internal social structure of the village is revealed in funeral rites, one which Obrębski pointed out in his above-mentioned article about the Macedonian village, and one which indicates the dominant role that women play in all ritual activities related to death. Men, despite the prevailing model of the patriarchal family, play a decisively subordinate role – unlike in everyday life. In rituals related to death, it is up to women to watch over the deceased all night, to wash and dress the body, to prepare meals for relatives and the singers, to arrange a funeral party and, most importantly, to mourn and express sorrow for the deceased. Lamentation is the domain and primary duty of women, above all, confirmation of which can be found in Federowski:

When taking the corpse out of the hut, loud crying should be heard, and they hold people against the rest of the family, especially the women, when there is silence in the hut: 'the deceased will not gain the favor of the other world if they don't cry over him.' It is also the mother, wife, sisters, godmothers, sisters-in-law and all the women of the family, who constantly weep with a mournful voice, and one after another, constantly burst out with a terrible scream and lamentation, demonstrating their deep sorrow and highlight the deceased's thousand qualities and cardinal virtues. [Feder., 1802] [...] A woman must not avoid crying for the deceased in any way: the wife of the worst husband, the family of the bloodiest member must mourn [Feder., 1813].

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56  Cf. M. Bijak, A. Garlicka, *Fotografia chłopów polskich* (Warszawa, 1993).

Obrębski writes: "The ritual expression of family feelings and the feeling of unity between the living and the dead is the role of women. It is this arrangement of duties that emphasizes the bilateral principle of family ties and kinship. A woman is obliged to cry for the members of the family in which she was born, the immediate (procreative) family and the family community into which she entered through marriage." [57] The woman belongs to two families at the same time and it is she, as a stranger to her husband's family and a ritual stranger to her family; she is the intermediary between these families and the rest of the world. She is also responsible for actively supporting ancestral identity and continuity, both in the biological and socio-cultural aspects, which is why, for example, the funeral of a young girl who did not have a chance to fulfill the social roles assigned to her poses a threat to the existence of the entire family: "You cannot put [into a coffin] a beaded necklace for a girl to take into that other world, because if the thread rots and her beads spill over, her whole family will fall apart in that world." [Feder., 1797].

There is no doubt that in peasant (and not only peasant) cultures, family and family life are primarily the domain of women. Death rituals also make people aware of this important feature in the social organization of rural areas. The woman is the guardian of her own and her husband's lineage. She is also the main "teller" of family stories and an expert in relatives. [58] The woman is also responsible for the religious education of children and grandchildren, specifically for their learning to pray – that is, teaching the language of prayer, which is an important element of religious identity – and their learning religious gestures:

> I have two daughters, one crosses herself as a Catholic and the other as an Orthodox, because they were taught by two different grandmothers. [B.Waw.k.pr.45]

Women also prepare household holidays (under one denomination or both), and thus shape the character of domestic religiosity, which most often involves breaking through the strongest religious barriers.

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57   J. Obrębski, "Obrzędowa struktura wsi macedońskiej," 208–209.

58   No wonder that most of my interlocutors were women – the family topic that I dealt with during research is their "special nature," which is why when I started talking to men, after some time I was most often referred to women who supposedly "know better about this." It was also important that I am a woman myself, so I chose "equal" male partners (and female partners) to talk to.

## Denomination as a Family Trait

Bi-denominationality becomes problematic only when it crosses the family's boundaries. Denomination is a family trait. Religious affiliation is a given, ascribed by kinship relations; it is an almost "innate" feature. The most important moment in the ritual marking of this identification is baptism, which fully defines a family member's identity.

> If he was baptized in the [Catholic] church, he was a Pole, a Christian. [B.Pap.m.kat.21]

> *And faith (on what does it depend)?* On baptism. Parents and children. For example: a person like a Russian, he does not care, he will be baptized in the [Orthodox] church, whether he is Orthodox, or he is a Belarusian, or he is Ukrainian – everyone is baptized in the [Orthodox] church. And Catholics, all of them in the [Catholic] churches. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

It is even difficult to determine whether the ritual of baptism is more important here, or whether it is birth in a specific family. This is a kind of determinism: it is not baptism in a Catholic church that makes a Catholic, but rather Catholics being baptized in a Catholic church and Orthodox Christians in an Orthodox church. Denomination is a permanent, hereditary trait and cannot be changed. One is a Catholic or an Orthodox in a substantial way, flesh and blood, but any changes in this status are of a different nature, are superficial, temporary. This is also the case with mixed marriages and the transition from one faith to another:

> That's what the father says, the husband says: Well, he [the fiancé] is Orthodox, maybe he won't go to [Catholic] church. Well, we haven't spoken yet. *And if he doesn't go?* Well, she will go, what to do. Well, when she is Polish, she will be there. One will come to the [Orthodox] church [laughs]. Well, even to the [Orthodox] church, but whatever you are, you stay like that. You will marry a Catholic or an Orthodox Catholic – it does not matter, you remain the nation as you are, although they will come together. There are some who change to the Orthodox and to Catholics. [B.Hor.k.kat.30]

> Well, if it's an Orthodox girl, and a Catholic boy – then to the [Catholic] church. And if it's an Orthodox groom and a Catholic bride – then to the [Orthodox] church. And no one stands against it, neither the fathers, nor anyone. *Does the girl have to change her faith then?* My children, and it's just an Orthodox wedding, and she remains a Catholic. If, for example, she's Orthodox, and she gets married in the [Catholic] church, then she remains Orthodox, regardless. She is of her own faith. The way she was born, where she was baptized, the way she will die. She only gets married in the [Catholic] church, but whatever, that doesn't change her baptism. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Baptism is considered the sacrament which seals a person's belonging to a given religion once and for all. In this sense it is thus an indispensable sacrament. A person must be baptized "into his own" – that is, he must have a clearly defined

religious identification. The church sacrament only lends credence to social sanctions. Until "Gorbachev allowed the faith," all children were baptized secretly, but no church weddings were concluded because there was no such strong standards in this regard. During the ten years of research in Belarus, we never once met people from families from the studied villages who had not been baptized. However, in the postwar generation it was very common to meet couples which had had no church wedding. This is a religiosity peculiarly understood: the marriage relationship does not have such significance for a person's identity as baptism, which places a person in a group of religiously defined people, even if not necessarily believers. One can thus be an Orthodox or Catholic atheist, because being assigned to a religion is independent of one's professed world view. This situation has been quite convenient when it comes to mixed marriages:

> It sometimes happens that it's not to your faith and not to mine. If not yours, then not mine. And neither to the [Catholic] church, nor to the [Orthodox] church, neither here nor there. There it is. I know many such cases. There was also a wedding here in Waw-iórka, her husband did not want to convert to her faith, to the Catholic one, and she did not want his. And they didn't get married at all, they didn't get married, nothing. Well, they just signed [at the state office] and she didn't convert to his and he didn't to hers. Yes, and they became neutral. Neither this nor that [B.Ser.k.kat.70]

> I have three daughters-in-law and all three are Poles. Imagine. As if on purpose. And that's theirs [points to pictures], the icons they brought when they got married. During the wedding. *They got married in an* [Orthodox] *church?* They only signed up in the *sielsawiet* [village council]. So that there would be no quarrel. And they live as they want. Well, the daughters-in-law go to church, they pray. Well good. We have one God, one Jesus Christ, and why should I be against the ones my sons have chosen? Why split up if God is one? *Were the children baptized in a [Orthodox] church or a [Catholic] church?* In an [Orthodox] church. With one son in a [Orthodox] church and the other in a [Catholic] church. Well, what's the difference for me? It doesn't matter, God is one. [B.Szp.k.pr.23]

As we see, children from such "neutral" unions are also defined denominationally by baptism, which here becomes more of an element of family tradition than of religion. Religious affiliation, which is a derivative of family affiliation, is an essential element of the identity of a person participating in traditional culture.[59]

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59  Characteristically, people who have recently come to the village, especially in the last fifteen years from other Soviet republics, with which there are basically no contacts, do not have a particular (in the minds of the locals) religious affiliation. Since they live on the sidelines of rural communities, no one needs to know their religious identification. On the other hand, people whose presence is in some way accepted (this applies to

A very clear indicator of this "affiliated" denomination is the language of prayer, passed down as part of the household tradition. Prayers mastered in childhood become a touchstone of religious identification, which was stated explicitly by one of our interlocutors: "I am Polish, I have been speaking Polish since I was a child" [B.Piel.k.kat.59]. Maintaining the language of prayer, despite the institutional change of religion (praying in Polish at an Orthodox church or "in Ruthenian" in a Catholic church), becomes a rudimentary form of "sticking with one's own." It is not about the difficulty of assimilating prayers in a second, often well-known language, but rather about being initiated into prayer in a certain language and then not being able to change that fact. The barrier here is the necessity to say a prayer that is "not one's own," which can be seen in the following conversation with a Russian-speaking Catholic girl:

> I was in a [Orthodox] church, I liked it there, but I didn't understand anything, because they didn't say the Lord's Prayer in our language. *So what is our language?* Polish. *And what language do they speak in the* [Orthodox] *church?* Russian. I understand, but I do not understand the prayer in their language. [B.Waw.Dz.kat.84]

Despite the fact that this girl's everyday language is Russian (Ruthenian), she does not understand the prayer in this language (even if it is orthodox Ruthenian, closer to Russian than Polish, which she found difficult to understand in a conversation with an ethnographer, which is why our conversation was conducted in Russian). However, the comprehensible prayer, "one's own" prayer, learned by heart in early childhood, are for her prayers recited in Polish.

## Prestige Asymmetry: Catholic Villages vs. Orthodox Villages

Now is the time to address the issue of how differences between Catholic and Orthodox Christians are perceived by inhabitants of the religious borderland themselves. We will focus on the interpretation of differences from the perspective of the inhabitants of denominationally homogeneous villages and of mixed villages, and of differences in their perception and evaluation.

In Catholic villages which are far enough from an Orthodox Church so that their inhabitants do not have direct contact with the followers of the latter religion and in which there are relatively few mixed marriages, there is a general

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both the kolkhoz "bigwigs," ethnographers who came to the village, and well-known people from television) – that is, people "domesticated" in their own way, are always assigned to a specific religion, just as their place of origin and family situation must also be known.

stereotype of the Orthodox faith's "inferiority." This belief is deeply rooted in the Catholic consciousness and consolidated in proverbs and sayings. Federowski cites the following examples: "The Catholic is off to heaven, and the Ruthenian must go to hell" [Feder., 1103]; "The Ruthenians seem to obey the laws of the Lord Jesus, but their priests are all married and therefore have no right to give communion with their hands, only with a spoon" [Feder., 1128]; "Our faith is better, because it is beautiful in our church, they play on the organ and sing together; we have white people in our paintings, and the Orthodox churches dirty ones" [Feder., 1129].

Similar beliefs about the inferiority of the Orthodox faith can be heard today in Catholic villages in Belarus, which usually result from poor knowledge of this religion or very superficial contact with it. Knowledge about Orthodoxy is heavily stereotyped, not supported by direct experience:

> I've never been in a [Orthodox] church. I don't know the customs. The batiushka [Orthodox priest] sings outside the door. You don't know how to cross yourself, you don't know how to act. For the priests' visits they have zwieback, not a wafer. *Hálušky* [a kind of drop dumplings] with poppy seeds, according to the law. They don't fast. The funeral – they come from the cemetery, offer barley groats and you must eat. The batiushka and his wife go from the funeral to the hut where the deceased comes from, to drink. [B.Pap.m.kat.21]

> I've been in a [Orthodox] church – maybe I have sinned, I haven't told the priest yet [...] They talk in the church like I am talking with you now. With us it's quiet – people pray. And there they only stand like donkeys. There is no rosary, they do not know prayers. They don't know how to pray like the Poles. They cross themselves with three fingers. They are far from our Catholic faith. [B.Pap.k.kat.43]

Orthodox Christians are often accused of ignorance of the prayers and devotional songs, and of a lack of adequate religious education and overall piety. More is required of Catholics formally – this creates the appearance of inaccessibility and this religion's elitism. They don't know anything, they just sang yesterday [on TV], my husband says: go, listen to them speaking Russian, Belarusian. I look, when they do not know how, these Belarusians do not have any songs, they do not have any... such that they are holy songs, those they have not learned. [B.Rou.k.kat.48]

> It is so by nature that they [Catholics] are stronger in their faith, to God. [B.Rou.m.kat.28]

> In the [Orthodox] church, the batiushka screams, and they [the Orthodox] talk among themselves. Here, everyone listens, nobody moves, and they don't have it – there it's without any sense of culture [B.Now.k.kat.30]

The belief in a "stronger" Catholic faith is motivated by, among other things, the high attendance of Catholics at Sunday mass, the number of "special" prayers (May prayers, June prayers, the rosary, etc.) and the great respect for the priest compared to the batiushka, who is generally treated as an "ordinary" man, not an inaccessible authority, as is the case with a Catholic priest whose uniqueness manifests itself primarily in celibacy.

> Polish faith is stronger. Why does the Orthodox priest marry and the priest not? He is married, he can only marry once. And the [Catholic] priest can no longer marry. [B.Czesz.k.kat.34]

> When I left Poland the priest was driving from Warsaw to Białystok. But once there were not yet priests among us. Now it's a priest in every church, but back then it wasn't like that. And I say: "We have few priests." He says, "How are people among you, how do they die?" I say: "Oh, yes, and they die. If there is no rescue, he dies without confession." "You can't do that, you have to at least have a [Orthodox] priest," he says. And I: "Oh no, no one among us Catholics will go to a [Orthodox] priest to confess and will not want him to take a confession." "What are you saying, you are sinning. [Orthodox] priests are also ordained clerics." I say: "Well, why are they married? And among us the priests are unmarried and [Orthodox] priests are married." And he says, "therefore they are married, for we are governors of Christ and they are governors of the apostles. The apostles were all married." And I say: "Whatever, their faith is lower than ours, because our priests are governors of Christ, and they are governors of the apostles. Well, it doesn't matter, they're subject to our faith. [B.Mac.k.kat.23]

Here we touch on an important issue that will be discussed later in this Part, namely the problem of the interchangeability of priestly ministries between both faiths. In this case as well, the prestige asymmetry is clearly visible: Catholics are rather reluctant to receive any sacraments from the hands of a batiushka, because they do not treat them on a par with Catholic priests. Such cases are considered a last resort and are often viewed as degradation, even with official Church approval:

> A priest used to be like that, it was a long time ago that he said that if a man dies and he is far from a priest, then one can take him to an Orthodox priest and he will pray in the same way in front of the dead. So they talk now as if they don't distinguish between the two. How is it? It is the way one wants it to be. [P.Top.k.kat.23]

It is a bit different with entering into mixed marriages. Contrary to the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church puts forward a multitude of formal reservations regarding such relationships involving the principles of inclusion and exclusion from the religious community, duties and orders toward spouses, and the Catholic baptism of children.[60]

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60  According to the Code of Canon Law, such a marriage is prohibited "without the

> [Mixed marriages] Well, the priest forbade him, he shouted. And the batiushka, no, let them get married. The batiushka said nothing, and the priest did not let him, he shouted. [B.Ser.k.kat.19]

> When Poles goes over to the Ruthenian faith, the batiushka will not require anything, only that people should go to confession. And marriage. He says: "Say Polish prayers and cross yourself in Polish – the batiushka orders – One Lord and one God and the one Mother of God. They are the only ones, there are no more of them. And we pray to one Christ, to one God, to one Mother of God." [B.Radz.k.pr.38]

Mixed marriages are a difficult situation for both sides, but it causes much more trouble for Catholics, and not only because of church policy. Catholics are generally more inclined to keep their faith "pure," not to confuse faiths within the family. Denominational distance on the part of Catholics is stronger because family boundaries are difficult to cross, which is especially visible in the environment of the parochial nobility, which usually does not allow this type of marriage. Here, there is a double barrier: social (nobility-peasant antagonism) and religious (Catholic-Orthodox). Our interlocutors told us quite openly about their dislike of Orthodoxy (or more precisely, to let an Orthodox Christian *intra muros* of their own family, even distant family):

> So, the wedding comes, they will get married. It was his mother who said: otherwise no, if not in an Orthodox church, don't get married. And her parents: if they get married in an [Orthodox] church, she will not marry him, we won't give it up. And here was the big issue. However, now they are overbearing their daughter, that it's like that! I even said this to his mother: "Danusia, this is a great shame and a great disgrace toward God, toward the people, toward everyone." [B.Mac.k.kat.25]

In the past only Catholics knew the custom of "calling out" girls marrying Orthodox Christians from the church bell tower, which was supposed to mean their symbolic death for the denominational community. On the Orthodox side, there were no analogous cases of social stigma.

> The Polish nation is more against the Orthodox. Why so? Who knows? The Orthodox are more open-minded. Like regarding a wedding, the Poles protest more: "Son, why are you taking the Orthodox one, there are no more Polish girls?" And when it comes to the Orthodox, they are not so opposed. *And in the past did the church bells call out a girl who married an Orthodox?* Well, who knows? Because she was the enemy of her faith and she

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express permission of the competent authority" [Can. 1124]. See http://www.intratext. com/IXT/ENG0017/_P40.HTM (accessed 9 November 2020) For more, see E. Gajda, *Problem dopuszczalności małżeństwa katolika z prawosławnym w prawie kanonicznym* (Toruń, 2001).

left her faith as a Catholic, and she married an Orthodox. The last bells in the church rang so she would not appear in the church anymore. She should bow to the [Orthodox] church. Oh – they rang the bells. *And they also rang in the* [Orthodox] *church?* Never in my life, never. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Greater openness to denominational differences among Orthodox Christians means that they willingly take over from Catholics some forms of religiosity (litanies, rosary, worship of the wandering image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, etc.), which fit well with a folk type of piety. This is again a one-sided phenomenon: Catholics are generally unfamiliar with Orthodox prayers. It can also be related to the language of prayer itself. Polish, which is the universal sacred language of the Catholic Church, is perceived as a "delicate," "cultured" language, because it was used on a daily basis only by priests, landowners and the petty nobility. The language is therefore associated directly with its original users. Ruthenian prayer, despite the fact that it differs from the everyday speech of the local inhabitants, which is a dialect of the Belarusian language (a so-called simple language), is considered a peasant, non-nobility and inferior variety.

The question of a different sacred language is, moreover, one of the fundamental differences that are significant in the division between Catholics and Orthodox. Such phrases as "Polish faith" and "Ruthenian faith" point directly to this interdependence. In a Catholic church they pray in Polish, in an Orthodox church they pray in Ruthenian. Catholic prayers are in Polish, and Orthodox ones in Ruthenian. The terms "faith," "nation," and "language" are often used interchangeably:[61]

> *How did these two faiths come about?* And it's all from our faith. Our Roman Catholic faith, but here it is Orthodox. And there is the Greek Catholic. Three faiths, bishops, they say, separated from the Roman one. They separated them into their own languages. [B.Piel.m.kat.24]

> *What are the differences between the nations?* I don't think there is one. Only into Polish and Russian, only in terms of language, and so they believe in the same God, only in another language. And I think the same faith. [B.Leb.m.pr.14]

The sacred language is a denomination's powerful distinguishing feature, it is sometimes even identified with that denomination. Hence, frequent protests

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61 This issue has been more extensively addressed by A. Engelking in the article "Nacje to znaczy grupy religijne. O wynikach etnograficznych badań terenowych na Grodzieńszczyźnie," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (1996), no. 1. I have also written on this subject: J. Straczuk, *Język a tożsamość człowieka w warunkach społecznej wielojęzyczności. Pogranicze polsko-litewsko-białoruskie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UW, 1999).

against the introduction of the Belarusian language into the Catholic Church, because it would mean, for followers, "destruction" of the religion. The Polish language in an Orthodox church is also an incomprehensible phenomenon for many people.

> *Why is there no mass in the Belarusian language in the [Catholic] church?* Why would there be? There is an Orthodox church in Radziwoniszki, in Lebioda. And they go to their [Orthodox] church. And how is it: in the [Catholic] church, mass for Catholics and for Orthodox Christians? [B.Radz.m.kat.28]

> And now I myself do not know why the batiushka celebrates in the church using some kind of Slavic [Old Church Slavonic], but he turns to the people and speaks Polish. *Oh, in Polish?* Because I myself will go to the [Orthodox] church sometimes, for some funeral, because a friend, neighbor, someone dies, so you have to go, so he will finish in his own language, then he talks in Polish. There is also a batiushka in the [Orthodox] church on TV, and he speaks Polish, so you know it yourself... I don't know, I just think to myself, what it is like in this world, but it is what whoever wants. [P.Top.k.kat.23]

In the realm of funeral rituals, the inequality of Polish and Ruthenian prayers is visible in the custom of inviting funeral singers. If a village does not have its own singers, Orthodox Christians often invite singers from Catholic villages to a funeral, at least those who are willing to accept the invitation, given the social prestige it entails. However, there is no analogous situation in Catholic villages.

> *Do the Orthodox invite singers?* Yes, and the Poles go there, and they invite them there. And they took me to such a funeral more than once. We only sing at home, and the batiushka is already coming to the cemetery. [...] We sing Polish songs in the same way, it makes no difference to us. [B.Kras.k.kat.25]

> *And Catholic singers sing at Orthodox funerals?* Yes, yes, what's the difference? *And the Orthodox at Catholic funerals?* They do not want to. If he knows Polish songs, then of course yes, but Orthodox songs for Catholics – no. *But Catholic ones among the Orthodox work?* They do. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The greatest doubts, and sometimes even scorn, shown by Catholics toward the Orthodox are related to the custom of eating food at graves. In this regard you hear various critical comments about Orthodox customs. It is one of the most distinguishing types of religious behavior, incomprehensible to Catholics, including to Catholics from mixed villages.

> *And why do Ruthenians carry food to graves?* I don't know. I came here once... people were brought here [to work] at the school and they died. I was the one who went. It was a surprise to me: she sat her butt down on the grave and gives it to everyone. Then they leave something to the birds. "Let the birds pray!" – they say. [B.Sur.k.kat.12]

> The Orthodox? They pray. They go there and eat at the graves. They leave something for the dead, but the birds eat it. And they pour vodka, they leave it there. Whoever likes to drink, they bring it over, went there and drink it so much they can hardly get out of there. Well, they bring candy to eat, you know, food. Birds eat it, or a dog who drops by, or a cat. [B.Biał.k.kat.23]

Feelings that the other denomination is strange and alien, and the strength of those feelings, are an individual matter. It depends on an individual's experience and knowledge of that denomination, but also on the internal confusion within one's own village and, especially, one's own family. Sometimes it is even difficult to explain the more or less open attitude held by particular individuals. However, in general, when one compares the materials collected in unmixed and mixed villages, there is a clear contrast in attitudes toward the other religion, which is apparently due to a different type of social relationship.

## Denominational Equivalence – Mixed Villages

Mixed denominational villages have developed ways of dealing with religious diversity by neutralizing it with strong family and neighborhood ties, which is why both Catholics and Orthodox are more inclined to be open-minded here. The more cases of mixed marriages in the immediate vicinity, including in one's own family, the greater the tolerance toward the matter of religious diversity. In mixed villages, religious boundaries are thus often blurred, lose their importance, and are sometimes not even noticed at all.

Most interlocutors denied the importance of religious differences. Belief in the equality of faiths, which is an important element of the social order, is enforced with strong moral sanction, as expressed in the oft-repeated formula: "*Boh adzin, wier mnoha*" [one God, many faiths],[62] which equates both denominations not only in their theological status (we believe in the same God), but also in the social status of their followers (we are the same people). The attachment of little importance to religious difference bears the hallmarks of an ethical imperative, as expressed in the saying: "As with a decent person, there is no difference," which is a belief we hear repeated often:

> As a good man, there comes faith? Not for a nation, they say, in which one has to be born, but for a man. Even, let's say, Orthodox – it doesn't matter, God is one. [B.Lel.m.kat.42]

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62  For more, see "Boh adzin, wier mnoha. Z badań etnograficznych na Grodzieńszczyźnie," *Konteksty* (1996): 3–4. This is a collective work by a laboratory group on the subject of conducted field research.

What's the difference? Just as we are used to our faiths, so you are Polish and we are Ruthenian. Look forward to your holidays, celebrate in due time and we look forward to our holidays. Because it seems there is no difference if there are good people. God is one, and we ask this one for health and for everything. [B.Radz.k.pr.38]

If it would be one God for Polish people, and another one for us, then maybe I would think: maybe ours is better? But if He is one and the Lord Jesus is the only one and the Virgin Mary, then how can we differ? They are distinguished by the fact that they go to church, baptize them in church, and they consider themselves Polish. And so they also talk the same, they do everything the same, and everything. There is no difference. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The confirmation of a mutual harmonious coexistence is an idyllic village picture that is eagerly presented to outsiders. People talk passionately about mutual tolerance, supporting their statements with numerous examples. Against this backdrop, antagonism is considered a deviation from the norm and is condemned.[63]

It was our parents who brought us up in such a way that we have to respect each other, because only together do we mean something. Because only our common love of one and the other, people who go to [the Catholic] church and people who go to [the Orthodox] church, will be perceived as a community, love, the good – then we will be worth something. Because if we quarrel with each other, nothing will come of it. Because not only the children will be bad, but also my parents at least and also our grandchildren will be bad. So there was no point, they did not see the point in quarreling, one against the other. On the contrary, I will say something even more interesting, there were even people who respected, respected a lot, maybe even exaggeratedly respected one another. Maybe that's why it is so in this village, that when it comes to faith, they never quarreled. There they were arguing over land, abutments, hectares, something else, but when it comes to faith, they didn't. What I liked the most about it was that during Spas [an Orthodox holiday], there was a fair in the Orthodox church, then none of the Catholics chopped wood or did anything to demonstrate that it was not a holiday. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

We live here in harmony. People are the same after all. There are Polish holidays – Ruthenians don't work, Ruthenian holidays, Poles don't work. People exchange, help each other. People don't divide up. All Ruthenians go to Polish holidays and allow them to celebrate Polish ones, and vice versa. There is no difference here as to sharing. [B.Radz.k.pr.12]

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63  Only once in several years of ethnographic research was I firmly asked to delete a recording. This single case involved a story of misunderstandings and conflicts related to entering into a mixed marriage. My interlocutor did not notice that I had turned on the voice recorder. Usually, such stories are told without a tape recorder. In this way, the image of reality is retouched; reality in stories intended for "external" use should convey a model idyll.

The commandment not to divide by denomination is rigorously followed in mixed villages, as is evident when one compares the views of people from nearby villages in which one denomination dominates. In mixed villages, people have worked out ways to show respect for the other religion. The most common and oft-cited example of harmonious coexistence is the ban on work during both religions' holidays, though this does not involve a complete ban on work, Rather, such work should not be visible and audible, so that its performance does not indicate a disregard of the others' holidays.

> Here, we treat Catholics in a neighborly way, when it's a Catholic holiday, we do nothing, I do nothing. Because with us it was like that at home, also taught that when there's a Catholic holiday, we would do something at home, but do it quietly, whether you mend or sew, or you patch something, but for dad to go thresh or cut chaff or to chop wood, God forbid, no. And the same at our house, because my mother-in-law was a Catholic. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

> And now everything is like that. When we celebrate, they are already sitting in the hut. And we also try. And when it's your holiday, we also try not to work. Well, all one God. And so they do the same. [B.Fel.k.pr.35]

When residents of mixed villages detect differences, they do not view them as evaluative, as residents of single-denomination villages do. Those differences that are mentioned are tied to the ritual order alone. They perceive only external features, often on the basis of a reverse, mirror image, generally not important in terms of the very essence of faith:

> Only with us three fingers and to the right, and with you to the left. And with us, the Mother of God holds the baby in her right hand, and with you in her left. No, with us it has to be on the left and you have it on the right... [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

> For me, the best faith is where the sacrament is. Do you understand what a sacrament is? It means the best faith. [...] *So, in which faith is the sacrament still?* Among the Orthodox. With us, I mean, is the Blood, and over there is Body. There they hand out such bread rolls. [B.Piel.m.kat.24]

The perception of religious differences among the inhabitants of homogeneous and mixed villages presented here shows that the former tend to perceive religious differences in evaluative terms (especially in the case of Catholics), while the latter regard differences as a natural state of affairs that cannot be judged. Bi-denominationality is inscribed here in the social order (Orthodox and Catholics live in our village) and the mythical order (the world is mixed; it consists of various nations that pray in different languages).

## The Difference between Polish and Belarusian Areas

From what has been said so far, it is quite clear that Belarusian fieldwork is very different from the Polish one, and the difference runs not along the religious border, but along the state border. Inhabitants of Belarusian villages belong to communities much more traditional than those in Poland. Many practices have survived here which in today's Poland are considered archaic and are mentioned only in textbooks describing peasant culture from the prewar years. Older people in Poland still remember various customs that have survived, here and there, in a rudimentary form, while in Belarus they are still very much alive – both in Catholic and Orthodox villages – although, as I have already shown, Orthodox villages have a much more traditional character.

I do not feel sufficiently competent here to make a thorough analysis of the macrostructural processes that have influenced this state of affairs. I can only make a few comments. Before the war, both areas belonged to the Polish state, were covered by the same educational and administrative systems, and functioned under similar social and political conditions. Their cultural profile was similar. In the postwar years, the Soviet Union's aggressive, long-lasting and systematic anti-church and anti-religious policies meant that rural communities, for which the sacred plane remained an inalienable element of social life, tried – with varying degrees of success – to isolate themselves from the influence of state ideology. The world of the communists, a world without God, appeared to people from traditional cultures as inhuman. After all, in terms of mentality, these two worlds were polar opposites. In the absence of priests and active churches, popular religiosity became even more a matter of local worship, an internal and secret sphere of social life. External institutions, including Catholic and Orthodox institutions, had little influence on popular religiosity, from which stemmed a high degree of conservatism in both beliefs and practices related to the cultivation of religion.

Despite the official atheization of the entire society under Soviet rule, it was common for people to secretly reach out to the still-serving clergy in order to have their children baptized or to get married in the church. Even party members, officially non-believers who did not attend mass, fostered their religious identification, which remained an indispensable part of their identity. In Poland, both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, despite limitations, were allowed to operate officially and therefore have an impact on their followers and on their religious awareness. Changes caused by contacts with the external environment also progressed faster, because negation of the "new order" was not so strong here.

All these phenomena are best viewed based on the example of the generation born after the war. Despite the radical social and political changes that took place in that period in both countries, we do not see in Belarus the great intergenerational difference that we see in Poland. While the overall attitudes of the older generation on both sides of the border are still comparable (i.e. a similar type of culture), the postwar generation is radically different. In Belarus, people born immediately after the war, until the mid-1950s, remain – to a large extent – a part of their parents' culture, while in Poland there was a radical break in this continuity. Accelerated industrialization, mass migration from the countryside to cities, and developments in education disrupted the customary transmission of local traditions from generation to generation.

Education in Soviet schools and the curricular battle against religiosity did not wreak as much havoc in the worldview of the younger generation as one might suppose. For people brought up in the Soviet system, it was possible to maintain a dual identity – as a loyal citizen of the communist state and, at the same time, as a representative of one's family and village, whose way of functioning and professed value system was in contradiction and opposition to the official ideology. In Poland, leaving the city and abandoning peasant culture was an obvious sign of social advancement. Confrontations with an external culture, the culture of the city, evoked feelings of backwardness and shame. Therefore, those who left the villages eagerly dissociated themselves from their rural roots and from the values of peasant culture, which was not an antidote to the "inhuman" ideology. In the accounts of my Polish interlocutors, socialist realism had a human face because religious practices were allowed without the threat of such severe restrictions as on the other side of the border.

The difference between Polish and Belarusian fieldwork can therefore be described briefly as the difference in the degree of departure from traditional forms of culture and from a collective model of social life, to increasingly progressive individualization and the autonomization of the individual. It is a change in the nature of both social bonds and cultural forms.

These processes and changes can also be seen in the rituals of death, e.g. in the custom of inviting funeral singers to watch over the deceased. In traditional peasant culture, singers were selected from the local community and performed this function socially. Currently, fewer and fewer villages have their own singers, increasingly often they have to be brought in from other places or hired individually and paid for their services. In Poland, they are sometimes replaced by a tape recorder.

> *And such singers, when they come, do you have to pay them?* What, for funerals? *Yes.* No, well, of course, you have to... *And it used to be that you paid?* In the past they did not come, because they sang there by themselves, there were more women, more singers in the village, they sang among themselves, our own. *When they sang, they weren't paid?* No, not only a party like that, oh, a cake was brought in, tea was served in glasses when they sing in the evening and oh, everything. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

The social institution of funeral singers, once indispensable in every village, is now a dying phenomenon, including in Belarus, because few young people want to learn to perform this function, one usually assigned to older people. So it is not a skill that would be passed on from one generation to the next. In Papiernia, which is very traditional in this respect, young people only participate in the rite of vigil, but none of them learns to sing anymore. For the prewar generation, the presence of singers at the vigil is essential both in Poland and Belarus, but the postwar generation differs fundamentally in this respect, because while in Belarus it is still considered a valuable and important element of funeral rituals, in Poland the younger generation rejects the need for this institution altogether. Here is the account of two women of similar age, one from Belarus and one from Poland:

> But that's how girls sing. They sing Orthodox songs so beautifully that it is impossible to convey. Such songs, mother, so moving that it is impossible to say: "Oh son, my son, we will come to you again..." [B.Biał.k.kat.57]

> For me it was so artificial, I … don't know, I didn't want to be there, let them roar there, they sing, do whatever they want. But that's my opinion. *But were they older people or did the young sing too?* Yes, they are mostly older people, the young people didn't come again, you could not see this young generation, it's just this old generation, the kind that made the bride cry when she got married, they sat there at the wedding reception roaring behind that table and all [*with a smile*]. Well, I still remember when I was a young child, also back then, you know, such stupidity. But that's it, that's all for me … I really didn't like it. I did not like it, I was even angry about it, at these old ladies, because I think to myself that they are screaming for some reason, instead of praying. And to my surprise there were times when they were already sitting, yes, for example, women come, but they more often pray. *So nobody sings anything anymore?* They sing when the family wishes, they sing, but most of the time they pray. So, to my surprise, it turned out for good. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

A clear aversion to traditional ritual forms, tied do a denial of their value, is not only an expression of rebellion against the old order, but also indicates the on-going process of cultural change, the disintegration of the traditional worldview. The refusal to conform to social regulations regarding feelings and emotions, the increased loosening of formal rules, which are perceived as creating distance

between external behavior and personal emotional feeling, cause the emphasis to shift from the collective to the individual, from group experience to private experience. There used to be no room for individual expression in traditional culture. But now, acts of collective emotionality, once common and expected, are seen as artificial and forced. The sphere of religious life also succumbs to de-socialization, becoming an element of privacy, and is separated from the whole of collective life.

It is similar with the once common folk lamentations – ritualized forms of expressing grief for the deceased. Even in 1935, Stanisław Dworakowski, describing funeral rituals in the north-eastern regions of Mazovia and thus adjacent to the area I examined, wrote: "Crying and lamentation are indispensable at a funeral among the local people: in a way, they enter the sphere of ritual. The louder they cry and lament the greater the sorrow they show for the dead."[64] The lamentations, called *wyliczanie* (reciting) or *hałaszenie* (making noise) in Belarus, have most likely completely disappeared from Polish territories (at least I have not been able to find sources that would confirm their continued use). In Belarus, however, it is still an accepted form of living expression, although many admit that not everyone can lament because you need special skills to do so.

> Here they lament, whether for their mother or father. They cry. They lament and groan and lament. And some with wild voices, can't remember who, where, what. That just the way it is with us. I cannot cry, lament. I can only speak in words. […] It's just like singing. As she laments: "Ah, my little one, ah you were good, and now what will I do..." You must have one, well, how to say it, you can learn to sing. You have to have a memory. You have to be able to pull it up like that. [B.Radz.k.pr.42]

> And the women who lament, they know how to sing, they lament so much that you only listen... But the mother – she is a mother, every mother laments – he drank it, that boy, and he drank, he drank to no end, without God the Father... And the mother drinks too, and the sister drinks... and she had a drink, at four in the morning that Sunday. She drank a lot, went out to the street next to the hut, we see her, and she laments: "Ah, my son, where the dew is dry and the grass has grown, the birds are singing, and why don't you come, why don't you come..." She drank a bottle of vodka, she cries so much, laments... [B.Radz.k.pr.38]

In Orthodox villages, lamentations are still viewed as an accepted way of expressing grief in various life situations. Lamentations were once a common, though very archaic form of expression of feelings through formulated lexical and

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64  S. Dworakowski, *Zwyczaje rodzinne w powiecie wysoko-mazowieckim* (Warszawa, 1935), 151.

syntactic structures, the poetics of which were based on a great deal of repetition, synonymy and tautology. Moreover, a large convergence of motifs and formulas was noticed in Slavic and Baltic folklore.[65] Those who cry (mostly women) provide a channel for the communication of socially accepted forms of expression, putting into words their own experiences with the help of permanent formulas. At the same time, these laments are improvised as one-time texts by – as Czistov puts it – "threading together" similar phrases, expressions, and clusters of words. They thus have an open structure, with the possibility of adding more stanzas, although the content itself is deeply conventional. As Roch Sulima writes: "Lamentation is not the exaltation of the individual, it is not an expression of individualism, it is not the individual pointing to himself, but rather the invoking of himself in front of everyone."[66]

The custom of lamenting is still remembered by Catholics, although in the Wawiórka parish I managed to obtain no further information on this subject. Therefore, I am presenting an account from a Catholic woman from the nearby Ejszyszki parish, located in today's Lithuania.

> [The lamentation] was a very welcome thing to us. Sometimes you could hear such separate voices in the cemetery, depending on how you approached the cemetery, wherever someone was buried. And sometimes, on All Saints' Day, on All Souls' Day, there was a procession from the church, and the priest and the organist sang the litany to All the Saints, and people there answered. And then at the cemetery it was such a sound of voices! Everyone with his own voice and on a different subject, and everyone did as he was able. And those were beautiful words. *Could you mention any such words?* For example, this is how a daughter cries after her mother: [*with wailing, in Belarusian*] "My ol' mother, my dear mother, why did God take you so early? And my ol' mother, dear mother, how difficult it is for us to live without you [...]." And after every few words like that, weeping very loudly. "My dear mother, come to us and advise us, we don't know how to live, and we don't know, and mom, no one has washed our shirts, and mom, no one has cooked for us [...]." And so on and so on, you know, listing these things. But each in his own way. [L.Ejsz.k.kat.25]

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65  Cf. K. W. Czistov, *Priczitanija* (Leningrad, 1960); L. G. Nevskaja, "Bałto-sławianskoje priczitanije: rekonstrukcija semanticzeskoj struktury," in *Issledowanija w obłasti bałto-sławiankoj kultury. Pogrebalnyj obriad* (Moscow, 1990). It is characteristic that even in Catholic villages where Polish is spoken on a daily basis, words of lamentation are expressed in Belarusian, which proves their non-church origin, in light of the fact that it is an archaic form of folk oral literature.

66  R. Sulima, "O umieraniu," 82.

The degree of tradition in a given community determines whether certain ritual forms are still alive and practiced or not. In an environment where close social ties are loosened, earlier forms of collective expression are abandoned in favor of experiencing emotions privately. Archaic forms of expressing regret, still alive in Belarus but almost forgotten in Poland, show that cultural differences depend not only on religion. Catholicism and Orthodoxy impose on their followers a certain type of religiosity, manifested in various cultural forms, but their influence also depends on the political and economic system. In Poland, where the rural community is generally less traditional than in Belarus, the differences between Catholics and Orthodox have a slightly different dimension, which is why I often point to cultural differences running along the Polish-Belarusian state border, not only the Catholic-Orthodox religious border.

## "But why divide things here?" – Or About Annulling Borders

Let us now return to the cemeteries so that – in light of the above analysis – we can take a second look at their borderland characteristics.

As I mentioned above, a cemetery is a village's denominational marker, indicating its church affiliation. It belongs to the village community, but it is also an area under the authority of a priest or a batiushka, who has the power to decide whether or not to admit the deceased to the cemetery. Ultimately, it is the priest, not the villagers themselves, who can decide who will be buried according to church rites. In the past, excommunication was most often imposed on people who died by suicide. At that time, it was only possible to celebrate a mass for the deceased's family, and the entire burial was deprived of its sacred dimension – both by refusing to bury the deceased in sacred ground and by forbidding mention of the deceased's name during the mass.

> *Where were the suicide cases buried?* My children, earlier, it was not allowed in the cemetery, neither in the Polish nor in the Orthodox one. Behind the cemetery, behind the wall. And now the priest or batiushka does not admit them in the [Catholic] church or the [Orthodox] church, though they are buried in the cemetery. No prayer, nothing. And then, when the thirtieth day comes, they buy a mass for the whole family and remember his name. The same for Polish and Ruthenian. That's the way it is now. And once behind the cemetery, like a game animal, not to compare the two. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Burying someone outside the cemetery fence, "in a ditch," had an extremely dramatic overtone, because it meant that the deceased was not only deprived of the last religious service, but was also excluded from the family's circle, and thus written out of human history. In this context, the cemetery fence itself gained a strong semantic character: it symbolically separated the space of social memory, it was supposed to protect it from profanation ("they fenced it off so that animals would not crawl over people, over their souls" [B.Lel.m.kat.42]). Only "exiles" removed from the local community of the dead were buried behind the fence, thus condemned to oblivion.

## About the Cemetery's Family Structure

The basic organizational principle behind a cemetery is a mapping of a village's social structure. "The cemetery is a reflection of a village's internal divisions," Obrebski writes. "The location of the graves reflects the system of local lineages, sublineages and families."[67] In rural cemeteries, graves are usually placed in

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67   J. Obrębski, *Obrzędowa struktura wsi*, 203.

family clusters. In Poland, these are separate areas, parts of the cemetery where there are several, sometimes even several dozen tombstones with a name around which a given cluster is organized. In Belarus, *abgarodki* [gardens] are typical – i.e. an area with cast-iron fences usually similar to fences that surround houses. In this way, you separate "your" space like one encloses one's farm. In peasant societies, land has always been treated as the most valuable family possession, hence a powerful need to set boundaries – whether it involves a farm, an arable field, or the space between graves (Photo 15). In its own way, the cemetery reflects the village's ownership structure, such that people often defend themselves against violations of their private space:

> His [the husband's] father is here, where he was buried [...] I used to say: "Józik, we have to fence ourselves off, or someone will crawl in." "What's that, too little space in Piatienka? That's enough." Enough – they took us and moved up next to his father! And it's okay. I say, "Now you will go to my mother." [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Family clusters are an excellent landmark, as are the various elements of the cemetery landscape: hills, trees, fences. Our interlocutors remember the topography of the cemetery and the burial place of individual people mainly according to the family key.[68]

> I ask you, where will you bury me in Michałowo: is it here, with all the Szymusiukis, on the hill, or down there, where all the Wróblewskis are? [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Recreating the cemetery space from memory is similar to remembering the layout of a village, its mental map, which is also marked with a series of farms and the families living in them. The division into farms, the checkerboard of arable fields and meadows, the boundaries between them, and the property rights by which they are covered, all of this – as Halbwachs argued in *On Collective Memory* – precedes and organizes the memories of peasant families. This is also the case with the organization of the cemetery: memories of the deceased are focused on the theme of family, the deceased are recalled as members of specific families, as "residents" of individual family clusters (photos 17 and 18). The

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68  In order to reach someone's grave – that of a relative of our interlocutor or a person who died in our absence – we had to understand at least a little about this internal structure of the cemetery, because the instructions we received from people in the village did not take into account the perspective of a person from the outside who was not fully aware of all family ties. As a result, finding the desired grave on one's own often either involved a miracle or was a failure.

location of the graves precedes the memory of the people buried in them, as it makes them be remembered in the context of family relationships.

> Oh, this is where yours had a monument, and here is another one, and here his father Skorupski is lying alone. And my mother over there, over there, next to Grandma. There, Miecia and Marysia's in-laws lie there, the parents, I mean, Miecia. Because it was his mother and my mother who were one's own, we are his cousins. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

The way graves are arranged additionally strengthens knowledge and memory about family structures and ties, because the graves' close proximity often indicates kinship. The arrangement of graves requires that we remember kinship relationships, and forces us to recall them with each visit to the cemetery. Younger family members learn from their elders whose graves are in one cluster and what the connections are between people gathering over the same grave. The tomb and the family cluster are a specific medium by which ties are mediated, emphasizing their importance so that one starts to think in terms of mutual family ties.

> Yes, they are buried like this, oh: this is the path, the one from the gate, the alley, this is the buried grandmother, this is my dad, this is dad's sister, dad's brother-in-law, I mean, how is it?... dad's sister-in-law, son, cousin, oh and this one, from Murowanka and my mother-in-law. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

## The Rules of Burial – Crossing Borders

In view of the importance attached to kinship relationships, which are the key to interpreting a cemetery's organization, an irresistible question emerges about the principles of burying deceased from mixed denominational families. According to the Catholic Code of Canon Law (Can. 1183 §3): "Provided their own minister is not available, baptized persons belonging to a non-catholic Church or ecclesial community may, in accordance with the prudent judgement of the local Ordinary, be allowed Church funeral rites, unless it is established that they did not wish this."[69] Catholic priests, however, often exert their authority to refuse burial in a cemetery for Catholics who entered into an Orthodox relationship, in which case their families are sent back to the Orthodox clergy. It is probably not marriage with a person of another religion that is the main factor in refusing a funeral, but rather the failure to fulfill certain church obligations. Nonetheless, all interlocutors perceive the problem in terms of a punishment for "betraying" their own religion. They are not interested in ecclesiastical dogmas,

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69  See http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/_P4A.HTM (accessed 9 November 2020).

but in the practical aspects of the issue; in their opinion, the priest interferes in internal family matters. The Orthodox Church's position is definitely more liberal here. There is a common belief that if a Catholic priest refuses a burial, then the batiushka will always accept the deceased into "his" cemetery. Thus, once again, the non-dogmatic nature of the Eastern Church favors the daily practice of ecumenism.

> One died there from Tylvica, the priest did not want his body in Zabłudów, because they didn't belong in Zabłudów. They went to Zabłudów, he said that "I will not accept it, because he lived with the Orthodox Church." So they buried him in Piatienka – OK, you don't want to, you don't have to, and the batiushka accepted him. A few such lie in Piacieńka. One of the A Catholic lived in Folwarki with an Orthodox and the priest did not accept the body, they also buried it. The batiushka went and brought it and he blessed it and prayed. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

> If a Pole didn't get married in a [Catholic] church, they don't take him to Polish graves, so says the priest. So a lot of them are buried here, in Ruthenian cemeteries. For the batiushka it does not matter what a person was, but for a priest there is a difference. There was one boy here. His parents and everyone all Poles, and he himself was a Pole. But he took a Ruthenian. They lived three months and he fell ill. And he died. His father went to Białogruda, to the priest, to be buried. But if he had been silent about getting married, perhaps the priest would have accepted him. But he asked, "Married?" "Yes, married." "Did he get married [in the Church]?" He says: "No, Father, he didn't." "So if he didn't, then into the ditch." That his grave would be hidden in the ditch. And he did not accept him because it was not in the Church, the head was not blessed. "Still maybe with the Ruthenians?" – he says. "Well, he took a Ruthenian one, they signed and lived". "Then go to the [Orthodox] church and let Orthodox priest bury him." And he did. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

However, one might well wonder to what extent the choice of a denominational cemetery is dictated by the desire to be buried according to the rite of one's own religion and among fellow believers, or to what extent it is a matter of having oneself buried with one's family. It seems that the religious motive is not the most important here; it is not a sense of religious bond that matters when making such a decision. In fact in most cases, it is not a matter of choosing a cemetery of a particular denomination, but rather a choice involving the person with whom one wants to rest – with a parent or spouse – and more broadly, one that involves the family cluster in which the grave will be located, with which family – the one into which one was born or entered through marriage. This type of motivation appears explicitly in the pleas of the sick on their deathbeds:

> My [mother-in-law] converted to the Orthodox Church. But when she fell ill, she told them to bury her in Michałowo, next to her mother, not to go to the Orthodox cemetery

> [the priest did not want to celebrate the funeral]. [...] So they took their holy water and blessed the grave, may God accept. Well, let them sin, right, how to do that? [...] Grandma said, she asked to be buried there. I say: "We will bury her in Piatienka, we will dream about her, there will be no peace. Because she wanted to be next to her mother."
> [P.Top.k.pr.19]

The process of choosing the Catholic cemetery was dictated in this case by the need to be buried not so much in the community of one's faith as in the community of one's deceased ancestors. The dying person's motivation was taken so seriously that, even after the priest's refusal, relatives decided to bury the deceased independently, without church sacraments. Mass was finally celebrated by the batiushka. At this point, the will of the deceased to be buried near her dead relatives was more important than the Catholic service in the church and in the cemetery. To be "in your place" was more important than the priest's prayer.

A similar type of motivation – a desire to return to deceased relatives, which often causes considerable trouble for relatives but is nevertheless respected – also appears when people are faced with a choice between two Catholic cemeteries:

> I came to her and said: "Mom, where should we bury you?" And she says: "In Białohruda, children." And I say: "No, in Wawiórka, you buried your son there and your husband, so you are there too". "Oh, children, little children, for me there with the girls [sisters]." They buried the sister there, she lived with her sister and the sister was buried.
> [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

It should come as no surprise (as seen from the examples given here) that, due to the patrilineal and patrilocal nature of family systems in the peasant community, it is primarily women who face the dilemma of choosing a cemetery, because they belong to two families – the family of origin and the husband's family. At the moment of death, a fundamental social problem arises, resulting from a woman's ancestral bilateralism. Choosing a cemetery is a solution to the dilemma of the family into which you want to be "bequeathed," and into which family you want to enter into social memory. Death is treated here as a moment of transition when changing one's current family affiliation is possible, when it is possible to restore relations ritually broken at the time of marriage. Death, then, is a reversal of the order of life in which one goes through the stages of breaking ties with one's original family.

The motive of a woman leaving her family home, abandoning it for the sake of her husband's family, moving from her own relatives to "strangers" and to "someone else's" relatives,[70] has appeared often in traditional wedding ceremonies

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70  In folklore works, especially in wedding songs, the husband's family and his village

and in folklore. Marriage was treated as the ritual death of a woman for her own family, which is confirmed by numerous analogous activities in death wedding and rituals. For example, as Federowski wrote: "In order for the wedding party to arrive successfully to the house of God, the mother of the bride, when they are about to move, brings a full bucket of water which is poured over all the horses one by one" [Feder., 1447]. This custom gains great importance in the context of a similar activity performed on the day of a funeral: "After they are taken out of the hut, they put the coffin on the ground right next to the doorstep, then the *waźnica* (which here means much the same as a funeral director in Kraków), taking a full bucket of water, pours it on the horse pulling the cart to take the deceased's body to its place of eternal rest" [Feder., 1804]. The bride's mother was also significant, as she played one of the main roles in wedding rituals. The bond between mother and child, especially mother and daughter, was particularly revealed here, because it was she who was to be broken away during these rituals. In traditional folk belief, it was the mother, not the father, who was endowed with a special magical power that could affect the child's continued well-being.[71] "Maternal tears," Dworakowski stated, "are a burden on the child's soul [you cannot mourn a child after death]; people talk less about the father, he often plays a subordinate role. In general, local folk attach more importance to the mother than to the father. The mother – they say – may curse the child so that it will never be undone, but the father not" [Dworak., ZR, 151].

The ritual severance of the mother-daughter bond was a necessary condition for starting a new family. In the traditional patrilineal model of the peasant family, the female line had to be excluded because the woman's ancestral duality posed a constant threat to the internal cohesion of the husband's family. Even today it is similar when it involves the issue of the socially desirable, though often not respected, norm of a woman adopting her husband's religion in mixed marriages, which was intended to prevent internal family conflicts, according to the often repeated saying: "There is nothing worse than two faiths in the bed."

This is why, in wedding rituals, the bride was forbidden to look back as she left her family home. It was like a final break in relations with the family home,

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are often portrayed as someone else, a stranger: "[...] and I am an orphan in *someone else's* country..." [Dworak.]; "[...] how does this young girl live on strange territory... [?]" [Kolb.].

71   For more, see A. Engelking, *Klątwa. Rzecz o ludowej magii słowa* (Wrocław, 2000). I want to thank the author for drawing my attention to the theme of the daughter's longing for her mother and family home, a theme that often appears in folk songs.

although, of course, only in the ritual aspect, which was to indicate a certain social norm and to raise awareness of the socially desirable hierarchy of values. The theme of the young wife's longing for her original family appears often in folk songs, which repeat the theme of the wife returning home in the form of a cuckoo. It is the echoes of this wailing, a need to return to one's family, that can be heard quite often in the pleas of women who "create problems" regarding the choice of a cemetery. The motive of being buried "next to your mother" is the most common argument here:

> Mom died first. My mother used to say "I will not go to Michałowo, because I have nothing there, my mother is buried in Piatienka, along with my sister and brother-in-law, all of them, and I'm going there." […] They were buried there, we come home, I say to my dad: "Papa, we buried mother in Piatienka. We are not waiting for your death, but this death will come someday, right? Someday one has to die. Where are we going to bury you?" He thought about it and he sits, sits, sits, he says: "She wanted to go to her mother, so I will go to my mother." [P.Top.k.pr.30]

The issue of burials for people from mixed marriages is actually one that is tied to family affiliation. If a denominational motive appears, it is only in the context of denomination as a family religion related to the need to remain faithful to the religion of one's family, and not to institutional affiliation to the Catholic Church or Orthodox Church. And it is mainly the woman who bears the burden of duality – ancestral, religious, and ritual – which fully reveals itself when one has to choose a final resting place. In the social institution of marriage, the woman is the link between two families and their household traditions, and – in the context of denominational borderlands and mixed marriages – between two religions.

Two-generation graves are often found in a cemetery, but most often it is the woman who is assigned to her husband's parents, and not the other way around. This is especially visible in tombstone inscriptions. Some inscriptions reveal the internal family hierarchy: it is the man who has, in addition to his first name, a surname; the remaining family members have only first names, and their relationship to the head of the family is determined by possessive pronouns and the name of the degrees of kinship:

Here rests / Bernacki Antoni / lived 63 yrs, died. XI 1966 // wife Julija // lived 65 yrs, died VI 1969 [Waw]

Józef / Danisiewicz / lived 88 yrs. d. 22 I 1964 // wife j. Albertyna / lived 86 yrs. d. 5 IX 1964 [Waw]

Here rests / Jasiukajczis Juzef lived 72 years died 4 II 1939 / and his wife Jadwiga / lived 72 yrs. d 22 X 1944 / and grandson Juljan / lived 15 years, d. in 1945 r. / / May his soul rest in peace [Waw]

Even though a dying person's request is extremely important, it is believed that denying something to a person on his deathbed brings bad luck,[72] and husbands have the right to oppose the will of a deceased spouse in the name of defending the family's integrity. In view of the risk of breaking family cohesion, it is permissible to defy a dying person's will:

> If my mother had died earlier, my father would have taken her to Piatienka and they would be buried together. There at the end is one Ostaszewski. He, along with his wife, was Catholic. Well, she also went to the [Orthodox] church and was in the [Orthodox] church her whole life and the children went to the [Orthodox] church, and then she wanted to come to Michałowo [to the Catholic cemetery], and he rejected it: "Not that way! Oh, there where I will be, you will be too." And he buried. *And she had to be buried there?* He buried her! He, she died, he buried her. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Sometimes, however, the decision to bury a deceased woman in a cemetery "not her own" causes opposition from her "original" family, especially if it is a family with a strong sense of religious identity, one which was nurtured by the deceased herself. This is most often the case with women from the nobility's villages or those far from a parish of another religion.

> And here one kolkhoz leader from beyond Lida brought a Polish girl. And how fierce she was, oh, oh! And here they built a house. And you see, she was sick, she was sick and she died. And the whole family stuck with the Polish side. So, to Białogruda [to the Catholic cemetery]. And her daughter, she was already an adult: "I will not let her go to Białogruda." *And this daughter was Orthodox?* No, Polish. "Here, she says, I will bury her [in the Orthodox cemetery]. It's not your business, it's mine. Wherever I want, I will bury my mother there." And she also insisted, and they buried her here. All those relatives they didn't even go home to eat a bit [after the funeral]. Oh, you can see what the difference is for some people. [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

In this case, it was primarily about the social prestige of both religions, the belief in the lower status of Orthodoxy and the associated sense of degradation of a deceased relative, who was finally buried against her will in an Orthodox cemetery. Burial in a cemetery of a different religion is a sign of betrayal of the deceased's clearly defined religious identification ("how fierce she was"), an arbitrary change of her "native" religion. The family did not even want to transfer

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72  M. Federowski writes: "It is a sin when someone does not do everything that a father, mother or a dying person commands; such a person will have no happiness throughout his whole life, because the deceased, from the other world, does not favor him and does not ask God for his happiness" [Feder., 1241].

the deceased to the family cemetery "somewhere beyond Lida," but only to any Catholic cemetery and celebrate a Catholic mass.

From the viewpoint of the living family, especially children of the deceased, it is inconvenient to bury married couples separately mainly for practical reasons:

> You know, you have to buy four flowers, two there and two there. And the monuments. That would be one monument, and two are necessary. You know how inconvenient this is for us. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Therefore, in general, as long as the will of the dying person was not different, the spouses are put to rest together in the cemetery that is most convenient for children and grandchildren to visit. It is usually a cemetery close to their place of residence, and therefore one that belongs to the religion of the spouse. It should be emphasized, however, that there is never a clear rule here: each time, the decision about the place of burial is a matter of individual choice; it is difficult to establish a fixed pattern. Choosing a local cemetery (and, therefore, regardless of religion) is the most practical option for the surviving family; here – apart from family reasons – the theme of local ties comes to the fore.

> Those are our buried now, oh, rural ones, ours. Our Poles are buried here [in the Orthodox cemetery]. They did not want to go to Wawiórka, because their daughters and sons live here. And what are they here, in the Ruthenians cemeteries, they live here and are buried here. It was the daughter who married ours, with an Orthodox, so why do they need it? Children don't want to bury anyone far away. Here, it's close, they will come to see and everything, to the cemetery. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

And it is precisely in such situations, when family and local ties take precedence over religious ties, that ecumenical junctures and mixing of denominations take place at border cemeteries.

## Cyrillic Dialogue with the Latin Alphabet

Religious confusion in cemeteries is not a feature that is visible at first glance. Often the only information that may indicate a deceased's religious affiliation is a small cross engraved over the text of the tombstone inscription on which alphabet is used, although the matter is not entirely clear even here. Knowledge about the deceased's denomination is treated as a family's internal matter; it is not a piece of information to be displayed, so the deceased's religious identification is sometimes not marked at all. When asked about the difference between Orthodox and Catholic graves, interlocutors usually give laconic answers: "*How do we know that these are Ruthenian graves?* What do you mean, not know? When

they bury them, they know" [B.Sur.k.kat.12]. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to estimate the degree of denominational confusion within one cemetery.

In the light of what has been said about the priest or batiushka's admission to the cemetery of people of other religions, it should be assumed that we will find many more Catholic graves in an Orthodox cemetery than Orthodox graves in a Catholic cemetery. We can see this above all in tombstone inscriptions: the Cyrillic alphabet is found in Catholic cemeteries much less often (or not at all, as in Michałowo) than the Latin alphabet in Orthodox cemeteries.

The alphabet used in inscriptions indicates the deceased's declaration only in the context of other inscriptions, sometimes written in Cyrillic and sometimes in Latin. It is therefore secondary information. The basic and intended content of the inscription is its onomastic content – the deceased's name and surname along with the date of death and – possibly – date of birth or length of life. Texts that go beyond this simple information are rare. In peasant culture, where an individual was perceived more as the bundle of social roles assigned to him than an individual person who did not function independently as a separate personality but rather always as a representative of a group (a specific family or a specific village), collective memory (the memory of the entire community) prevailed over individual memory.[73] This is best evidenced by tombstone inscriptions in which, next to the canonical lived-died formula, there is usually information about the position of the deceased's family (the deceased is always from a family), and sometimes (on older tombstones) about the town he came from.

Here rests / Kazberuk Anna / village of Kuchmy-Gor. / lived 83 years / died 3 XII // 1953 / Rest in peace. [Mich.kat.]

Wincenty / Prakop / died 9 V 1947 / age 68 / from the village of Garanca [Waw]

Nowogrodzki Win-t / from the village of Kurdiuka / died 6 XI 1966 / age 59 [Waw]

Tombstones not only serve as a commemoration of the deceased person. They are also a form for commemorating the entire community – the family and the

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73  The way in which the social perception of an individual is reflected in the character and style of graves is even more clearly visible in the example of children's graves. The position of a child in peasant culture has never been particularly high, given that the child was not capable of hard physical work, which was the greatest value (see S. Siekierski, *Etos chłopski w świetle pamiętników* [Kraków, 1992]). Therefore, a deceased child, as a socially insignificant creature, was usually buried without a funeral in a sand grave, which could only last 10–20 years. As the child's social "value" gradually increased, this fact was reflected in the more permanent and decorative character of the children's tombstones and their mourning inscriptions.

village. It is also a testimony issued to the tombstone founders (those who organized the tombstone and perhaps paid for it), to all relatives. This can be seen from the example of the following inscription-prayer from the cemetery in Wawiórka: "For the souls of Malwina / Wadejko and her parents / and all her kin / from the village of Garanca / May these souls rest in peace."

Some inscriptions are simply a record of the family history, informing us about who died and when, whom he left behind, who erected a monument on his behalf and – if the graves are in the family cluster – what was the fate of the founders. The tombstone inscription is often the only written document concerning the family history, containing specific dates, names, and information about the family composition (photos 25 and 26).

Раба Божая Феофила Гомза / род. 1903 г. ум. 1958 г. / Мир праха её! / / Память от мужа Николая Гомзы; Раб Божий Николай Степанович Гомза / род. 1901 г. умер 1962 / Мир праху его! / Память от детей [Leb] [God's handmaid Teofila Gomza/born 1903 died 1958 /Rest in peace// Memento from her husband Mikołaj Gomza; Servant of God Mikołaj Gomza/ born 1901 died 1962/ Rest in peace! / Memento from the children]

Inscriptions emphasize the deceased's family affiliation which is also expressed in the language forms used. Often the deceased from a particular family are buried under one surname used in a collective form, e.g.:

Репники [further on the tombstone, without dates:] Ольга Иван Мария Григорий Анна / Леонтий Владимир [an empty space] / Мир праху их [Piat] [Repniki: Olga Iwan Maria Grigorij Anna/Leontij Władimir/ May their souls rest in peace]

Lulewicze Antoni lived 66 died 3 VIII 1957 / Marianna lived 46 died 4 XII 1948 / May their souls rest in peace // [at the top] Lulewicze Aniela lived 56 years died on 5 XII 1985 / Antoni lived / died / May their souls rest in peace / / Jesus, I trust in You [Waw]

Here rest / Szpileckie / Michał / lived 86 years / died 4 VI 1959 / Magdalenna / lived 78 years / died 12 VII / 1957 / May their souls rest in peace [Waw]

Terms of kinship are the only functions mentioned in the inscriptions carried out by the deceased while alive. Most often they appear in dedications, indicating the social (family) position of the deceased. Dedications are also a way to record the names of the tombstone's founders, which is why, next to conventional statements – "A memento from the children"; "A memento from his wife"; "A memento from the son and daughter-in-law"; "A memento from daughter and son-in-law" – we also read individual inscriptions, taking into account the names of the founders: "Memento from / nephews Lionia / and husband Petrus" [Waw]; "Памятъ от дочери Яни и её семьи" [Memory from daughter Jana and

her family] [Leb]. When it comes to marking the deceased's religious identification, the interlocutors most often said that the very fact of being buried in a religious cemetery indicates this affiliation. According to others, it is important not to change the deceased's "real" religious identity. Often, even in spite of an institutional change of religion at the time of marriage, a person is still perceived as belonging to the religion in which he/she was born; the religion inherited by a family is seen as an "innate" characteristic. In this case, death is a return to the starting point: coming into this world, for example into a Catholic family, means that you also enter the "other" world as a Catholic, no matter what happened between these two borderline moments.

> Some, as I said, some say, oh crap, my son was born a Catholic, and his ID said Polish, and everything, and on the monument… Because he married an Orthodox girl, got married in an Orthodox church and died, and the monument is written in Ruthenian, It says what it says. In many cases it also determines that these people do not want to get involved in this, they already draw just a normal cross, normal, I think that's why. This is an argument that… it seems to me such a serious argument that whatever this wife was, she was not so staunchly Orthodox, so very Orthodox, it also sometimes comes to mind, she thinks: well, why should I convert him? *When he was born differently?* And after death, one writes on it… *Even though he changed his faith earlier?* Despite the fact that he changed, it does not stop him from resting here in this Orthodox cemetery, but why change him, right? Well, I talked to many people like this, many people said: no, they say he was born that way, or she was born that way. So let them write that her name was Karolina, not just some invented name, in Ruthenian. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

The connection between the deceased's religious identification and the sacred language used in the inscription is therefore strong. As already mentioned, the language of prayer is often identified as the fundamental and often only difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. This is especially visible in the terms used to denote both denominations and their sacred languages, which are often treated synonymously and are mutually equivalent. Thus, we have the "Ruthenian" and "Polish" faith, but also the "Catholic" and "Orthodox" language:

> People have such little books, there in Orthodox language. Oh yeah, letters, those Orthodox letters. And so they write "In the name of the Father" in Orthodox [letters] – Polish words. [B.Pap.m.kat.19]

> Polish is the most beautiful, delicate, Catholic language. [B.Now.k.kat.30]

The identification of a denomination with a sacred language also extends into its graphic form. The alphabet also becomes a visual religious sign:

> Well, once in this area, these young people were simply taught in the Orthodox Church to read from these prayer books, from these little books. They were learning Cyrillic. I

> suspect that later they transferred it... when someone learned to pray in Cyrillic, when someone studied at the [Orthodox] church, he transferred something, he wanted to have... It was such a symbol... for them it is such a symbol of their faith, you know. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

However, this issue is also not entirely clear. The differences in the alphabet used for inscriptions, resulting from the fact that people belong to different Eastern and Western Church traditions and their different sacred languages, are overlapped by others factors, namely those resulting from affiliation with two states: the Polish state (using the Latin alphabet) and the Belarusian state (using Cyrillic). In order to complete the confusion, it should also be noted that Belarusian statehood is not reflected in the Belarusian language used in the inscriptions (I managed to find only a few such inscriptions): Russian is used here (in Belarus it is a parallel state language), possibly the Russified form of the Old Church Slavonic.

It is often impossible to judge whether the alphabet used is derived from the sacred or the state language. However, more or less since the 1980s, both in Belarus and Poland, there was a clear tendency to adapt to the state language: new graves in Orthodox cemeteries in Poland have inscriptions written increasingly often with the Latin alphabet in Polish, while the new part of the Catholic cemetery in Wawiórka has mostly Russian using the Cyrillic alphabet.

In this case, one may wonder whether alphabets provide information about the deceased himself or about the creators and readers of the inscription. The inscription's creators can be both the deceased (if, before his death, he expressed a definite will about the alphabet to be used on his tombstone) and the tombstone founder (usually the surviving spouse or children of the deceased). The choice of alphabet (or perhaps rather the language whose alphabet is the external form) may also be dictated by ideas about the inscription's future readers (e.g. grandchildren of the deceased or bystanders who know only the alphabet of the state language).

> And, of course, young people began to protest that she would not speak [in that Orthodox church] in Ruthenian. *But because they don't understand or because they don't want to?* Because they are too lazy, they are lazy people. *Well, maybe that's precisely why the Latin alphabet is in the Orthodox cemetery?* The second thing is that sometimes the older folks think: when I die, they won't even read it later. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

A clear generation difference comes into play here: the graves of middle-age and young people born in the postwar years are almost exclusively inscribed in a language compatible with the state language, while the prewar generation usually chooses the language of their religion. This may be due to the simple ignorance

of Cyrillic in Poland and the Latin alphabet among the younger generation, who often did not learn these alphabets at school. While the spoken language used in the church is at least a bit understandable for them, many have difficulties with the written language. Hence, Catholic catechisms for children written in Polish, but using the Cyrillic alphabet, are popular in Belarus (photo 14).

The phenomenon of overlapping sacred and state languages is particularly visible in the case of inscriptions on the graves of people from the same family: while information about the older deceased is written in the language of religion, information about the deceased from the younger generation is written in the language of the state. This is the case, for example, of two graves standing together in the same garden – the first one is traditional, the second one is in a modern Soviet style, the older one is inscribed with Polish, the younger one with Russian (photo 5):

Barejry [?] Selewicz 1916–1979 / May his spirit rest in peace / Memento from wife and children

Селевич Геннадий Збыславович / 1967–1989 / Дорогому сыну брату мужу и папочке [Waw] [Selewicz Gienadij Zbysławowicz/ 1967–1989/ To our dear son, brother, husband and father]

The use of both Cyrillic and Latin within one cluster or even one monument also happens when spouses of the same generation die with a long interval in between. Then the inscription for the person who died earlier (usually the man) is founded by the spouse; the later deceased person gets an inscription plaque most often from her children which is already written in the alphabet of the state language. Not only the alphabet itself is changed here, but also the surname, the phonetic form of which is adapted to the alphabet used (photo 11):

Antoni Kuklis 1904–1979 / May his soul rest in peace / Memento from his wife – Куклис Мария Ивановна / 1910–1984 / Память от детей [Waw] [Kuklis Maria Iwanowna 1910–1984/ Memento from the children]

Miciłowicz / Jan / lived 65 / died in '73 – Митилович / Зофья / / Иосифовна / 1906–1989 [Waw] [Mitiłowicz Zofia Josifowna]

Бирицки / Константин / жил лет 58 ск 8 1973 – Wiera / Birycka / / lived 78 years died 1992 [Mich/pr] [Biricki Konstantyn lived 58 years died 8 1973

But the generation key is not always a sufficient tool to explain the reasons for using different alphabets. It is often a matter of coincidence, best seen in the example of renovated tombstones (some of them require renovation after an average of 20 years). In the Orthodox cemetery in Michałowo, on one of the graves in which Orthodox spouses rest (as evidenced by the crosses above the text), on completely new plaques with inscriptions, one of them is written in Cyrillic (the husband died in 1973), the other in Latin (the wife died in 1992). There is a plate

underneath, a dedication written in Cyrillic: *Память от жень и детей* [A memento from his wife and children]. Why are spouses of the same faith associated with different alphabets? Was the woman of Catholic origin, or did she die at a time when the Latin alphabet was widely used, even in an Orthodox cemetery? Why is her husband's inscription written in Cyrillic when his plaque was renovated at the same time that his wife's plaque was made? Was the inscription simply recreated as it was originally? Perhaps so, since the dedication *от жень и детей* is also written in Cyrillic (on a separate, renovated plaque), and it comes from the time when the deceased's wife was alive. We see an equally mysterious situation in Michałowo on another grave of Orthodox spouses: here the wife also outlived her husband by 20 years, but both have a new common plaque written in Latin, while the dedication – *Память от жены и сынов* [Memento from wife and sons] – is written on a separate table in Cyrillic. Is it an old plaque from the 1970s (it does not look like it), when the husband died, and the founders simply wanted to save on material, or was it mechanically rewritten from the old plaque to a new one? Was it a decision made by the stonemason without consulting the family, or did the founders themselves wish to do so?

The Cyrillic and Latin alphabets "meet" on several levels. First, as adjacent inscription texts, written in two language versions and the corresponding alphabets. The same (as a rule) content is thus expressed in Latin and Cyrillic. Full translatability, occurring in double graphic form, both Ruthenian and Polish text, can only be discussed at the level of anthroponyms. The same names and surnames often appear in both texts, as if they were familiarizing themselves, getting used to taking one or another form:

Anna Ostrowiecka / lived 77 years / died 1998 – Анна Островецка / / ум. 1955 r. [Mich.pr]

Trochimczuk Maria born died 1988 – Трохимчук Мария 1974 [Piat]

Анна Малашевска 1940 – Anna Małaszewska 1941 [Piat]

Inscriptions on graves gathered in family clusters often follow the pattern of a Polish-Ruthenian chessboard, e.g. in one row: Piotr **Gryc** 1947, Maria Gryc 1969, *Роман **Грыц** 1975*, *Петро Грыц 1980* [Piat] or a dozen or so graves in three rows with the surname **Jarockie** alternating with ***Яроцкие*** [Mich.pr] (photos 12 and 17). Sometimes the alphabet "conflicts" with its own language: typically Polish names are written in Cyrillic (*Боголейша Николай Чеславович*, *Адамчук Чеслав Вацлавович*, *Якубовский Тадеуш Юзефович*) [Bogolejsza Mikołaj Czesławowicz, Adamczyk Czesław Wacławowicz, Jakuboski Tadeusz Józefowicz], while typical Ruthenian names are in Latin (Sofja Surowińska, Anton Wasilewski, Siemaszko Zina). There are also different forms of women's surnames, even those written in Cyrillic: the same surnames have shorter and longer forms, with an

East Slavic ending: *Евгения Каменьска* and *Надежда Каменьская*; *Анна Сосновска* and *Стефанида Сосновская*; *Богуцка Анна* and *Богуцкая Анна*. [*Eugenia Kamieńska* and *Nadieżda Kamieńskaja*; *Anna Sosnowska* and *Stefania Sosnowskaja*; *Bogucka Anna* and *Boguckaja Anna*].

The difference in the spelling of names and surnames is also a result of their constant translation from one language to another, and the mutual adaptation of both phonetic and alphabetical systems, as evidenced by a resident of a nobility's area who explains why her surname has different written versions:

> *But we have seen several versions of the name Rouba, Raubo, Rowbo, different ones...* So you see, all of them, they were, like Raubo is in Polish. In Belarusian it's written Roubo, and in Russian Rowbo. Not with a "u" but a "w." As Rowbo is written in Russian. And when I gave birth to three children, some people used to write my name as Jelena, that is Alina, and elsewhere Helena. And it was different with every child: here it is Rowbo, there Raubo, and elsewhere Rouba. And then she took all our birth certificates, the secretary from the selsoviet, and she converted them into Rowbo. And we gave up. Actually our name is Raubo, Raubo. There are many who spell Raubo like Rouba. [B.Rou.k.kat.31]

However, for most inhabitants of peasant villages, the different spelling of their surnames is not easily discernible. Accustomed to the spoken version of their surname with various permissible alternatives, they do not pay attention to their equally different spellings. Captions often indicate they are a direct reflection of the way they are pronounced in speech. Names and surnames and their spelling do not have a canonical form and do not follow the conventionalization inherent in the very nature of writing. It is probably from this fact that various spellings of the same surname are allowed. Some of them have as many written versions as they appear in the inscriptions on the tombstones, even in the same immediate vicinity: *Zofiia* **Jastszębska**; *Pelagiia* **Jastszemska**, **Jastszemski** *Piotr*, **Jastremski** *Józef* [Waw]; *Czesław and Kazimeż* **Paleiczjk**, *Anna* **Polejczyk**, *Jan* **Palejczyk**, **Paleiczyk** *Anna*, **Palejczyk** *Jaugeńuś* [Waw]. It is similar with the spelling of names: here you can see both *Józef* and *Juzef*, *Kazimierz* and *Kazimież*, *Katarzyna* and *Katażyna*. There is also a varied and definitely unconventional spelling of the inscriptions on the dedications: *Pamiontka ot żony i synóf* [Memento from wife and sons], *Pamiantka od curak* [Memento from daughter], *Pokui jeho duszy* [May his soul rest in peace].

These types of inscriptions testify to the difficulties their authors faced in using the written form, to the novelty of this form of expression in peasant culture, whose members were accustomed to the "oral way of being in the world" (Roch Sulima's words). For the older generation, especially the inhabitants of Belarus, the written form is a phenomenon not fully internalized yet and therefore still unusual, used only on special occasions. Its festive character is evidenced

by the official forms of names placed on tombstones at the Catholic cemetery in Wawiórka. The very fact of writing them down requires a solemn form, which is not used on a daily basis, hence difficulties in finding that form. Official names, which perform an honorary function in the inscription, are more known here from hearing than from spelling, which is why they have different secondary forms: *Henowefa/Geonefa*, *Wikenti/Wincęty*, *Filemiena*, *Emeljan*, *Salameia*, *Helenna*, *Jaugeńuś*, *Walerija*, *Orszula*, *Karołjna*, *Edmond*, *Parfiry*, *Barejry*, *Wiktoryja*, *Pietrunela*, *Sylwestry*, *Zygmąd*.

In Belarusian cemeteries, the influence of the spoken word, the overlapping of the verbal and written types of consciousness, is particularly visible. The objectifying nature of writing is disrupted by the practice of extra-textual life: inscriptions betray their authors by showing their individual characteristics. Formalized notations are influenced by everyday speech, their direct source is the spoken language with all its specific phonetic features, not the standard form of written language. Which is why both Polish and Russian inscriptions contain elements of the Belarusian dialect with its characteristic softenings, *akaniem* and *dziakaniem* (photo 8 and 9): *Bo**lie**sław*, *Wa**li**erjan*, *Tek**lia***, *Szpi**lie**cki*, *Cha**lia**wski*, *Pamiantka od / cur**ak*** [Memento from / daughter]; *Oboj**a** z Roubów*; *Pokój je**ho** duszy* [May his soul rest in peace]; *Pa od mężże i **die**ci* [Bye from husband and children]; *żył **lia**t 38* [lived 38 years]. Belarusian inflectional forms are also present: *Kochanemu mężu i ojcu*; *Śpi spokoino mama moia / wiecznaja pamic od syna Józefa*; *pokój twojej duszie*; *żyli po 6 miesjoncy*; *Żyła 41 rok*.

The graphic form of these inscriptions also exhibits non-standard, extra-canonical properties. Many of them, especially on older graves, were formulated by someone from the deceased's family who is usually not very familiar with handwriting, and who leaves their individual chirographic features in the inscriptions. It is not only about mixing speech with writing, but also mixing alphabets and letters, also capital letters with minuscule (*Story / frANCISZEK / Ftory MaR / / Ian. ChOdySZ Orszuli / ZdOMU Filipczykó*w [Waw]) or confusing individual letters so that it is sometimes difficult to decipher the intended content (*zżtawiec Jan / zyt 48 lat / zmar 44 rok / zwete pam; Jozce Paclko; Swehjei / pomenci* [Waw]).

These types of representations also happen to stonemasons themselves, who are skilled in the use of Cyrillic or Latin on a daily basis; they often involuntarily weave letters in expressions that are better known to them. Therefore, graphic interferences of the Russian and Polish alphabets are often found within one word (photo 10). As a rule, this is due to the similarity of some letters, for example s – г, n – п (CiCh**п**o / Ftaп**ir**law / i **r**ovia, [Waw]), n – и (Dyo**и**izy Eismat / / l.38 zm 1941 matka A**ии**a lat 68 zm 1942, [Waw]), p – ф (**Ф**okui duszy jej /

Фамięć от супа [Mich]). Sometimes the inscriber "forgets," and instead of Latin letters he inserts Cyrillic letters (*Pamiotka / ot дzeci* [Waw], *Filipczyk Гelenna* [Waw]) or he starts in Cyrillic and ends in Latin (*Петр жил 60 let* [Leb]). It is significant, however, that the founders of the tombstone do not mind such mistakes; they are either unable to notice them or do not consider them important. The written word has not yet gained a fully autonomous position and visual constancy here; it is burdened by the context of the specific circumstances in which it appeared: in a borderland situation and in a community in which oral communication is predominant.

Perhaps this is why it is sometimes the case that the issue of distinguishing Cyrillic and Latin is not a matter of reflection, because the very material aspect of the writing, its placement on the tombstone, is more important than its graphic form, expressed in one or another alphabet. One of my interlocutors paid no attention to the fact that the inscription on the tombstone already built for her three years ago was written in Cyrillic, and not, as she had assumed, in Latin:

> *But there are many graves already, those from the 1990s, written with Polish letters, not Ruthenian letters.* We have also used Polish letters. *But it is written in Ruthenian …* written in Ruthenian? *Yes, yes, in Ruthenian!* In Ruthenian? They said it's written in Polish... because we... she [someone from the stonemason company] came to visit us. We ordered it from her and she wrote everything there. And she comes and says that she looked at the batiushka's everywhere, including in Zabłudów, that Felicja [the interlocutor's name]. And at the batiushka's is nothing to be found. And in Zabłudów it happened. So I'm there. And she says, she checked all documents in Zabłudów and Felicja is not there. And she came, and I say, because I, I say, I am baptized in the [Catholic] church. *Felicja is a Polish name, right?* Yeah. *But who was looking for it?* The one who was here already, the tombstone maker. Well, they did not know how or where the name came from, it is nowhere to be found. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

A Polish name – Polish letters. This relationship seemed so obvious to the interlocutor that she did not have to prove for herself whether it was so. This peculiar indistinctness of alphabets, or rather the failure to perceive a difference, which seems obvious to outsiders, is an effect typical of the phenomenon of social bilingualism ("diglossia") as described in detail by sociolinguists.[74] The parallel use

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74 This term was introduced by C. A. Ferguson to denote the interchangeable use of two varieties of the same language, while J. Fischman modified the concept of diglossia to denote social bilingualism. See also, among other works, S. Gal, *Language Shift. Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria* (New York-San Francisco-London: Academic Press, 1979); J. J. Gumperz, *Language and Social Identity* (Cambridge, 1982), E. Smułkowa, "Dwujęzyczność po białorusku: bilingwizm,

of two languages is so natural that often the fact of flipping from one code to another (so-called code-switching) is imperceptible to both the speaker and the listener. Bilingualism functions here on the basis of the repertoire of two systems that complement each other in different social situations. Such a phenomenon favors the mixing of languages, their interference taking place on various levels of the linguistic system. Scholars analyze diglossia and related interference most often in the context of spoken languages. However, in the cemeteries described here, we are dealing with the interference of written languages – mainly their graphic forms, i.e. the mixing of letters.

## Binominality, Duality

Earlier I mentioned translating names from one language to another. The problem of dichotomy here, however, has a dimension that is deeper than just a linguistic dimension. In traditional culture, a name is often equated with the person who bears it. When remembering the dead, it is necessary to say their names ("When the thirtieth day [after death] comes, they buy a mass for the whole family and remember his name"), and when talking about diseases, it is necessary to know the name of the sick person who cannot be present during prayer ("And the name, for example: Lodzia or Jadzia. And a prayer will be said, and everything, and it helps. *And where is she then?* Oj, Lord, he can be in the next apartment, so that he knows his name" [[B.Pep.k.kat.37]). A name is an important element of identity here, often defining a person, giving him certain features, foretelling a certain fate.

> "When there is some half-wit or drunkard or thief in the village, you cannot give his name to a child, because it would be the same" ('Oh my God! Why did they give him such a name? To give him others, maybe it would be better' – the plea of a certain noblewoman)" [Feder., 1644].

> My husband is Mikołaj so my son was named Mikołaj because when we wanted to baptize the older son, my dad says: "Baptize him like the father, he is so good, calm, maybe this is what the son will be like." [P.Top.k.pr.19]

It is important that the baptismal name be a name of a "saint," referring to a specific patron saint. This is important for ritualistic reasons: the name must belong to the holy order because it is mentioned in prayer.

dyglosja, czy coś innego?" in *Język a tożsamość na pograniczu kultur*, eds. E. Smułkowa, A. Engelking (vol. 1, Prace Katedry Kultury Białoruskiej UwB, Białystok, 2000).

"Saint John, patron of this soul, pray for her." Oh yes, they sing like that among us. When we pray, this is the name they sing, and some say: "What name are you giving? And how will you be, he says, when he dies, what name will you remember?" There is no such name. So they gave theirs Alina. There is no Saint Alina. [B.Pap.k.kat.17]

[To the coffin] A rosary only for the hand and scapulars, and a picture of the patron, in whose name is she baptized. [B.Sur.k.kat.15]

However, on the level of everyday life, it is possible to translate the name received at baptism – i.e. a name from the order of the sacred language – into its everyday, local and common Belarusian version, because this is the language used on an everyday basis (in Poland, only by the oldest generation).

They have already figured out that they didn't even want to give a Polish name. The priest will baptize one, and here they call it [differently] Jan – and here Iwan, Władek – this is Wałodzia. In the village they did want to name people [in Polish]. [B.Pap.m.kat.21]

The priest baptizes in his own way, in Polish. *And if parents want a Ruthenian name?* Whatever, he'll translate it into his own, and call it out in Ruthenian. [B.Rou.k.kat.33]

Therefore, it often happens that a person has two versions of his name – the official name "from baptism," which indicates his religious affiliation and which is also placed on the tombstone, and the familiar name, a local version, used every day. This local version does not have to be religious. For example, one of my interlocutors, who everyone in the village calls Jania because "that's what my mother called me at home," has the name Nina written on the tombstone, not Janina. This practice of "renaming" is quite common and very old. Sometimes it becomes an object of controversy, as in the following case, when a changed name became a nickname for the whole family, used by villagers for several generations:

Well, though she, although they baptized in Ruthenian, she is Timfoder in Ruthenian and Tomasz in Polish. *He has two first names?* No, it's one name, but in the Ruthenian language it was one that my great-great-great-grandmother did not like. It was she who named her son that, my father used to say they baptized as they baptized, and he was baptized, but his mother called him "my Tomasz, my Tomulek. My Tomuś, my Tomeczek." Well, people gossiped about it, because no one knows why, God only knows, why they have such hatred, so they gave this nickname to the grandfather of the father: Tomoczkowyj. Tomoczkowa, then ask your grandmother, she will tell you that until today my father was called Tomoczkow Józik, and I was Tomoczkowa Regina. [P.Top.k.kat.22]

Currently, however, this clear division into Catholic and Orthodox names, clearly indicating religious affiliation, has been disrupted. Especially the young generation, brought up – depending on the country in which they live – in Russian

or Polish, do not want to give names in accordance with the sacred language, preferring to exercise their individual choice, based on their own preferences. Older people do not like this development because for them it is a mix of orders.

> Now they baptize with Ruthenian names, even in our church. Why do they choose crazy names and not Polish ones, so that the child has a patron to whom he can pray? And they change Polish names to Ruthenian. For example my sons: Stanisław – Sława, Janek – Wania, and daughter Gienia – Żenia. From my confirmation I have Teresa. I have a picture of her, I am keeping it till death so that I would have a guide. [B.Lid.k.kat.20]

For older people, in terms of religion, there is still a strict division between what is Orthodox and what is Catholic; it is mainly about the language used. The version of the name is also part of the linguistic sphere: in a Catholic church, one should be baptized in Polish, and in an Orthodox church in Ruthenian. One's name is a sign of the sacred language and therefore of the denomination itself. On the sacred level, there is only one option, they must not be mixed with each other. Here the boundaries are clear and intransgressible. There is a set standard. Among the younger generation, the social division into two orders – the sacred and the everyday – is not so clear. Therefore, this norm ceases to apply. It becomes possible to mix sacred languages with everyday languages. There are no clear boundaries here.

Problems also arise when giving names tied to prayers for the dead or prayers for health. For older people, the translation is natural – the Polish and Ruthenian versions of the name can be used interchangeably depending on the place of prayer – in an Orthodox church or a Catholic church. This contextual translation is often unnoticeable and automatic. Again we are dealing with not entirely conscious, situational code switching.

> And now she ordered a mass for the soul's peace but she forgot to register Jurek's name [the granddaughter – speaking about her father]. *Jurek is turning over in his grave...* And then I say... And matuszka took this piece of paper: "Where's your Grigorij?" That Jurek is not registered. [Granddaughter:] *Who, who?* Grigorij. I say, "I'll write this down one more time." [P.Top.k.pr.25]

However, for the interviewee's daughter, the translation of the names seems unnatural and done deliberately. The Ruthenian form of her husband's name suggests a desire to "drag" him toward Orthodoxy. A change of name is therefore associated with a change of denomination.

> Because she also converted my late husband to Yurija. I say: "What kind of Yurij is he, since he is Jerzy!" And always all the time, it was with this... Well, but you can say to yourself... *And it wasn't sort of automatic for her that she thinks in Ruthenian?* My dear, it can't be automatic, I told her to her face. She says, "Aj, because I think so and so on."

I'm the one who says: " So what, you wanted to say, it's already such an automaton, that you turn right away, right? You don't excuse yourself here that this is an automaton – I say – because if you want, you will say it in such a way." "Oh, because that's the way it is with me..." I say: "By force, you stretch this religion, you stretch it – I say – but you know, you can't stretch it, it's too short a quilt," I say. That's how I talked to her, I say: "You do not twist him, because he is not Yurij but Jerzy." [P.Top.k.kat.50]

Double, "transitive" names are a phenomenon on the border of an open type, where the boundaries between one and the other denomination are so blurred that it becomes possible to freely move from one system to another. At the moment when such transience becomes noticeable yet poorly seen, interfaith boundaries take on clarity and meaning, indicating the separateness of both denominations and the inability to synthesize them.

## Conclusions

As the above analysis indicates, rural cemeteries reflect the communities to which they belong; they demonstrate the values cultivated by these communities, providing a clear record of social and cultural phenomena. Their appearance and organization are a manifestation of the character and content of the memory recorded there in the intentions of their users. This analysis also shows the changes that have taken place in this area over the last few decades. Changes in the tombstone building material, in their external appearance and style, are a material record of the tendency to more and more individualized remembering of the dead, a departure from the once popular model of remembering all the dead of a given community, merging with time into an anonymous group of ancestors. These changes are therefore also an indication of the gradual abandonment of community life, which was once based on the functioning of rural communities in traditional peasant culture.

On the denominational borderland, cemeteries are also a good illustration of the phenomenon of borderland, ways of dealing with religious divisions and related cultural differences. It turns out that when it comes to the very event of the death of someone from the local community, it always takes place above and beyond differences and divisions. Peasant funeral rituals are probably one of the last that fully mobilize an entire community to communal behavior. In such situations, minor ritual differences between Orthodox and Catholics are swept aside, and interfaith boundaries (e.g. participation in a "different" mass) are freely crossed.

The actual space of the denominational cemetery as an institutional separation between Catholic and Orthodox Christians is negated here by the constant annulment of external boundaries, which are not considered essential in the rural community and which thus succumb to negation. Both Orthodox and Catholics are therefore buried by relatives in cemeteries of the other denomination. Family ties turn out to be more important here than religious ties. Despite its institutional affiliation to one of the churches, the cemetery demonstrates a mixed religious community. The deceased's religious identification is not as clearly marked here as his family affiliation, which is the basic key to the organization of cemetery space, just as it is in rural life.

The most important phenomena tied to the border situation are thus revealed in border cemeteries. The fairly widespread mixing of Cyrillic and Latin is a sign of "differentiation," blurred borders which, despite their objective existence, are not perceived as differentiating by the inhabitants of mixed villages. Another phenomenon is the free transition from one religious tradition to another, which

is visible both on the linguistic level and in the mixing of sacred languages, the double – Polish and Ruthenian – versions of names and surnames. In this way, the borderland forces its inhabitants to adopt various forms of duality, which is a special feature of the rural cemeteries described here.

# Part III: The Community of the Table: The Integrative Properties of Food

## Food as a Research Topic

> Although human phenomena – whether attitudes, wishes or structures – may be looked
> at on their own, independently of their connections with the social life of people, they
> are by nature nothing but substantializations of human relations and of human beha-
> vior, embodiments of social and mental life. This is true of speech […] art, science, eco-
> nomics and politics; it is true both of phenomena which rank high on our scale of values
> and of others which seem trivial or worthless. But it is often precisely these latter, ap-
> parently trivial phenomena that give us clear and simple insights into the structure and
> development of the psyche and its relations which are at first denied us by the former.
>
> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*[1]

In social studies, the subject of food long seemed too trivial to be dealt with "seri-
ously." In Polish literature, the few voices on this matter come in essays in which
authors postulate only the need for a deeper interest in this type of issue. On the
other hand, eating practices are rarely treated as a separate monographic topic
that can become in itself, and not on the margins of other matters, the subject
of in-depth analysis.[2] Roland Barthes quite accurately described this situation in
the early 1960s: "[…] we do not see our own food or, worse, we assume that it is
insignificant. Even – or perhaps especially – to the scholar, the subject of food
connotes triviality or guilt."[3] However, since then there has been a tremendous
increase in interest in food shown in Western literature; separate sub-disciplines
have emerged, both in sociology and in anthropology, dealing exclusively with
these issues.[4]

As far as Polish literature is concerned, the field in which the issues of food
and its relations with cultural and social life were most often discussed was

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1   Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*,
    trans. Edmund Jephcott (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 99–100.
2   Here, I describe the state of research as of the early 2000s, when there were no food
    studies in Poland, nor studies in the field of food anthropology or sociology. This
    book was basically the first introduction to this subject in the country (author's fn.
    from 2020).
3   R. Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in *Food
    and Culture*, eds. C. Counihan, P. Van Esterik (New York-London: Routledge, 1997),
    20–21 (reprint: "Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine," *Annales
    E-S-C* 16 [1961], no. 5: 977–986).
4   In fact, by the early 2000s, food study was already a clearly crystallized research field
    in the West, though it remained as a discipline on the fashionable margins for several
    years before it began to fully develop. Today it would be difficult to even just recapit-
    ulate achievements in this field in one short chapter (author's fn. from 2020).

ethnography, where food production, the most characteristic dishes, types of diets and food preparation technologies were described as part of material cultural. But if we look at the most famous work in this field, Kazimierz Moszyński's *Kultura ludowej Słowian* (The Folk Culture of the Slavs), it turns out that despite the perceived research potential, the author did not view the subject of food with great interest. Known for his meticulousness in relation to the most diverse aspects of material culture, ranging from detailed descriptions of roof structures, detailed typologies of harrows and types of flails, Moszyński – in the case of food culture – states quite laconically:

> We will not, <u>of course</u> [author's underline – JS] consider in detail various Slavic soups and groats. We will only point out that the relevant material has been collected – especially from the southern Slavs – in extreme amounts, and that deeper research on this topic may shed a great deal of light on old cultural relations and, among other things, on the cultural relations of different peoples with one another. Various dishes and their names are eagerly borrowed from neighboring peoples.[5]

Culinary subject matter was therefore interesting and provided promising opportunities for research – because of the ease of cultural borrowing, it brought with it what was most interesting for Moszyński: a record of various cultural relationships among Slavic communities. And yet, at the same time, it was not worth exploring in detail. Moszyński limited himself to listing only a few types of dishes without his usual scrupulously drawn up genealogy, typology and geography of borrowings. In later ethnographic literature as well, the topic of food appears more as a descriptive rather than analytical category. There is no reflection of "cultural relations" mentioned by Moszyński, but rather only a detailed record of elements of the peasant's diet and their history with elements of regional diversification. The methods of preparing dishes and the tools used are given, but they are treated only as a record of a certain material heritage of peasant culture, and not as an element that says something more about that culture's members.[6] Food is a topic in itself, without any special reference to the cultural system in which it functions. The only attempt to associate food with culture comes in the work

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5   K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, vol. 1: *Kultura materialna* (Warszawa, 1967), 287.

6   See, for example, the expansive study: *Pożywienie i sprzęty z nim związane. Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego*, vol. 3, ed. J. Bohdziewicz (Wrocław, 1996); see also *Pożywienie ludności wiejskiej* (Kraków, 1973); *Pożywienie w dawnej Polsce* (Warszawa, 1967).

of Anna Kowalska-Lewicka and Zofia Szromba-Rysowa, who described the link between the peasant diet and the lifestyle and cultural type of this social group.[7]

Language practices as the transmission of cultural codes and social norms were more often described in anthropological works. After all, the most important feature of food is the fact that it is situated on the border between the biological and the cultural; thus, by its very essence it touches on issues at anthropology's center. Rarely do we come across phenomena that demonstrate the connection between the biological and the cultural in such an obvious way, something which was also emphasized by Malinowski:

> Saturation is undoubtedly a condition tied to the existence of the human organism. But the original inhabitant of Australia who satisfied his hunger by mistakenly eating a totem animal, or the Orthodox Jew who accidentally ate pork, or the Brahman who was forced to eat beef, all will develop symptoms of a physiological nature: vomiting, stomach upset, signs of disease and the belief that this is punishment for breaking the prohibition.[8]

Elsewhere, Malinowski states that food is not only an important element of culture, but even its constitutive element, and thus can also provide a perfect apparatus for learning about culture:

> [...] it [food] is the social group's center, the basis of value systems, the germ of ritual acts and religious beliefs. […] Culture cannot be understood until one examines its nutritional institutions in relation to the preparation and consumption of food, to obtain food, to distribute it, and to accumulate it.[9]

But Malinowski did not himself attempt to describe any such "nutritional institution," apart from, of course, that which is directly tied to food and coral gardens.[10] As in the works of other anthropologists of his time, food appeared as a single issue quite often in his analyses generally in connection with rituals and magical ceremonies. This sphere – ritual and magic, various totemic systems and religious prohibitions – was therefore concerned primarily with the sacred aspects of food consumption and was for a long time the main field of anthropological interest in the analysis of eating behaviors.

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7   A. Kowalska-Lewicka, Z. Szromba-Rysowa, "Pożywienie," in *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 1 (Wrocław, 1976).

8   B. Malinowski, "Naukowa teoria kultury," in his, *Szkice z teorii kultury* (Warszawa, 1958), 68.

9   B. Malinowski, *Życie seksualne dzikich* (Łódź 1957), xliii.

10  I B. Malinowski, "Ogrody koralowe i ich magia," in his, *Dzieła*, vol. 4 (Warszawa, 1986).

Claude Lévi-Strauss treated the issue of food somewhat differently in his structural analyses. According to him, the culinary arts are a kind of universal code, a language present in every culture, in which the unconscious structures of human thinking are exposed. "Cooking," Lévi-Strauss wrote, "is with language a truly universal form of human activity; if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food."[11] Lévi-Strauss tried to create a universal structural model of the culinary arts, following the example of the linguistic model, by distinguishing its characteristic "taste-emes" – the smallest significant units, forming binary oppositions. In his famous "The Culinary Triangle," he presents the process of changing food from raw to cooked, as a reflection of the process of human transition from its natural state to a culturally organized world. The term "culinary triangle" was modeled on the phonological vowel triangle, contrasting the raw with the processed, while the spoiled one is supplemented by the triangle describing preparation techniques: roasting, smoking and boiling. In accordance with the author's postulates, the diagram developed in this way could be used in the analysis of other areas of culture:

> […] so that it can be superposed on other contrasts of a sociological, economic, esthetic, or religious nature: men and women, family and society, village and bush, economy and prodigality, nobility and commonality, sacred and profane, etc. Thus we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure [...].[12]

While Lévi-Strauss's holistic approach to culinary issues can be considered highly controversial and too restrictively tied to the linguistic model,[13] his works, despite their highly speculative nature and numerous over-interpretations, have provided a great deal of inspiration for further structural and semiotic analyses.

In this respect, the most interesting works are undoubtedly those published by Mary Douglas, who takes into account the issue of cultural relativism to a much greater extent than Lévi-Strauss; she places her analyzes in a specific British context, using examples based on her own experience serving home meals. In her article "Deciphering a Meal," Douglas examines, for example, sequences of meals

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11  C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle," in *Food and Culture*, 28 (reprint: "Le triangle culinaire," *L'Arc* [1965], no. 26: 19–29).

12  Ibid., 35.

13  It is widely known, after all, that linguists themselves have failed to go much beyond the level of phonological description in their structuralist analyses of language, let alone apply such a method to the whole of culture.

in their mutual syntagmatic relations, because it is in these relations, she argues, that their meaning is hidden. Due to its structure, hierarchy, and defined order of administration, each meal provides meaning to a different meal. Various categories of food denote social events, express hierarchy, boundaries, etc., such that they reflect current social systems and situations that characterize a given culture:

> If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries."[14]

Perhaps Douglas is best known for her analyses of food prohibitions in Judaism and their relationship to the religious system.[15] As the author shows, prohibited animals from the Book of Leviticus are not merely randomly selected specimens; their characteristic feature is that they do not fall within the framework defined by the basic classification of herbivores (ruminants and even-toed animals) and carnivores, so they do not maintain the purity of the species – they stand on the verge of an ordered world. Thus, the taxonomy of prohibited animals reflects Judaism's basic ideas: those animals on the border of classification are unclean; they are anomalies of the species.

In Poland, Jerzy S. Wasilewski followed a similar path with his determination of the methods for structural and semiotic analysis of taboo dietary systems.[16] In his work, he explores the symbolic meaning of salt as a metonym for all culturally processed foods and the operator of change in rites of passage in Polish and partly Mongolian traditional culture. This trend of studies also includes recently published works by Piotr Kowalski and Katarzyna Łeńska-Bąk,[17] which are monographs of two products – bread and salt – and an analysis of their ritual semiotics, which can be read in folk beliefs, rituals and medicine. A characteristic feature of these Polish works is a kind of "freezing," representing a state of folk culture that has little in common with today's realities. The authors draw inspiration from various existing sources and from different areas and historical periods, providing a synchronic description that lacks temporal and spatial

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14  M. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 231.

15  Idem, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

16  J. S. Wasilewski, *Tabu a paradygmaty etnologii* (Warszawa, 1989).

17  P. Kowalski, *Chleb nasz powszedni. O pieczywie w obrzędach, magii, literackich obrazach i opiniach dietetyków* (Wrocław, 2000); K. Łeńska-Bąk, *Sól ziemi* (Wrocław, 2002).

categories; they treat "folk culture" as an indivisible monolith. The lack of speci-
ficity and location in a concrete historical and cultural context (even if Douglas'
analyses focus on a specific religious and cultural system, created at a specific
time and practiced entirely by a specific people) causes such descriptions to be-
come partly abstract; setting aside practices of everyday life, they do not take into
account elements of internal differentiation within the culinary habits of a given
society, nor do they take into account the factor of change always present in any
nutritional system. This fact was indicated by David Sutton, the author of an in-
teresting work on the relationship between food and remembering:

> […] food must not be seen as providing meaning *only* through structure, through pro-
> viding categories of clean and polluted, edible and inedible, as Mary Douglas has well
> illustrated, but also through the everyday practices that have increasingly come to our
> attention as part of anthropological interest in "hidden histories," the "practice of eve-
> ryday life" and the "history of the present."[18]

Lévi-Strauss and Douglas paid little attention to everyday life practices, fo-
cusing more on the then popular structural analysis and viewing food as pro-
viding meaning through an internal system of binary oppositions: edible and
inedible, raw and processed, pure and impure. Everyday eating practices were
of interest to historians, especially those from the circle of the French Annales
school, who – with their focus on analyzing not only the past, but also its con-
nections with the present – devoted a great deal of space to eating as a material
testimony of social and historical change. One example is the work by Jean-Louis
Flandrin,[19] who analyzes changes in dietary preferences in the sixteenth and the
seventeenth centuries, placing them in the cultural and historical context proper
to that era. The concept of good taste that emerged at that time, according to
Flandrin, was a reflection and a tool of social hierarchy as a weapon forged by
members of the old aristocracy to maintain symbolic superiority against upstarts
challenging their social status in increasing numbers. Flandrin also examines the
mutual influences of the culinary and other fine arts at the time, considering,
for example, whether literary and artistic classicism arose out of trends that first
manifested themselves in the culinary arts.[20]

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18  D. E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts. An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford-
    New York: Berg, 2001), 6.

19  J.-L. Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste," in *History of Private Life*, vol. 3: *Passions of
    the Renaissance*, ed. R. Chartier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 264–308.

20  Similar questions, though based on completely different premises, had already been
    asked by R. Jakobson, who noted, for example, connections between the culinary arts
    in Czechoslovakia and Poland with styles in architecture and literature: "The Gothic

In a similar "Annales" vein, Norbert Elias analyzed changes in eating behavior in his work on the civilizing process.[21] He, too, drew attention to seemingly insignificant customs of everyday life in order to use them to make extensive analyses of sociological changes in the scale of an entire epoch. For example, Elias pointed to the seeming interdependence of biological activities related to satisfying physiological needs and general social tendencies, arguing that it is only apparently that individual sensory sensitivity has, basically, a very social character. He showed how manifestations of a shift in the threshold of sensitivity led to a changed standard, if they were consistent with the overall direction of society's evolution. Material culture is treated as a kind of record of these social changes: "The fork is nothing other than the embodiment of a specific standard of emotions and a specific level of revulsion."[22]

A separate place in this cursory review should be devoted to Roland Barthes, who is indirectly connected to the Annales school, and who in the 1950s and 1960s made interesting observations about changes taking place in the culinary culture of contemporary French and American societies. In short articles, later collected in *Mythologies*,[23] the author reflects on the visions and ideas that arose around wine and milk, and beefsteak and fries, in these two cultures. He also carries out a cultural "decoding" of "ornamental" cuisine – luxurious culinary recipes appearing in *Elle* magazine.

Perhaps Barthe's most significant contribution, however, was his essay on the psychosociology of food consumption,[24] in which Barthes examines food

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emphasis was stronger and grew faster in the Czech kingdom, while Romanesque habits persisted in Poland. Along with the development of Gothic art, the juxtaposition of various planes and the association of elements alien to each other became increasingly important. The traditions of stuffing, stuffing with conflicting ingredients – in general – the syncretic character of late medieval gastronomy harmonizes with the "mixed style" of medieval drama. It is not for nothing that etymology links the farce – which initially meant a kind of stuffing of the liturgical text with secular interludes – with the culinary stuffing. It is no coincidence that stuffed fish, pike or carp were a typical Czech Gothic dish that later penetrated into Poland [...]." R. Jakobson, "Szczupak po polsku," in his, *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka. Wybór pism* (Warszawa, 1989), 106.

21  Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 107.

22  Ibid., 173.

23  R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (Hill and Wang, 2013) [originally published as *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957)].

24  R. Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption."

advertising; he treated food as a specific communication system that signals patterns of social behavior. "Sugar or wine, these two superabundant substances are also institutions. And these institutions necessarily imply a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices, and values."[25] The meaning of advertised products can be read by relating them to significant phenomena in contemporary culture, the advertisements of which are only a reflection. Barthes's analyses show how food preserves and sanctifies the national past; it expresses the traditional division between male and female, conveys values grouped around the concept of health. Therefore, it is organically related to a type of culture; as a material, it can indicate immaterial reality. It is a sign of modernity, and touches on various life situations. "One could say," Barthes concludes, "that an entire 'world' (social environment) is present in and signified by food."[26]

Undoubtedly, French researchers were pioneers in revealing various aspects and relationships between food and cultural and social life. The works of Pierre Bourdieu occupy a separate place here, especially his famous *La Distinction*.[27] Using the concept of *habitus* (introduced by Elias), Bourdieu deals in this work with the issue of choices and preferences concerning not only food, but also clothing, furniture, cinema, literature and music, all of which characterize certain social classes in France. These choices, Bourdieu claims, bear the hallmarks of individual taste. As it turns out, they are easily predictable if one takes into account the issue of a person's social position. Tastes, preferences and related behaviors have powerful associations with socially inherited habits, perceptions and values specific to each class. Culinary taste is not only an individual taste, but also has a social genesis; it is an expression of a competitive struggle between social groups (hence the distinction between good taste and common taste and its strictly historical and social character).

This is not the place for a detailed review of works from the quickly developing field of food studies. From the wide range of interesting English-language publications on the mutual influence of diet and cultural and social phenomena, we should point in particular to the work of Sidney Wilfred Mintz,[28] who describes the history of the introduction of sugar into common use among the

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25  Ibid., 20.

26  Ibid., 23.

27  P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) (original: *La Distinction* [Paris, 1979]).

28  S. W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985).

English working class during industrialization. As one of the first luxury goods, a product of an advertising campaign, and therefore closely related to modernity, sugar influenced a change not only in eating habits, but also in the organization of work and the perception of time. Similar phenomena, resulting from the change of the traditional lifestyle and related changes in diet (on the example of the Bellah tribes of Burkina Faso) and the cultural consequences of introducing new products (margarine, chocolate) and diets (vegetarian, Mediterranean) into the life of modern communities, have been described by Margaret Visser. She sums up her considerations this way: "My point is that food is closely interwoven with culture – change the diet and you will change the culture, and vice versa."[29] Also extremely interesting is the work of another anthropologist specializing in nutrition, Carole Counihan,[30] who describes and analyzes changes in the production, distribution and consumption of bread in the contemporary Sardinian countryside; it perfectly illustrates the transformations taking place in local cultural and social life: the ongoing process of individualization and atomization of social relationships.

Undoubtedly, with the end of the twentieth century, the subject of food appears more and more frequently in cultural studies and sociology, revealing new aspects of the mutual influence of cultural and nutritional patterns. Let us now consider to what extent this type of issue might prove useful in research on the cultural borderland.

## The Differentiating and Integrating Properties of Food

> There are communities that we join voluntarily. We even create some of them ourselves. But there are also those to which we belong whether we like it or not. Such is the communion of food, the universal service with the body, to which we are all condemned, and through which we exist and perish. And there are few situations in life where compulsion meets with our goodwill, inevitability with desire.
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> J. Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia*[31]

As mentioned above, many researchers have pointed to the close relationships between – on the one hand – types of food, the system of serving meals, their

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29  M. Visser, "Food and Culture: Interconnections," *Social Research* 66 (Spring 1999), no. 1: 103–129. Quoted text appears on p. 119.

30  C. Counihan, *Bread as World. Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia*, w: *Food and Culture*, eds. C. Counihan, P. Van Esterik (New York–London, 1997).

31  Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1992), 226.

structure, ways of composing and selecting food, and rules of behavior at the table and – on the other hand – a specific cultural and social system, cultural preferences, social situations, hierarchy and divisions. And I repeat this information because this *differentiating* aspect seems to be very important. Food as a strictly social phenomenon can be an extremely useful tool for delineating and eliminating boundaries between people, hidden under the mask of everyday, ordinary life. In fact, this special property of eating behavior and the ability to symbolically express the social identity of eaters has been pointed out many times. After all, identity always focuses on specific boundaries that define the differences between people in terms of class, economic, age, and gender.

Researchers of the history of the cuisine of individual nations have repeatedly pointed out that these food traditions have never been compact monoliths; there have always been certain differences in this respect – time, regional, class. Within national cultures, the distinctions of tastes, customs and food choices are particularly often made on the basis of social status. Flandrin,[32] comparing the changes that took place in French cuisine from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, points to several distinguishing features of different kinds of eating behavior in different social classes. Such distinguishing features were not only specific to table manners or the type of tableware used, but also, quite obviously, to the type of products used and the way they were put together. Such distinctions were related not only to financial issues (poor folks could not afford what the aristocracy were able to eat), but also to the issue of having good taste, which is a cultural tool of social hierarchy, and which makes us value more that which is liked by the rich. Therefore, the parts of an animal that were eaten at aristocratic courts were considered tastier, while other types of meat, although commonly eaten by notables less than a century earlier, ended up in the "vulgar" category. In this way, the type of meat eaten, labeled "better" and "worse" cuts, determined the social hierarchy among eaters.

In an article on contemporary American society, Marshall Sahlins also draws attention to the social conditions and the evaluation of various pieces of meat. The author reflects on the category of edibility and inedibility in terms of various animal species (including horses and dogs), as well as individual pieces of the animal carcass (especially categories of offal – hearts, stomachs, livers, etc.), linking them indirectly with the taboo of cannibalism (associations with "human" characteristics of animals and "human" parts of the body). It is not primarily about questions of nutrition or taste, Sahlins states, but above all about the fact that

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32  J.-L. Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste."

"the social value of steak or a roast, as compared with tripe or tongue, is what underlies the difference in economic value. From the nutritional point of view, such a notion of 'better' and 'inferior' cuts would be difficult to defend." Horse meat or offal, culturally and socially depreciated, therefore lose their market value and become the food of the poor – in the case of American society, especially African Americans – which additionally adds to racial differentiation and related prejudices. Thus, the author concludes, "[…] the 'inferiority' of blacks is realized also as a culinary defilement."[33]

Another indicator of social prestige, especially in highly industrialized modern societies, may well be, for example, adherence to the rules of a healthy diet, because in such societies, health, good physical condition and a slender figure are highly valued socially. So-called healthy food is juxtaposed to fatty, high-calorie, high-sugar, industrially processed, canned and frozen meals. The same products, once highly valued, therefore find themselves now on the other side of social evaluation scale. Eating meat also loses importance in the social hierarchy due to increasingly fashionable vegetarianism. It is no different with other products, such as white wheat bread, always considered a symbol of luxury, which is currently losing in the competition against "healthy" whole grain bread. As long as a fashionable and socially valued healthy lifestyle is what determines social prestige, it will be a model for a preferred lifestyle and eating behavior. Therefore, even the way food is prepared (baking as opposed to frying) can become socially differentiated, as long as it has the power to denote a high standard of living and social position.

The type of food, the way it is processed and consumed, can inform us not only about the social status of a person, their belonging to a specific class or environment, but also about other distinguishing features of social identity, independent of (at least not directly dependent on) social stratification, such as age or sex. While little has been published on differences in diet between older and younger people in the field of sociology or cultural anthropology, gender differences is a leading topic, not only in feminist literature. The focus is on eating disorders of all kinds – bulimia or anorexia – which are generally the domain of women's eating habits as dictated by cultural patterns and requirements for female body appearance. The tendency toward nutritional deficiencies and starving oneself among women is a phenomenon that characterizes not only the world of today,

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33  M. Sahlins, "Food as Symbolic Code," in *Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates*, eds. J. C. Alexander, S. Seidman (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 99–100 (reprint: *Culture and Practical Reason* [Chicago, 1976], 166–179).

but that of the past. Caroline Walker, analyzing the religious eating behavior of medieval women,[34] claims that fasting (much more frequent among women than men) was associated with the widespread association of women with the preparation and distribution of food rather than with its consumption. It has been a matter of culture that women cook and serve, while men eat.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu draws attention not only to the class determinants of culinary taste and diet, but also to the opposition between masculinity and femininity, which reaches not only into the areas of food preferences and the amount of food consumed, but also into specific ways of using the body while eating. Here is just a sample of his subtle analysis:

> [...] in the working class, fish tends to be regarded as an unsuitable food for men, not only because it is a light food, insufficiently "filling," which would only be cooked for health reasons, i.e. for invalids and children, but also because, like fruit (except bananas) it is one of the "fiddly" things which a man's hands cannot cope with and which make him childlike (the woman, adopting a maternal role, as in all similar cases, will prepare the fish on the plate or peel the pear); but above all, it is because fish has to be eaten in a way which totally contradicts the masculine way of eating, that is, with restraint, in small mouthfuls, chewed gently, with the front of the mouth, on the tips of the teeth (because of the bones). The whole masculine identity – what is called virility – is involved in those two ways of eating, nibbling and picking, as befits a woman, or with wholehearted male gulps and mouthfuls [...].[35]

Is it just as easy to express ethnic, national and religious identity through food? It seems so. I have already mentioned Mary Douglas' famous work on food prohibitions in the Judaic tradition.[36] Douglas demonstrates, among other things, that the concept of edible and inedible animals concerns the issue of their species purity, and this in turn is related to the cleanliness of the people who eat such animals. Animals forbidden to Jews and eaten by other nations also render these nations unclean, leading to the establishment of strong boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, thereby justifying the prohibition of exogamous marriages. Just as animals of different species cannot be mixed, members of nations and religious groups – analogous to biological, social, and cultural species – should not mix with each other. "It would seem," Douglas writes, "that whenever a people are aware of encroachment and danger, dietary rules controlling what goes into

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34  C. W. Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Food and Culture*, passim.

35  P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 190–191.

36  M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, passim.

the body would serve as a vivid analogy of the corpus of their cultural categories at risk."[37] Nutritional principles are therefore a tool of inclusion and exclusion, establishing clear, almost physically experienced boundaries between ethnic groups. Jean Soler drew similar conclusions in "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible,"[38] pointing to the fact that due to the biblical prohibition of marriage with foreigners, Christianity could come about only after the abolition of borders between Jews and other peoples, which was reflected also in the lifting of food prohibitions.

Nutritional differences, by naturalizing them, can therefore emphasize religious boundaries that seem insurmountable. No wonder then that in stereotypical thinking about the diversity of religions, the theme of a different way of eating, so closely tied to religious rituals, appears very often as an argument that proves a complete difference, not only religious, but also cultural or even civilizational, clearly indicating the barbarism of foreigners. Such themes also appear in statements made by our interlocutors:

> The Jews drink our blood for their Easter. We share the egg, and they eat matzah and give and share to everyone. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

> Oh, Luther is different. They also have different products. I heard that they eat dogs, among them it is accepted that you can. [B.Pie.m.kat.24]

Cuisine can also become the material of national ideologization, serving as identification and consolidation indicators for the nation's members and pointing to its distinctiveness and uniqueness. It is about so-called dishes-symbols, unambiguously associated with the heritage of a particular nation and often reflecting not so much a culinary reality as an ideological creation. Rastislava Stoličná, reflecting on the Slovak national dish *bryndzové halušky*,[39] claims that it is more of a fictional dish than an authentic dish, produced as part of the project of creating the Slovak national identity, which was mainly aimed at revealing the ancient and Proto-Slavic traditions of the Slovak nation. A simple, archaic dish of Wallachian highlanders, quite widespread also in neighboring countries, was chosen as the culinary symbol of Slovakia, not something more typical and specific to the lowlands culturally rooted in this region. National cuisine, Stoličná says, does

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37   M. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," 250.

38   J. Soler, "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible," *Food and Culture*, 55–66.

39   R. Stoličná, "Strava ako etnoidentifikačný znak," in *Studia etnologiczne i antropologiczne*, vol. 6: *Dawne i współczesne oblicze kultury europejskiej – jedność w różnorodności* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2002), 251–264.

not have to reflect reality. The process of its creation takes place in close cor-
relation with the shaping of a national consciousness, and should therefore be
treated as a metaphor for various other socio-cultural processes.

These processes do not have to be related to national ideologies. Currently,
economic issues and globalization seem to be much more important factors in
creating ethnic or national cuisines, which cause increasing problems with the
authenticity of such cuisines, whose task is to adapt to the needs and tastes of
target consumers. In her article "Food and Culture,"[40] Margaret Visser shows
that the so-called Mediterranean diet is, to a large extent, an American phenom-
enon, because it was adapted to the fashionable vegetarianism there, and to the
consumer needs of the local society, inspired by advertising put up by supply
and food companies. This is not just a case of foreign cuisines; one could just as
easily create and sell one's own national cuisine, as exemplified by the entire se-
ries of French products bearing the brand name *Reflet de France*: "Here," Visser
writes, "in your own country, from your own *terroir*, your own food is a mere
'reflection' of itself. No postmodernist could ask for greater alienation, a greater
subtlety, a greater complexity of relationship between self and other – or rather,
self as other."[41]

The above comments involve the ideologization or commercialization of na-
tional culinary tastes. However, apart from the aspect of "show" at work here,
often created out of whole cloth, there is an even more interesting sphere of au-
thentic dietary preferences and tastes that stem directly from habits acquired
most often in childhood, in the family home. The domestic sphere is one of those
areas of national heritage into which an individual grows – at the earliest stage
and most emotionally – into culture, including culinary culture. Tastes taken
from home are often our most vivid memory of everything that is associated
with our local origins, which, according to Ossowski,[42] are a necessary link with
the wider ideological homeland and a sense of attachment to it. Among immi-
grants of all countries and nationalities, their own cuisine, "home cooking" so
to speak, is often one of the few cultural characteristics with which they iden-
tify, which helps them maintain an emotional bond with their country of origin,
and which they manage to pass on to future generations. It is no accident that
the test of Polish cultural symbols carried out by Paweł Boski on the American
Polish community pointed to – alongside Chopin, Jasna Góra and the Battle of

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40  M. Visser, "Food and Culture…"
41  Ibid., 124.
42  S. Ossowski, *O ojczyźnie i narodzie* (Warszawa, 1984).

Grunwald – sausage and pierogi.[43] Thus, cuisine can play a consolidating role in the shaping of national identity, regardless of whether it is the result of ideological processes or un-thought-out, habitual dietary preferences.

Yet another food property is worth noting here. Among all the cultural characteristics, culinary preferences are among those that spread most easily. Jerzy Smolicz once included the culinary arts as one of the most divisible features of ethnic culture[44] since they have the power to cross even the strongest intergroup boundaries. The popularity of ethnic cuisines in "host" communities is the first sign in this regard; they serve as a tool for overcoming foreignness and provide a path to integration. Culinary meetings are often the first plane of inter-ethnic contact, a fact which has found confirmation in numerous studies, including in empirical research conducted in Poland. Postwar migratory movements in Poland meant that people from different regions with different cultural traditions, including culinary traditions, met within a single local community. It can be said that it was food that was one of the first integration factors, noticed by direct witnesses from those times. Here is a telling example from Kashubia:

> I would like to say that Ukrainians were a more closed group than Kashubians. And it was probably because they felt uncomfortable here. It started, it started to change somewhere, after some time, because these relations were typically neighborly, through the fence – someone was living with someone. I myself remember a situation where a neighbor named Ościsławska came as a result of "Akcja 'W',"[45] and I don't know, as part of good neighborly relations she brought my mother pierogi. And I want to say that pierogi were a food product unknown in Kashubia. This was the first time my mother saw them, she took it as a warm gesture. When Mrs. Ościsławska left, she threw them away because she did not know what they were. As part of the culinary exchange, so to speak, my mother offered this Mrs. Ościsławska "brzad" soup, a milk soup with fruit. It is a Kashubian dish, with a lot of different kinds of fruit, especially apples and cherries. Well, Mrs. Ościsławska did not know how to eat it, because it was also the first time she

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43  P. Boski, "O byciu Polakiem w ojczyźnie i o zmianach tożsamości kulturowo-narodowej na obczyźnie," in P. Boski, M. Jarymowicz, H. Malewska-Peyre, *Tożsamość a odmienność kulturowa* (Warszawa: Instytut Psychologii PAN, 1992).

44  J. J. Smolicz, "Multiculturalism as an Over-Arching Framework of Values for Cultural Diversity. The Australian Experience and its Educational Implications," in *Ethnicity, Nation, Culture. Central and East European Perspectives*, eds. B. Balla, A. Sterbling (Hamburg: Kramer, 1998), passim.

45  "Akcja 'W'" is a reference to Operation Vistula, which involved the forced resettlement in 1947 of Ukrainians and members of other ethnic groups from the southeastern provinces of postwar Poland to the so-called Recovered Territories (formerly German) in the north and west of the country.

had encountered something like that. But this is an example of relations that are completely neighborly, through the fence, which – as it were – well, softened these customs [an elderly resident of Bytów, Kashubia].[46]

The exchange of food and recipes as part of good neighborly relations is one of the first signs of barriers breaking down between two different communities. Food becomes a mediating tool for social interaction, a material sign of relationships being formed. Researchers from Opole Silesia also write about a similar phenomenon, the gradual mixing of culinary traditions in areas inhabited by different groups:

> In Siołkowice, women made roulades on Sundays, and those folks [from the eastern territories] made pierogi [dumplings]. And now one has learned from the other, and such is the exchange. [Councilman from the Popielów commune][47]

Food is therefore an important element in a community's functioning, because it can be easily incorporated into the local exchange system, which encourages the maintenance of bonds within the local community. This will be the subject of our further considerations.

## Food as a Topic of Conversation and an Element of Ethnographic Experience

> Neither treat people food nor give it away to eat, I don't know how you can. I don't know, I couldn't. When a person comes to me, what I have is with all my soul. How is it that? You are supposed to treat and receive a person?
>
> Ms. Jadzia from Papiernia

When I was preparing the scenario for the food conversations, it seemed to me that the topic would be quite easy and pleasant, that it would inspire longer narrative statements from interlocutors. However, the implementation of the scenario turned out to be a difficult task: I never managed to complete it in its entirety, as it would run the risk of turning a relatively natural conversation into questioning for both sides. The interlocutors (in fact mostly women, who were broadly considered to be more competent in this matter) quickly got bored with the subject, escaping into various side threads that seemed more interesting to them.

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46  Text written by students of sociology at Collegium Civitas from Warsaw during my field exercise in Bytów in the summer of 2002.

47  This text comes from I. Bukraba-Rylska, *Kultura w społeczności lokalnej – podmiotowość odzyskana?* (Warszawa, 2000), 171; recorded during sociological research conducted in the Popielów commune in 1998.

It turned out that food, although universal and a matter of everyday life, is a part of reality in its own way unnoticeable and difficult to verbalize. Even the seemingly narrative thread that focuses on Christmas cooking habits was no exception. In these communities, food is first of all collected, prepared and eaten; it is not the subject of any particular reflection or storytelling motif. Food is so entangled in everyday reality that it was difficult to exclude from the broader life experience. For most of the interviewees, topics related to food constituted no value in themselves; these topics were not developed in order to talk only about food as such, e.g. about culinary preferences, skills, habits, interesting recipes (such narratives were created only by younger interviewees). I managed to get the most interesting and least forced statements when talking about other topics, when the nutritional thread appeared unintentionally. One such topic involved childhood memories, especially those related to the family home, when recalling the names of already forgotten dishes became a substitutionalization of the bygone time.[48]

The natural context for conversations about food was also the common celebratory meal, during which the topic of food emerged somehow by itself, often imperceptibly for both sides. Indeed it is characteristic that for me as well – especially in the initial period of research when such topics did not even come to mind and I had an insufficiently good ear for certain types of themes – food was part of a reality that was primarily related not to any anthropological reflection, but to various inconveniences. Food that is too fatty, alcohol that is too strong, tea that is too sweet, and the compulsion to eat too much (according to the "guest-slave" principle) – all these extremely burdensome elements of the ethnographic experience effectively limited the independent observation of cultural specificity resulting from different eating patterns. Only while listening to material recorded by a dictaphone that I had accidentally forgotten to turn off during a celebratory meal was I allowed to establish distance and calmly observe myself as the object of feeding by generous hosts. One can hear the entire ritual related to hospitality, which at the time, as one participated in it, was the only element of a tormenting, non-reflective experience:

> B.W.: Ania, you don't want pork fat... oh, a sausage, take it!... A.E: *No, no, thank you, thank you...* Kazik: Kaśka...! K.D.: *I can't do it anymore... I have bread, just fine after*

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48   Such a highly affective and, at the same time, memory-forming taste turned out to be, for example, the once popular *kwas zbożowy* (a fermented grain drink), whose recollection, as with Marcel Proust's madeleines, often evoked a series of stories about the past.

*vodka...* B.W.: So, you'll eat dry bread! K.D.: *After vodka it is best to follow it up with a piece of bread...* Z.S .: Well, take a cucumber... [...]. B.W .: Aneczka, eat! I will give you... A.E.: *I am eating, I am eating...* Z.S.: Please, here... [...] Kazik: Zosia, cut some tomato for the girls... B.W.: Leave it be, Zosia, cut them for the kids, let them eat... [...] Kazik: Well, now maybe those fried scraps... B.W.: Kazik, yes, you're a Pole, match those girls up with the Polish boys! […] B.W.: Don't cut tomatoes anymore, Zosia, you're wasting them! Kazik: Cut, cut, cut... [Radziwoniszki]

A.B.: Drink a little more then, give it here, I'll pour it. K.D.: *Oh dear …* T.B.: But she hasn't drunk yet! J.S .: *I still have it, I will finish it.* K.D.: *Just a little for me. Enough, enough!* A.B .: Okay, let's drink some more. J.S.: *Okay, that's for health.* K.D.: *Yuck, strong!* A.B .: Please drink, oh! but they are drinking it completely! Yes, and they are drinking. J.S.: *Then I will drink a little bit...* T.B.: Oh, girls, some more, and oh, sometimes only this way and with shame. [Rouby]

M.M.: Eat, girls, cut some more, don't regret it. Bad tea? Okay, so it's bitter. Please sweeten it. Don't be shy. Yet why so little? [...] Maybe you don't have money, I'll give it to you? [Serafiny]

Mary Douglas, analyzing types of meals and the way they are served,[49] noticed that their choice is the best message indicating the degree of comradery among guests participating in a given meal; on this basis, it is possible to determine the degree of intimacy among those eating. According to Douglas' classifications (which reflect the situation of the British middle class), warm, hearty meals are for the family, close friends and important guests. For strangers, friends and employees, i.e. people with whom you are not too closely connected, drinks are available. Between these two forms of meals there are various mediators in the form of, for example, cold dishes or sweet dishes, which signal intermediate situations, an entire spectrum of different types of social contacts.

Serving up food and feasting together is a kind of operator in intimacy and distance. By observing the behavior of her hosts, the researcher can discover to what extent she has managed to "enter the field" and gain the trust of her interlocutors, whether she is still treated as a complete stranger, or whether she has overcome certain thresholds of alienation. In the field, it often happened that we assumed certain social roles toward our hosts – from half-family and familiar roles to official roles. We were thus adopted grandchildren, girls who had to be "married off" to the local bachelors, children sent "from school" or "journalists" sent "by the government," compatriots from the Polish homeland, newcomers from Poland, students from the Polish university. The way we were welcomed

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49  M. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," passim.

into our homes was an obvious sign of a certain level of familiarity. The more we were taken to be "one's own," which was strengthened with successive returns and closer relations, the more often and more abundantly we were served food. In the Catholic village of Papiernia, with which we ourselves have the greatest ethnographic sentiment, it was impossible to survive the day without eating a few meals from different hosts.

In this respect, it is difficult to compare Polish and Belarusian territories, not only because of the completely different way we function in the communities on both sides of the border. There is also the issue of different patterns of hospitality in Belarus and Poland. On the Belarusian side, hospitality and generosity are universally applicable norms, which is why it rarely happened that people with whom we spoke did not invite us into their homes and offer some sort of refreshments (when it did happen, it could have been simply due to shame tied to the fact that there was nothing at home with which to treat guests). Most often there were ritual "guest" dishes – vodka (moonshine) and meat (pork fat). In Poland, we came across at most an offer to serve tea and something sweet, but these were rather rare cases. Here, too, the attitude toward us was more official; one could sense a much greater distance, visible for example in the forms of addressing us and the degree of interest in us as private persons (people were asked about their origin and place of residence, but there were no questions about, for example, marital status and family, which is a rule in Belarus).

From the research point of view, food is therefore a topic that manifests itself not necessarily in narratives or conversations, but more often in the researcher's observations and direct experience. It is the researcher, her bodily sensations and emotions that are, to a large extent, the research tools used in the below analyses.

# Food as an Element of the Peasant Ethos

In their own way, all conversations about food reflected the peasant reality, depicting the peasantry's fate – its plight and misery. Pointing to various aspects of existence, they referred to the key areas of peasant consciousness, to patterns of a certain way of life and professed values. The way of organizing food, obtaining food products, cooking, eating, and sharing food turned out to be fundamentally related to the most important elements of the peasant ethos, especially values focused on farming and farmers' ties with the land, poverty and deprivation, the role of the family structure and the neighborhood community in social life, attachment to one's own religion and a particular type of religiosity. This ethos, referred to in the literature as appropriate to the peasant culture at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries,[50] is still alive in the minds of the oldest generation in both Belarus and Poland. A clear change in worldview and culture is noticeable only in the generation born after the war. As a result of mass migration to cities, exposure to external influences (schools, media, etc.), the abandonment of traditional agricultural activities, and changes in the way the economy is run, this generation also professes a different set of values, quite distant from the models of traditional culture. Food-related spheres of life perfectly illustrate these differences.

## The Earth-Provider

Farming was no doubt the basic feature that distinguished peasants from other social strata, and it also determined the specificity of peasant reality and the character of peasant culture. Land was the most important value because it was the basic source of income; its quantity and quality determined levels of prosperity and the conditions of existence. In the peasant consciousness, work on the land, often considered a synonym for work in general, became the basic measure for a proper way of life. Any other way of earning money ran against morality. Hence, people who did not make a living through manual labor were suspected of living an "easy" way of life, of living at the expense of actual working people.

> Once they lived from the land alone, and now they do not – the land has been left behind, they do not want to work. [P.Top.k.pr.14]

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50  For various perspectives on this issue, see L. Stomma, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX wieku* (Warszawa, 1986); S. Siekierski, *Etos chłopski w świetle pamiętników* (Kraków, 1992); R. Sulima, *Słowo i etos. Szkice o kulturze* (Kraków, 1992).

In the times described by our interlocutors, the peasant lived almost exclusively from the cultivation of land. The state of its ownership therefore became the key condition for survival. No wonder, then, that efforts were made to obtain as much land as possible, because only the amount of land and the amount of labor invested determined one's level of wealth or relative prosperity:

> Whoever was rich, yes, but when we were at home there was little land, so you had to go away to earn money, you earn so you can buy yourself a dress or slippers, and there was nothing from home, because they were saving money to buy more land. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

The entire life of the family revolved around land and – by involving almost all its members in agricultural work – the family became a small production enterprise, a separate unit connected by, alongside kinship ties, labor relations and the shared land. Therefore, land was one of the most important factors in marriage choices and in the distribution of family goods, and it was a common subject of family disputes.

> I was poorer and he was rich, had a lot of land. In the past, everything was for land, everything so that there was lot of land, a lot of land, so he is rich. And I didn't want that, I didn't like him, but my mother was hitting me and... *She ordered you to go?* Go. [...] It was good, they lived well, they had three cows, they had horses, bread and fat for the bread, and milk, everything you want, just work, work, work hard... [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

> And so one brother took the other brother to court. Because my dad was in the tsarist war for seven years [...] he came and that guy doesn't want to give him land! [...] Well, papa sued him, they faced off in court, then he married into someone else's house. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Work on the land was directly related to diet; in the countryside, people ate almost exclusively products from their own cultivation and breeding. Self-sufficiency was the basic principle of management. The amount and type of harvested product also determined the amount and type of food. Due to the great similarity of agricultural techniques and cultivated crops, peasant food was essentially similar throughout Eastern Europe.[51] The diets of the rich and poor differed more in

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51  For more extensive analyses of the European territories of the tsarist Russian governorates see, among others: R. E. F. Smith, D. Christian, *Bread and Salt. A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984); for Polish territories, see A. Kowalska-Lewicka, Z. Szromba-Rysowa, "Pożywienie…"; J. Bohdziewicz, "Pożywienie," in *Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego*, vol. 3: *Pożywienie i sprzęty z nim związane* (Wrocław, 1996); *Pożywienie ludności wiejskiej* (Kraków, 1973).

terms of the amount of consumed products than in their type or quality. Peasant cuisine was definitely plant-based. As estimated by Smith and Christian,[52] at the end of the nineteenth century in European Russia (including the Vilnius and Grodno governorates of interest to us), food consumption on average was 40% cereal products, 22% potatoes, 9–12% other vegetables and fruits (especially cabbage and legumes), only 20–30% animal products (especially dairy products), and only 2–4% meat and animal fats (usually during religious holidays). This composition of the diet was related to economic considerations: where land was scarce, agriculture – and not livestock farming – was more profitable because it took at least ten times more arable land to feed animals whose meat could provide the same amount of calories as grain and vegetables.

A peasant's menu was thus directly related to farming: people grew crops primarily for their own needs; only a small part of the harvest was sold. At the same time, peasants avoided buying food from outside their own production, not only for economic reasons; self-sufficiency, which ensured relative autonomy and independence from the outside world, served to additionally strengthen the internal unity of the family, closing it in a circle of people connected not only by blood ties, but by shared production and consumption. Self-produced food, commonly known as "our own," marked the boundary between familiarity and alienation.

However, food bought in some way was also associated with agricultural work: the prices of salt and sugar were converted into the daily value of wage labor. These calculations, even from prewar times, remain deep in the memory of interlocutors, who are able to recite food prices in particular political periods over the last several dozen years.

> Sugar was also very expensive. A kilo of sugar cost 80 Polish [prewar] groszy! And for a zloty, there were such days that I reaped for a whole day for one zloty. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

Eating was also associated with farm work in that work determined a specific rhythm of the day; it also regulated the time and place of meals and – in part – their character. Depending on the season and the current work calendar, people ate at home or in the fields so as not to interrupt work for an unnecessarily long period of time. Therefore, meals had to be – on the one hand – easy to heat up, and – on the other hand – easy to transport to the workplace.

> There was no such dinner in the countryside, and at my place, for example, there was no such dinner as dinner... *But what was there instead?* Mostly for this dinner you were

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52  R. E. F. Smith, D. Christian, *Bread and Salt…*

out there somewhere, outside the home. *At work, somewhere in the field?* In the field. It was only such a dinner-supper, rather, you would already come for dinner, when everyone did everything on the farm, they cleaned up after themselves, the animals and everything there, well, you would come home, wash and then dinner. But that's late in the summer. [P. Top.k.kat.50]

The caloric value of meals, necessary to perform physical work in the field, was also important. One ate in order to be able to work, and one worked to have enough to eat. Hence the belief that men who work harder should receive a meal considered more valuable and higher in calories, especially meat and fat, as opposed to women, who can settle for something lighter, not necessarily meat.

### "Consumption Minimalism"

Although food was important because of the energy it provided for work, no special attention was paid to the cooking and preparing of meals, especially on a daily basis, on weekdays. Women working in the field could not spend too much time on kitchen work, so meals had to be, above all, simple and not very labor-intensive:

Well, then no, they baked, but... no, I mean... There were big groups in the hut, where to bake for everyone here? Where's that grandma, where to stand all day, to bake these potatoes? If you have to work out there. [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

Anna Kowalska-Lewicka and Zofia Szromba-Rysowa, describing the food consumed by Polish peasants from the beginning of the twentieth century, claim that it was characterized primarily by "consumption minimalism;" because production was more important than consumption, everyday meals were of relatively low importance, and excessive cooking was treated as a waste of time.[53] There is a striking similarity across the entire described terrain between preparation techniques – the most economical in terms of time (especially cooking and frying) – and the dishes themselves. In general, soups or mash were prepared quickly once a day. This made the daily menu extremely monotonous.

It always had to be there for breakfast, it had to be... There was no special kind of bread, because you baked bread only once in a while, there was such stale bread, there weren't buns in those days, unless you made them yourself. So yes: milk soup. *Daily?* Almost every day. *But the kind with carrots, what did Grandma Fela used to give us?* Not necessarily, because there were all kinds of milk soup. Everyday... Enough of that, later in my youth I ate no milk soup at all. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

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53  A. Kowalska-Lewicka, Z. Szromba-Rysowa, "Pożywienie…"

Witold Staniewicz, author of a 1923 monograph on the village of Matujzy Bołondziszki in the Lida region discussed here, gave a detailed description of the village inhabitants' diet which largely corresponds to the accounts of our interlocutors. There were usually two soups for breakfast – bland and sour soups, along with bread or potatoes. The opposition of these two flavors – expressive (sour) and flat (bland) – was the main distinguishing feature of the dishes, because individual ingredients were mixed randomly and freely, depending on what was in the kitchen. The same two soups together with buckwheat or millet groats or grated potatoes were eaten for dinner; and for supper: mashed potatoes or milled or topped barley.[54] The type of dishes basically changed only on holiday occasions: on Sundays, when you could afford to spend more time cooking, there are, for example, potato or buckwheat pound cake, yeast pancakes or potato dumplings. On Sundays, meat was sometimes eaten in small amounts as an addition to soups, though it was eaten in large amounts – like other products, including cheese, butter or eggs – only during religious holidays. The weekly menu was therefore strictly in line with the division into weekdays and holidays. A characteristic feature of the peasant menu was the seasonality of consumption, adapted to the seasons and the availability of various products. In summer, instead of hot soups, curdled milk with potatoes or chilled sour milk with chard was served, while in winter, when milk and its products were rarely available, they were replaced with bread kvass (*sołoducha*) made from fermented flour or potatoes.

The household members' culinary preferences were not the most important issue in the daily preparation of meals. It was more about satisfying hunger than satisfying tastes. There is no taste calculation here: good was sour because it meant some distinct flavor, and good was fatty because it provided a lot of energy. The basic criterion for good food was its quantity, not the type. The ability to eat as much as one wanted, the abundance of food, and not the meal's sophistication, are thus what determined the culinary satisfaction of those sitting at the table.

## Family: A Sharing Community

One of the constant themes that appear in memories associated with food is scarcity and hunger, which were in turn closely correlated with the amount of land

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54  W. Staniewicz, *Matujzy Bołondziszki. Wieś powiatu lidzkiego. Studium społeczno-gospodarcze* (Wilno, 1923), 108–109.

owned and the size of the family. Depending on the composition of the family, its structure and prevailing relationships, the quality of food that members ate varied. However, there was also a certain awareness factor at stake here: in the peasant world, food was considered a basic good, a basic resource, and according to the peasant worldview, the amount of goods available to man is generally limited; an excess here causes a deficiency there, and those who reach for a limited good work to the detriment of others. In the family circle, the key issue was the number of people among whom food was to be divided – the smaller the family, the better the food.

> Because I say, he was alone with only one sister, they lived better and we lost everything in court. They had flour and bread and everything. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

> I was the only one at my mother's, the little store was at mother's, I was ok, I had candies and cake, everything. [B.Pap.k.kat.24]

> Well, sometimes there is a large family and little grain. Well, yes – they grated beats and even radish. And which, you know, in case of a smaller family, they made bread from one flour, the bread was delicious. [P.Pot.k.pr.14]

Food, its quality and quantity, therefore serves as an indicator of the family structure; the division of available food products was an additional element determining the internal hierarchy of family members and their mutual interdependence. Talk about food is often talk about good and bad family relations, which are measured by the fair and unfair sharing of food:

> I remember at home we had two children and my father-in-law, mother-in-law, the two of us and two children. They cooked sausage, a whole ring, on Sunday. And they cut it in half, and that's your half, this is ours. And they, my dear, if they have such a ring of that kiełbasa, they have such a piece, and we would cut it for one [child], for the other, and for myself, and for him, and we only got this much. What to do? You had to live like that. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

> Mom said that she went to her mother for milk when Olo was little – my brother was born in 1933, because I was born in 1930. There were such mugs, oh, wider here, they were seventy – you understand, not half a liter, not a liter, but seventy [dl]. It was like this: he poured a half liter, but not all the way, he measures out half a liter and pours it. And my mother says: "Sometimes I go and shed tears around it." Oh, birth mother [it was]! [P.Top.k.pr.30]

## The Experience of Hunger – Memory of Taste

Narratives about times of hunger and scarcity have a specific kind of poetics. These memories always refer to a particular time, when the shortage of food meant that everything eaten at that time was delicious, and they were thus deeply

embedded in memory. These shortages meant that memory took on exceptional clarity, and the meals eaten at that time, their very names, evoke vivid and intense images from the old days. Especially dishes that are no longer served have this evocative power; they become a material sign, a substantiation of the past. These include, above all, oat kissel, which is still made here and there on Christmas Eve, and *sołoducha*, i.e. bread kvass for drinking. Each of these dishes is associated with the oldest, semi-mythical times – ("*Sołoducha* came from our great-grandfathers" [B.Radz.k.pr.42]; "There was kissel for Christmas. They cooked it a long time ago, for centuries" [B.Radz.k.pr.35]) – and constitutes at the same time a specific turning point; its disappearance is associated with the end of a certain world, which goes away with the oldest generation. One talks about the methods of their preparation with great sentiment, reinforcing the narrative with numerous diminutives and exclamation marks, which testify to an emotional attitude toward them. The above-mentioned recipes usually form neat narratives, because they are not only a simple recipe, but a story about a piece of a bygone reality:

> He tosses in potatoes, buckwheat flour, and he mixes them and it turns sour. After it's sour, oh, girls, how tasty! *Tasty?* Oh, tasty! *Sołoducha, because it was sweet or sour, or what?* It's so sour. *And was it drinkable?* Yes, drinkable. And so we grew rye, we would visit people somewhere, to see if made their own rye, and grandmother, stepmother did that, we would do it for the summer, this *sołodushka*, and you get tired, hot, hard work, reap by hand. You can drink a cup, oh yes, better than water! [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

> *How did they cook [kissel]?* How did they cook it? Well, just as they made bread in such bowls, they made this kissel. Well, they already knew how much flour to put in with the oat kissel. They would stir it up with warm water and it sours up somehow. Maybe three days, maybe two, it would sour up but good. Then they strained it in a strainer, strained it twice. And the oat milk was so delicious! [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Kissel and *sołoducha* are "sentimental" dishes, which take on flavor precisely because they are now rare or are not prepared at all. Perhaps it is not their taste that brings back the memory of the past, but the memory of the past and one's youth intensifies their taste; it makes the dishes that were often repeated in the past, which are an inseparable part of that reality, even the most common ones, become exceptionally good. For people born in more recent times, the taste of these dishes is disgusting.[55] For the younger generation, the main objects of memories, real delicacies, are other dishes that have become obsolete in their times, such as home-made bread or cold cuts. Stories about them are characterized by a similar

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55  For me personally, the famous kissel also turned out to be unpalatable.

narrative style, indicating a special stimulation of the senses. At the same time, they are fragments of idealized family memories, of idyllic times of childhood and youth.

> And bread, when my mother would bake bread, I remember it well! It used to be that way, but today, you go to the cold cut shop, it's full... No, back then. Once, when grandma baked bread, when my mother baked bread, even when it had turned green, it was cut out and you ate it for a week. We wouldn't throw it into the garbage can, stale. No, no, my dear, it was different. And now yes, in winter, well, the meat was always salty, the meat and ham were salted and the bacon was beautifully salty, but what if they taught us to spread the skin with garlic, take it, take the skin off, then when grandma put out the bread, then on the table, well, one bread – sniff! We would press it with one of our hands, me or my brother, because there were two of us, with his hands pressed, and then, when the bread is pressed hot, the crust comes off, it is great for spreading. We had ways of our own. [P.Top.m.pr.51]

> In kaszanka a substitute could be used… For example, there were little kidneys, soaked in milk, or in some salted water, the skin was peeled of and they were cut into squares, and in this kaszanka they were like raisins in a yeast roll. It was the most important thing, such little kidneys and such pieces. There must have been some sliced pork in the kaszanka, there was a lot that, back then, I'll say… kaszanka looked very photogenic, because it was dark and the white pork would stick out. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

Memories of old dishes assume almost poetic form with the often-repeated formula "it was delicious!" The interlocutors themselves admit that the tastiness of these dishes is tied above all to time passed and their awareness of its irreversibility. It is therefore a sentiment not so much about food itself, but to a certain reality idealized in memories. Here, taste becomes a temporal property, not a gastronomic one; it is the embodiment, a materialization of the past.

> They used to eat so little once. We would sit down, clay bowls, wooden spoons, we would all sit at the table, five of us, seven with dad and mom. We sat down, put the bowl under our nose, filled with something like barley soup, potatoes in the middle of the table, sat down, and scooped it up, scooped it – tasty! What would it be like now, oh, there would be no taste, not so tasty now... [B.Radz.k.pr.43]

> It's no longer what we used to eat, there's not that smell, not that flavor. This is, I would say, this is the taste of the twenty-first century. [...] Which is why we always return to those years, when something was missing, when this shortage most likely instills in us the fact that we look through the beautiful, colorful glass all our memories and remember these smells, tastes and we miss them, or under the guise of these smells, tastes and memories is a longing for past times. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

## Food as a Metonymy for Life

Food narratives had a broader scope than might be expected; they seemed to be narratives about life in general, its pitfalls and misfortunes. Food appeared here not only as necessary for life, but also as a representation of that life, life's metonymy. The synonymous sequence of bread – food – life also appears in free and imaginative statements, in spontaneously created metaphors of everyday life, even in images that appear in dreams, e.g. where the symbolism of divided bread serves as a sign foretelling the imminent cessation of marital life:

> When I got married, I dreamed of Mother Mary in poor clothes. […] And Mother Mary brought, oh yes – half a loaf of bread, oh, she held it out like that. We shared with my husband. We lived twelve years together. Yes, no one knows how long he will survive. [B.Piel.k.kat.59]

Based on stories from our interlocutors about food, it is clear that the saying "as comes the food, so goes life" is extremely strong in their consciousness. This phenomenon becomes quite understandable when we consider the value of food in the countryside; it is the main concern in life, the object of hard work and associated endeavors, a matter of greatest importance. Which is why everyday food, diet quality, and the amount of food products consumed, together become the essence, the image, and single best proof of what is a good life.

> You don't have to, they have what they have, cows, they have their own food to eat, a piglet in the field, they have what is good and they live. They feed children and live. [B.Sur.k.kat.21]

> Now they have divided that Russia into those republics and... let there be no war, girls. Oh, somewhere there is something going on, and here it is quiet: there is bread, there is something to eat with bread, we keep cows, we keep pigs, and here – that's how we live. [B.Moż.k.pr.25]

The right amount of food guarantees a good and happy life. In turn, the scarcity and lack of food offers an unhappy, hard life. A meager diet is automatically associated with misery. In narratives, like a refrain, there is often a formulaic summary phrase: "life was like this," as if the very story of hunger once experienced was testimony to all other aspects of existence at that time:

> And mom baked the potato pancakes on a baking tray, and in such a large bowl, because there were five of us, along with papa and mother seven, and then my mother would season them with a little fat and mix it up, so you look at the one that is fattest and the best – oh, that was my life. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Even when economic conditions change and food supplies are sufficient, attitudes toward food do not change fundamentally; food is still the main value. Satiety, the possibility of filling one's stomach, becomes a kind of "catching up," making up for past losses, compensation for past times, the proper completion of life:

> But you buy something and eat it, and my husband says: "Eat, we were so tired all our lives. All our life, he says, tired, there was nothing to eat, eat it now, though a year or two before death. No, he says, there is nothing to stint – whether it's a tomato now or a cucumber – he'll buy, he says, buy, though we'll try now, because we all lived like this…" [P.Top.k.pr.30]

This constant concern about food quantity is so important to people that it does not leave an individual even at the moment of death; no one knows if there is enough food in the "other world" to suffice for everyone. The threat of a food shortage is an immanent feature of peasant existence – on earth and beyond.

> Our neighbor had a dream, at night before the memorial day she dreamt about her husband. For you [Catholics] there are prayers for the dead for thirty days, and for us [Orthodox] forty [days after death]. And she asks him: "Well, how are you?" And he says, "You know, nothing good. But calm down at least, because our life is not as stupid as yours – all kinds of perestroika. Among us – he says – people are calm, people are better, and there is no money." And his legs were like this, his blood had stopped, no blood was circulating in him. And he died from that. "Wołodia," she says, "do your legs ache?" "No, you know, they don't hurt." "Well, how's it with the food, is it enough?" And he says: "Well, I eat this and that, I don't eat much." But whatever, he was a bit dissatisfied. It means there's not enough food for him. If he had more, it would have been better for him. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

## Everyday Life and Holidays

A characteristic feature of the peasant diet was a strict division between everyday food and holiday food. The more traditional the culture, the stricter this division. While daily consumption was moderate and uniform, the diet changed radically on various types of holidays. Christmas food had to be plentiful and sumptuous. The everyday monotony of dishes was interrupted and replaced by more sophisticated and labor-intensive products. Those consumed on holidays, due to their association with the extraordinary time, took on a special symbolic meaning that went well beyond purely nutritive functions.

No doubt such products included meat, especially pork, which – apart from poultry – was eaten most often in the countryside. Not without significance was the fact that the customary pig slaughtering, which is the primary source of meat intended for consumption, took place just before holidays – once or twice a year,

before Christmas and before Easter. Thus, a great deal of meat was usually eaten only during these two periods, the most important Christian holidays. The consumption of pork was thus inherently associated with religious moments in time; it marked and confirmed the Christian cycle of annual holidays, but also the weekly cycle by refraining on weekdays to save for Sundays:

> They hung like this, the hams were so big all hung up. When I got married, this is how the ham was hanging in this room, I'm afraid to take it, and I want it so much, but you can't, because they, my mother-in-law would cook it only on Sunday, and so there's nothing for every day. [P.Top.k.pr.31]

Eating and abstaining from meat thus gave a material dimension to the division of time into the ordinary and the extraordinary; it sustained this fundamental opposition, giving it a sacral dimension. The kind of behavior that defined a good Christian became the behavior directly related to eating. Abstinence from meat dishes during periods of fasting was also a binding social norm, whose transgression was associated with a violation of religious and moral principles:

> And now, when you go to Ash Wednesday, the woman is holding a piece of sausage and eating. Well, what kind of Christian is she? Oh, I don't believe these people anymore, I don't! [B.Senk.kat.13]

> Well, I say, when there was a fast, it was a fast. And this, well, she gave [the child] sausages, because he was crying, because "I want something to eat." No, it wasn't that way with us. I raised four children, but it was not that way. My children did not cry for sausage. No, fasting is fasting. When it's a sausage, it's a sausage. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Due to its great social significance, but also probably because of the religious zeal involved, fasting often took on radical forms:

> But among the Orthodox it's the old women, they don't eat on the first day [of Easter]. *On the first day they fast?* Yes, they fast, there is a fast. *So still on Sunday, yes?* Yes. And it works like this, if one eats supper on Thursday, then you eat the consecrated food only on the second day of Easter, and then you don't eat the whole time. It's older here, oh, my neighbor. *But in general, there is something for fasting?* Something to drink, you drink a little there, but nothing to eat, not at all. And you go to confession, to communion. *Well, they have a woman's health!* Yes, they faint sometimes, but now that's it... [P.Top.k.pr.25]

No doubt, in addition to the religious significance, strict adherence to fasting – abstaining from not only meat dishes, but also from dairy products such as butter or milk, and from hearty meals in general – had a social, economic and partly psychological basis. Fasting was a kind of panacea for the lack of food in the countryside, it was an ethical and religious justification for a difficult living situation. For religious reasons, hunger became a moral virtue, transforming

material poverty into spiritual wealth. In this way, poverty becomes something of value and hunger leads to holiness. In the past, people thus fasted not only on days specially designated by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches but also when it was not religiously ordered, but at most recommended – on individual days of the week throughout the year. At those times, not only meat was not consumed, but also such other "luxury'" products as milk, butter, and eggs.

> Fasting was not like it is now – fasting – no one follows the fast, but back then fasting was fasting. *So, what did you eat?* Well, there was the fast, that's it. Maybe some flax seed. Or like this: cook a soup, as we would call it – a broth, cut the potatoes, and then all the garlic halves, throw it in and boil it, boil it, sit down and eat. And it was tasty. And now – I have to add pork scratchings or milk, but not back then. *Milk was not used during the fast?* No, not drunk. Fasting is fasting. Only they ate everything on Sunday, maybe Monday and Tuesday, I don't remember anymore, maybe Monday just like that, and Wednesday was everything, until Sunday, and that's how people lived... [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

> They fasted very strictly, not so much during Advent. Even this frying pan, which baked bacon, they would scrub it down. And only on Sunday could you have a piece of meat or prepare a soup. Tuesday, Thursday, Monday was with milk, and Wednesday, Friday, Saturday was a dry fast. [B.Was.k.kat.08]

When food supplies increased in the countryside, people no longer justified fasting with economic reasons, and restrictive moral principles were thus loosened. Today, people fast for religious reasons alone because they are not forced to do so by other circumstances. The number of fasting days is therefore definitely limited, and prohibitions apply primarily to eating meat. Still, fasting comes with a certain high regard:

> My son and daughter are here in Fasty. And they are doing a fast-day dinner in Fasty, and a saint's day in Fasty, the Feast of the Cross. And we go there. We go to Janek's for lunch: fish, potatoes with oil, herring. And they say something about it being a day of fasting, and the in-law parents [of Ela] from Gródek said: "And I thought that Ela didn't have a sausage, that she didn't cut it." You see I'm an old person, you see. Different people. Maybe Ela ate like that at home, but when she came to us, to our family, it was different. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

It is worth drawing attention to one more aspect related to the consumption of meat. Because it was eaten quite rarely, on special occasions, it had not just a particular material value, but also symbolic value. Hospitality without meat seemed to be an incomplete feast, revealing that the hosts were cheap or poor. In this sense, serving meat had, and still has, a ritual character; it is an expression of a special honor extended to guests, but also a sign of the hosts' generosity.[56]

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56  Many times during our stay in the field, we were tormented by the sacrificial hospitality

As I remember, my mother told me, sometimes she cried that beggars like that came to us, poor folks, and we had to... the *sołtys* [village chief] sent them around the village – today to this cottage, tomorrow to this, the day after tomorrow to another one. And he brought this man to mother on New Year's Eve, understand, on New Year's Eve he brought this man to mother, for the night. And my mother went to my grandmother and said: "Mom, give me at least a few pieces of pork fat." "What do you need it for?" "Well, the *sołtys* brought a man for the night and I want to make pork rinds with potatoes." "Ooh, if it was for yourself, but for a stranger!" And she did not give her anything. My mother walked all the way back and cried, and she did not give her anything. And my mother, like for the fast, cooked up some potatoes and milk, and it was New Year's Eve. And this person ate what we ate. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

The terms "fast" and "with fasting" were often used as a synonym for a meat- or dairy-free dish, one that lacked the necessary connection with its religious aspect. The omission of fasting's sacred function can also be seen in other situations, such as when hospitality is involved, when the customary prestige given to meat dishes calls for a break with religious prohibitions.

It was not only the connection with religious events that gave food sacred features. In traditional peasant culture, eating meals together in the household was one of the main scenes of family life, which was also accompanied by certain rules and norms indicating the importance and seriousness of the act of eating itself. Eating family meals together mediated between the holy and the everyday. Strict rules of behavior at the table and the nature of their justification ("Whoever moves a leg while eating is swayed by the devil"[57]) demonstrate that even daily eating was not treated as an entirely secular activity, which is also evidenced by the custom of saying prayers before and after each meal, later limited only to such festive occasions as Christmas Eve and Easter. Such a phenomenon is also mentioned by prewar sources and by some interlocutors from more traditional families. "Eating was once a serious, dignified activity. It was customary to eat slowly, carefully, and put a spoon on the table after each bite. […] The custom of crossing oneself before and after eating is still common. [...] When eating, one dares not laugh – the old folks said – it's 'a sin.'" [Dworak., KS, 230]

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of our Belarusian hosts. With great anticipation, we waited for Friday, when – using the excuse that we were obligated to fast, we were able to get around the compulsory consumption of more pork fat. Unfortunately, we often heard the response: "First of all, you are on a journey, second, you are still children," and we thus missed the opportunity for any dispensation. However, our young age did not save us from having to drink another glass of strong moonshine.

57  A. Saloni, *Zaściankowa szlachta polska w Delejowie* (Kraków, 1912), 65.

> We all sit at the table, we say the Lord's Prayer, then... we do not sit down, we stand, we say the Lord's Prayer, then we sit down, eat, eat everything, then we say the Lord's Prayer, we cross ourselves. I have already told you: when they sat down, there had to be silence at the table! If you moved your legs – daddy would give it to you! If you talk – put down the spoon! *You had to eat in silence all the time?* Yes, when they sat down behind the table – silence! They say: When I eat, I am deaf and dumb. They say it's a sin to talk at the table. [B.Radz.k.pr.42]

Food-related accouterments were also given respect, especially the table, which was the sacred center of the house, dividing the household space into the everyday and the festive. There were certain rules of behavior toward the table, confirmed by numerous sources: it was not allowed to sit on the table, put a child on the table, or a hat or a comb, etc. Dworakowski devotes a longer passage to this matter:

> Among household accouterments, the table used to be especially respected by people, which in the old hut always stood in a ceremonial corner, opposite the chimney and the stove. Bread lay on a table covered with a tablecloth, testifying to the hut's abundance, and next to it were pictures of the Lord Jesus and the saints. [...] In more recent times, more pious people set up a home altar with the table by placing a cross on it or a picture of a particularly venerated patron saint. [...] Among the people, the table was a festive accouterment for ceremonial occasions. It was sat at only during the most important annual or family rituals and hospitable feasts. [Dworak., KS, 223]

The sacred corner with a table is found in Belarus to this day (photos 28 and 29), both among Catholic and Orthodox Christians; it is the common element in the organization of domestic space in a guest room. Here, however, it is no longer a table that would be used to eat on festive occasions, but rather a large piece of furniture, usually standing in the center of the guest room and no longer exhibiting such obvious signs of "holiness." The table in a traditional *pokuć* (a holy corner in a home) is reduced to a small piece of equipment, used most often – in addition to the base for candles lit under the "holy" pictures hanging on the walls (for Orthodox Christians hanging in the corner, for Catholics – on the walls near the corner) – as a shelf under the TV. The spatial dimension of the sanctity of food is also practically invisible today.

Another example of the sacralization of food is when a special power – apotropaic, healing and magical – is attributed to certain foods by including them in ritualistic activities accompanying various rites. Here, bread and salt are used most often, appearing especially in rites of passage related to the most important stages in human life – at funerals, baptisms and weddings – and in various contexts and activities explained in various ways by their performers and

by ethnographers and cultural experts interpreting such behavior.[58] Numerous ethnographic sources, as well as materials collected in the field, document such common activities as putting bread and salt into a cradle for a child (a sign of acculturalization) or into a deceased person's coffin; giving bread and salt to godparents and young people on the path to church (to ward off evil along the way), greeting newlyweds after returning home, or offering a final goodbye to the deceased, with bread and salt (the beginning of a new stage in life). Thus, these activities function generally as a signal of a changed situation and, on the other hand, as a defense against dangers associated with such change. Interpretations like these, as read in Federowski's work and overheard in the field, are strikingly similar:

> "With us, when the godparents go off to the baptism, grandma twists garlic and a lump of salt into a rag, puts it all in her breast pocket and in the child's nappy, so that no one casts a spell on the godparents and the baby on the way." [Feder., 1646]

> Here, when a person dies, whether Polish or Orthodox, they immediately put a loaf of bread and salt on the table in the room where the deceased lies. *But why?* Well, because they take him in with bread and salt and say goodbye with bread and salt. And then the bread is on the table, and those who are already there, they cut it and eat it. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The same food items – bread, salt, and sometimes sugar – appear quite often in magical procedures related to folk medicine, especially with "*zamawianie*" (from the verb *zamawiać*, to say prayers to ward off illness), which are still popular in these territories today. Foods play an auxiliary role here, and their strength is increased by a special prayer uttered during treatment.

> But my mother-in-law, when she *zamawiała*, you know, it helped. But she also *zamawiała* with bread? Bread, water. A lot [of sick people] came, really a lot. And with young children. *But what diseases did she remove?* Fear and different spells. *And was it ordinary bread?* Plain black bread, cut off a little piece of bread and that's it. Or the water, that's just over the water – she says, she says, and she will collect it in this water, give it back to the sick woman to drink it on an empty stomach. And the bread must be eaten on an empty stomach the next day. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

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58  There is already quite extensive literature on this subject (for example the above-cited P. Kowalski, *Chleb nasz powszedni…*; K. Łeńska-Bąk, *Sól ziemi…*; J. S. Wasilewski, *Tabu…*), so I will not devote too much space to it here, although the source material available is in fact huge.

> Then, as they say in our village: the cow has been bitten by a snake and its udder hurts. It is he [the ordering party] who prays over the bread. He cut off a piece, gave it to eat and the pain would go away. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The procedure of "hexing" (*podrabianie*) that is, the use of magical forces in order to harm another person, had an opposite meaning to ordering. Foods with negative power here are primarily vodka, sometimes also eggs.

> The husband of the neighbor's daughter went into the army, and she began to fancy someone else. Her in-laws hexed her; they went outside Lida to someone who hexed. The father himself told me that they had hexed her. They hexed her on vodka. And when the time for which they hexed comes, she was in such pain everywhere! And she went to Wołkowysk and she got it removed and was healthy. [B.Myt.k.kat.23]

> They put down the eggs. In winter I can see – there is an egg under the pigsty. I took it and threw it into the orchard. Maybe I took it unnecessarily. And now I'm sick. Suddenly I fall, then good again. [B.Myt.k.kat.23]

Bread, salt, eggs, vodka – all these foods, due to their use in various exceptional and unusual situations related to both rural and temple rituals (more on that in a moment), and because they are foods consumed simply every day, were part of the merging of everyday life with festivity, domesticating religiosity as something commonplace, practiced in the most ordinary of everyday activities.

## Generational Change – Breaking Tradition

Most of the people I was able to talk to belong to a generation born before the war. Such is the demographic condition of Belarusian, and especially Polish, villages in the border area under examination; they are mainly inhabited by elderly folks. Therefore, the world presented in their statements is a world dying with them, one which no longer finds continuation in the lives of younger generations.

In one of his essays, Wiesław Myśliwski diagnoses the agonizing state of peasant culture: "[…] peasant culture has lost the clash against encroaching civilization, even one as frail as in the Polish version. It was set up to lose. To the culture of poverty and isolation, civilization offered to raise the standard of living and work conditions and to open up to the world. The temptations are too great to be resisted."[59] The process by which peasant culture is becoming extinct can be traced on the basis of statements made by people from the postwar generation, in which their attitude to their parents and grandparents' cuisine perfectly

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59  W. Myśliwski, "Kres kultury chłopskiej," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22–23 V 2004.

illustrates the social and cultural change that has taken place in the countryside over the course of the last half century.

The strong relationship between food and the peasant ethos began to loosen as farming ceased to be the villagers' only occupation. Improvements in agricultural-production technology also played a significant role. At this time, the role and value assigned to manual labor changed:

> They live like lords now, really. Now no housewife knows the harvest, because they've mown it there, spread it out with a combine and everything. The digger will only go and collect the potatoes, and you used to have to dig so much with the hoe. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

Shops in the countryside emerged with relatively cheap food, more and more of which found its way onto tables. Hunger ceased to be a constant threat to the peasant's existence. The lifestyle and, in part, mentality of young people brought up in the "modern" postwar times have also changed. All of these cultural and social changes are reflected in the peasant cuisine.

One of the main differences between the older and younger generations of housewives is the completely different style of cooking. Older housewives pay little attention to their culinary skills, as cooking was not considered a special skill; it was rather an activity that came out on its own, without any special preparation or study. Cooking skills were an integral part of the social role of every woman, whose most important responsibility was to prepare meals for the entire family.

> *And who did you learn to cook from – from this grandmother or from your stepmother?* How to put it? From here and there. And from myself. *From yourself too?* Sure, you see someone doing it and you do it yourself. And you live more and you apply yourself. [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

> *And where did you learn to cook, from your mother?* Oh, by myself. My mother was there, my mother knew how to cook, she could do everything well, and I... my mother always did everything, she baked, and I didn't watch, and she said to me: "If I die, you will be nothing, you won't cook anything." I say: "Mom, I'll cook." So, by myself, I can cook too. Well, maybe something like that is better, maybe I can't do that, but something like that, I will. *And all in your head, all these recipes?* Well, I do it without recipes. Well, if you do it according to a recipe, you need to have a scale to be serious about everything, and I don't have one. So, that's it. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

When asked about recipes, or rather ways of preparing specific dishes, respondents generally had difficulties providing specific measures and weights, which proves that they were not used to this type of meal preparation. The art of cooking for them is not a discursive knowledge, but a practical one, integrated through

observation and experience. When asked about the recipe for wonderful pancakes, which she always offered us when we visited, Mrs. Wala replies:

> *A teaspoon, two?* No, no, girls, I have three fingers of everything, salt, and sugar, I have no sense of a teaspoon. My dear, but not too much, girls, don't pour too much baking soda, you will spoil the pancakes. Just that much soda [she shows us]. […] We'll bake it again, you'll spend the night, you can bake by yourselves tomorrow, and you will start to cook. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Knowledge of a recipe could not be separated from the cook herself, who had everything in her head and the necessary measures in her fingers or in her eye. This knowledge was embedded, extra-linguistic knowledge, a kind of *metis*. Her skills required participation, co-presence, practicing on one's own, apprenticeship. The ability to cook was also an inseparable element of social life; its development resulted from social contacts and mutual observation.

> *And where do you get the recipes from? Did you come up with it on your own or did you get it from someone?* Not there, from someone. Someone was doing something there, you ask. Now, this woman named Genia came to me during Spas and she also brought me, she brought a bun, and such a nice one. I think to myself: I'll try. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

> *Do you have all the recipes in your head?* Yes, almost everything in my head, there are some records, but mostly in the head. Only when I marinate something, I write down the marinade, but everything else from my head. *Where do you write it from, newspapers?* No, I will go somewhere, ask how to do it, then I do it myself. [B.Radz.k.pr.43]

Working together in the kitchen was one of the main channels by which women's culture was communicated: women cooking together had the opportunity to improve their skills, but also to exchange life wisdom, set standards for the qualities of a good hostess, wife and mother, and a proper life. For women, the kitchen was one of the most important places for socialization. Men, who socialized themselves through "male" jobs and did not participate in this sphere of life, were unable to cook. This clear division of work into male and female showed the complementary nature of the two social roles: a man could not do without a woman, and vice versa:

> I got married before the war. Then I went to war. So my dad took this woman from the *khutor* [settlement, or hamlet], because the mother was taken by her daughter and he was the only one left. Well, there was no one to cook for him. So he took a *khutoranka*, a woman. And they lived here until I came back. [B.Radz.m.pr.17]

Cooking fulfilled a social role because cooking was always for someone. Food was supposed to support the existence of the entire family. Widows who live

alone often cease to pay any attention to cooking – this activity, deprived of its social dimension, ceases to be important:

> They did it, they used to do everything, children. Whom to do it for now? We have one person each in a cottage, for whom to do it? [...]. For example, where there is a family, they do it. I am now by myself and I don't do it. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

> *You don't want to cook for yourself?* I don't want to. One person doesn't want to. They will come, the holidays are upon us, the grandchildren will come. [B.Pap.k.kat.37]

When young girls started going to schools in the city *en masse* and then settled there permanently, intergenerational contacts in the kitchen necessarily weakened, which led to a complete break in continuity with regard to culinary traditions. Young housewives, born after the war, cook completely differently than their mothers. There is no mutual exchange between the first and the second generations, a fact which is conditioned not only by the greater number of products and the application of more complicated techniques, but also a completely different attitude toward the culinary arts themselves. Cooking is now considered a valuable skill that not everyone is able to learn; hence one's cooking can be better or worse, depending on determination and ability. Thus, cooking has become an individual skill based on the way it is acquired and a distinctive skill based on the way it is presented and the possibility to "show oneself." It becomes a matter of discursive knowledge, but also an art practiced for itself, not only an obligatory activity carried out by a woman-hostess. Unlike their mothers and grandmothers, who simply "cook," young housewives "know how to cook."

> *So which housewife cooks well here?* Well, the younger one does, the more one is around. Well, we know that she is more modern, she will do it better. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

> Back then, people were simpler, they didn't know how to cook. Now they can do it better. [B.Ser.k.kat.13]

The different ways that younger women cook are considered better, more refined, more "modern." So it marks a certain cultural difference, a different attitude toward life. Indeed, it is an indicator of progress and development.

> There was no such culture, there was no such custom, they did not offer plates, only one plate for everyone, a sausage on a single plate and with a hand, like this he gives it. And when I was at weddings, it was not so noble then. Why, now they give wedding receptions fit for a count! [P.Top.k.kat.14]

Some foods are no longer cooked because of a decline in the production of certain crops (e.g. oats and buckwheat, which are now more for animals than humans) and the appearance of cheap food in stores. Oat kissel and buckwheat

*sołoducha*, which took a long time to prepare, have been replaced by relatively inexpensive store products – powdered kissel and bottled drinks. It is characteristic that even older people, despite the previously described sentiment toward oat kissel, quickly switched to "industrial" kissel, and they have no restrictions on using the same name for two completely different dishes – in terms of composition, preparation and taste.

> We cook the kissel from oats. And red kissel. *Red? From what?* Oh, you buy, for example, cherry flavored. *Ahh, from the store...* just like that, in stores. That's what we cook. Both in a way that is thick, and in a way we can drink. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

> We would put this oat kissel on the stove to make it sour a little, and then you need to put it through a strainer and into a pot, and mix everything, mix it and bring it to a boil, it gets thick. And when you buy red kissel, you just boil it like... For me it's blueberry, put it in a pot and mix everything up, mix it up and it's ready, then I take it out and it cools. And you have kissel. [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

The young generation of housewives no longer knows and is in no way interested in learning how to prepare old dishes, which required much more work and were not as impressive as modern dishes, which come from a multitude of recipes and use ingredients that are readily available today. There is no connection between the old and the new; rather, there has been a radical break.

> I know how to cook kissel, I cook it. *And your daughters, are they able to cook it?* No, they aren't. *They don't know?* They don't like it and they don't eat it too much. I make kissel, it's my specialty, I know how to make it, my daughters, they don't. *Do daughters cook differently?* Yes, they just make instant kissel... [P.Top.k.pr.30]

> *Would you know how to make kissel?* Oh, probably not anymore. Because you need oats, you need to soak the oats, you have to squeeze it, you have to strain it, I don't know if I would be able to do it. No, because it's just… I don't know if I could bake bread, certainly not. Sure, I would bake bread, because it's a reasonable person who knows what it is about, but it would not be this bread, like bread baked in the countryside. It must be left to rise for some time, leavened for some time, somehow it must be kneaded. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

However, the disappearance of some dishes has been caused not only by technological and economic changes, but also, and perhaps above all, by changes in culture and consciousness. By rejecting the old dishes, younger women are also renouncing a certain lifestyle – peasantness, the rustic, the traditional – all of which in the "modern" world, in the common understanding, is stigmatized as "inferior" and associated with poverty and backwardness. The interruption of the intergenerational transfer is therefore, above all, an expression of a lack of interest in the old culture and the old world, a rebellion against that way of life,

a desire to "break away" from an unpleasant and – in the majority view – not very useful heritage. The traditional values of the peasant ethos have depreciated, which one can detect not only in food, but also in many other areas of culture.

Young women do not want to accept, for example, from their mothers traditionally made linen and tablecloths – the hard and tedious physical work that was associated with their preparation, because it is not valued enough to win the competition against fabrics bought in shops – produced industrially and thus in a "modern" way, with the use of fashionable "urban" patterns that go against traditional "rural" tastes.

> *When did people stop weaving?* Now weaving is not in fashion, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago, maybe more. When we weaved, my God, we had to weave for children, this and this and this had to be woven for children. And now they don't want our weaving. They went into town and they don't want ours. Better for them that it is bought. And they don't want it, or they throw ours at our feet. [B.Ser.k.kat.43]

> They weaved at night, without eating, without drinking, they flew with those looms, and now it is just lying around – our work. It lies there until it rots. And those pieces are priceless – no price can be put on them. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Simple dishes, handicrafts, or a certain language dialect (so-called "simple speech") – all of this is associated with despised qualities of peasantness and rusticity, and is therefore rejected. On the other hand, the reputation of some dishes is enhanced by their relation to tradition. This is the case, for example, with typical Christmas dishes, such as kutia or oat kissel, whose presence on the table testifies to socially valued domestic rituals and family traditions. That having been said, these dishes are no longer prepared as in the past, but are rather ornamental versions of the old dishes (hence the poppy seeds and dried fruits in kutia – unprecedented on peasant tables), which are more a sign of a rich family tradition than a desire to indicate their peasant origin.

## Food as a Material Sign of Social Ties

> Food has a distinctive feature, one that sets it off from the rest of material culture: it is ingested, it is eaten, it goes inside. […] As output of one person and as input into another, food is a particularly apt vehicle for symbolizing and expressing ideas about the relationship of self and other.
>
> A. Meigs, "Food as a Cultural Construction"[60]

In this chapter, I will to take a closer look at how food serves to mark and eliminate borders in the denominational borderland described here, how it is "used" to build relationships within the rural family-neighborhood community. As I wrote above, in the traditional peasant culture, food was associated with the family circle in a special way. Eating meals together every day was a central part of domestic life, uniting people at the table who were linked by blood and who worked the closest alongside one another. In agrarian culture, the symbolism of food is particularly strong because of the work that family members carry out, which is a kind of separate production enterprise, focusing primarily on the production, processing and preparation of food. Meals are therefore a direct result of shared physical work in which the internal structure of the family is confirmed – the mutual, complementary relationship between women and men and the interdependence of all family members: father, sons and brothers focused on "male" work, such as plowing or grain processing, and mother, daughters and sisters focused on such "female" jobs as animal care and cooking. The division of labor in the production of food, and the division of food at its consumption, point directly to the family as a separate social unit and to the specificity of the social structure of the village in which the family plays a fundamental role.

## The Family Circle and the Domestic Sphere

Food also very literally points to another aspect of the family community – the biological bonds that tie. Due to their ability to form "common substance," foods have a special power to form kinship. After all, kinship is the same blood and body, and food builds the body in a purely physical sense, creates a physical community. As W. R. Smith, a scholar of ancient rituals and myths, has written, referring to the equality of blood and milk kinship in Arab cultures: "After the child is weaned, his flesh and blood continue to be nourished and renewed by

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60  Anna Meigs, "Food as a Cultural Construction," *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. Carole Counihan & Penny Van Esterik (New York, London: Routledge, 1997), 95–106. Quoted text appears on pp. 104–105.

the food which he shares with his commensals, so that commensality can be thought of (1) as confirming or even (2) as constituting kinship in a very real sense."[61] Our interlocutors on our terrain also interpreted – in a similar way – milk siblings who establish biological relationships between a mother and a child whom she feeds:

> At home with my mother – this Gypsy woman came, she slept, she had just had a child and Wacek [the brother] was also small, he would sometimes breast feed from this gypsy woman, and then he had a dark complexion, they said from the Gypsy. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

The community of food has a special symbolic power when it comes to building the physical unity of the persons feasting together and their relationships. A family eating a meal together is to be an organic whole. The parallel between food and the internal consistency among those eating, mentioned by Federowski, is significant:

> "When eating a meal, one should avoid spilling salt, because a quarrel in the house could break out." [Feder., 1479]

> "After lunch or another meal you cannot leave uneaten bread on the table, because there would be an argument in the hut." [Feder., 1480]

Thanks to the symbolism of food, deceased ancestors are also included in the community of those eating, and in this way they continue to participate in domestic life. Through food, the family's durability over time is confirmed, and genealogical memory and family continuity are materialized. In most cases today, sharing food with the dead only makes sense metaphorically.

> [On Christmas Eve] We leave everything on the table and go to sleep. Everything is on the table, and the next morning we pick it up from the table. *Why is it left on the table?* I don't know. It's just custom. *That you leave it there?* Yes, that it's left there. And when we sit down and eat, we cry out: "Come to us, everyone from that world, for supper!" *So the souls of the dead come, right?* Well, yes. The souls of the dead: "Come to us for supper." *Do they come?* [laughter] No indeed... You go to the graves and they don't want to talk, and how are they to come for Christmas Eve, but you have to invite them to come, here. [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

Sometimes, however, especially where memories of the deceased are still alive, and when its departure is, for family members, still emotionally painful, eating

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61  William Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 2002) [originally published in 1894], 274.

food together with the deceased, understood very literally, clearly has a compensatory function:

> *And at such a dinner after the deceased has departed, is a place left at the table for the deceased?* W.: Oh yes, still... You come from the cemetery, they have already buried dad, or you bury another deceased... You come home and first you pour a glass full for him. And you put it on the table and cover it with a piece of bread. And then everyone drinks. But first, to him. *And what do you do with this glass for the deceased afterwards?* A: The family drinks the next day. And it stands on the table overnight. W: You can put it on the table, you can put it under his picture. A: And this table is not cleared. It sits on the table. W: It sits there all night, other things can be cleaned, but keep the glass sitting there. Maybe he will come, maybe with his friends... [B.Radz.k.pr.43 (W.), k.pr.l2 (A.)]

> One time, when I buried [my husband], maybe a month hadn't passed yet and I baked pancakes. And I'm sitting here by the kitchen, eating, I say: "Wania, you liked pancakes so much, come to me for a supper." But I ate them all. And I put away an empty pan. At night I dream: he comes, like alive, he turned on the light, looked and walked over from this side of the table and put on the empty pan. So now whenever I eat dinner, I always leave a part of it for him. But it never happened again. And you can see how bad off he is – he was offended by what I did. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The community of the rural family is not only a community of people – living and dead. It also includes the entire farm – animals, livestock, tools, land – confirming their close relationship with people, their prosperity and well-being. Foods, most often blessed at the church, play a role in strengthening these relationships, thanks to which this interdependence acquires a universal, sacred dimension. Sharing blessed food is meant to ensure success in work and to protect home and household from misfortune. Dworakowski reports:

> "The shells of Easter (blessed) eggs, laid with the first sheaf in the barn, were to protect the grain from mice; the belief was that when you put them under the foundation of the house, mice would not enter the house. [...] The bones of a saint were put behind the rafters of a hut to protect it from lightning [...] when buried in a meadow or in the garden, they would scare away moles, and scattered around the field, they destroyed thistle." [Dworak., KS, 81]

> The grain [consecrated on Blessed Virgin St. Mary of the Sowing] now, you know, I don't know who's doing what, but with us it was like that when the farmer goes to sow, then you wipe it, because the little ears of grain, you wipe them and the grain, and he goes to sow the blessed ones. Because I know that my mother always wiped them off, she would put them in a piece of paper and he would make the sign of the cross and then take the grain and sow it. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

The very way of eating festive dishes is closely related to future results of work: careful consumption – as Federowski writes – was supposed to ensure its

careful production: "When eating kutia, one has to take a teaspoon at a time, the harvesters will succeed in doing thin beds" [Feder., 1494]. Thus, what we have here is confirmation of a series of versatile dependencies: food – work – family.

Farm animals are also included in the domestic community through food, and they usually get a share of the food left over from the Easter basket or the Christmas Eve supper. Catholics generally use the wafer, and the Orthodox kutia:

> Once, I remember that even with us there at home, they don't clean anything, yes, oh, everything is laying around, and only on the second day, when dad gets mom to clean it up, because he brings in the hay, goes to divide it up for cows, there were cows, horses, and even... Well, when I came here, we did not share the kutia in our house so that anyone there... Well, you can give a bit for hens, and here it is more so for the Orthodox, you toss a little kutia there for everything, to the pigs and everything, everything. You share with everything.[P.Top.k.pr.25]

This organic relationship between the farm, the household and animals can also be seen in the popular belief that the deceased farmer can "drag" all livestock "with him into the other world." Therefore, after the farmer's death, various types of operations are carried out to prevent the animals from dying out (If someone asks to eat before he dies, then the animal dies. Then you have to take the food and bury it in the grave. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]). There is also a known custom of knocking on the doors of barns and rooms where animals are kept at the time of the farmer's death:

> W.L.: They say when they take a dead man out, you have to go to the pigsty, wake up all the animals, and open the door for a moment. W.R.: What for? W.L.: Oh, many reasons. I didn't wake anything up. W.R.: You don't need to wake up anything. W. L .: I blessed them and that's it, you go: "God, let the animals be fertile and give birth to young. He has lived his entire life." I myself will pray like that. We did nothing to him [the deceased father]. And at my mother's, when our grandmother died, they instructed us to go, wake up all the animals – they instructed my mother to do this – knock on the door, wake up the animals, open everything. And within a year the cow died, and two pigs and chickens died. Everything followed her. Woke up and woke up! *So now you just blessed the animals?* W.L.: I myself, I walk around the house like this: "May God give as best He knows." Why do I need such poverty: I will take the deceased from the house and drag the animals along. [B.Radz.k.pr.43 (W. L.), k.pr.38 (W. R.)]

The role of the pig is significant here, as it has a strong symbolic relationship with the souls of the dead and with family life. Ethnographic sources describe various beliefs about the breeding, feeding and selling of pigs, and they show that those beliefs – as a system – were inextricably linked with the idea of a home and household. When selling a pig, various steps had to be taken to symbolically separate it from the household, so as not to lose the "good" – that is, the

prosperity that would come with breeding the remaining animals on the farm. As Dworakowski writes:

> If a farmer was taking piglets to the fair, his wife would throw salt on them. [...] The buyer, having bought a piglet, took a handful of straw from the wagon on which the piglets were lying. The farmer, of course, frowned on this because he did not want to give away the "good" with the straw from the wagon, because he believed that his pigs would get sick. [...] "You evidently want to take me with everything, with the whole nest." [Dworak., KS, 202]

Pigs, as the subject of farm operations, also participate in various activities directly related to food – its preparation and its consumption. The magic associated with food works here on both sides – it has a beneficial effect on both household members and animals, which only confirms their mutual interdependence. This can be seen, for example, in the case of baking bread: "For pigs to be healthy, when putting the bread in the oven, you have to take the dough and throw it into the pig's trough" [Feder., 2054]. "If the kneading-bowl breaks, you have to tear the currant leaves, mix them with the dough, bake unleavened bread and make leaven out of it; if it sits there a day to four, pour it out to the pigs and the bread will be good." [Feder., 2272]

It should be remembered that pork was of exceptional importance in the festive peasant diet. Smith and Christian report that in the Russian provinces, it was usually the only type of meat eaten by peasants, apart from poultry and (much less often) mutton, and only on holiday occasions; hence its symbolism. Let us recall that the percentage of meat consumed in relation to other foods at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in peasant families from these areas was only about 2–4%. Therefore, "the presence or absence of meat from the peasants' diet was regarded as the clearest measure of the quality of the diet, as a good measure of an improvement or decline in living standards generally, and also as a sensitive indicator of class distinction."[62] Pork was thus extremely valuable, and its symbolism was additionally strengthened by the fact that twice a year there was a family pig-slaughter ritual, when the carcass was fairly divided among individual family members. Even today, such a division determines the strength of mutual relationships and the position one holds in the family:

> When we slaughtered a pig, it was like this: a quarter for Irena [daughter], a quarter for Władek [son]. Well, Irena shares it with Wojtek [her son]. And a half for ourselves. Later, when they come again, it is again piece by piece. So to be sold, nobody is selling.

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62   R. E. F. Smith, D. Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 260.

> This year we slaughtered a calf, and it went this way: a quarter for everybody. Well, I got a little from Wojtek and a little from myself, and then I gave some to Jarek's [a neighbor's] mother. And besides, for relatives, it came out to be just a quarter for each. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

The division of the carcass also indicated the boundaries of family and neighborhood relationships; it defined the borders of familiarity and alienness. The group of people sharing pork belonged to the nearest group of closely related or interdependent people. Some pieces of meat were intended for the closest neighbors, and giving meat to them somehow confirmed and strengthened those bonds. One important factor in the structure of contacts determined in this way was the amount and type of meat offered, which demonstrates the degree of one's closeness to the family that carried out the slaughter:

> Because once I got such fresh meat... When I was an adult but had no children yet, and I went and they [parents] killed a pig and there was a custom that they had a quarter for me, a quarter for my brother and the rest for themselves. *Was that the division?* Yes, only we had to make a choice about who took the front and who took the back, so that no one would interfere anymore, because the half of it was already divided for us. So once I took the back and another time my brother took the back. I went there and that's how the meat was lying, in piles. I say: "Mom, what is this meat here in piles, it must be taken from here and this paper rolled up, because this..." And she says that it is for this person, for that person, and for someone else. I have to take more. [...] And this slaughtered pig was still used by a lot of people, because there were so many people, that's nice, I liked it very much that when they slaughter a pig, you need to give it to this neighbor, that neighbor, that one and then another one, and also to this cousin, and more. So it was not that they themselves sat happily by this pig and devoured it there, and there it was, only that they were still sharing. It was great, because many times there was such a surprise: I come home from school and my mother says: "Well, today we have fresh meat." "So who slaughtered pig?" And it was immediately obvious: someone had slaughtered a pig.[P.Top.k.kat.50]

Giving away meat from slaughter signified and built not only family relations, but also neighborly relations, setting the boundaries of familiarity and closeness. However, apart from this symbolic function, it also played a purely practical role: meat increased the quality of the diet by building up the community's physical body.

Strong family ties with the farm and household are also confirmed in the symbolism of household utensils associated with food. Among them, the bowl for making bread was of particular importance because it represented the entire household and its well-being. In a cornerstone ritual, "the farmer carried a bread bowl between the foundations of the house under construction, turned it over, and covered it on the bottom with a tablecloth, and the wife put down food and

drink" [Dworak., KS, 212]. The bowl could be lent to no one or taken across the threshold for fear of bringing about failure in baking:

> "And the kneading bowl, my mother used to say that Papa did not let her lend the kneading bowl. *Why?* You can't lend the kneading bowl because then the bread won't work." [P.Top.k.pr.30]

The kneading bowl was handled in a special way; it became part of rituals testifying to its important role on the farm:

> "In our village it is the fashion that after putting the bread into the oven, the wife picks up the bowl from the floor and the place where the bowl stood, she splashes or pours water into a cross and she crosses herself, because that place is important, where the bowl once stood." [Feder., 2290]

> "When the bowl is broken, having removed the dough, you have to take it outside, without cleaning it, for the pigs to gnaw, so that it gets scared and then the bread will come out the best." [Feder., 2271]

The bread bowl was directly related to the baking of homemade bread, which was the center of family life, its sacred center, where all family members gathered. This activity was the woman's domain; hence the oft-attested symbolism of the bowl, the bread and the housekeeper: "Where girls are at home, as soon as they put the bread into the oven, you have to quickly cover the bowl and take it to the chamber so that they can get married quickly" [Feder., 2291]. It was also believed that the taste of bread is inextricably linked with the woman who gives it a characteristic "*kiś*" (special "spice"); that is why lending a bowl from home was associated with the danger of changing the taste.

The economic change taking place, which resulted in the appearance of commercial bread in homes, did not go hand in hand with cultural change: for a long time there was no social acceptance for the abandonment of this important domestic ritual. Buying bread posed a serious threat to the traditional model of the peasant family, where the structural legitimacy of the family as a group of interdependent people in all spheres of life was confirmed precisely in homemade bread. Therefore, even after initial attempts to switch to "store bought" bread, there was often a return to homemade bread.

> I was in primary school, most people bought bread. Then there was a break, somehow, that my father also decided that we would bake bread, which means that my mother would bake bread because he did not like the [store-bought] bread. *Your father decided to bake* [bread] *and your mother had to do it, right?* Exactly, it was exactly like that, because he did not like it [the store-bought bread], he just didn't, because he worked hard, because he had to use this scythe or shovel, so we liked this baked bread very much too,

it was such a break, you lived for a few years with bought bread, and then we went back to leaven and bread. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

Relations within a family must have changed for the good before store-bought bread appeared in homes. A change in taste concerned not only the sensory sphere, but also the socio-cultural sphere: there must have been loosening within the traditional family model based on the close interconnection and interdependence of its members.

## The Family-Neighborhood Community

In rural communities, family ties were extended to include neighbors, which gave that community relationship a family-like quality. Family-neighborhood ties have never been individual in nature; they have never been so much connected by individual people as by members of individual families, who were viewed through the prism of their ancestral affiliation. Therefore, such inter-family relationships were generally permanent; they sometimes lasted for several generations, reinforced by subsequent acts and rituals.

Food shared with others was a visible manifestation of these connections, and often a way to establish or renew them. The circulation of food as a gift marked the network of intra-village sympathies and dependencies as well as the degree of rapprochement between neighboring families; it organized and sustained the village's social structure. Acts of food exchange were common both in everyday life and in festive life, and their various forms and functions are reminiscent of Mauss' idea of the exchange of gifts as a whole social fact. "In these *total* social phenomena, as we propose to call them," Mauss writes, "all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types."[63]

Mauss emphasized the longevity of relationships concluded through the exchange of gifts. Once given, a gift obligates the recipient to position himself in some relation to the giver and to assume certain obligations toward him. The gift requires that we accept and reciprocate the donor. "To refuse to give, or to fail to invite, is – like refusing to accept – the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse."[64] A gift, therefore, is a kind of long-term

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63  Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton & Co., 1967), 1 [originally published in *L'Année Sociologique* in 1925].

64  Ibid., 11.

transaction that puts both parties on the path toward mutual bonds that foster the maintenance of social relationships.

In peasant communities, food exchange covered the entirety of social life in its many aspects. We might say that almost every social interaction was mediated precisely by gifts of food: on festive occasions, such as religious or family holidays, and in everyday situations, such as during help in the field and on the farm, during a pig slaughter, when borrowing food products. Considering the high value of food at a time when there were great food shortages in the countryside, gifts of food were indeed obligatory, while also serving as a guarantor of assistance in difficult times for the family. They had an additional power, which has already been mentioned in part: they were not only obligatory, but they somehow also internalized the receiver's debt toward the giver; it made him materially related to the giver, permanently inscribed in the circle of "almost relatives."

Sharing food within the family-neighborhood community also had a significant impact on its material survival; to some extent, it leveled economic disparities: poorer folks were able to survive periods of hunger, and richer people ensured the social prestige that came with being generous and devoted givers. Village community life was therefore inherently associated with some form of food exchange – each family participated in it as both a producer and a consumer, giver and recipient. Food sharing was an indispensable part of social life.

One form of exchange involved, for example, family-wide celebrations – baptisms, weddings, funerals – which always went beyond the family circle. Birth or death, setting up a new family, were all events that happened on the scale of the entire village; they foreshadowed some kind of change that was significant for every inhabitant, and they therefore had to be properly announced through a sumptuous feast, as large as possible. The abundance and variety of food (such an occasion was a sufficient reason for a slaughter; thus, for example, meat, which was otherwise rarely eaten, appeared on the table) constituted a break from the daily monotonous peasant diet, and thus materially marked the uniqueness of the situation.

The important role played by this abundance and diversity is evidenced by the fact that in the past, on such family occasions, additional potluck events were held to which the guests themselves brought various dishes (women) and alcohol (men). In this way, even in the case of events celebrated in poorer families, the opportunity to eat as much as one wants was ensured, fulfilling – in a way – the social model of Christmas consumption. Prewar sources, but also our interlocutors, talk about the custom of such potluck events:

"Potlucks happened only at the guests' expense. The men brought vodka and beer, the women an appetizer. Potlucks were often more abundant in drinks and food than just baptisms at the home of a less wealthy host." [Dworak., ZR, 39]

In the past, like for a christening, everyone brought something – a woman brings something made from meat, some cookies, even for christenings. Nothing was brought for the child, and the man brought a half-liter. *Did the godfather bring that?* No, any one of the family who goes. Everyone who goes to the christening goes with a half-liter, and the woman brings something. And they were already preparing something for themselves. *And do they bring something nowadays too?* Not now. Now they bring something for the baby and that's it. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

In this way, group life brought very tangible benefits: it was an opportunity to satisfy one's hunger and to eat better and more abundantly than usual. After all, on weekdays, even in richer families, people ate dishes with little variety and in rather meager amounts. There was a fairly clear pattern of consumption: the distinction between eating on a daily basis (smaller portions, with the family) and on festive occasions (plentiful, unlimited, with the wider community). This style of eating placed great value in the role of the rural community, which, apart from its social aspects, was also associated with material rewards. Participation in village life and maintaining living contacts was therefore much more profitable than closing oneself off within one's own family circle.

Abundant consumption, being a communal activity, connected the family with the wider community. Thus, the opportunity to eat one's fill, even excessively, has always been associated with some aspect of collective life, a kind of gratification of social behavior. However, this consumption pattern has changed. Currently, abundant food consumption is increasingly withdrawing from the public sphere to the private sphere, where it is becoming an individual and individualizing activity, one that does not provide motivation to open up to group and community life. The number of guests at family celebrations organized by the younger generation, which is limited more and more to invitations extended to the narrowest family circles, is decreasing.

*And now, for example, when weddings are done, you invite only relatives or everyone from the village, or who is invited?* That is, closer neighbors are invited, and closer relatives are invited, and also closer people. Because now they don't do weddings for 300 people anymore. *But they used to?* Yes, back in the day they used to. *What does it mean, back in the day?* Well, when – when people were poorer! [P.Top.m.pr.51]

It is also important that such celebrations are increasingly organized by third parties (caterers, hired cooks and waitresses), often in public premises, where one no longer needs to prepare one's own products, but rather pays a certain

amount of money depending on the number of invited guests. Therefore, the cost ratio itself is also changing: instead of the amount of food served (number of animals slaughtered and bottles of alcohol), specific sums of money are given per each invited person.

> E.: At my daughter's, when there was wedding, you know, in the barn, there were two hundred people. *Wow, two hundred?* […] E.: Yes, they slaughtered two hogs and made their own products. J.: And we, for the third daughter, when they prepared their products, there were two hogs and two calves, and the father-in-law gave a calf as did we. [P.Top.k.pr.30 (J), k.pr.l9 (E)]

> *And are a lot of people invited to the funeral?* J.: It depends on where. (…) E .: At our place the first time in March, there were eighty-four or eighty-six people, and forty days [after death] it was fifty-four, and for the anniversary it was fifty-eight. And this is one person for thirty zlotys. [P.Top.k.pr.30 (J), k.pr.l9 (E)]

The change in the model of Christmas and collective consumption, as well as everyday and individual consumption, can also be seen in the disappearance of contributory games beyond the potluck, e.g. during the Shrovetide season. Organizing contributory games, once very popular, required mutual cooperation and good group organization. Everyone was obliged to bear some of the costs for the benefit of the community, but they also reaped real benefits – the opportunity to have some fun and eat to their heart's content.

> Always during carnival, i.e. always after Three Kings, Andrzejek, during this short carnival, always on Saturday or Sunday, there was a so-called *kudzielniki*, that's what it was called. Because there was no other entertainment, so you would put your husband under your arm, leave your children either with their grandmothers or somewhere, and there was always one house where... and in this house they did it, because that someone, the housewife there, either baked up a nice cake, or she had something, she did something nice, she cooked something up good, she did something. It was an excuse for the rest of these housewives to bring something too. Of course, guys, booze, most often moonshine flavored with flamed caramel [...] At any rate, it was fun because you know that we ate at home then, too. Because it was not very interesting at home then, so when we had a *kudzielniki*, we were left with such a bowl of cakes and the so-called thrown, yeast pancakes, they were so nice. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

It is significant that potlucks, whose important function was to make up for nutritional deficiencies, lost their popularity just when the economic value of food was decreasing. Collective life ceased to bring tangible benefits, leading to a loosening of intra-village ties and interdependence.

Another type of food exchange was the so-called bestowing, i.e. a direct gift of more valuable food products. There used to be many situations that encouraged people to "bestow," as even Kolberg mentions, giving special names for each

occasion – now mostly forgotten – for various circumstances in which – in ex-change for affirmations – gifts in the form of food were received.

> When the linen is ripe and ready, when a yokel kills a pig at Christmas, when his first son or daughter comes into the world, a poor resident of this village, sometimes of noble birth, the dispatcher, or steward, or rather their wives and daughters, because it is a female privilege, they go with a bottle of vodka from cottage to cottage […] and wher-ever they treat the host, they receive a handful of flax, some sausage or pork fat or pork. In early spring, they usually give those who come greeting eggs or a piece of poultry. [Kolb., 138]

In addition to the already mentioned sharing of meat after a pig slaughter, a popular form of sharing until recently was the so-called *wołoczebne*, or the giving of food to children by godparents on the occasion of religious holidays, especially Easter. The most common form of gift was eggs, which used to have a certain economic value (one of the products most often sold to the city), but which later was only symbolic. Currently, eggs are increasingly being replaced by money.

> How many children did I baptize, and for each one I baked a cake, for the girl two cakes and groats, and I baptized seven children. [...] *Did you give your children linen for baptisms?* Surely! And the eggs and the present, until it grows up, you need a present. […] When I had a girl, when I baptized her, I baked two cakes, so that she would be happy. *Two cakes?* Two cakes and a bowl of groats. *How about for the boys?* And for the boys, one. One. A girl, so that there would be a couple, and the boy would go anyway … [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

> *And each godson had one egg?* J.: No, they gave them four. E.: One egg is not nice. J.: Not nice, you need four. And it used to be if a godfather, they go to the godfather, and now, dear lady, who wants to? Once my granddaughters came. "Grandma, Children's Day!" I say, "But I didn't buy you anything." "Grandma, you can give money." Oh, it's like this now: you don't need eggs, you can give them money. [P.Top.k.pr.30 (J.), k.pr.19 (E.)]

Another type of "bestowing" involved "visits" – i.e. visits made by women in the village to a woman after giving birth. Congratulations were, in a way, confirmed by gifts of food: the newborn was admitted into the community. Often, women who brought something to eat received something in return – thus strengthening mutual obligations.

> *Was it customary to come to visit a woman in childbed?* Yes. The first one was like this – you go there to see. Then you take something over there. Well, it's always been such a custom that you can't go without bread. *With bread, right?* Yes, with bread. Some bread, you take something else with your bread, some meat if you have any, or something like that, or you can buy a bread roll – then you go see. Or some cake. You go to visit like this. And only then the women gather, and there are their neighbors and some friends,

and they also go to visit. It is then that they go there, some Sunday, and on Sunday it happens there. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

A declining form of giving food, still encountered sometimes in Belarus though practically non-existent in Poland today, is the custom of New Year and Easter felicitations ("carolers") extended by a group of villagers to all neighbors. It is significant that well-wishes are given in Belarus not only with food, but also with alcohol.

> We would go [with a carol], right, we took eggs, and pierogi and vodka, and whoever brought something, we took it. And then we went, we have this club, and she went, she shared it all with us. And then some insults, some rumors, and this year we did not go any more. We say: why go, why sing holy songs, so that such words can be thrown around. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

In Belarus, where the diet of the average kolkhoznik is neither rich nor varied, food still has a price; thus, food gifts are considered valuable, which is perhaps why there is still a living custom of the *dziady* (forefathers) – giving food to poor old people in exchange for them praying for the dead. The institution of *dziady* once played an important social function: it regulated the shortage of food in the countryside, because in this way people who were not able to earn for themselves with other work could feed themselves. In Poland, this custom disappeared in the early postwar years, but in Belarus you can still find people earning a living, or at least "earning extra," by praying for the dead. However, even in Belarus, this is quite rare, mainly because of the relative independence of older people, who receive a small but helpful state pension.

> The beggars, oh, it is said that they didn't have... Well, maybe they had it at home, but they just walked around like that, they didn't have anything. And they begged. They go to an Orthodox church or a Catholic church, people give them stuff: eggs and bacon, and let's say sausages, a piece of bread or cheese. Well, just anything. Whatever they have, that's it. They say: for my souls, for my dad, for my mother, for my sister, for my brothers... For the remembered and the unremembered, and for those still on this earth. [B.Radz.k.kat.21]

> *And when the dead ask for something to eat, what do you do?* You have to give something to the poor for someone to say a prayer. *Where can you meet the poor?* They used to, they would come, sit at the church, in the village, such poor folks, old women. And now they're not around anymore. One woman lives here like that. I give her something to eat, so that she can say a prayer for the deceased and for everything. *And do you bring this to an Orthodox woman?* There is no difference. There is no difference whether the prayer is Orthodox or Catholic. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

The difference between the Polish and Belarusian territories in the valuation of food, which still has the power to create and maintain social ties, can also be seen in situations requiring the employment of people to help in various types of work. In traditional rural communities, in helping-out situations, money was usually out of the question, and it was not accepted to pay for work, especially for the work of people from their own village. In return for service, apart from the readiness to pay back in the future, working people were always offered food, which was supposed to be more abundant and more valuable than the usual daily meals. Such forms of help, mediated by food, created long-term relationships based on interdependence and readiness to assist each other in need. It was completely different in the case of paid work. Relationships mediated by money, due to its measurable value, were considered definitively settled: they ended with payment and left no participant in a state of mutual obligation. Therefore, such forms of payment were avoided, at least within one's own rural community, which was based on the long-term bonds between its members. One thus did not pay, for example, funeral singers from your own village, for "borderers" or a "grandmother" delivering a child. Paying for services in such cases would be a great breach of etiquette: "They didn't pay! Someone will give her a handkerchief and she'll take it for a blouse, yes. But money, God forbid!" [P.Top.k.pr.19].

Meat and alcohol were the indispensable elements of food and drink that were served as barter in exchange for work, products which were the most highly valued, but which also had their ritual significance. Meat increased the quality of the served meal, testifying to the hospitality of the hosts and the proper reception of the guests. How important its presence on the table was in such situations is evidenced by the following story.

> And my dad used to say that he, at grandmother's, his mother-in-law, that they were cutting rye in the yard there. And the grandmother brought dinner, some soup, cabbage or beetroot, there was some soup. Well, they ate the soup. And the meat? – "it will be for meal time," because there will be pieces of meat, but "it will be for meal time." He says: "We were cutting, cutting, cutting until about four o'clock, when the clouds came out, and it rained, it is impossible to cut when it is wet. And the afternoon meal was taken by my grandmother and she went to the cottage. Meat – he says – we, oh! We got it!". That papa could not forgive, he constantly recalled how I, he says, reaped for my mother-in-law. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

Vodka, used in almost every social situation, had even greater utility and ritual value. "Vodka was the single most important item in the peasantry's festive diet," Smith and Christian write.

> […] It was a basic ingredient of all celebrations, of church festivals, family celebrations and so on. It was also a sort of seal on ceremonial – vodka was drunk when a deal was made or a bargain struck. And vodka was used to maintain networks of patronage and to manipulate village politics. It was widely used as a medicine and an anesthetic, and it could also be quite ruinous. Because of its overwhelmingly social significance, the purchase of vodka is probably best regarded as a deduction from the households "ceremonial" fund rather than its "subsistence" fund. This is why money often seemed available for vodka even when a family was near starvation.[65]

The value of vodka in ritual life was determined by the powerful ritualization of behaviors associated with it, both in the area of giving (people knew what amount and for what occasions) and in various forms of alcohol etiquette – rules of pouring, drinking and getting drunk. As Ludwik Krzywicki rightly noted in his time: "[...] such thought as used for the etiquette of drinking was not put into any village matter other than the division of land."[66] Numerous sources write extensively on this subject; likewise, detailed information is provided by our interlocutors:

> "The vodka having been drunk, the glass was always turned upside down to pour out the rest. It was said that whoever drinks the rest of the water or other liquid after the one before, he will know his thoughts." [Dworak., KS]

> Listen, they say that if someone is pouring [vodka] with the left hand, you can't drink it. Oh, for example, I will be pouring for you, for this cousin, you can't, it's not good. And it is not yet possible, as they say, for the left side.[shows how]. Oh, if you pour it this way, it's also wrong. If someone pours it this way more than once, they say: "You do not pour it like that, because I will not drink it." [P.Top.k.pr.30]

A consequence of the ritual indispensability of vodka is the frequent brewing of moonshine: "Because as I watched it, the family that had a party was producing. He had christenings – he was driving moonshine, he had a wedding – he was driving moonshine or some other family event – then he was driving moonshine" [P.Top.k.kat.50]. In this matter, there are clear differences between the Polish and Belarusian territories. While it is still a common activity on the other side of the eastern border, it is no longer practiced in Poland, at least not on such a scale as it was a couple decades ago. First, because the moonshine is displaced

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65  R. E. F. Smith, D. Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 316.

66  L. Krzywicki, *Ustroje społeczno-gospodarcze w okresie dzikości i barbarzyństwa* (Warszawa, 1914), 478; quoted in Z. Szromba-Rysowa, "*Zwyczaje towarzyskie, zawodowe i okolicznościowe*," in *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2 (Wrocław, 1981).

by store-bought vodka, and second, alcohol abuse is seen here in terms of mere drunkenness, and not, as in Belarus, an obvious state of affairs that is not usually met with social disapproval (at least not in the case of intoxicated men). In view of the relatively low and unstable value of money, vodka in Belarus still has a large exchange value, one that is reinforced by custom and habit that seem to take increasingly radical forms.

> I will not say, now they are doing this wedding, it is not known how much of this vodka, because it is... 100 liters! *And it wasn't like that before?* Oh no! When they got married, maybe 20 liters, and when they baptized, the older folks told me that when they baptized it was 2 liters of vodka, they say, oh, it was a baptism! And when I was still at home, it's Easter, so my father buys half a liter of vodka and you know what it was, both on the first day and on the second, and it stays for Divine Mercy Sunday. Oh, this is how they used to drink. And now, as he put it – there is nothing to say. Oh, what a broken world! [B.Rou.m.kat.28]

In Belarus, vodka still remains the most common and accepted form of payment for help and services. It exceeds its ritual function when alcohol only added splendor to the food and drink, was consumed jointly, and becomes a common object of barter, constituting a socially accepted form somewhere between a gift and a payment in money.

> And now from the sugar [moonshine] the head hurts sometimes, but you must have it! You have it at home, because something will happen, and dollars will not help. Here it [vodka] is called dollars. It's true, because someone comes to help, which means: "I will not take [the money], give me half a liter, I will help," and when you give money: "Oh, I – he says – will have to go buy!", will go and rack his brain. That's how you give him vodka, he drank it, he won't go far after he drinks it. [B.Rou.m.kat.28]

In Poland, where the value of money is more predictable, paying with alcohol for work has become obsolete.

> No, you give money, however much it costs for a day. If someone gives you a glass for dinner, that's different. Mine used to say, he built a hut at the Kulej's house, at Aleksander's house, he said, we're coming over, dinner on the table and one large glass of vodka each. Already poured. And they just drank, ate dinner, and went to work. And payment is the payment, that's it, and if anyone does not give, he will not give [vodka], they will eat it and he will not ask again. [P.Top.k.pr.31]

## Divisions and Borders – Nobility and Peasants

Food, beyond its integrative functions, can also indicate and emphasize social barriers and divisions. Detecting differences in the way food is eaten, the types of foods eaten, and the rules of table etiquette are often more than just

the differences associated with the food itself. Eating, as a both social and a biological activity, often serves to naturalize differences and inequalities between people. In terms of cultural superiority and inferiority, it is precisely with these differences and inequalities in mind that we talk about habits observed elsewhere, in another village, in a strange community.

> We went to Wiejki for tomorrow. [...] They arrived, a hut so small, whitewashed with this clay. There at this [...] Olek, the elder, got married. Well, we sat down, me and Olo, my brother. And Olo had a bridesmaid, oh, this one from next door. Well, they put two glasses for the young ones, and maybe two for the older ones, and the rest – I drank it, poured another, and gave it to you, you drank it, poured another, and gave it to you. No forks, they take the meat with their hands, eat it. And with us, in Topolany, culture was a bit higher, even though it was somewhere in 1949 or 1948, well, I don't remember, but it was a bit better, and there were forks. And this Stasia jumped out of the window, the bridesmaid of our Olo, brought a few glasses, brought a couple of forks... [P.Top.k.pr.30]

The Eliasian description of the fork as determining factor in defining a certain standard of sensitivity and domestication appears quite often in the accounts of our interlocutors, especially in the context of social divisions into peasant villages and nobility's regions. Peasant food from one bowl is so far the subject of mockery by local residents, but cutlery is also the subject of special attention on the part of villagers, which would indicate that their use is also treated as an expression of "culture:" "even in the village – a plate for everyone, forks for everyone, only no knives, because everything needs to be washed" [B.Pap.k.kat.32].

Not only the quality of the tableware but also certain eating habits, such as rituals tied to family celebrations, the potluck nature of contributory games, etc., are things noblemen use to fundamentally set themselves apart from peasants. The neighborhood boasts different customs, confirmed by other sources: "Potluck feasts were not widespread among petty nobility. Their counterpart was the 'good morning,' during which the wedding guests were walking around the village, welcomed by the hosts with food and drink. Potluck feasts as well as ritual thefts and masquerades connected with them are characteristic of peasant weddings" [Dworak., ZR, 90–91].

The nobility regard peasant customs as simple, unrefined and often absurd. They are irrefutable proof of the nobility's alleged cultural superiority; nobles are "by birth" a gentle, polished and intelligent people:

> Under the name of the nobility here, the courtiers [from the Russian *dwarianie*], oh yes. Yes, here all were cultured people, in the past they had no education, only an innate, natural culture. And, as it is said, now concerts are named like that, and these are the performances they played, many invited guests were invited, the property was here

already after that, Lord Brochocki. They came, youth clubs did, and they were very intelligent people.[B.Rou.k.kat.36]

*How was Rouby different?* How? A delicacy, you know. Delicacy. They won't say anything to you, the words were so gentle. There was no such cursing, and these simple [peasants] and their curses, the ugly word, they say not a good one. [B.Rou.k.kat.30]

The nobility's faith in their cultural superiority is, in turn, the subject of ridicule by peasants who try to discredit them by telling stories of their alleged sloppiness and uncleanness, including in the context of nutrition.

There was a girl at our place in Bancewicze, and her mother from Rouby, a nobility's area. They matched her with a boy also from Rouby; they went there matchmaking. They sit at the table. Then they brought a big pig and gave it food at the doorstep. This pig together with people! "I will not go for such a dirty man!" – she said. [B.Myt.k.kat.25]

And now, so now, and someday with these nobility, go home, and break your legs there, they were so dirty. They already have time now, but in the old days their farms were so great, they didn't have time to clean, they worked [in the fields]. [B.Pap.m.kat.21]

There are significant social distinctions hidden under the above-mentioned differences, often interpreted as a civilizational gap. The nobility – like the peasants, living off the land, having at their disposal similar work techniques – differed from the peasants in terms of larger land allotments, fewer family members and a much higher level of education. The greatest difference, however, was related to forms of identity and perceived social status. As social differences weakened and became blurred, especially after the Second World War, the parochial nobility felt threatened in their identity, so they tried to emphasize and sharpen the boundaries between the neighborhood and villages, marking their cultural superiority:

Well, they [the nobility] did not want to go to the dances here and they did not want to take the girls. Alone with themselves or wherever they go, to another nobility's village like this. They went to school here, but they didn't come to the dances. [B.Pap.m.kat.21]

The nobility was a closed environment: social relations were maintained only among themselves, between regions that were sometimes several dozen kilometers apart. A nobility-peasant marriage was practically impossible, therefore the courting period among the nobility, which was small in number compared to the peasant population, sometimes lasted a long time, and the average age of newlyweds was greater among gentries than among peasants.[67]

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67  For precise data on this subject, see D. Markowska, *Rodzina wiejska na Podlasiu 1863–1964* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1970).

Since the material status of the nobility differed little from that of the peasants, their daily menu included no dishes and products that were essentially different than those in the villages, given that they lived off the same crops. The nobility's wealth is visible only in the larger amount of consumed products, including meat and milk. A local resident says:

> It used to be that two soups were always cooked. One was, you know, with meat, and sauerkraut, something like that, and the other was something from milk. It was obligatory. *But everyday?* There had to be soup every day, so long as they didn't bake in the morning. Those pancakes always, made of flour, and in our case there were buckwheat pancakes, oh, tasty pancakes. But you had to eat them a lot, you had to eat them always with milk or cream, because mom always made cottage cheese and then sweet cream and put it together, oh, that was good. [B.Rou.m.kat.23]

When visiting the nobility's neighborhoods, apart from the usual lard and vodka (sometimes a liqueur, "for the ladies"), one could always count on something different, something that was generally unavailable in peasant villages: salad, jam, compote, tea. The main difference, however, concerns not the substance, but the nomenclature: the nobility consistently uses the Polish language, often giving the same dishes different names. Nevertheless, in the face of the increasing number of mixed marriages and the gradual abandonment of the use of Polish on a daily basis, here too there are visible changes that show the blurring of boundaries – social, cultural and culinary – between the nobility and peasants.

## Food and Denominational Differences

As the analysis so far shows, food is a tool for creating social connections and divisions, it is their material marker. In peasant villages, it reflects close family and neighborhood relations and strengthens them through a system of gift exchange. It also reflects the social antagonisms existing between villages and nobility's neighborhoods by pointing to the different behavior at the table, interpreted in terms of cultural superiority and inferiority. Let us now consider how food reflects the situation on the religious borderland – what social and cultural phenomena it indicates, and what social relations are sustained and exhibited through it.

In various parts of everyday life, in everyday activities and behaviors, including those involving food, the borderline between Orthodox-Catholic villages is practically imperceptible. Denominational differences are revealed only in some aspects of festive life and they result mainly from the two churches' different rites, and not from rural rituals, which are essentially similar.

Religious holidays are closely connected with festive dishes, which are often their basic element on the level of domestic rituals. It is worth paying particular attention to the terminology used, for instance, to denote the Christmas Eve supper. In the Belarusian territories discussed here, Christmas Eve is usually called Kutia,[68] as is the dish that appears on the table at that time. In turn, in literary language of Belarusian Christmas is *Kaliady*, a word derived from the Latin *calendae* (the first day of the month), which is also used to denote a Christmas Eve wafer, Christmas Eve supper and Christmas Eve dishes.[69]

The application of holiday names to food dishes proves that those dishes are a constitutive element of ritual ceremonies that help organize and identify these occasions. This fact is evidenced by the memories of a teacher from the communist era, when celebrating religious holidays was often frowned on:

> If [a child] comes to school and brings some *halušky* [a kind of drop dumplings] for Christmas Eve, they were afraid to eat it, because they would be reprimanded, "Why did you bring the *halušky*? You did Christmas Eve!" [B.Hor.k.kat.30]

Since it can be seen on the linguistic level itself that festivity often evokes associations with food and vice versa, it is no surprise that if you ask about the ritual differences between Orthodox and Catholics, a motif often invoked, one that appears equally with the celibacy of Catholic priests, is the non-use of the wafer on Orthodox Christmas Eve. This difference is seen by some Catholics as evidence of a less rich and incomplete rituals as compared to Catholicism.

> Christmas Eve: for them [Orthodox] there is no wafer. Also fasting, and then in the evening they eat and then they eat more, everything, with vodka. [B.Pap.m.kat.23]

> On Christmas Eve, there are no wafers for the Orthodox. I was once at an Orthodox Christmas Eve. Well, everything is fasting. And they don't sing any songs. We sing Christmas carols on Christmas Eve and we pray and share the wafer, which is not the case with Orthodox Christians. [B.Bia.k.kat.23]

Catholic sharing of the wafer is a reduced form of an old rite conducted in memory of the dead. This fact is noted by Poniatowski:

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68 Hence, the Lithuanian word *Kučios* (Pol. *Wigilia*, Christmas Eve), which is a direct borrowing from the speech of the neighboring Ruthenians.

69 Dworakowski also points to the ambiguous nature of the words "kutia" and "kolęda," in *Kultura społeczna*, 34.

[...] the wafer is a modified old custom of sharing ritual bread, known in places, including in our country on All Souls' holidays, the equivalent of the wafer are buckwheat *ołatki* [pancakes] or other ceremonial dough products.[70]

This custom was also used in the old Christian liturgy, from which the Western Church gradually diverged in the process of erasing its pre-Christian lineage. This was also the case with the Christmas Eve feast, the meaning of which was forgotten over time. It is different in the Eastern Church, which continued ancient traditions, especially those concerning memory of the dead. In the Orthodox Church liturgy, the faithful share the ritual bread called prosphora,[71] through which they emphasize the deep all souls' meaning of the Christmas Eve supper.[72]

> *And for Christmas Eve the Orthodox use a wafer?* Children, there is no wafer with us on Christmas Eve. The batiushka doesn't give anything anymore. Just holy water, which he blesses. And with us, when they bury a deceased, or for whatever reason, they offer a little prosphora, a blessed bread roll. So, then a roll like you have a wafer, in pieces, like we have a bread roll given to everyone. It's called a prosphora. *And when does he give this roll?* Well, even on any Sunday you can order it at the batiushka. When they bury the deceased, they give it at the wake. Just like when they buried that grandfather and they went to eat dinner. It is before this dinner that prayers are said, and everyone at this table must take a piece and eat it. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Prosphora is not an indispensable element of Christmas Eve rituals, but because of the proximity of Catholics, it has increasingly entered Orthodox homes during the Christmas season. This is a clear indication of the influence of Catholic custom, one which – due to its singular nature – is more expressive, yet meaningfully different. This adaptive tendency is visible especially on the Polish side:

> Christmas Eve is different than it was with my grandmother, with Catholics there was a wafer and kutia, and with the Orthodox Christians only kutia. Now they give prosphora, and once there was no such... *Such a habit to share?* I mean, maybe this mother [the batiushka's wife] did not care much about anyone having any, though in principle this prosphora should be present on such occasions. Since this little bread is generally available in the [Orthodox] church at mass, it is true that at solemn masses there is a tray

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70  S. Poniatowski, *Etnografia Polski. Wiedza o Polsce*, vol. 3 (Warszawa, 1932), quoted in S. Dworakowski, *Kultura społeczna,* 36.

71  E. Przybył, *Prawosławie* (Kraków, 2000); K. Bondaruk, *Nauka o nabożeństwach prawosławnych* (Białystok, 1987); M. Lenczewski, *Liturgika prawosławna* (Warszawa, 1978).

72  Cf. J. Kallenbach, "Tło obrzędowe 'Dziadów'. Studium porównawcze," *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki* (Lwów, 1898), 222–248; J. Gołąbek, "Dziady białoruskie," *Lud* (Lwów, 1925), 27–40.

and you can take it. [...] For example, solemn funeral masses and anniversary masses, there is always a prosphora available. *And do you take it home and share it?* Before, listen, before eating, eating, dinner, right after mass we go home, we have some kind of dinner there, because it's such a custom that we sit at this table, so first a prayer, you serve a piece to everyone, no matter what religion. And you sit down to eat. It's something like that.[P.Top.k.kat.50]

Thus, prosphora began to perform a function like that of the wafer; such is at least how its secondary meaning in Orthodox Christmas Eve rituals is read. In any case, some Orthodox Christians, especially those from mixed marriages, willingly join Christmas Eve rituals with the Catholic wafer, further enriching the festive ceremonies. The family's double faith is reflected in the duality of the symbolic Christmas foods – wafer and prosphora.

> *And on this Orthodox Christmas Eve there is no wafer?* No, there isn't. My brother sent me wafers [from Poland], and this year there was no wafer for me, because there was no one to send it to. Nina came, she [daughter-in-law] is called Nina here, she says: "Mama, the wafer". And I say: "There is no more wafer." My brother used to send me a wafer in a letter. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

> The batiushka gives us such pieces [of bread]. So, we take a little bread, we do not have wafers. But there's Anton [the son-in-law], Polish, and he brings the wafer. We eat it. We do not argue whether it's the Catholic church or Orthodox church, we accept it in any case. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Similar borrowings associated with home festivities also occur in the case of a different kutia. Kutia derives directly from the church liturgy, where it is also used when commemorating the dead. However, its etymology is much older. According to Moszyński, it was originally tied to *bób* (broad bean), which was "one of the oldest all souls dishes; in a certain area of Europe, it was once dedicated to the spirits of the dead. The name *kutia* was derived from *bób* (Novgorod *kukki* – broad bean; old Greek *kokkos* – seed, grain; orthodox *kucija*)."[73] The Eastern Church adopted and preserved the ancient custom of sharing kutia on all-souls' occasions, including on Christmas Eve.

> *And kutia, is it done only on Christmas Eve or on other days as well?* It is as often as you like, but yes, on Christmas Eve, and well, whenever, I've done kutia on the anniversary [after a funeral]. Well, you always put this cooked kutia there and put it in a glass or something and say it, when it is cleared away, it is taken to the church. It is in the church that a candle is placed in this kutia. *Into the kutia?* Yeah. And this candle will burn out or not burn out, take it out, and then come to dinner [the wake], that's all, they give a bread

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73  K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian.*

roll [prosphora], just such a thing, such as this, as finely sliced, if it's a larger family, the batiushka even gives two, sliced, then you take a kutia and a few grains and this roll, a piece of this roll. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

And some cook groats [kutia] for Christmas Eve. [...] They boil such a thick porridge, then twist it into a napkin, put it in a [holy corner], take it from under the icon, and just a spoon for everyone. This is called kutia. [...] Here and at our funerals, some people cook this kind of rice porridge. *From rice?* Yes, yes. Well, me too, when they were buried, there, at the mass, I didn't cook it. *From flour or rice?* One rice porridge, another sweet rice porridge, and they take it to the [Orthodox] church as they pray for the dead souls, the batiushka blesses it and take it, and after the mass, everyone has to take a teaspoon of this porridge. [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

For Catholics, kutia – as a Christmas Eve dish – must have appeared quite a long time ago, since it is characteristic for the entire region, also in Catholic Lithuania. However, it does not have such a ritual significance as in the case of the Orthodox Church, rather only customary – it is a typical Christmas Eve dish. Nevertheless, its fairly widespread presence in Catholic families once again confirms the ease with which dishes are borrowed, including those that are an obvious distinctive feature of a religion.

The fact that Catholicism and Orthodoxy are derived from the same old-Christian tradition makes the mutual borrowing and substitution of liturgical foods at the local and family level fairly easy to carry out. It is rural rituals and the typical type of folk religiosity that allowed the eastern and western liturgical differences, developed over centuries, to overlap at the level of morality, usually by combining elements of both traditions, thus leading to a peculiar ecumenization in everyday life.

When it comes to other foods that are part of the Catholic and Orthodox liturgy, there is basically a great similarity here. Religious ceremonies are analogous in which herbs and fruits are blessed; for example, with Catholics – on the feast of the Assumption of Mary or the Blessed Virgin St. Mary of the Sowing, and with Orthodox Christians – on the Feast of Transfiguration. It is similar with the blessing of the Easter basket – the composition of the basket and the subsequent use of the blessed products differ in no way between Catholics and Orthodox. The very fact of consecration in the church is significant; what counts is their "utilitarian" function, the possibility of application in secular rituals, which are essentially similar. Blessed foods are used in various spheres of domestic and economic life, imparting a sacred dimension to the domestic space, to various economic activities, and to the family itself and all its members. They are also commonly used as healing or apotropaic agents.

Oh, holy salt. We blessed the salt, blessed the eggs. I tie the shells, tie them up, carry them somewhere under the thatch. Somewhere in the building. After all, these are sacred shells. I'll tie them up, tie them up, stick them somewhere. May God protect me from the wind, from thunder, from poverty. And I'll eat the salt. I'll salt something and then eat that salt. [B.Radz.k.pr.43]

And I bless [...], as my mother used to say, you need a bone with a bone of ham. *With a bone?* Yes. And this bone should also lay all year round, because if something hurts someone somewhere, a tumor or something, you press it there, when a horse or a cow gets sick, then you apply the bone. [RTop.k.kat.14]

A good example of the equivalence of "liturgical" foods, later used in rural rituals, is so-called St. Agatha's bread – the Catholic custom of blessing bread and salt, which in the folk tradition are considered extremely effective in protecting the household against misfortune, especially against fire, hence the often repeated saying: "Bread, salt of St. Agatha guards the hut from fire."

Our house was on fire here, and I say: "Bring out the St. Agatha bread and the picture!" (of Our Lady). And immediately the wind blew in the other direction and the hut was saved when the bread was brought (around the house four times). I say that every year there should be bread like this at home, because it is very good. And also the blessed water and the salt. [B.Bilt.k.kat.30]

The Orthodox, who do not have a similar holiday, use the holy bread for the same purpose during the main liturgy on Easter Sunday (the so-called *artos*). The secondary function of this bread (i.e. protection from fire), for which an analogy has been found in the church liturgy, is evidenced by the fact that the Orthodox sometimes also call it the bread of Saint Agatha, although officially there is no similar feast in the Eastern liturgy. Despite different church traditions, secular rituals, even those directly related to the temple, are identical for the followers of both religions.

J.: On the Tuesday after Easter or the next Sunday, where the mass takes place, and at our cemetery there on Tuesday, in Piatienka. That's when they give away, wrap up those buns. Such a bun is large and sits around the whole week from Easter in the church and the batiushka blesses it for Easter and it sits all week. Then they cut it open and wrap it in these pieces of paper and hand it out. And you have to keep this bread, because they say that it protects against fire, just like that one... *Saint Agatha's?* E .: Yeah. When it thunders, the storm comes, then… J.: Well, they say to put it on the window, oh, it's just that, but there is no salt and no bread, only this bun [P.Top.k.pr.19 (E.), k.pr.30 (J.)]

On the borderland under examination here, minor differences related to sacred foods seem to be insignificant – they are readily adapted and shared, and therefore constitute the basis for the development of rituals, and not for marking

symbolic boundaries between two communities. It is difficult to talk about divisions here, since on the level of everyday practice, Catholics and Orthodox live within the same community, connected by bonds of interdependence and by vital, cultural similarities.

## Vodka and the Priest's Authority

When it comes to food, especially alcoholic beverages, the difference in authority between the priest and the batiushka is once again revealed, particularly in his ability to impose discipline regarding vodka consumption on religious and family holidays. Catholics in Belarus repeatedly emphasize that the Orthodox abuse alcohol during all-soul ceremonies, funeral receptions or even Christmas Eve – in all those situations when Catholic priests prohibit it. This is supposed to prove the cultural "superiority" of the Catholic faith. Life practice is slightly different – vodka still plays a ritual function on such occasions, and compliance with the ban on consumption is generally only for show:

> And now priests scream that this vodka when there is a funeral – so that there's no vodka or we won't celebrate mass. Come on, vodka is everywhere. [B.Pap.m.kat.23]

> *Can vodka be at this* [funeral] *dinner?* Yes! They drink! If they drink, they will drink a lot and they can sing a *bredniuszka*! *What? A bredniuszka?* Oh, a bredniuszka, a song, from the top of your head, something will come up and they sing. As long as the priest is there, there is no vodka, and when he goes, they hand it out. [B.Bilt.k.kat.30]

There is a question of authority and discipline that would testify to the power of the Catholic priest and the weakness of the Orthodox priest. The church that restricts certain activities is perceived as an institution with authority. The Orthodox Church's insignificant interference in the organization of non-church life, especially in secular ritual life, which is the subject of the constant care of the Catholic Church, is viewed as an expression of its powerlessness and lack of proper authority. Orthodox priests in Belarus not only do not prohibit the consumption of alcohol in festive situations, but also take part in the rituals of its consumption without hiding it.

> *Someone told us that the batiushka must drink three glasses at such a* [funeral] *dinner...* Everyone has to, everyone. It is like this: light candles, drink a glass, eat. Then one more time and after a glass, and eat again, and then after the third glass, well, eat up. When the candles burn out, then they will be full. That's what you have to do. [B.Radz.k.pr.38]

Such an attitude on the part of batiushkas influences the different perception the faithful have of clergy of both religions. Since people do not have the opportunity to see a Catholic priest drinking vodka in public, it is easy to draw the conclusion

that he is completely abstinent and that he is steadfast in the rules which, like celibacy, he is forced to follow. Catholicism is thus seen as a "stronger" religion, placing much higher demands on its priests than Orthodoxy. The common understanding of the Catholic priest is a bit "out of this world" – he plays the role of a local authority, keeping distance from the faithful; he does not participate fully – that is, like everyone else – in village ceremonies, so in a certain way he stands above the people. But the batiushka – who, together with his faithful, follows the common customs, has a family, and thus lives like all other mortals – is more "himself," "closer to the people," and yet his participation in rural rituals, his much greater availability (compared to the Catholic priest's), is perceived as lowering the prestige of the priestly function.

> A funeral – they come from the cemetery, offer barley groats and you have to eat. The batiushka and his wife [come] from the funeral to the cottage, where the deceased came from, to drink. Belarusians [Orthodox] do not believe like we do, [they are] indifferent, unlike us. [B.Pap.m.k.23]

> Oh, the [Catholic] priest prays with people, I've never seen it anywhere – and I'm seventy-two years old – I've never seen a priest sit down and drink vodka anywhere. [B.Ser.k.kat.21]

> The [Catholic] Church is better, our faith is better. Theirs get married. Our priest does not get married. Pardon me. Our parish priest won't get married. The batiushka gets married, but only once. The priest does not drink vodka, but the batiushka takes a hundred grams. [B.Waw.m.kat.24]

The priest and the batiushka and their behavior turn out to be a feature that clearly distinguishes the two denominations, serving as a source for stereotyping. The figure of the clergyman, treated as a representative, an icon of a given denomination, influences the way, to a great extent, that denomination is perceived and valued.

### Double Time – "First" and "Second" Holidays

Family groups, connected through a system of mutual obligations and bonds, have never been united on the basis of religious divisions. It always took place above and beyond religious differences, which did not play a major role in the village's social life. In the food exchange system – apart from certain liturgical differences and various types of ritual foods, which can be easily adapted to each other – the main difficulty is the two separate dates, which from the "village" point of view finds no rational justification, even though stories on this subject exist that are part mythical and part humorous:

> Two guys were walking along, a Pole and a Russian. The Pole was walking in shoes, and the Russian in footwraps. And they came to the river. The Pole took off his shoes and walked through the water to the other side. The Russian took his time untying his footwraps, and after he crossed the river, he took his time tying them back up. And that's why their holidays are two weeks later." [B.Lid.k.kat.18]

Most residents, however, view the two holiday dates not as a predetermined order of the world, but as a limitation imposed by the church hierarchy that only makes life difficult for "ordinary" people.

> This year Easter was together, how good it was, because they could do these holidays together, so they would be together, and that's, oh, such a tangle, this one does this, while the other one celebrates, right? [P.Top.k.pr.19]

> *Are Catholic holidays different from Orthodox holidays?* All the same. All of them. Here Christmas is called *Rażdżestwo*. It's just that we don't celebrate on the same day. Oh, Christmas on December 25th and ours on January 7th. Fourteen days, two weeks. Everyone had their own then. And Easter, Passover it is called in Ruthenian. Easter, sometimes the difference is even five weeks. Why is this so? Who did that? Well, let it be that we believe in the same thing, all baptized people, not some Lutherans, we could celebrate on the same day. All together. But not here. [B.Szp.k.pr.30]

It is thus not the dual denominations of the rural community that are seen as disruptive to life, but the double holiday season, which is indicated by the nomenclature itself – the "first" and "second" holidays, not "Catholic" and "Orthodox" – in which only their sequentiality in time is visible, not the kind of content or religious character that could be subject to evaluation. Both mixed families and mixed villages must accommodate this temporal duality in their formula. The main factor is that holidays are not something private – they are inscribed into the village's social life; therefore it is impossible to remain indifferent to the "other" holidays. Even single-faith families, woven into a network of dependencies within the rural community, celebrate twice. The moral norm is that both denominations are treated equally. Within this temporal duality, each family finds an individual pattern across the spectrum of possibilities: from abstaining from noisy work, through hosting holidays in the homes of neighbors of the other religion, to arranging both holidays at home in the same way.

> Dad did not allow work on the Polish holiday. I don't know who… whose feast is better – whether Polish or Ruthenian. God is one, and there are two faiths, and you can celebrate both here and there. You can never work – neither on the Assumption, nor on such other annual holidays. [B.Radz.k.pr.43]

> *And when your mother was Orthodox and your father was Catholic, when was Christmas Eve?* I don't remember, because I was 7 years old when my father died, I do not know,

> I don't remember. Well, they always did Orthodox Kutia. And all Orthodox holidays, Christmas, and... There was a Polish neighbor, they were in the neighborhood, they were Polish, they always invited my dad to their place for Kutia and I went with him. For Easter and for Kutia. And after Dad died, everything was Orthodox. [B.Fel.k.pr.16]

> They invite one another to the holidays. We used to have Catholic neighbors across the way, where we did not go to Christmas Eve on the first day of Christmas, but on the second day of Christmas, they invited us. And then we invited them again later. [P.Top.k.pr.19]

This duality thus does not mean equal participation in the holidays of both denominations; rather, it means the at least "passive" celebration of them both in various situations imposed by the very fact of living closely together with persons of the other denomination in the same rural community. The religious function of holidays mixes with their secular function: after all, it is about celebrating together, about the rhythm of holidays and work shared by the entire village. Two religious holidays force the adaptation of rural rituals. Thus, in the case of the habitual "bestowing," one has to take into account the dissimilarity of denominations between parents and godparents, which happens often, and which explains why it usually takes place twice, i.e. on the first and second Easter. It is much the same with caroling: in mixed villages, the same group of people often visit homes on both Catholic and Orthodox holidays, changing only the repertoire or even only the language of the songs and felicitations.

> Carolers. Last year? We went. Surely. And wait, it was the Easter for the Poles and Ruthenians, yes, together. We went from hut to hut. Well, how to tie a string in your shoes, that's how we did it, from chimney to chimney. Oh, and we were like this. [B.Radz.m.kat.40]

> *And they sing this only in Orthodox villages or in Catholic ones too?* No, in Catholic ones too, only in the Catholic language! *Oh. Are the same people singing it in Catholic? Because Mr. Olek says that he is a Pole and he sings both here and there, in Catholic and Orthodox...* Well, sometimes it is Easter on a single day. Sometimes they come together, both Catholic and Orthodox. Singers walk together. Oh, you are a Catholic, then with the Catholics, and an Orthodox one with the Orthodox. And if not [if the holidays are together], they go alone, there is no difference, they receive both them and them. This side and that side. So. Well, they did not attend Catholic Easter this year. In no way did they gather, there was no one. Yes. And the Orthodox have already organized themselves and have already left. That's it, interesting, right? [B.Radz.k.pr.35]

Living in a rural community of mixed denominations requires involvement – at least to some extent – in the rituals of the other religion; it forces one to adopt some form of denominational duality, along a certain continuum: from a cursory knowledge of external behavior related to the other religion to equal and full

participation in the rituals of both denominations, without noticing any differences. The latter is most often the case with mixed families.

## Mixed Families – Blurring Borders

Each in their own way, mixed families organize a temporary Christmas duality – most often celebrating both holidays on an equal basis. In domestic rituals, there are practically no differences in the way Catholic and Orthodox holidays are celebrated: the same dishes are prepared, and minor differences in the liturgical traditions of both Churches (such as sharing the wafer or the prosphora) are essentially equivalent. The family Christmas table is the first front in any taming denominational differences.

> *And at your home, at your parents, you used to do Catholic holidays, like on Christmas Eve or at Easter?* Yes, Catholic holidays. *And later, when you came here, did you do Orthodox or Catholic?* No, when I came here, there were two brothers here and my stepmother, so we did the Orthodox holidays. It's like this: we used to go there [to my parents], to the Catholic one, and then they would come to us. *But things are prepared the same, the dishes are all the same?* Yes, yes, the same. Well, someone else will add something different, if for this farm wife yes, for that farm wife yes, but mostly... And again, among the Catholic's, you get the wafer, and here there is a bread roll like this and the batiushka blesses it. He blesses it, says the prayers there and blesses it. And later they take it from the batiushka. [P.Top.k.pr.25]

> *How, for example, was a holiday celebrated, how – two?* Two. Both Polish and Ruthenian. And later, when they did that kolkhoz, when the Soviets came, there was a neighbor there with us: "Boys, don't pick on Bobrownik, because he celebrates two holidays and he eats for two holidays." And he says: "So what, and what's the problem, that I can taste it better?" And he ends, and nobody says anything, the Poles are silent, and the Ruthenian ones follow. *And the same dishes, for example, were cooked for Catholic and Orthodox holidays?* The same. *But the wafer?* And the wafers and the husband always crosses himself, as he eats the wafers, along with the children. [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

There are thus different variants of the celebration of the two holidays. A characteristic feature, in both cases, is the mixing of Orthodox and Catholic themes – it is impossible to maintain the complete separation of traditions from each denomination, and it therefore becomes possible to say Catholic prayers for Orthodox holidays or bless food made by a Catholic farm wife in a nearby [Orthodox] church. The fact that there are no strong boundaries between religions favors a blurring, a transience, and a mixing of both traditions, which means that each loses its distinct identity.

> I had a Catholic mother-in-law and an Orthodox father-in-law, but I only celebrated Orthodox holidays. And at my [Orthodox] mother's place, it was also Catholic Christmas

Eve, because my father was a Catholic and all of us children were Catholic. Christmas Eve was Catholic. They celebrated the Orthodox holiday, but they did not do Christmas Eve anymore. Now Easter: if they were together, because it is a coincidence – every four years – then my mother would carry the basket to the [Orthodox] church and we all eat it. If they are separate, then we go, because it is always the first Catholic Easter, then we go to Michałowo [to the church] to bless the basket and my mother doesn't do the second one. They celebrate, they came to us, because it was already an Orthodox holiday with us, but daddy also celebrated, he did not do anything to go to the field or make her do anything, no but they did not do the second holiday anymore. They did not do the second Christmas Eve anymore, they did not do the second basket. *But they celebrated.* They celebrated, in a way. *Because the dishes themselves, everything, the table preparation, are the same, right?* The same. Yes, the same. *Probably the only difference is that there is no wafer?* But with us there is the bread roll. There is the bread roll, the prosphora. That's the only difference. [P.Top.k.pr.30]

*And when it was Christmas, who said the prayer before Kutia – you or your husband?* I did. The Polish prayer and… *And how was it on Orthodox Christmas? Did he do it?* I did both the Ruthenian and the Polish. *That means, during Orthodox Kutia, you also said your prayers in Polish?* In Polish – the Polish one's in Polish, and the Ruthenian ones in Polish. *And the husband in Ruthenian?* And he sits there and listens, and I say a prayer, then we eat Kutia, we divide the wafer... [B.Radz.k.pr.06]

Perhaps because of such blurring of boundaries, religious ties run in no way contrary to family ties: mixed families simply have a more "voluminous" formula for celebration, one which takes into account the traditions of both Churches without special distinction between "theirs" and "ours." The coexistence of two faiths is not viewed as a limitation or a threat to the family's internal cohesion – it is simply an extension of domestic customs, enriched by additional elements. Some interlocutors even emphasize the advantages of such a family situation, and they make the argument in various ways: it offers an opportunity to eat better, to celebrate together with both sets of grandparents, and to acquire greater civility in the face of diversity.

*And you went, I mean, when it was a Catholic holiday, did you go to your grandparents?* Yes. *For Easter and Christmas Eve too?* Yes. And I used to go to church with them for Midnight Mass. That's why later, when I got married, it was so much easier for me, because I was not like that, for me it was not some kind of phenomenon that you have to go to a priest, something like that, for me it was not like that, you know, I would be, to put it kind of funny: worldly. I had already been there, I went to church, I knew when you had to stand up in the church, I knew when they sang "Our Father," when the priest says the blessing, about which my Orthodox friends in many cases had no idea until adulthood. So in that sense, I was worldly. [P.Top.k.kat.50]

On the level of family relations around the festive table, the problem of religious diversity seems to pose no major problems, which would be yet another indication that the "sharing" properties of food – including festive foods – connect people, despite differences, with great ease.

# Conclusions

Food is an important element in the creation of relationships between people, a material object through which the essential features of social relationships are revealed. Food is also an effective tool for mediating these relationships, and the food exchange system points to values that are important to a given community. As an almost imperceptible element of culture, one that is used routinely in everyday life, it is a "strong" indicator of social and cultural phenomena, systems, ties and divisions.

Our analysis of eating behavior in mixed-denominational Orthodox and Catholic villages showed, first of all, the extent to which eating is related to the characteristics of the peasant fate and the ethos associated with it, quite apart from denominational differences. Food is the axis around which life in the rural community is focused, primarily through its production and consumption, which in the case of the communities described here has a circular character: one eats primarily the products of one's own labor. Everything that is important in the peasant ethos – land as the greatest value, farm work, memory of poverty, consumption minimalism – is reflected in eating practices. Here, food is the primary goal and result of community life, especially of the family and strong family and neighborhood ties.

The eating practices described here show that neighborly relations – living closely together and dependent on one another – favors the establishment and maintenance of contacts above and beyond differences existing in a given community, which go practically unnoticed on a daily basis. This is evidenced by, for example, the food exchange system, which indicates that regardless of religious affiliation, relationships are made and maintained between people as inhabitants of the countryside, not as Catholics or Orthodox. In mixed denominational villages, family and neighborhood ties are more important than religious divisions, which most often negate or blur the former. These relationships are confirmed precisely by the services, exchanges and assistance that individuals provide each other, which are a sign of the intense community life on which the functioning of the rural community was once based.

This analysis of eating practices also reveals the enormous cultural changes that have taken place in the rural environment in the last couple decades. Along with the oldest generation, traditional peasant culture and its ethos are dying out. When it comes to food, these changes are clearly visible in the different method of cooking practiced by the younger generation – here, continuity was completely interrupted. The old dishes, closely associated with farming, are now a thing of the past, having given way to new, more refined dishes, learned from

cookbooks and other sources, rather than in the family home. Cooking – which was once an important element of female community and played an important role in the socialization of the "woman-housewife" according to traditional patterns – is becoming an increasingly secluded activity, a display of individual abilities, independent of social contacts, especially family contacts. A complete change in cooking styles is also an expression of the negation of old culture by the younger generation, of the deliberate abandonment of that culture and an unwillingness to continue it. Of course, macro-social and economic factors are not without significance here: mass emigration to cities and changes in the farming system, which mean that the culture based on traditional agricultural methods loses its technical and material foundation.

The gradual abandonment of food gifting also reflects the weakening of once-strong social bonds. As the economic value of food has decreased, this exchange, once materially important in everyday life, has lost its utilitarian function. Thus, the semantic capacity and "symbolic effectiveness" of food, as commonly tied to various ritual and ritual activities, have weakened. The broader consumption model – which until recently was modest and monotonous on a daily basis in the close family circle, but abundant and varied on holiday occasions in the wider family and in the rural community – has also changed; it has increasingly withdrawn from the public sphere and begun to satisfy, above all, individual needs. This phenomenon reflects the radical changes that have taken place in the nature of mutual relationships inside the rural community: social isolation is progressing at an increasing rate, which leads in turn to one being closed in the family circle and among close friends. There is no longer such strong interdependence – people are not bound by a system of mutual obligations and duties. Food exchange, which used to tie former participants into long-lasting and strong relationships, is increasingly being replaced by service fees, which help in no way to maintain relationships or to encourage social contact.

At the same time, however, old patterns of mutual coexistence between Catholics and Orthodox Christians have been preserved: the social norm is equal treatment for both denominations. This fact may be influenced by numerous mixed marriages and religious mixing within families, which are forced to adapt to the borderland situation. Thus, the model for coexistence between the two faiths that has developed over the centuries in everyday life practices remains valid today.

The situation on the religious borderland forces inhabitants into a kind of duality, a cultural bivalence – it is impossible to live in a mixed denominational environment within only one tradition. To a large extent, this situation is socially conditioned; strong family and family-neighborhood ties, along with

entanglement in a network of mutual dependencies within the rural community, mobilize borderland inhabitants to tame and assimilate the differences that stem from the various traditions of the Eastern and Western Churches. This can be seen based on the example of certain sacred dishes (wafer, kutia, prosphora), two-time celebrations, and the exchange of food, depending on the double holiday season (*wołoczebne*, caroling). There are different degrees of this cultural duality – from full participation in both traditions to the passive adjustment to neighbors' rituals (double holiday season). Depending on the degree of family mixture and rural mixture, everyone finds their own individual pattern in this continuum.

Differences related to belonging to two Churches are tamed and neutralized in the practice of everyday life, because they are assigned no significant importance and are socially insignificant. It is not so much the differences themselves that are important here, but the importance that people attribute to them, which in turn depends on the nature of social connections. Differences become visible and significant only when they depart from the schema of daily practice and become an element of discourse – a deliberate pointing to cultural differences and boundaries that are an expression of social differences, of a lack of mutual contact and relationships. They then become a tool for the confirmation and maintenance of divisions and mutual isolation, and not the other way around: these divisions are not created by themselves. Where social distinctions become important, as in the case of peasant villages vs. nobility's neighborhoods, differences are not only noticed but also emphasized, even if they are not particularly great. They also become the basis for creating an identity, setting mental boundaries in relation to others. This is reflected in different behaviors and a complete lack of exchange, which seems to only confirm this strangeness.

# Recapitulation: The Transitivity, Situationality and Graduability of the Borderland

Death and food – two extremely important areas of social life – constituted the context of the above considerations on the cultural diversity of the religious borderland and the functioning of ethnic borders between Orthodox and Catholic inhabitants of villages on the Polish-Belarusian border. At the cemetery and the kitchen table, this research revealed both differences stemming from various rituals and religious traditions and similarities resulting from the universal human condition: equality in the face of death and the inclusiveness of food, both of which have the power to eliminate all boundaries.

What is the result of these analyses in terms of research on the so-called "ethnic-cultural" borderland? Above all, there is the fact that such an apparently objective identification feature as religious denomination is not an obvious qualifier that clearly indicates the existence of "ethnic relations." Whether or not the denominational difference has any significance for feelings of separateness, or in defining the friend/relative-stranger opposition, depends on their carriers, not on outside observers. In the context of ethnicity, one cannot talk about "objectively" existing cultural differences, but rather about constructed meanings, which renders them one element in the construction of individual and group identity. As Benedict Anderson wrote, social communities, including ethnic ones, are imaginary creations; they are contained mainly within thoughts about the creations themselves, and all of their "objective" manifestations – such as religion and language – do not so much designate them as serve as tools to be used for their legitimacy. People express a community in the form of ethnicity when it is the most appropriate means for them to express themselves, not the other way around: it is not ethnicity itself that determines identity or organizes the community. The borderland is therefore not an encounter between two cultural groups as separate physical entities. Rather, it is more symbolic than physical in nature; it is a mental construction, a state in which certain cultural differences are perceived as significant and others considered insignificant. The place of cultural contact are individuals who, entangled in various social relationships – family, local, regional – present their own idiosyncratic cultural system, used and interpreted in different ways.

Such subjective and imaginative aspects of the borderland are best studied using the ethnographic method, which allows scholars to detect the ambiguity and polyvalence of ethnic distinctions, their variability and fluidity. The borderland's main features are its dynamics and relativity. The frontier is a liminal zone: blurred and changeable. By observing specific practices, establishing close contacts, striking up conversations and making attempts to understand the meanings those practices have for borderland inhabitants, we reach into the subjective dimension of the borderland that is not available to outside researchers.

Our research shows that at the level of the rural local community, highly valued family-neighborhood relationships are the most important building block of identity, more important than denominational differences. It is not the institutional framework of a particular Church that establishes, and makes real, the community's boundaries, but rather the socially recognized and respected values of peasant culture, which are common ground for Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and which tend to annul denominational boundaries. Denominational differences, which elsewhere are meaningfully divisive, are treated here as less important than family-neighborhood ties. The different ritual behaviors of Catholics and Orthodox Christians fall within the limits of the social and cultural norms that usually define a community's limits. Cultural differences do not lead to the creation of borders because they are not given special meaning. In Catholic-Orthodox villages, denominational differences are accepted on the basis of repertoire diversity ("uniformly, but each in his own way"); they do not reach the structural level and do not mark off different value systems or mutually incomprehensible rules.

This does not mean that differences are not perceived at all. One extremely important aspect of research on the borderland turns out to be the situation and dynamics tied to feelings of alienation and familiarity, which change depending on the social context. In certain situations, cultural difference can become a boundary, and in others it is invalidated. In the terrain under examination here, the generally impassable boundaries of a denominational cemetery are destroyed when it comes to ancestral solidarity. When there is funeral of someone from the same town, the boundaries of participation in funeral services of another religion are exceeded. Also, the dual liturgical calendar prompts inhabitants of mixed villages to more or less actively participate in "not their" holidays. The reality of the rural community is therefore determined by the locality and family-neighborly ties, and not by religious identification: the more the difference is woven into the local community's social life, the more imperceptible and irrelevant it becomes. Differences lead to exaggeration when the strength of social unions decreases;

hence the strong boundaries and emphasis on the differences between peasant villages and nobility's neighborhoods.

The second aspect of border research that I would point to is the **graduability** of borders. In the material analyzed here, we can distinguish various forms of encounter between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. They intensify and come closer as mutual social ties increase. The weaker the connection, the greater the distance and the higher the boundaries. Thus, more distant neighbors, residents of religiously uniform villages adjacent to villages of the other denomination, define themselves unequivocally as Catholics or Orthodox, coming into contact with people of the other denomination; they move primarily within their own religious tradition and know the rituals of the other denomination as external observers, though they do so familiar, to some extent, with denominational alienation. Another form of encounter is close proximity to people who acquire certain abilities within the tradition of the other denomination and are able, to a limited extent, to use them (they know certain behaviors and gestures, and can explain certain ritual activities). Here, mutual adaptation takes place, even if knowledge about the other denomination is only partial. Representatives of this group would be inhabitants of mixed denominational villages who enter into daily, direct, neighborly interactions with people of the other denomination, connected by a network of mutual relations and interdependencies, as well as by family-neighbor relations. Finally, the last level of encounter is the mixed family, people who are equally adept in both traditions, have the same abilities in each, and often have problems with unambiguous definition of their denominational identification because they are equally attached to both denominations. This is especially the case for women brought up in mixed families who entered into a marriage with a person of a denomination other than theirs. Socially assigned to women, the bilateral nature of the family bond – between their family of origin and with the family to which they enter through marriage – make them especially predestined to denominational duality, especially when a specific denomination is a family feature, when it is a matter of family belonging. Also, the special role women play in the performance of religious rituals in the domestic and rural context forces them, above all, to overcome the greatest religious barriers, such as knowledge and active use of two sacred languages, active participation in services, and knowledge of the rituals of both faiths.

The increasing degree of contact reveals another feature of the borderland described here – its **transitivity**. In mixed families, the borderland becomes a blurry zone in which we detect various forms of cultural duality, where the boundaries between the two cultures are blurred, so that it becomes impossible to distinguish between them clearly. Perhaps because the Orthodox and Catholic

traditions do not differ to a large extent; the resulting cultural differences meet at the same structural level, leading to a synthesis of both traditions.

The borderland is therefore a situational phenomenon, one that is gradual, where the ability to interfere with and eliminate differences increases depending on the strength of social bonds. My research shows that in peasant communities, the most natural environment for enculturation with this type of borderness is the family-neighborhood community, which is the "first front" in the taming and synthesis of differences that result from two denominational traditions. It is here where we most often detect a characteristic lack of distinction, revealed, for example, in the mixing of Cyrillic and Latin alphabets on tombstones, or in the combining of the wafer and prosphora during Christmas Eve, which are signs of a particular borderland transitivity, a harmonious combining of various cultural elements, an almost imperceptible and unreflective transition from one tradition to another.

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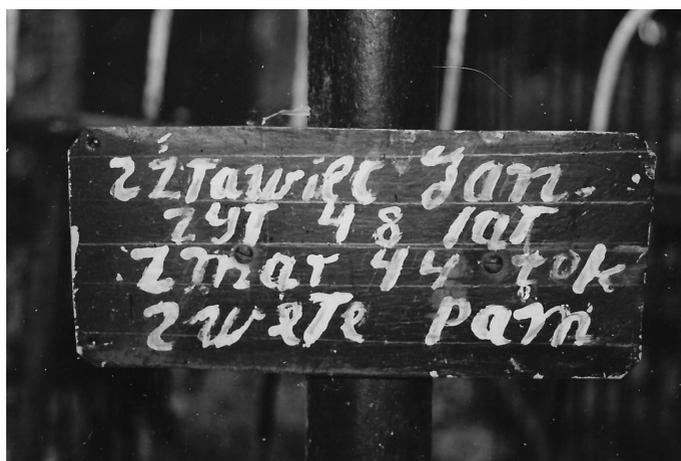


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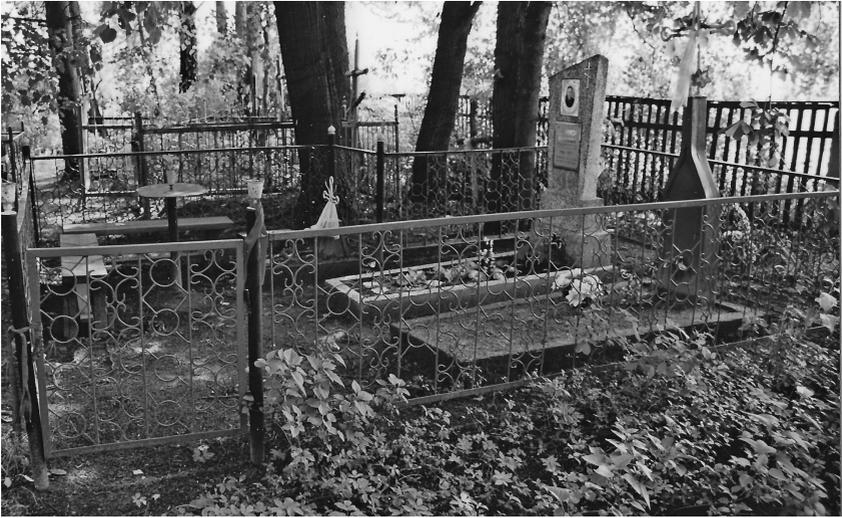
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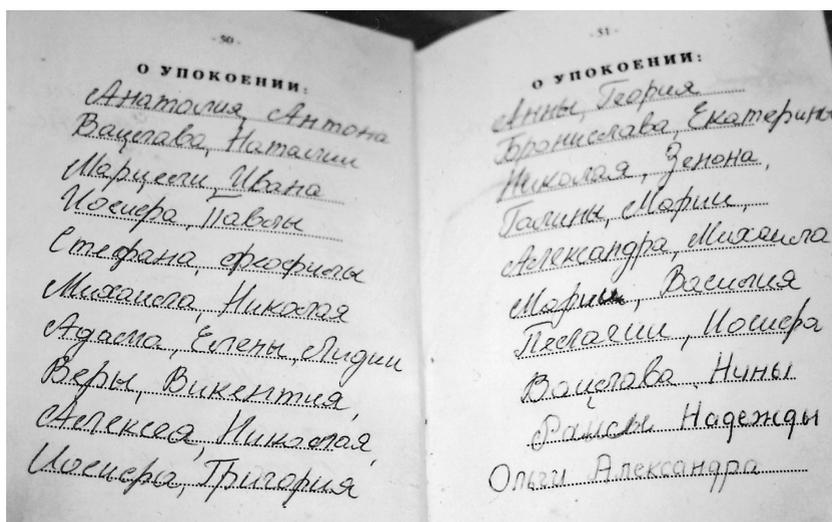


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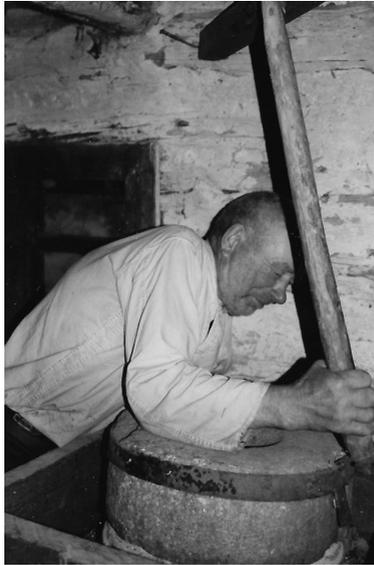
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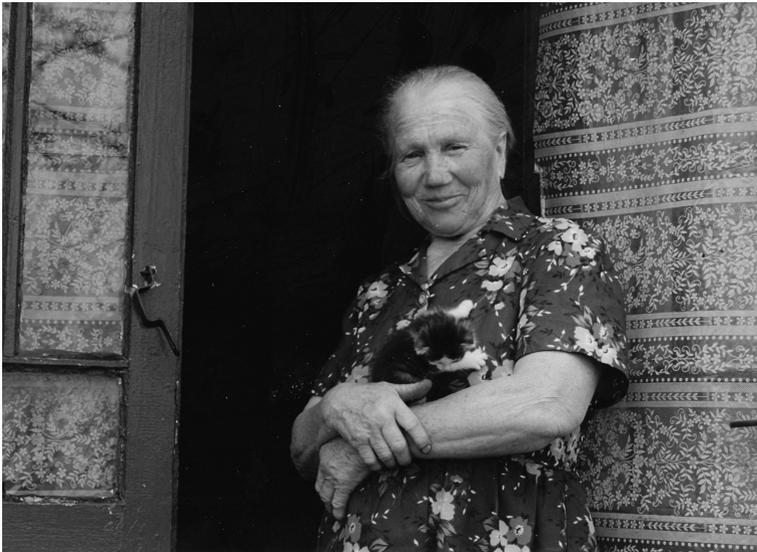


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