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Forgive, Forget, or Feign: ‘Everyday Diplomacy’ in Local Communities of Polish Subcarpathia¹



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INTRODUCTION

This article is based on my ethnographic fieldwork in the Polish city of Przemyśl and several nearby villages in 2015–17.² As I tackled a research project on religious practices and pilgrimages in those religiously and ethnically mixed locations, and predominantly in Kalwaria Paławska,³ I faced challenges that effectively shifted the direction of my original research plan and changed my overall understanding of this region. In my interactions with the locals, certain themes came to light that seemed to bear little relation to religion. My status as a female researcher from Ukraine stirred up a number of other subjects that my interlocutors, Polish or Ukrainian, were eager to discuss.⁴

One of the most important themes in those conversations were the Polish-Ukrainian relations in the interwar period, during World War II, and afterward. Without ever meaning to, I would get involved in heated discussions about the two nations' respective traumas and the bloodiest pages in Polish-Ukrainian history, such as the

- 1 The English language correction of the text was made by Piotr Szymczak, to whom I express my gratitude for his careful work.
- 2 The research was conducted as part of a grant of the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) in the OPUS 6 program, "Multisensory Religious Imageries in Selected Catholic Shrines in South-Eastern Poland," DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/01443 (Principal Investigator Dr. Magdalena Lubańska), while the work on this article became possible thanks to the fellowship, "Prisma-Ukraina—Research Network Eastern Europe," which I received from the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin (October 10, 2017–January 10, 2018). I would like to express gratitude to my colleagues from the research team: Magdalena Lubańska, Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, and Konrad Siekierski for their helpful comments on this text. I also wish to thank all the people I got to know in the field and who taught me a lot. They must remain anonymous because of privacy concerns, but I want to express my gratitude for their generous help in various ways during my fieldwork.
- 3 Iuliia Buyskykh, "Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą. Ukraińska pielgrzymka na Kalwarię Paławską," *Etnografia Polska* 60 (2016): 43–62.
- 4 For instance, people sometimes didn't perceive me as a researcher. Instead, they assumed I was simply a young girl from Ukraine looking for work as a cleaner, babysitter, caretaker, or for some other kind of seasonal work, like berry picking. Some also thought I had come to find a husband in Poland. Some friendly women even made attempts to introduce me to their single male neighbors, explaining that marrying a Polish man, getting a work permit, and staying in Poland, a country in the European Union, for a longer period of time would be my ticket to a better life. Also, I was confronted with the apparent apprehension about the large influx of Ukrainian workers in reaction to the political instability and economic crisis in Ukraine. For my initial thoughts on this point, see Buyskykh, "A Ukrainian Scholar in Poland: Notes in the Margins," *Lud* 100 (2016): 153–60, and "I Plead for a Dispassionate Dialogue of Memory," interview for the *Forum Transregionale Studien*, Berlin: <http://trafo.hypotheses.org/7848>.



mutual ethnic cleansings and forcible resettlements of Greek Catholic and Orthodox populations in 1944–46 and during Action Vistula in 1947. Those discussions were a challenging experience for me. I seemed to serve as a kind of touchstone, drawing out controversies and conflicting opinions in the communities in which I was working. Overwhelmed by this unexpected development in my fieldwork, at first I tried to steer clear of any topics other than religion and religious practices. That strategy failed almost immediately, and I came to understand that the material I was receiving on the “margins” of my intended research project was actually bringing me closer to an understanding of the complex factors that contribute to the religious identity of individuals and whole religious communities, including phenomena of “post memory.”⁵ As a result, in my attempts to seek reactions and feedback among people living in the borderlands, I became an “instrument of knowing,”⁶ using my own background and my national and religious identities as a kind of research tool.

Wherever they conduct their fieldwork, anthropologists are often perceived as someone positioned “betwixt and between.” We act as mediators between various local actors, and the texts we produce are aimed at mediating between the communities we study, academia, and broader contexts. In conducting my fieldwork, publishing the early results, and going back to the area for follow-up research, I could also see how my presence influenced the space and the relations between different categories of my respondents—in some cases, to the point of causing tension between neighbors. As a result, maintaining a diplomatic stance was a considerable challenge. As Jeremy Morris argues in his emphasis on the role of fieldworker as diplomat, “Fieldwork relations themselves can serve as a useful sites to explore how

5 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008):103–28. According to Hirsch, who coined this term, postmemory uses histories, images, and behavioral patterns of those who experience collective or cultural trauma, transmitting it to the next generation(s): “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.” (106–7).

6 Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173.



notions of political eventfulness are incorporated into the everyday.”⁷ Given the methodological and ethical difficulties involved in the study, reflexive anthropology provided me with important guidance in my role as the researcher and my relation to the context in which I was working.⁸

Given the high number of multiple-site international studies on the subject,⁹ the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands might seem like a well-researched area. However, my work soon made me realize that this region continues to hold considerable research potential on a variety of topics connected with conflicting memories (including state policies of memory), religious culture, nationalism, and routine survival strategies that may be slow to respond to the changing administrative nature of the border between Ukraine and Poland as an EU member.¹⁰

These routine strategies are tightly connected with the grassroots modes of dealing with “others”—that is, both the “domestic others” (neighbors of other ethnic origins and denominations) and the “foreign others” coming to eastern Poland from Ukraine. In this article, I intend to analyze such modes, including those that

- 7 Jeremy Morris, “Not Soft Power, but Speaking Softly: ‘Everyday Diplomacy’ in Field Relations during the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,” in “Everyday Diplomacy: Insights from Ethnography,” special issue, *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2016): 111.
- 8 Kristen Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); James P. Spradley, “Ethnography and Culture,” in *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, eds. J. P. Spradley and D. W. McCurdy (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 6–12.
- 9 See, for example, Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Juraj Buzalka, *Nation and Religion: The Politics of Commemorations in South-East Poland* (Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia Bd. 14, 2007); Karolina S. Follis, *Building Fortress Europe: The Polish-Ukrainian Frontier* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); R. N. M. Lehmann, “Struggling for Peace: Understanding Polish-Ukrainian Coexistence in Southeast Poland (1943–2007)” (PhD diss, University of Amsterdam, 2009); Magdalena Lubańska, ed., *Religijność chrześcijan obrządku wschodniego na pograniczu polsko-ukraińskim* (Warszawa: IEiAK i DiG, 2007); Magdalena Zowczak, ed., *Na pograniczu ‘nowej Europy.’ Polsko-ukraińskie sąsiedztwo* (Warszawa: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej, DiG, 2010).
- 10 The situation on the Polish-Ukrainian border (extraordinarily long queues that I have personally experienced many times, smuggler trade, illegal border crossings) may also change for the better following the recent short-term arrangement involving the lifting of Schengen visa requirements for Ukrainians (in force since June 11, 2017). However, several generations have grown up on either side of the state border, having survived by doing small-scale “business” across the border with varying degrees of legality. I doubt those everyday life strategies will change immediately just because the administrative status of the border has been altered.



pertain to religious context, by using the concept of everyday diplomacy to describe the forms of religion-related interactions and exchanges that occur in borderland contact zones, many of which are located along the phantom lines that trace the historical borders of past empires.¹¹ Those everyday encounters are a means for knowing and engaging with otherness through trade, civic interactions, and cosmopolitan and ecumenical outlooks. As the authors of the concept indicate, everyday diplomacy appeals to the

ways in which historic and ongoing geopolitical processes are experienced by communities, and how such experiences form the ground upon which distinctively diplomatic skills, such as mediation, communication, persuasion, dissuasion and negotiation are enacted, instantiated and embodied, becoming salient aspects of individual and collective self-understandings as well as of the affective and semiotic worlds such communities create and inhabit.¹²

Hence, everyday diplomacy refers to a set of practices that hold together social relations between categorically different social actors in a specific context.¹³ A focus on everyday diplomacy makes it possible for me to, on the one hand, respond to the challenges and unexpected issues the field throws at me, and, on the other hand, to engage in anthropological research that moves beyond local, nation-state, or confessional frames to consider how the current political discourse in Poland and Ukraine shapes religious practices, issues of memory, and perceptions of history in local communities near Przemyśl more broadly.

LOCATIONS, PEOPLE, AND RELATIONS WITHIN THE FIELD

A brief introduction to the historical context of the relationships within the communities under discussion might be in order. Without going too deeply into the complicated history of Polish-Ukrainian relationships, which go back to early

11 Magnus Marsden, Diana Ibañez-Tirado, and David Henig, "Everyday Diplomacy: Introduction to Special Issue," *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2016): 2–22.

12 *Ibid.*, 6.

13 Here I refer to David Henig, "Everyday Diplomacy: Rethinking Coexistence in Postcosmopolitan Spaces," public lecture for International Interdisciplinary Workshop for Young Scholars, "Imaginary Borderlands: Interpretations of Cultures and Strategies of Coexistence," Kyiv, June 2, 2017.



modernity (a subject that has been well researched), I wish to outline here just some of the main historical events that shaped the realms of memory in the rural communities near Przemyśl in which I worked. Despite the fact that the memory of World War I and the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918–19 remains palpable is essential in Przemyśl and continues to influence the cultural landscape through memorials related to both sides of the conflict,¹⁴ the most crucial reference point for multiple memories and latent tensions between Poles and Ukrainians is World War II and the Nazi and Soviet occupations, as well as the aftermath of the war, which was a time when both Polish and Ukrainian underground forces were active in the region of Subcarpathia (Polish: *Podkarpacie*).¹⁵ Military clashes between them led to collateral damage in the local rural populations made up of Ukrainians, Lemkos, Boykos, and Poles. The year 1946 was particularly hard for local residents in the area, with villages attacked by plundering gangs and units of Polish or Ukrainian partisans that denuded those rural communities of any remaining resources in that difficult postwar period.¹⁶

Because of postwar international agreements and forcible resettlements in 1944–46, most of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox inhabitants of the area who identified as Ukrainians were resettled to the Soviet Ukraine. The rest who remained were resettled to Western Pomerania and Mazury Land in 1947 as part of Action Vistula. Greek Catholic church structures were destroyed; churches were demolished or, at best, given to Roman Catholic institutions or, later on, to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The latter was perceived by the communist authorities of postwar Poland as “less dangerous,” mostly because of their lack of unambiguous identification with the Ukrainian community and the relatively better

14 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “The Border as Pain and Remedy: Commemorating the Polish-Ukrainian Conflict of 1918–1919 in Lviv and Przemyśl,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol. 42, nr. 2, March 2014, 242–68 (2014). doi:[10.1080/00905992.2013.801416](https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.801416)

15 Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*, 39–41; Grzegorz Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji Wisła. Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011).

16 Roman Kabaczij, *Wygynani na Stepy. Przesiedlenia ludności ukraińskiej z Polski na południe Ukrainy w latach 1944–1946* (Warszawa: Związek Ukraińców w Polsce, 2012), 53; Krzysztof Z. Nowakowski, “Administracja Apostolska łemkowszczyzny w latach 1939–1947” In *Polska-Ukraina. 1000 lat sąsiedztwa*, Vol. 3, edited by S. Stępień, Przemyśl, 1996. 241, 243

cooperation of Orthodox high clergy with state structures.¹⁷ Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, Ukrainians, Boykos and Lemkos began to return to their home region from Poland's western and northern territories, being forged into a "community of memory."¹⁸ Both state and local authorities encouraged returning Greek Catholics to join the newly created Orthodox parishes, simultaneously complicating the pastoral activities of the Greek Catholic clergy.¹⁹ However, since 1989 the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Poland and in Subcarpathia have experienced a revival that includes construction of new buildings.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the past continues to remain palpable in this area in a number of ways.²⁰ Both the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic churches play a crucial role in preserving the difficult past in present-day neighborly relations. As I have observed, the Orthodox Church is less involved in this process but undoubtedly remains a part of it. Importantly, I noticed no tensions between Greek Catholics and Orthodox respondents concerning issues such as churches, parishes, or who "should" be attending any given place of worship. My respondents, who were originally baptized in the Greek Catholic Church but have attended Orthodox parishes ever since they or their parents returned to

17 Eliza Litak, *Pamięć a tożsamość. Rzymskokatolickie, greckokatolickie i prawosławne wspólnoty w południowo-wschodniej Polsce* (Kraków: NOMOS, 2014), 103.

18 Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*. I use this term following Buzalka, who shows pervasively how Greek Catholic families (Ukrainian, Lemkos, and Boykos) have been forged through recollections of violence into a distinct Ukrainian community of memory.

19 Litak, *Pamięć a tożsamość*, 103.

20 Henig, "Prayer as a History: Of Witnesses, Martyrs, and Plural Pasts in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Social Analysis* 61, no. 1 (2017): 41–54, doi:[10.3167/sa.2017.610103](https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2017.610103). For the sake of comparison, it is important to refer to David Henig's study of shared sacred spaces in Bosnia. As he notes, during his research in 2008, he "could hardly avoid encountering the recent painful memories and atrocities of the 1990s war." (45). Henig underlines that "'the war' constitutes a significant frame of reference for talking about and reflecting on the past in the present and on the present" (45). However, the traumatic memory of the war, which influenced the narrations of Henig's respondents in the Balkans, is so palpable and urgent in the construction of one's identity because of the recent occurrence of the military events in the region (the 1990s). By way of contrast, most of my respondents were born a decade or two after the end of World War II. Only a few of my older Ukrainian respondents were children during the war or personally experienced resettlement as part of Action Vistula. None of my Polish respondents experienced any personal trauma or violence in connection with the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). Nonetheless, Ukrainians and Poles alike have inherited trauma from parents or even grandparents, which emphasizes the need to invoke the category of postmemory.



Subcarpathia, seemed to disregard any differences between Greek Catholic and Orthodox liturgies. Sometimes, those interlocutors originally from Greek Catholic families, who are currently attending Orthodox churches, told me that the main thing for them was the Byzantine liturgy and Ukrainian language of liturgy used both in Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches in the area. Crucially, those Ukrainians were in some cases returning to their “own” (original) churches (belonging to the Greek Catholic Church before the postwar resettlements), where their parents were married and they themselves were baptized.²¹ Based on her research in other localities in Eastern Poland, Magdalena Lubańska similarly believes that the relationship of Greek Catholics with a given parish or shrine was often determined by the change of their denomination in Orthodoxy. The Eastern rite was more important to the Greek Catholics in this situation than the denomination.²²

It should be pointed out that Subcarpathia is similar to many borderland areas²³ in that religion continues to provide the means for perpetuating ethnic identities, and ethnic and religious categorizations are often used interchangeably (“a Ukrainian liturgy,” “a Polish church,” “a Ukrainian chaplain,” “a Polish cemetery,” etc.). This interchangeability is crucial to understanding everyday prewar relations in “mixed neighbourhoods,” which Agnieszka Pasieka warns us against framing as “multicultural,” stressing that “the process of formation of ethnic identifications has not been complete” in the former eastern borderlands of Poland.²⁴ A number of my

21 Buyskykh, “Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą,” 50.

22 Lubańska, *Religijność chrześcijan*, 28.

23 This is quite a widespread phenomenon in the borderlands of Central and Eastern Europe. For instance, during my research in the Ukrainian-Belarusian borderlands, questions concerning a person’s religious denomination would invite such possible definitions of religious identity as “Catholic,” but also as “a Pole.” A similar conflation related to national identity: respondents asked to declare their nationality (“Who are you?”) would not put “Ukrainian” but rather “Orthodox.” See Bujskich, “Stereotypy wyznaniowe i wierzenia mitologiczne o ‘swoich’ i ‘obcych’ na Polesiu Zachodnim Ukrainy: przypadek wspólnot protestanckich,” *Slavia Orientalis* 65, no. 1 (2016): 111. A similar situation was observed during the research of Roman Catholic communities in Belarus, where respondents tend to identify their Roman Catholic denomination solely with Polishness. Similarly, the notions “Orthodox faith” or “Ruthenian faith” (*ruska wiara*) were associated with a Belarussian identity. See Ewa Golachowska, *Jak mówić do Pana Boga? Wielojęzyczność katolików na Białorusi na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* (Warszawa: Instytut Sławistyki PAN & Wydawnictwo Agade BIS, 2012), 79.

24 Agnieszka Pasieka, “Neighbors: About the Multiculturalization of the Polish Past,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 28, no. 1 (2014): 232. doi:[10.1177/0888325413502222](https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325413502222)



respondents produced narrations that confirm this statement. I have been told that Polish people in the area who practiced the Eastern rite of Catholicism were called "Ruthenians" (*rusini*) and "Ukrainians" by their Roman Catholic neighbors before and during World War II. Moreover, the families were mixed, and rural residents at that time (parents and grandparents of my respondents) would not have been "obsessed with national ideas."²⁵ Research by Juraj Buzalka reveals a large number of marriages between Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics in the Przemyśl area until the late 1930s. He concludes, "The high rate of intermarriage between Roman and Greek Catholics in the aftermath of the Polish-Ukrainian war suggests that local people were less engaged in struggles between religious-national camps than the national history books lead one to expect."²⁶ Based on my earlier research and fieldwork, I suggest that religious denomination became an identifying and dividing factor during the ethnic cleansings of the latter part of World War II and during the subsequent forcible resettlements after the war. In this regard, I refer to Jack Goody's reconsideration of religion as a "primary element of identities," especially in places where "ethnic cleansing," which has been fundamental to the establishment of many nations, is in many (but not all) cases strongly motivated by religious factors."²⁷ Moreover, violence and looming memories of it can play a crucial role in changing the local understanding of nationhood, ultimately "transforming neighbours into enemies."²⁸ With this in mind, I wish to stress that I am far from finding an answer to the question of why people of various ethnic origin and religious denominations who live as neighbors in the studied area came to victimize each other under pressure from two totalitarian systems. Multiple answers in numerous studies have been proposed; however, none satisfactorily addresses the full complexity of the large-scale research problem. My goal is to show the main everyday strategies the descendants of this wartime population have developed to ensure coexistence under the burden of contested memories still preserved today.

25 I borrowed this expression from my respondent, male, Pole, born 1962.

26 Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*, 37.

27 Jack Goody, "Bitter Icons and Ethnic Cleansing," *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 13, 2002, Issue 1, 11. DOI: [10.1080/02757200290002851](https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200290002851)

28 Glen Bowman, "Xenophobia, Fantasy and the Nation: The Logic of Ethnic Violence in Former Yugoslavia," in *The Anthropology of Europe*, eds. V. Goddard, J. R. Llobera, and C. Shore (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 149.



I will focus predominantly on my observations and interactions with people in several villages near Przemyśl. In the town of Przemyśl itself, there were only two main respondents (one male and one female, both self-identified as Ukrainian Greek Catholics) with whom I had a considerable amount of interaction. People in the area felt quite vulnerable, mostly declining to be recorded during interviews.²⁹ It was therefore vital to preserve their total anonymity and to conceal their addresses. In general terms, the four villages were located in the Fredropol district (*gmina*). During my fieldwork in 2015–17, I worked with a total of seventeen respondents (ten male, seven female). Self-identified Ukrainians included three women (two Orthodox Christians from Greek Catholic families, one Roman Catholic from a Greek Catholic family) and four men (one Roman Catholic, one Roman Catholic originally baptized in the Greek Catholic Church and with a Greek Catholic family background, two Orthodox Christians from Greek Catholic families). The remaining ten respondents were Polish Roman Catholics (six men, four women). I also had a series of minor interactions with inhabitants of local villages and pilgrims visiting a regional pilgrimage shrine known as Kalwaria Pałacowska (The Shrine of the Lord's Calvary and the Calvary Holy Mother of God) on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary in August. The latter contributed strongly to my understanding of the area and the contested memories of its inhabitants.

Because I was likewise being closely observed by my respondents, our interactions and exchanges became a separate cultural text—itsself the object of ethnographic analysis. In the early stages of my fieldwork in the area, I experienced difficulties stemming from mistrust, fear, and suspicion. Especially in my interactions with older people (both Polish and Ukrainian), it took considerable diplomacy to persuade them that my questions about the past and the present were harmless. In my early attempts to approach potential respondents and ask them about Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic neighborhoods before World War II, the replies I got

29 This is why in quoting most of the narratives I rely on my field notes—the only means I could use where people categorically declined to be recorded. At one point, a female Greek Catholic respondent consented to be recorded, but after the interview she got quite nervous and asked me to delete the mp3 file on my voice recorder. I had no choice but to grant her wish and delete the four-hour biographical interview I had just recorded. My field notes in this case were my backup solution for that important source.

were often evasive: "I don't remember," "My mother remembers but she wouldn't talk to you," "That was a long time ago; I've got nothing to say," "You should ask the chaplain whether he would give me permission to talk to you." Małgorzata Wosińska, in her work on the collective traumatic memory in a formerly diverse local community in Lithuania, regards those kinds of negative answers as indicative of a latent conflict between neighbors—possibly no longer outwardly visible, but still very palpable.³⁰

The following examples are illustrative of my field experiences. After interacting with me for two years, two respondents who had always self-identified as Roman Catholic Poles confessed to me that they each had at least one Ukrainian parent or grandparent. Both emphatically asked me not to share that information with anyone because they felt the information posed a potential threat to them. One person born in 1962 said this to explain why disclosing this kind of information felt uncomfortable: "I don't want anyone from the IPN³¹ to come sniffing around for my family's past." The other instance was even more poignant. A Greek Catholic respondent with whom I'd had some long, deep conversations, during which we had opened up to each other on many occasions, told me during my last trip that in the almost two years of our acquaintance he had been afraid to interact with me and actually entertained the possibility that I might be a "Russian agent" sent to Poland on some kind of underhanded mission. Born near Przemyśl in the 1950s, after his parents returned from Western Pomerania, following the forcible resettlement in Action Vistula (1947), that most agreeable man was a recognizable figure in the local Greek Catholic community. He was heavily involved with matters connected with neglected sacred places important to the Greek Catholic

30 Małgorzata Wosińska, "Przypadek 'złotego zęba.' Etnologiczne metody badawcze w przestrzeni traumy i konfliktu," in *Teren w antropologii. Praktyka badawcza we współczesnej antropologii kulturowej*, eds. Tarczycusz Buliński and Mariusz Kairski, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2013, 151.

31 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN; Institute of National Remembrance)—a research institute in Poland that functions as a body of state and judiciary administration, combining the curation of archives with research work and educational projects. Since 2007, the IPN also conducts vetting procedures on candidates for public office (based on information from the institute's official page, <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/2,Institute-of-National-Remembrance-Commission-for-the-Prosecution-of-Crimes-again.html>).



community dating back to the prewar period. When we first met in the summer of 2015, I asked a series of questions about a pilgrimage site that once played a major role for Greek Catholics before World War II and that had been vandalized almost ten years after the war³²—the man became visibly anxious. I later realized that his fear was connected with his own efforts to revive the pilgrimage site for Ukrainians: the last thing he wanted was any sort of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, the local authorities, his Polish neighbors, or anyone else. Sensing his anxiety, I tried to put him at ease and insisted that he and his family would be safe from harm, that no audio recording would be made of our conversation, and that his anonymity would be protected. When we talked for the last time, the man told me that in the intervening two years he had been gathering information about me and now felt safer communicating with me. What persuaded him that I was not a Russian special service agent was an article I'd published in Polish in an academic journal he read, coupled with his personal contact with a colleague of mine from Warsaw. In one sense, I found that experience profoundly unsettling, but in another, it gave me plenty of food for thought on how to gain a better understanding of my Ukrainian respondents' imaginaries of Russia as a "third force" ("third actor") that exerted a malign influence on Polish-Ukrainian relations both at the level of national politics and in the daily lives of local communities in Polish Subcarpathia.

Perceptions of this "third force" is a major research problem, calling for systematic study that goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it needs to be pointed out that my Ukrainian respondents tend to associate the wave of vandalizations of tombstones and commemorative signs connected both to the massacres of Ukrainian civilians (perpetrated by the Polish underground military units [AK] or Polish communist military units [Wojsko Polskie]) and to the burials of Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) partisans in old Ukrainian cemeteries in Subcarpathia in

32 For research on multiple pilgrimages in the area, see Kamila Baraniecka, "Communitas a intencje pątników. Typy uczestnictwa w pielgrzymce. Wielki Odpust Kalwaryjski Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Kalwarii Pałacowskiej," *Etnografia Polska* 52, no. 1-2 (2008) 137-54, for the English language version see: https://www.academia.edu/33028696/COMMUNITAS_vs._PILGRIMS_IN-TENTIONS_TYPES_OF_PARTICIPATION_IN_PILGRIMAGE_GREAT_FEAST_OF_ASSUMPTION_OF_VIRGIN_MARY_IN_KALWARIA_PAC%C5%81AWSKA; and Buyskykh, "Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą", 2016.

2014–17³³ with the activity of “Russian agents in Poland.” This opinion is reinforced by the media coverage of such problems, as well as the general tone of public discourse in Poland and Ukraine, in which the subject of the on-going “hybrid war” features prominently. On several occasions, my respondents, both Poles and Ukrainians, told me that the Russian Federation and the former USSR was the “external force” seeking to sow division between Poles and Ukrainians in the area.

Working among those locals in the Przemyśl area who identified themselves as Ukrainians (Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians), I sometimes faced strong apprehension and distrust. I expected the local Ukrainians to perceive me as one of their “own,” but they did not. Because I came from Ukraine and spoke the Ukrainian language differently, I came across to them as an “alien Ukrainian” and not really “one of their own” people. They often felt threatened by events from the distant past (such as the Polish-Ukrainian partisan conflicts in Subcarpathia that led to ethnic cleansing and forcible resettlements). They thought that my research plan was to investigate the Nazi occupation period and the military action of the UPA against Polish civilians in order to expose their family ties to UPA partisans. Most declined to be recorded and asked me to sign nondisclosure documents promising not to use any of the information against them. I found it overwhelming that people continue to feel responsible for, and threatened by, things in which they or, in most cases, their parents and grandparents had not been personally involved. Such conversations required tact and sensitivity to avoid hurting or alienating people, and to protect their anonymity.

Those respondents who identified themselves as Roman Catholic Poles would often start our conversations by talking about the UPA and *banderivtsi* (UPA fighters).³⁴ Their opening question was often something along the lines of, “Was your

33 See https://espresso.tv/news/2017/05/04/zyavylasya_karta_ruynuvan_ukrayinskykh_pamyatnykiv_u_polschi

34 Banderivtsi (in Polish: *banderowcy*) is a term derived from the name of Stepan Bandera. Originally it referred to his supporters, members of the radical Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists-Banderivtsi (OUN-B). The UPA arose out of the OUN-B in 1942. Fighting to create an independent Ukrainian state, the UPA perpetrated mass killings of the Polish civilian population of Volhynia and East Galicia in 1943–44, including members of mixed Polish-Ukrainian families. The formation continued its struggle against the NKVD (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del in Russian, The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and the Soviet authorities until the early 1950s. The



grandfather in the UPA?” or “I want you to apologize to me for the Volhynia massacre, and then we can talk.” It was confusing because I’d been asking them about local sacred sites and pilgrimages, mixed Polish-Ukrainian families, and personal religious practices, but instead I’d be treated to expositions on the UPA. Having never been exposed to such stereotypes before, I had never experienced that perception of Ukrainians as a homogeneous group bearing collective responsibility for past crimes committed only by representatives of the group. Notably, none of my Polish respondents in the area regarded me as a potential “Russian agent.” However, they kept asking me about my own opinions on questions such as, “How has Russia been influencing Polish-Ukrainian relations over the past century?” Similar to the Ukrainians, the Poles appeared to take it for granted that there was a “third force” at work that was influencing their mutual relationships.

In a way, that opinion is also connected to the nostalgic narrative about the multicultural, agrarian past of Galicja (the historic name of that region under the Austro-Hungarian Empire), where Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews had lived peacefully together until two totalitarian regimes destroyed their idyllic coexistence “from the outside.”³⁵ The crucial difference between the viewpoint of the Polish Roman Catholic majority on the one hand and the Greek Catholic Ukrainian and Orthodox (mostly also Ukrainian) minorities in the area on the other is that this idea of a multicultural belle époque, where neighbors of various ethnic origins and religious denominations coexisted peacefully, is predominantly reproduced by Roman Catholic Poles. My observation is confirmed by previous research in southeastern

name *banderivtsi* also came to be applied to UPA partisans as well as the Ukrainian civilians who supported them. In the communist postwar rhetoric of the USSR and communist Poland, the term became a negative appellation describing persons of Ukrainian origin.

- 35 I would like to note that a large amount of scholarship is available on the subject of neighborly relationships between Poles and Jews; or Poles, Byelorussians, Jews, and Lithuanians; or Poles and Ukrainians, Lemkos and Boykos, which went from friendly coexistence to ethnic cleansings. See Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Jan Tomasz Gross’s *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) is perhaps one of the most well-known and dramatic instances. However, my aim here is not to present a comprehensive overview of this literature, but merely to highlight some of the relevant issues.

Poland.³⁶ Writing about the need to rethink the romanticized idea of a peaceful “multicultural neighborhood,” Agnieszka Pasięka has pointed out that “such a view usually regards the period of interwar Poland and depicts the situation in the eastern or southeastern borderlands of Poland at the time. And it is usually the representative of the then dominant group—Poles—that presents such a view.”³⁷ She emphasizes the need to “pay attention to the ‘neighborhood’ itself, and not only on its ‘multireligious’ or ‘multiethnic’ character,” taking into account “the grassroots meaning of neighborhood,” which covers “practices of mutual respect and cooperation ... regardless of people’s religious and ethnic identity.”³⁸ Similarly, Magdalena Lubanska believes that routine neighborly relations should be seen as “a bottom-up cultural strategy ... which needs to be affirmed in everyday relationships of reciprocity.”³⁹ Relying on these studies and on my own data, I believe that a focus on micro-level cases and everyday grassroots strategies of coexistence allows us to capture the ways in which people understand the past in their localities, how they perceive their erstwhile and current neighbors alongside whom they live, and how they are reconciled with, or simply cope with, memories that can be contested and politicized.

During my two years of fieldwork trips, I had inadvertently taken on the peculiar role of a “third person” standing between the Poles and the Ukrainians, burdened with their expectation that I should write “the right things” about their communities in “an appropriate way.” This was particularly apparent among the Ukrainian local community. My respondents generously introduced me to new potential interlocutors who were their relatives or friends, and sometimes came with me to services at the main Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Przemyśl. Nearly every new person I was introduced to was surprised by my project and demanded to know why I, a person with no roots or family connections to Subcarpathia, would want to write about the interreligious intersections in the area; and that being the case, they felt that as a Ukrainian I needed to write “the truth” about

36 See, for example, Litak, *Pamięć a tożsamość* and Pasięka, “Neighbors.”

37 Pasięka, “Neighbors,” 230.

38 Ibid., 232.

39 Lubanska, *Muslims and Christians in the Bulgarian Rhodopes: Studies on Religious (Anti)Syncretism* (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter Open Ltd., 2015), 59.



the Greek Catholic community in this region, which continued to feel threatened. That feeling was strengthened by numerous incidents related to the activity of nationalistic groups in Poland.⁴⁰

Thus, trauma not only was present at the level of discourse but also found expression in my research challenges in the field, as well as in my respondents themselves—in how they related to the past and how they related to me—which was indicative of the general atmosphere of distrust. This trauma became a new research problem for me since the polyphony of coexistence I was witnessing was grounded in mutual past traumas. For me, maintaining an entirely neutral stance turned out to be impossible since all my fieldwork relationships were affected by an ongoing war in Ukraine and an economic crisis that had produced a large influx of Ukrainian workers in the area, as well as by the “management of historical policy” by Poland and Ukraine and their respective public discourses on “national heroes,” in which the two groups’ views intrinsically clashed with each other. I had anticipated that either nation’s heroes were the other nation’s foes, but I had never experienced how such officially mandated “historical policies” (including “politics of memory”) could impact the everyday lives of ordinary people in local communities on the periphery.

40 For instance, at the end of June 2016 a group of nationalistically oriented young men attacked the religious procession of Greek Catholics and Orthodox (*Panachyda*), who, after a requiem for Ukrainian soldiers buried in Poland, came out to walk in procession from the main Greek Catholic Cathedral of Przemyśl to the Ukrainian military cemetery in Pikulice (in Ukrainian: Пикulichi). In June 2017, the annual procession was escorted by a large police force deployed to prevent attacks. Notably, the old cemetery in Pikulice (a village at the edge of the town of Przemyśl) was originally a World War I cemetery containing a memorial to the fallen in the Ukrainian Galician Army, who fought in the Polish-Ukrainian war of 1918–19. Since 1921, the annual religious mourning procession to the Pikulice cemetery on the Sunday following Pentecost (Trinity Sunday) became a local tradition for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Przemyśl. As a religious ceremony, it could not be banned by Polish authorities at the time. After 2000, the cemetery gained a new significance following the burial of the remains of UPA soldiers who died fighting after World War II and were later exhumed from graves in the town of Bircza (in Ukrainian: Бірча), thirty kilometers to the west of Przemyśl, the location of some particularly violent clashes between the UPA and Polish troops in 1946. See Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*, 82–86; Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “The Border as Pain and Remedy: Commemorating the Polish–Ukrainian Conflict of 1918–1919 in Lviv and Przemyśl,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* Vol. 42, no. 2, March 2014, 242–68 (2014), 247. doi:[10.1080/00905992.2013.801416](https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.801416); Huk, Bohdan. *Pokhody na mohyly voiniv ukrainskykh armij XX st. u Pykulyakh*: Zbirnyk istorychnykh materialiv. Peremysli, 2006.

Without a doubt, sensationalizing media coverage contributes to those everyday forms of mediation as well.

My opinions here are based on interactions with common citizens in several local communities on the country's periphery and may therefore appear subjective. I didn't interview local government officials, high-ranking clergymen, or other public figures, meaning that my points of reference reflect the perspective of ordinary people and their worldviews, everyday experiences, and relationships with neighbors. Accordingly, my study focuses not on "real" history, but on images glimpsed from articulations of local points of view, including experiences and perceptions of the "other." I'm not looking for any nationally oriented "truth" (Polish or Ukrainian); instead, I'm interested in how neighborly coexistence is (or was) perceived by my respondents regardless of their national and religious identity.

THREE STRATEGIES OF COEXISTENCE: FORGIVE, FORGET, OR FEIGN

National history narratives produced in Poland and Ukraine overlook, and sometimes contradict, the often complex and highly ambivalent memories and everyday experiences of people living in the borderlands.⁴¹ Those are based on the multiplicity of "plural pasts,"⁴² often experienced not by my respondents but by their parents or grandparents, which I believe need to be examined by applying the category of postmemory to the study of the diverse local communities in the area. Juraj Buzalka emphasizes that, in particular, "memories of violence are highly political and contested; they are recalled by individuals and groups especially when the memories are tied to national and religious policies and ideologies."⁴³

41 According to Anatoly M. Khazanov and Stanley G. Payne's "How to Deal with the Past?" in *Perpetrators, Accomplices and Victims in Twentieth-Century Politics: Reckoning with the Past*, eds. Anatoly M. Khazanov and Stanley Payne (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), the past is divisive in at least two cases: "when different groups within a state have conflicting opinions on its past" and "when other states have opinions on the past of an individual post-totalitarian or post-authoritarian state that is significantly different from its own self-perception." They go on to emphasize that "many post-communist countries may serve as an example of the first case, since their societies lack consensus on the prewar, war-time and communist periods of their history," (258).

42 I borrow this term from Henig, "Prayer as a History," 43.

43 Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*, 5-6.



Inhabited by people of Ukrainian and Polish descent, local rural communities in Subcarpathia incorporate the Polish national narrative that divides the two groups at a symbolic level. At the same time, the locals have to live with their ambivalent and sometimes contradictory experiences of how history unfolded in the context of their particular village. To a certain extent, some of the Ukrainians are invested in the Ukrainian national narrative, which gets reinforced and transmitted through the Greek Catholic Church. Additionally, memories of past violence are revitalized in periods of political and economic instability and become inflated in media coverage. The question arises, how do people in local communities handle this kind of deadlock?

In this context, I see a considerable potential for the idea of everyday diplomacy as a mode for living with the ghosts of the past in a way that makes it possible to deal with “domestic others” and to acknowledge difference in proximity. As far as I can tell, this approach expresses itself through three strategies of coexistence, which I refer to as *forgive*, *forget*, and *feign*. To interpret those three modes, which I note in the oral narratives as provisional categories, I also took into account the context in which they were produced (how people viewed me, how they were able or unable to trust me and share information) and their symbolic meaning. This context, which I described in part above, becomes particularly interesting when it provides an insight into the hidden roots of these peoples’ coexistence and their varying viewpoints.

The first strategy is what I provisionally term *forgiving*. According to my data, not too many respondents (only six out of seventeen) when involved in random interactions⁴⁴ represented this approach, that is, talking explicitly about forgiveness or reconciliation and commenting on the pleasure of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Most of those who did emphasized not just the need to know history and to take lessons from it but also to forgive for the sake of a better future for their children. One respondent stated,

44 Meaning the numerous minor interactions and conversations in churches, local buses, bistros, and also places where I lived during my fieldwork.

I think that the [Greek Catholic and Orthodox] churches are part of our region's cultural heritage. In my opinion, we should take care of them, and develop tourism here, and signs should be put up saying that those used to be Ukrainian and Lemko villages. I know that someone from my family was actually baptized as a Greek Catholic. Subcarpathia, at any rate, had never been homogeneous! The families were mixed, everybody here knows that. ... I hold no resentments against the Ukrainians. It's true that *banderowcy* killed Poles in Volhynia, and here in these mountains as well. That was a crime, no arguing with that. But Poles also killed Ukrainians, and personally I find that shameful. ... The Ukrainians who lived here, in these villages, they were not causing any harm to Poles. Let me tell you, there were mixed families. ... Today the times are different, we should be living peacefully. A girl from Ukraine lives in our village, she married a guy I know. It's probably making his grandfather turn in his grave [*laughs*]; he didn't like Ukrainians. But his grandson is now married to a Ukrainian girl, and that's all right. That's how things should be. (April 2017; Pole, male, born 1962)⁴⁵

Like many others, the man I quoted above declined to be recorded. However, he was always sincere with me and eager to assist me in my research. Notably, his village (like many others in the area) contains a number of physical memorials that are contradictory to the Ukrainian and Polish points of view. After World War II, the village became homogenous, but formerly it was inhabited by Greek Catholic Ukrainians living side by side with Roman Catholic Poles. There used to be two churches, one for each denomination, that were also pilgrimage sites for Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics, respectively.⁴⁶ The village was one of the locations affected by military clashes between the UPA and the AK. During the resettlements in 1944–46 and Action Vistula (1947), the Ukrainian villagers (including mixed families) were forcibly relocated. The Greek Catholic church located in that area was destroyed almost ten years after those events. The former location of that Greek Catholic church and pilgrimage site, which is situated on a hill, is now

45 From this point on, all translations from Polish and Ukrainian into English are mine—the dates indicate when an interaction took place.

46 Buyskykh, "Pomiędzy pamięcią a granicą," 43–46



privately owned land, with remnants of the church's foundations still visible. The only thing suggesting that this was once home to a Greek Catholic community is a memorial cross put up, with the current owner's consent, by Ukrainians from Przemyśl and other localities in order to commemorate a sacred place that was once important to their ancestors. During the pilgrimage season in August, some Greek Catholic pilgrims both from Ukraine and from Przemyśl come to that cross and take part in liturgy provided by a Greek Catholic priest from Ukraine.⁴⁷ Less than a five minutes' walk from that place is the other memorial—not a grassroots initiative but rather an official one—a granite monument with a dedication, "To the memory of the victims of OUN-UPA in 1939–1948," containing the names of the fallen and the Polish military units in which they served. The respondent I quoted was perhaps one of the few people in the village who tried to reconcile the multiple overlapping pasts by treating both of those materialized memories with respect for the dead, regardless of ethnic origin or religious denomination. Sometimes, he told me, he lights a candle (*znicz*) at each monument since every dead person "deserves respect and forgiveness." However, this behavior and way of thinking about the past was uncommon among my respondents.

Another respondent representing the *forgive* approach emphasized the "Christian values" shared by Poles and Ukrainians:

My attitude towards the Poles is very good. What's past is past, it's gone. The Poles are our neighbors, and we should be living peacefully as neighbors. Do you see what's going on in Ukraine right now, at Donbass? That will never happen in Poland! There are bad Poles and good Poles, but there are also bad Ukrainians and good Ukrainians. That's just people for you. And we live normally here, as neighbors. Let me tell you something: I attend usually the *kościół*,⁴⁸ not the *церква*. That's despite the fact that I'm a Greek Catholic, and so are my children. But here, in my village, there is only a *kościół*, and it is too far for me to ride a bicycle to Przemyśl. And I don't have a car. So, I only go to

47 Ibid, 57 - 59

48 Both in the Ukrainian and Polish languages, there are different notions on the churches of Western and Eastern Christianity: *kościół* (ко́сьцёл) means a Roman Catholic church, and *cerkiew* (цeрквa) is a Greek Catholic and Orthodox church.

our main cathedral on big holidays, like Easter and Christmas. Many people do the same thing, and who can judge that? We're all Christians. (August 2017; Ukrainian, female, born 1951)

The same woman also told me that she believed it was the right thing to do to light a candle at every abandoned grave, Polish or Ukrainian, when visiting a cemetery on All Saints' Day. In our conversations, she made frequent references to passages from the liturgy and prayer, telling me that it was "her duty as a Christian" to forgive.

The second strategy of coexistence is *forgetting* (or avoiding) the past. In this case, I rely on the respondents' conviction that forgetting offers a way to achieve reconciliation. As one Orthodox man of Ukrainian origin noted:

In order to survive, I had to become a different person. My parents were Ukrainians and they were resettled from our village. I remember nothing of that. I was a little kid at that time. I can only remember the church, I used to sing in a choir. ... I wanted to study, to serve in the army, and so I had to become a Pole. I almost forgot the [Ukrainian] language, and my children are Polish. ... Why have I come back here? Well, I'm retired now, and these are different times. Nobody cares about my family's past. I've come back to our village and helped to renovate our church. I was Greek Catholic, but now I'm Orthodox, and to me there's no difference between the two. I'm faithful to the shrine. (August 2015; Ukrainian, male, born 1939)

He was quite emphatic about the fact that he felt no resentment toward Poles—so much so, in fact, that his insistence on having almost forgotten his family past gave me reason to doubt his veracity. There's a difference between *actually forgetting* and *wanting to forget*. But when I came across similar opinions on several occasions, I also realized that there was a certain pattern at work here: with Poles as well as Ukrainians, believing that they needed "to live as they do," and choose to forget was a deliberate strategy of neighborly coexistence. Some were, in fact, too young to remember the events of World War II and its aftermath in the region. However, they insisted even the traumatic postmemory in their families had no influence on them:



We live normally here. I personally don't want to dig in the past, I don't want to know who did more of the killing: we [the Poles] or you [the Ukrainians]. A regular person can agree with another regular person, Polish or Ukrainian, it makes no difference. ... Politicians stir up problems, regular folk don't. Politics ruins everything. And a normal person will find common ground for understanding with another normal person. (August 2015; Pole, male, born 1958)

This point of view, predicated as it is on the idea that “politicians” interfere with the lives of regular people, is linked to the imaginaries of a “third force” that poisons good neighborly relations in the area, as mentioned above. In my fieldwork, I heard on numerous occasions that the responsibility for the existing tensions between the Poles and the Ukrainians weighs heavily “on the conscience of politicians” or even of a “third state” (meaning Russia) that influences those relations. Conversely, those respondents who are inclined to forgive and those who wish to forget were constantly expressing the opinion that reciprocal help and assistance in routine daily interactions was an effective mode of dealing with the “plural pasts.” As examples, my respondents listed the ability to provide mutual assistance in agricultural work, to extend money loans in emergencies (and to return it in a timely fashion), to assist each other following bereavements, to provide help in family matters, and to cooperate on various small business ventures.

I refer to the third strategy of neighborly coexistence as *feigning* (or pretending). This is the most frequent mode my respondents and their friends used to handle the past. Feigning involves a complex set of behavioral patterns and narratives produced in the presence of a researcher (me), calculated to project a convincing image that normal neighborly coexistence between the Polish Roman Catholic majority and the mainly Ukrainian minorities (Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Orthodox) is nowadays a matter of course. However, discernible in those declarations of good neighborly relations were elements of historical escapism along with hidden wounds and grievances that manifested themselves through hints, gossip, envy, stereotypes, and other behaviors. In describing similar neighborly relations between Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and their Orthodox Christian neighbors, Magdalena

Lubanska uses the concept of a “strategy of silence,”⁴⁹ which to me seems an apt description that frames this particular mode of coexistence.

I find that this strategy of silence is more palpable in the Ukrainian communities—both Orthodox and Greek Catholic—which share a strong sense of victimization at the hands of the majority. However, Orthodox believers were not particularly eager to argue the point with me. Their usual formula was “we’ve gotten used to it all” or “we’ve got churches of our own, and that’s all that matters.” However, this is obviously not “all that matters” for my Greek Catholic respondents, even if they tend to argue to outsiders like me that they bear no grudges and the past “had gone”:

My father wasn’t a member of the UPA, we just were ordinary people, as were most of the villagers! ... Do you know that this village used to be entirely Ukrainian? And now it’s entirely Polish. Everything’s changed, but who can I blame? Should I complain that my children are Polish, and they go to the *kościół*? They understand Ukrainian, they have Ukrainian names, but they’re Polish like their mother. And they’ll bury me in the Polish cemetery because it’s close to the *kościół*, and it’s closer to our house. I doubt they’ll manage to write my name in Ukrainian [Cyrillic writing] on the grave, but I don’t care anymore. ... You’re too young, and I’ll tell you something: Polish, Ukrainian, Greek Catholics, or Roman Catholics—we’re all neighbors here, get it? So we have to live together even if we don’t especially want to. To be buried among Poles? I say no problem, at least we’re all Christians. (April 2017; Ukrainian, male, born 1930)

The notion that “we’re all Christians” is also quite typical of Roman Catholic Poles. I was told on numerous occasions that, compared to Muslims, it was “better” to have Greek Catholics and Orthodox as neighbors, since “they are also Christians.” This idea would emerge in conversations about marriages between Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics, which tended to be quite emotional. Generally, my respondents in all categories (i.e., forgiving, forgetting, and feigning) had tolerant views on mixed marriages between Ukrainians and Poles, insisting that “feelings

49 Lubanska, *Muslims and Christians*, 58.

know no borders” and “our children should live as they want.” But as a rule, Poles and Ukrainians alike are unhappy, not so much because their children enter mixed marriages, but rather that their children might change their religious rite after marriage. Of course, my Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Orthodox respondents were aware that practicing endogamy was hardly possible these days. However, Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians would claim that it was difficult to preserve their confessional group as a minority, so it was important to find a partner in the same Church and to raise children in “one faith,” or at least one Byzantine rite. In turn, Roman Catholics would say that both Greek Catholicism and Orthodoxy were “very beautiful,” “inspiring,” or even “magical” cultural phenomena, but the Roman Catholic Church was “more developed” and connected with the Vatican, amounting to a “civilizational choice.” I also noticed that some of my Roman Catholic respondents were not aware that Greek Catholicism was likewise part of the Catholic Church and thus recognize the authority of the Vatican. To the local Roman Catholics, both the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox rites were perceived positively in the terms of “beautiful liturgy,” “inspiring church singing,” and so on, but at the same time were seen as “alien,” “Eastern,” “not common to Polish culture.” I tend to perceive such an attitude as a form of exotization because members of the dominant group view the religious culture of the neighboring minority groups as a kind of curious ethnographic attraction.

I propose that the Greek Catholic and Orthodox communities don’t warrant this stereotypical exotization; however, they are marginalized partly because of their own on-going narrative of their community’s collective trauma. This is highly palpable in the Greek Catholic community, which cherishes its image of victimization. Having been present at some Greek Catholic services on big holidays like Easter or Trinity, I noticed how the phantom pains of loss and the collective victimhood complex get transmitted through liturgy. In April 2017, when the seventieth anniversary of Action Vistula was being commemorated by the Ukrainian community of Przemyśl, I could observe and sense that the trauma of the resettlement

was still powerfully felt.⁵⁰ Even the third generation of Greek Catholic Ukrainians inherited it along with a sense of separate group identity—distinct both from Poles and from Ukrainians coming from Ukraine. Olga Solarz, a Polish ethnologist of Ukrainian origin, tends to regard Action Vistula as “an enforced rite of passage that formed the foundation of the collective identity of Ukrainians in Poland.”⁵¹ Reflecting on her own family experience, she emphasized that “the awareness of a shared trauma of displacement, shared fear and painful social exclusion set them [Ukrainians] apart from the majority, and became another building block for the collective identity of Ukrainians in Poland.”⁵² At the same time, Solarz emphasizes the necessity to finally “get out of the cars of the deportation trains” and to rework the collective complex of the community’s “victimhood.” She actually embodies the reconciliation of the past traumas of the Ukrainian community through a set of practical actions involving the restoration of old cemeteries. Together with Szymon Modrzejewski, Polish restorer and sculptor, and a group of volunteers working together as “Stowarzyszenie Magurycz” (The Magurych Association),⁵³ they run workshops and summer camps focusing on the restoration and renovation of old Ukrainian, Boyko, Lemko, Jewish, and Polish cemeteries in Subcarpathia. Participation in Magurych activities is something that unites many young people from Poland and Ukraine, regardless of origin, traumatic experience in the family, or religious denomination.

During my trips to the Przemyśl area, I always tried to ask people: What is it that unites you? When do you really experience a sense of good neighborhood? The kinds of social reflection that I could make out from their replies, which were sometimes indirect and oblique rather than straightforward and literal, might be

50 Referring to Buzalka’s monograph published ten years ago, I conclude that little has changed since then. He quotes the words spoken by a local Greek Catholic priest during Mass: “Action Vistula took place more than fifty years ago, but in my opinion, it is still going on” (Buzalka, *Nation and Religion*, 55). I’ve heard many variations on that opinion, especially from first- and second-generation people who returned to Subcarpathia from western and northern Poland. However, a deeper insight into this issue goes beyond the scope of this article.

51 Olga Solarz, “O sztuce wychodzenia z deportacyjnego wagonu.” *Kwartalnik “Więź”* 2 (668) 2017. Accessed May 18, 2018. <http://laboratorium.wiez.pl/2017/07/14/o-sztuce-wychodzenia-z-deportacyjnego-wagonu/>

52 Ibid.

53 See <https://www.facebook.com/pg/StowarzyszenieMagurycz/about/>



surprising. For instance, people born 1950–65 would often tell me that they enjoyed “ecumenical initiatives,” like gathering and praying together on a rosary (both Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics) or attending solemn services in the Roman Catholic cathedral, with the Greek Catholic chaplain in attendance as a guest. Those respondents as well as younger ones would also say that they might enjoy various concerts and festivals in Bieszczady that presented the “cultural heritage” of their region. I propose that those modes of social practice are precisely the forms of reflection that don’t emphasize problems of ethnicity or nationality, but rather address the immediate, everyday context, symptomatic of bottom-up cooperation and leisure. Along with various volunteer activities, small business ventures, and routine interactions I mention above, such an approach contributes to the difficult and long-term process of coming to terms with the past in the region of Subcarpathia.

CONCLUSIONS

The research on religious practices in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands in the area of Subcarpathia opens up another set of important research questions connected with overlapping memories that tend to be highly contested and politicized in the public discourses of both Poland and Ukraine. Those memories became visible to me in the process of research both through religious expressions and through those modes of dealing with the past and elaborating on neighborly coexistence that could be framed as “everyday diplomacy.” In this article, I use the term “everyday diplomacy” to refer to a number of routine grassroots strategies for living alongside neighbors with different ethnic (national) identities and religious denominations under the burden of contested memories that go back to World War II and its aftermath. Participation in neighborly relationships is strengthened by the impact the media have on people’s everyday life in local communities, reviving the contradictory memories of past violence in the area. Additionally, the role of the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic Churches in (re)constructing memories and perceptions of history within the parishes shouldn’t be underestimated.

The main strategies of coexistence in the local diverse communities of Subcarpathia, as I frame them, involve *forgiving* (personal reconciliation and forgiveness without forgetfulness), *forgetting* (oblivion, including deliberate nonremembering),



and *feigning* (a strategy of silence). However, silence as the main strategy of coexistence can be applied to each. These strategies become visible through a number of behavioral patterns and religious expressions, but mostly in the modes of personal communication where various hints, lies, stereotypes, mutual traumas, but also perspectives on dialogue with the “domestic others” surface. It also seemed like local dwellers may be employing aspects of each category, simultaneously depending on the context in which they are performing (a conversation with me, conversations with neighbors, references to clergy, materialized attitudes to ambiguous monuments, etc.). Thus, the categories, weaving around one another in an inseparable manner, function more like a phenomenon of continued silent coexistence, inherited from the communist times. These are the grassroots cultural strategies that help somehow to reconcile mutual historical resentments that are experienced by various actors in diverse local communities in Subcarpathia. However, none of the three diplomatic strategies of coexistence successfully remove the basic reality that the Greek Catholic and Orthodox minorities living in Subcarpathia are surrounded by a Roman Catholic Polish majority, by whom they are exoticized and marginalized. Thus, religion in the area serves as both a distinguishing factor (Roman Catholics vs. Orthodox and Greek Catholics) and a bridge (“at least we are all Christians”).

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