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New Multicultural Identities in Europe

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CHAPTER 6
A Case of Euro-Muslimness
in Poland? The Polish Tartars case

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The chapter focuses on Polish Tartars, the progeny of the Golden Horde – a small ethno-religious community which has thoroughly written itself into the Polish ethno-cultural landscape. The example of their history and contemporary life shows both the identity strategies undertaken by the groups which have a post-migration origin and which for centuries have lived in a social environment that is different from their own culture and religion, as well as – which is significant in the context of the debate in recent years concerning the possibility of a dialogue between the Islamic and Western worlds – the ways of building relations which, metaphorically speaking, can be described as good-neighbourly. I will illustrate the principles and the logic of building intercultural relations which, above all, are geared towards cooperation.

Between ‘post-migrant’ and indigenous status

Co-existence or the neighbourhood of cultures can take on different forms, starting with co-operation or neutral distance, and ending with conflict relationships. The logic and dynamics of these relations are derivatives of many factors: the character and a range of cultural diversity in a society on the macro-, mezzo- and micro-social scales; the dominating political discourse (official and existing in the public domain) dealing with the desired state of affairs in intercultural relations; the type of nationalism which determines the attitude

towards ethno-cultural otherness; and finally factors of a historical or geopolitical nature.

One of the more important aspects of intercultural relations is those in which the host and the newcomers, or members of the receiving society and migrants, are entangled. Their presence in a given society can be relatively short-term or can last for many centuries, just as the reasons for their arrival can be different from the conditions on which their stay in their place of settlement is possible. In time, they can become 'one of us' (from the perspective of a receiving society) and assimilate; they can also, metaphorically speaking, become a personification of strangeness/a symbol of otherness; but they can also be regarded as the familiarized other.

The issue of migration and its consequences for the entirety of cultural relations within contemporary societies has found its place in the centre of attention of numerous social researchers. My goal is not to review the literature on the subject, as the main theoretical considerations were made in the Introduction (Leman, Toğuşlu and Sezgin), but to draw the reader's attention to one of the most interesting dimensions of intercultural relations between newcomers and their hosts, i.e. long-term relations.

In this part of Europe, Tartars – Sunni Muslims – invite curiosity because their location seems untypical, even exotic. Intriguing as it may seem, their exoticism is not the only reason for which they have been taken as an example. From the standpoint of migration issues, the community does not belong to those who, according to objective criteria, can be described as sufficiently settled in a given social place that their post-migrant status loses its significance. Members of this community have a sense of their separateness which partly results from their uncommon history. Also, their social environment communicates this very context of their being unique. Furthermore, the long time which has passed since the time of the Tartars' settlement in this part of Europe has resulted in their conviction about their right to be 'here', about being 'at home' in territorial, symbolic and identity dimensions.

Therefore, one can say that the group is positioned "in-between" as they are not really post-migrant and not really seen as indigenous. This ambivalent status makes it the starting point for my consideration of the issue in the title: Being a Muslim in Poland.

Polish Tartars: an introduction

According to historical sources, contemporary Polish, Lithuanian and Belorussian Tartars are, first of all, the descendants of newcomers from the Golden Horde, who settled in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the fourteenth century. In those days, the population was not dense, as it is estimated to have been 12,000 or so in total. The main concentration of the Tatar population was in Vilnius and its surrounding areas – Troki, Minsk, Słonim and in the Podlasie area. The Tartar settlement in contemporary Poland – in Podlasie, where the biggest Tartar group (approximately 3000 strong) currently resides – began in the second half of the seventeenth century (Borawski; Dubiński 1986).

In the context of the issue being discussed, it is important to stress that arriving in the territories of Lithuania and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth meant, in the majority of cases, the specific location of the Tartars within the spaces of these political entities, both in reference to the location of the settlement (geographically) and in reference to their legal status based on the right to land and nobility and related privileges and obligations (which does not pertain to those who were not free or the descendants of Tartar prisoners). Generally speaking, they were allowed to settle down in return for military service. Although limited due to their religious otherness, they were granted some citizenship rights. Islam, the practice of which was not in any way restricted (except during the period of persecutions in the 17th century), constituted a barrier, making it impossible to be fully included in the privileged group of citizens of the old Republic. As a result of marriages with Catholic and Orthodox partners, some of them became Christians and assimilated.

One can say metaphorically that, in a period of a few hundred years, a Tartar ethnic world was born and developed: not a temporary world but a well-established one. It had a specific character, in which such elements as religion (Islam), the nobility ethos as well as traditions and social and cultural values of the surrounding environment permeated each other, especially since their own ethnic language ceased to be the centre of communication as early as the sixteenth century. Within this world, community life went on, new mosques were built and cemeteries and places of remembrance established.

The situation changed only in 1918 when national borders divided the Tartar community for the first time. Statistics from 1930 show that there were about 6,000 Tartars in Poland, mainly concentrated in the Vilnius, Nowogródek,

Grodno and Białystok regions. About 2,500 Tartars lived in Soviet Belorussia, and a little over 1,000 in Lithuania. (Miśkiewicz 1990).

The consequences of World War II were also crucial for the Tartars' situation because at that time another breakup of the group took place. After the change of national borders, some Tartars took the decision to leave their local mother country in 1945 and, together with other Poles, left the territories then annexed to the Soviet Union and moved, first of all, to the Western Territories, and then to the Podlasie region. The immigration movement included one third of the population which had lived in Poland before the War. The borders, which divided the Tartar community for many years to come, not only brought about physical alienation of the members of the group but also, in consequence, contributed to the creation of different Tartar ethnoses.

Even in the interwar period the community functioned under the common name of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars, which had historical connotations. Today, however, we speak of Polish Tartars, Lithuanian Tartars and Belorussian Tartars. The *ethonym* (composed of two elements) can serve as an interesting indicator of an identity situation among contemporary Tatars. Firstly, it informs one about the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars' common origin, their ethnic history, culture or specific Muslim religiousness, which – when considered together – decide the separate, unique character of this historical community.

Secondly, the adjectives “Polish”, “Lithuanian” or “Belorussian” are not just territorial indicators of a group's roots in the meaning of contemporary state locations but also – as the case of the Polish Tartars shows – a national identification or – in the case of the Lithuanian or Belorussian Tartars – a potential piece of information about community ties or citizen loyalty.

Currently, the Tartar population in Poland numbers roughly 5,000 according to estimates by the Muslim Religious Association.¹

The national census of 2011 showed that, in Poland, it had almost 2,000 members. The legal status of Polish Tartars was regulated by the Act of 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on regional languages, according to which they are a recognized ethnic minority in Poland. It gives them some rights and financial support from the state and its institutions.

Today's Polish Tartars do not constitute a socially compact community, as they are dispersed all over Poland, living mostly in smaller or bigger towns. The reconstruction of a community life of the past has been only partially successful. At present, Białystok, the capital of the region, and the neighbouring towns are the area where over half of the members of the Tartar community live, although

before WWII only some 10% of them lived here. We can say that contemporary Tartars do not cultivate their traditional community life around the place of their residence, but rather around moments of being together on religious, ethnic or family occasions, although their kinsmen in Lithuania still live in conglomerations, like the one in the village of Sorok Tatary, where a community of several tens of Tartars have lived for over 450 years.

They gather in two associations – religious and ethnic. The Muslim Religious Association keeps eight religious communes, linking for the most part Muslims of Tartar origin. Today, the Muslim Religious Association and its ethnic organization – the Polish Tartars’ Association – have their seats in Białystok. And so, near Białystok, in the villages of Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, there are two old mosques and cemeteries which date back to the 18th and 19th centuries (from among 17 temples and 39 cemeteries they had during the interwar period). These places have, as my interlocutors declare, the most symbolic meaning to them. Once typically Tartar, at present these villages are inhabited by a few families, and they constitute places where during their major religious holidays Tartars from all over Poland arrive to pray together in the mosques and to visit their ancestors’ graves. Another relatively socially compact group of about 200 Tartars lives in Gdańsk.

They have, besides the aforementioned old mosques, a temple in Gdańsk, three cemeteries and a few houses of prayer. In 2004 the post of Mufti was established. Being a representative of the group, he leads the religious life of the Muslim community.

For many years, the Muslim Religious Association was the only religious association connecting Muslims in Poland, and, for the most part, the Tartars functioned as imams. Under the organization’s statutes, everyone who came from a Muslim family automatically became a member of the Association. In practice, this meant that he/she also had Tartar origin. It was so because for many years the Polish Tartars shared a conviction that they were the only group of Muslims in Poland that could be distinctly separated. The stereotype that every Tartar in Poland is a Muslim and every Muslim in Poland is a Tartar confirmed this. The awareness had both historical roots, as the Polish Tartars had always lived in relative isolation from the Islamic world, and political roots because the contact of members of this community with other Muslim believers, especially in communist Poland, boiled down to more or less sporadic and intensive meetings with students from Muslim countries. The latter, among others, served as teachers of religion in the absence of those members of the group who were able to run such educational courses.

The situation started to change in the 1990s when Muslims from other countries started to settle in Poland temporarily or permanently, and when conversions to Islam began to occur. What is more, in 2004 another religious association was legalized – the Muslim League of Poland. Those factors have brought about a change in the formula of membership of the Muslim Religious Association, which for the past few years has been admitting Muslim believers who have Polish citizenship or a permanent residence card. Consequently, the ethnic make-up of the Muslim Religious Association has changed; at present 1/3 are non-Tartars, and the communes are led by people from outside their ethnic community.

A complex configuration of identifications

My research on Tartar identity has shown that members of this group are carriers of a multiple identity in the ethno-cultural sense.² For members of the community, combining and integrating three aspects in one identity project, i.e. the religious, ethnic and national-citizen aspects, is a legacy and obvious reality. The image of the world based on which one can be a Muslim, a Tartar and a Pole at the same time has been permanently domesticated by group tradition and ideological visions as well as by the experiences of individuals. The existing identifying *status quo* is a result of both identity choices and also a certain historical logic.

Their being Polish comes from the fact of their acquisitive prescription (of over 600 years), cultural community (the language), historic traditions (especially military ones), historical memory and citizenship. Their being Tartars, however, is determined by their origins, historical memory, traditions, but most of all by their religion, Islam, which delineates the ethnicity of the group very strongly. I wish to stress, in general terms, that in the case of this group, on the identity level, we are dealing with a strong mutual permeation of ethnic and religious elements, like the abovementioned stereotype. Therefore, we can talk about a far-reaching ethnicization of religion. Moreover, another strong component of a collective identity in its ethno-cultural aspect is Polishness, understood as a national or state identification.

Polishness locates itself, metaphorically speaking, between an obligation and a fate. The fact of having (participated) lived in Polish society for many decades brought about a far-reaching enculturation into Polishness within the aspect of popular culture and also within the values of the national canon of

values, attitudes, visions of the history, everyday and festive codes. This finds its expression in the manner of argument for being Polish, which is deeply rooted in the traditional/dominating discourse, although the civic element has become stronger in recent years, and it is stressed in many declarations that citizenship and nationality are two separate issues. It is interesting that the scholarly discourse which postulates the existence of multiple identities goes hand in hand with the declarations of the members of the community and, to a certain degree, is used reversibly for self-description. So one can say that it has become an element of a reference knowledge.

At this point I would like to mention yet another issue. The Tartar community is distinct in respect of religion as its members practise Islam. Their religion is tightly bound up with the ethnic dimension of identity, although for some of the group's members it is a dimension that functions independently of the ethnic one, which is expressed in the name used to mark the group: Polish Muslims. This is not the place to explain the role of religion in marking the ethnic boundaries of a group but, in the context of a collective memory of the type I am speaking about, the fact of preserving Islam is equivalent to preserving the separateness of the ethnic group and, like Tartariness, an argument of a dual character. Perhaps I should just mention that the religious past constitutes a crucial key to deviations from Islamic principles, especially in relations with Muslims from outside Poland. An ultimate argument is those 600 years of being here, in the sea of Christianity, as one of my interlocutors said, and preserving the religion of the ancestors.

This complex identity configuration, resulting from the mutual permeation of cultural areas as a system of reference for building self-definition, i.e. those connected with the Tartar origin, religion and Polishness, causes the processes of building symbolic borders of the community to be dynamic and multifaceted. As my interlocutors declare, each of the mentioned elements is important to them and, in a sense, inalienable, despite the fact that their importance differs depending on how a given subject constructs his/her vision of self and the community.

To illustrate this issue briefly, let us refer to the name as an important emblem of the group. Some of its members name "him/herself" as "Polish Tartars – Muslims", others as "Polish Muslims", "Poles of Tartar origin". If each of these terms were to be treated as a declaration of identity, not just as a customarily used name, then one would be able to note the complexity of this system of identification. Stressing or omitting one of the three key elements in one's declaration does not exclude the others. It does show, however, his/her identification preferences in a given time and place or a moment in that person's life. One should also remember

that that social identity is always constructed *vis a vis* others, be it members of one's own group or a social environment in a broad sense, and this fact define a possible area for the negotiation of social recognition.

For instance, if for some of the members of the group it is being a Muslim (let us add a Polish Muslim) that is most important, and if they emphasize this community identification in relations with others, then perhaps they will encounter a barrier caused by the situation where in popular discourse they function, first of all, under the name of Polish Tartars – Polish Muslims. Such a situation took place when the Muslim Religious Association celebrated its 80th anniversary, when during the festivities the Mufti used in his speech the term “we Polish Muslims”, while the representatives of local authorities addressed their words to the Polish Tartars saying “our Tartars”. It has to be stressed that this did not stir up any objections on the part of the representatives of the group. Nevertheless, it was an interesting example of the interplay between internal and external aspects of social identity.

Co-operative neighbourhood relations

In the case of Polish Muslims, being a Tartar in Poland translates into a variety of institutional, ideological and less formal daily activities which are based on such an interplay of similarities and differences when delineating symbolic borders of the community, so that on the one hand its religious and ethnic separateness could be preserved, and so that it was possible to delineate a possibly wide field of complementarity with the dominating group on the other. Hence, the identity aspect and social practices are equally important.

In order to describe strategies which members of this community adopt in multicultural relations with representatives of other ethnic and religious groups which are situated on similar or dominating social positions, one has to take note of a few variables.

Firstly, nowadays Poland is a country of a relatively low degree of saturation with multiculturalism in its ethnic and religious aspects. The Białystok region, however, where the largest population of Tartars is located, is not only a region of borderline character but also an area where the proportion of ethnic and religious minorities in the general population is higher than in other regions (Belarussians, Orthodox, Roma). This makes us take into consideration the specificity of Tartar actions on a local level.

Secondly, in public discourse at the national level, Tartars seldom appear as social partners/subjects, and in the recent years they were talked about (as Muslims in Poland, our Muslims, Tartars, Euro-Muslims) in the context of the 2001 events, publications in the press printing cartoons depicting Mohammed, and the problem of headscarves in France.

These circumstances became a pretext for Tartars to communicate a vision of mutual relations. Also, the Polish press reports on the fact that Polish Tartars, who are Muslims who have been living in Poland for centuries, celebrate Kurban Bajram and Ramadam Bajram.

Thirdly, one cannot but agree that, in the group leaders' opinion, the Tartars as a numerically small group have a marginal position among other ethnic and religious minorities in Poland and cannot expect (in fact, they do not expect) to become important partners in relations with at least the authorities. As they say, they are local exotica. It should be stressed that they do not present to the dominant group any demands addressing discrimination. To cite A.P. Cohen's (1975) typology, one can speak of a strategy of "assertive marginality", i.e. a way of constructing their identity so that the marginality stigma is minimized by turning it into a positive value.

Going back to the analysis of the rules or logic behind building neighbourly relations between different religious and ethnic communities, the example of Polish Tartars is a good illustration of a strategy focused on cooperation. The mechanisms of such actions are based on a game of similarities and differences while delineating the symbolic borders of a community in such a way as, while preserving their own cultural resources, to mark a possibly large field of complementarity with the dominating group and to build an image of a "tamed other" within Polish (Christian) society.

If we understand neighbourhood on the level of coexistence within a larger community of groups that are different in respect of culture, then these rhetorical strategies gain special importance when used by members of a discussed group, especially its leaders, who speak about their Polishness as a way of stressing cultural, historical closeness. And so, such values and attitudes are manifested as Tartar patriotism, their involvement in the defence of the country, loyalty, from time almost immemorial being part of Polish culture and tradition. At the same time, the Tartars declare that Poland is their mother country and that they feel themselves and are considered by others to be Poland's "loyal sons", to use the Tartar leaders' rhetoric.

In this case, the religion of Islam is undercommunicated, as a crucial element of Polishness is Catholicism, and this specific criterion potentially excludes the Tartars from the community of nationals. Polishness, on the other hand, is positively associated with Islam as building the image of the Tartars as Polish Muslims, i.e. “ones of their own”, “proven”, ones that can be relied on. Such rhetoric appeared in Tartars’ statements especially when issues relating to Muslim extremism, terrorism and the threat of the “war between civilizations” were tackled in the public discourse.

In such circumstances they usually overcommunicated their cultural and historical ties with Poland as a representative of Western civilization. They condemned aggressive actions on the part of some Islamic groups; they educated “others”, showing the peaceful “face” of their religion, by using their own example. Another important issue was their indicating cultural community with Europe rather than with that which is Arabic. In this way, they clearly showed their hierarchy of values.

It is also interesting that, when the other Muslim association (besides the Muslim Religious Association) was legalized by the authorities in 2004 some Tartar leaders expressed their disappointment with such a move, and said that in such a situation they would not be able to take care of the Polish interests in the broadly understood world of Islam because those interests had been passed to other than Tartar hands. In the case of the discussion on the “scarves”, they also clearly stressed their Polish/European roots, indicating cultural distance from “the brothers in Islam”, which did not result in the depreciation of their own religion, but showed its positive character, i.e. – Polish Tartars –Muslims.

Another aspect of neighbourhood in its “global” dimension is their involvement in joint ventures which have the character of organized cooperation. In this case, since 1997 the Tartar Muslims have participated in the Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims, which constitutes a forum for religious dialogue. The Council works to strengthen peace, desisting from aggression in mutual contacts, wants to prevent conflict and stereotypes by getting people to know each other and by mutual understanding.

For several years now, educational initiatives for a religious dialogue have been underway in cooperation with different institutions. For instance, in June 2008, the Centre of Culture of the Polish Tartars in Gdańsk organized a conference entitled “Islam in Europe”. Alongside academics, among the invited guests were leaders and representatives of the Jewish and Catholic communities. And in Sokółka, a local annual event called “Sokólski Orient” is organized, during which

Byelorussian, Roma and Tartar folk groups from Vilnius perform. The theme of the event is “Culture unites nations”.

Moreover, the organizers of important religious or ethnic celebrations invite representatives of the Catholic church (bishops and local priests) and sometimes representatives of the Orthodox church to be present as guests of honour during the festivities.

Therefore, one can say that there are many different institutionalized levels or platforms on which the “neighbourhood” of cultures, nations and religions is implemented, where the platforms are created and initialized by representatives of the community or in which they participate.

Community coexistence has yet another dimension: that of everyday relations where the logic and character of mutual relations come to the surface, where there are fewer declarations and manifestations of attitudes and more practical social life. In this case too one can talk about a cultural strategy of neighbourhood on the part of representatives of the discussed group that is expressed through such a construction of symbolic boundaries so that it is possible to delineate the widest possible field of complementarity with “others”. Such an approach assumes striving to accept the existing differences, not only as a fact but as an asset. In any case, this is a typical strategy for minority groups oriented towards cooperation rather than competition or conflict.

Conversations with members of the group paint the following picture of neighbourly relations. Usually, the fact that they are Tartars and Muslims is well known. As they declare, among the people from their close social environment, the fact stirs friendly interest, rather than dislike or distance. They have friends both among “their own kind” and among many Catholics and Orthodox, and that makes no difference to them. They stress that in their relations it is the character of a person or mutual attitude that matters, not the person’s ethnic origin or religion. Care for good neighbourly relations is expressed through respecting holidays, whether Catholic or Orthodox. Therefore, they abstain from activities which, according to the traditions of other religions, should not be performed. For instance avoiding making a noise or engaging in deep and thorough pre-holiday tidying. Friends from outside the group are guests at such celebrations as weddings or birthday parties, while they are invited to and participate in similar social occasions.

This picture of good neighbourly relations can be overshadowed by a fact which was present in many statements: in their childhood, at school or in the playground, situations frequently took place in which my interlocutors were ridiculed or

called names because of their different religious or ethnic origin. Sometimes they were called “you Tartar gob”, nowadays more often “binladens”. When asked about their views on those experiences, they would blame such behaviour on “children’s silliness” and lack of understanding rather than verbal aggression, in this way minimizing or marginalizing sources of possible conflict situations.

Invisible Muslimness

In the context of discussing multicultural relations, it is also important to note that the Tartars’ religious distinction is not visible in a social sense in many everyday situations. This is so partly because of the essence of the Tartar Muslim practice, and partly because of the nature of the functioning of this religious community which gathers not so much around places as around common moments of being together.

The Tartar religiousness first of all has a private character as it concentrates within a family. When asked about their religious practice (which differs from the “orthodoxy” as they are well aware), my interlocutors stressed many times that they had to “adapt” to their surroundings, giving up some of the requirements of their religion at the same time. In their opinion, however, this does not change the fact that they are Muslims in their hearts and actions, only their Islam is “local” and Tartar. The few situations in a year when Polish Muslims celebrate their holidays together, for example Kurban Bajram, during which they publicly sacrifice animals, take place in relatively distant places away from their homes. I give this example as this custom clearly communicates a religious distinctiveness and can shock because of its bloody character. The two mosques to which Tartars from all over Poland arrive to pray together are located in small villages and their Christian (Catholic or Orthodox) inhabitants are well accustomed to this Muslim custom. They are observers of the ceremonies who keep their distance and do not enter the mosque.

The everyday life of the group is also not deeply marked by what could make their religious practice clearly visible. For instance, the majority do not say their prayers five times a day and religious services take place on Sundays when their neighbours attend services too. Besides, their lifestyle lacks those elements which can be associated with Arabic Islam, such as headscarves.

This issue is connected with another interesting topic, namely a wider cultural location of Polish Tartars-Muslims. I mean their Europeanness as a key to their

geopolitical location, hence an argument in debates on their familiarity or otherness in Poland as a part of Europe.

Euro-Muslimness

Since 1994, the Tartar ethnic union has been a corresponding member of the Federation of European Union Ethnic Groups at the EU Council, but the Muslim Religious Association, which links Polish Tartars and represents the religious interests of that community, is associated with world Muslim organizations. This fact clearly shows the dual or (in a cultural sense) borderland character of the group location, which in a symbolic sense locates itself between the Western and Islamic civilizations, to use Samuel Huntington's terminology. On the one hand, for hundreds of years this group has been connected with Europe geographically and culturally (through its ties with Poland), and on the other hand, through Islam, with the world community connoted through values other than the ones typical for the place of settling. The cultural thread of Europeanness was already shown in my research on the identity of Polish Tartars in the 1990s. Even then, my Tartar interlocutors were mentioning their Europeanness when the issue of their religiousness was touched upon, which, in the eyes of Muslims from other countries, was not considered as being completely in line with Islamic orthodoxy. The Tartars would claim, however, that they were completely loyal/orthodox Muslims and the Islam they were cultivating had a specific Tartar character that was as valid as its Arabic version. They would stress differences in morals and civilization relative to other Muslims, their religious and everyday culture by valuing it as being more European or civilized (Warمیńska 1999). It is worth adding that not all members were of the same opinion and some would negatively perceive the deviations from orthodoxy and would strive for cleansing Islam of what was new – Tartar.

This thread returned at the beginning of the 2000s, especially after September 11, 2001, and took on a new meaning in the context of the international discourse which placed Islam in a new political and cultural light, *e.g.* presenting a conflict between the Western and Muslim civilizations. It was then that the group's leaders, when required to take a position on their relationship with the Arab states or toward Islamic terrorism, clearly distanced themselves from this type of action or ideology. One of the weighty arguments was the Europeanness of the group, professing other values. As one of the activists said, "We have chosen

our own path of development as Polish or European Muslims... We think that acculturation with the Polish or European environment is not wrong; on the contrary, we believe that the Muslim world should Europeanize itself, similar to Japan, which could contribute to its peaceful growth” (Chazbijewicz 2001). In one of the interviews, the above-quoted Tartar leader referred to himself as a ‘Euro-Muslim,’ thus signaling that religion – Islam – and nation or culture are two separate issues and that he feels that he belongs more to the European culture than, for instance, to the Arab culture, with which Islam is often associated (Euroislam 2004). In the context of Polish Tartars, the concept of ‘Euro-Islam’ has divided the group. Part of the group, following the line of the current MRU’s policy programme and their Mufti, claims that Islam is one and the term ‘Euro-Islam’ distorts the essence of the religion and is one that should not be promoted.

The Europeanness of Polish Tartars – Muslims is at times mentioned in statements of the group’s representatives when asked especially by journalists about Muslim customs which they profess. When talking about the group’s customs, they stressed their European character, rather than the Arab one which is foreign to them from the culture and civilization standpoint. As one of the Tartar women stated in an interview in the daily *Rzeczpospolita*, ‘Imams try to introduce customs which are foreign to the Tartar culture. Our mothers and grandmothers did not wear scarves. We are Europeans. Our girls would rebel against it.’ (Południk 2004).

When considering the issue of symbolic boundaries and when describing their functioning in intergroup relations, one must see in what contexts they take on the form of a barrier or a wall. Metaphorically speaking, they are clearly visible “inside the mosque” and they pertain to the relations between the Muslims of the group in question and the non-Tartar Muslims.

In the declarative sphere and partly in social practice, both communities maintain some relations. The Tartars refer to non-Tartar Muslims as “brothers in Islam”, stressing a certain fundamental bond among believers regardless of their ethnic provenance. Similarly, like the majority of the representatives of the Islamic world, they were indignant at the publication of the Mohammed caricatures, and in this context they communicated their community with the world of Islam.

In any case, the Mufti, a person who for many years lived and received education in Saudi Arabia, has been acting for the integration of the two Muslim groups. Suspected of pro-Arabic sympathies, during his initial work he was treated by Tartars with a certain distance, and only after a few years did he win their respect. This, however, still does not change the fact that the two sides separate

themselves from each other. The separation is visible in the fact that they pray separately, and Muslims from outside the group do not participate in religious holidays which are celebrated in the “Tartar style”. Hardly ever do they establish or keep close relations except for religious occasions even if there is no language barrier.

As I mentioned earlier, students from the Arab countries were religion teachers and this fact, except in a very few cases, did not establish non-formal relations. It is symptomatic that, if we look at the “makeup” of the groups praying in the Gdańsk mosque during Friday prayers, the majority come from outside the Tartar group, while those praying in the old mosques are Tartars. The reasons for this situation are complex. When listening to the members of the group in question one can hear arguments which point to the cultural strangeness of other Muslims, to a different lifestyle, customs and lack of willingness to make contact, or their isolating themselves. The differences are also seen in the sphere of religion: according to the Tartars, the “Arabs” (as they often call the Muslims who do not belong to their group) pray differently, faster, in a less celebratory manner than the Tartars, and the melody of the prayer is different too. Moreover, in the Tartars’ opinion, the “Arabs” criticized their Muslim practice, reproaching them with numerous mistakes and departures from the norm. To a certain extent, the Tartars share a dislike of the “Arabs” with the Poles. The scope of the solidarity with the Islamic world depends on the social context, sometimes the feeling of unity appears, but more often there is a distance.

Conclusion: an in-between consciousness

To sum up, the above mentioned unique in-between status of the group results, first of all, from the context – the migrant genesis of this community in Poland. What is important, using the words of members of this group, is that in their own eyes they are both newcomers and indigenous – Tartars, Tartars-Muslims, just Polish ones. That is how they are perceived by the broadly understood social environment. A significant role is played by the Tartars’ long settlement which, on the level of everyday and ideological experiences, has allowed others to get accustomed to their otherness or to write themselves permanently into the Polish landscape and as a familiarized other. However, on the level of identification processes, not only has it released strong ties with Polishness but also deep roots in their own, local, Polish-Tartar-Muslim social world.

Secondly, this ambivalent status comes from the location of this community in a specific cultural borderland in a symbolic dimension – between Polishness and Tartariness/Muslimness; Muslimness and Polishness; and finally between Polishness/European Muslimness and Arab/orthodox Muslimness. Being ‘between’ these dimensions can release both certain dilemmas or identity tensions but also, as I wanted to show, it creates an identity *status quo* based on which individual members of the community can give sense to their lives.

The above considerations pertain, first of all, to the Tartar vision of relations with their neighbours. Therefore, we can see a group which strives to impose on the social environment, both near and far, such an image of themselves which would allow them to be seen as good, trustworthy neighbours that have been present in the Polish cultural space, who area familiar ‘other’ rather than strangers. Polish Tartars appear as a community which, by striving to be considered separate, is building its relations with the ‘neighbours’, one that is focused on cooperation rather than on dichotomization. I wish to stress that, in the case of Polish Tartars, to be a Muslim in Poland translates into a variety of identity strategies, from the point of view of both the institutional and less formal, everyday aspects.

Notes

- 1 The main religious organization of Polish Tartars, the Muslim Religious Association, was founded in 1925 and reactivated as early as 1947.
- 2 The analyses presented in this part of the chapter were prepared on the basis of the anthropological research I have been conducting among Polish Tartars since the beginning of the 1990s. I collected the research material over many years during my in-depth interviews with members and the leaders of the group. I have also analysed the printed materials published in the Tartar press and on the Internet. Furthermore, I participated in group events during which I conducted participant observation.

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