

# **Practices of Belonging: Identity Among Polish Tatars**

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I, Kelsey Anne Weber, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

The recent success of right-wing parties in countries around the world, including Hungary, the US, and Poland, has brought renewed attempts to understand how forms of identity have been politicized as a way to navigate a world that is portrayed as increasingly variegated and uncertain. Through research among the historic Muslim Polish Tatar community in the politically conservative Podlasie region, I attempt to unpack how group identity and boundary formation occurs. My work focuses on how conceptions of (be)longing are reproduced and/or tactically contested in affective and bodily ways, such as through emotionally replete communal gatherings for Ramadan Bajram, food practices that both uphold and contest Islamic dietary prohibitions, and dance practices that fuse Polish, Turkish and Tatar traditions. In my research I attempt to unpack how narratives of origins, blood, and rooted-ness do not foreclose possibilities of movement, but rather connect peoples across paths that allow for multiple, conflicting lens of belonging. Building on existing literature on religious communities and group formation, I am interested in where tensions and slippages occur between idealized narratives of group membership based on religious and kinship ties, and how individual identities are actually practiced and performed. My research attempts to foreground the affective capabilities and motility of the body to understand how belonging differentially flows and sticks to individuals at the nexus of gender, community, and religious positionalities.

## **Impact Statement**

This work is an attempt to investigate how individuals conceptualize, maintain, and experience life within a community, positing that belonging is an affectively dense flow and resonance that resides between and among individuals, forming ties that can both bind and exclude bodies from the collective. Through working with a minority Polish community that has not been extensively studied, I hope to understand how in a time of increasing Islamophobia they come to feel fully integrated members of the Polish nation. Such research may allow us a glimpse into how inter- and intra-group boundary lines are drawn and how groups can coexist within difference, such that modern configurations of national communities can accept diversity without pressures to assimilate. While acknowledging the tensions that arise between and among groups of people, this work attempts to also highlight the moments of tolerance and community that can provide a useful lens through which to understand minority experiences, placing their voices at the forefront. In this thesis I attempt to utilize an understanding of identity that both acknowledges its underlying movement and transitory qualities, while also trying to contend with the essentializing way it is understood by some individuals.

These discussions are important both within academia and without, as these issues are intimately caught up with matrixes of power and practices of inclusion and exclusion that have real life, practical consequences for those involved. The ways in which this thesis analyses minority issues can be beneficial to further research within Poland through highlighting the acknowledgement of Poland's diversity despite narratives which tie Polish and Catholic together in an exclusionary discourse. Other academic works could utilize the analytical lens that I adopt in this thesis, which brings understandings of the body back to discussions of belonging and magnifies lived experiences over and above rarefied, theoretical discourse. Through future publishing in academic journals and by spreading information in non-academic channels, I hope to impact others' perceptions of Poland as necessarily and determinatively religiously exclusive. In discussions with my interlocutors about what they hoped this work would achieve, they asked for acknowledgement of their positionality as both Polish and Muslim, thereby breaking popular stereotypes which question their affective attachment. By bringing awareness to the Polish Tatars, this work will hopefully positively impact their community by receiving increased academic and popular interest, expanding constrictive ideas of what it means to belong to local and national communities.

## Acknowledgements

Praca ta zawdzięcza przede wszystkim hojności polskiej społeczności tatarskiej na Podlasiu, która otworzyła się i przyjęła mnie w sposób, jakiego nie mogłam sobie wyobrazić przed rozpoczęciem badań. Chęć moich rozmówców do omawiania trudnych kwestii w szczerych rozmowach i pokazania mi swojego życia na zawsze pozostanie w mojej pamięci. Będę pamiętać o ludziach na piątkowych modlitwach, które z radością włączyły mnie do swojej pomodlitwowej herbaty, o towarzyskich kobietach na sesjach studiowania Koranu, o przyjaźni mojej „polskiej babci”, która dbała o moje dobro i bezpieczeństwo, o postaciach religijnych, które nauczyły mnie głębszego zrozumienia islamu. Szczególnie dziękuję Basi, Alji, Zosi i Julii, które pokazały mi co to jest przyjaźń i koleżeństwo bez granic.

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## **A Few Words to Begin**

I failed my first attempt at fieldwork.

I had arrived in Białystok on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, 2019 and spent the first few days buying groceries, settling in my two cats who had flown with me from London, and getting familiar with my small, rented apartment located in a grey apartment block in the center of the city. I was anxious to start my research, worrying that I was spending too much time getting acquainted with my new residence, aware of each passing day ticking down the 12 months I had to complete my fieldwork. I saw a post online for a prayer at the local Muslim prayer house for Polish Armed Forces Day (Święto Wojska Polskiego) and decided that this would be a good option for my first fieldwork event.

The morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> I hurriedly made my way to the Białystok prayer house (dom modlitwy) on foot, as I was still not sure how to buy tickets for the extensive public bus service that criss-crosses the city. I clutched my newly purchased notebook and pen tightly,



Figure 1: Old prayer house (*dom modlitwy*) at *Piastowska 13F*

with an extra pen tucked into my trouser pockets just in case. By time I arrived at the prayer house I was sweating and questioning my choice of clothing, since I had opted for a modest long sleeve shirt and trousers on a hot summer day.

The prayer house is nestled between towering apartment blocks and not visible from the busy road that runs parallel alongside it. A narrow driveway leads to a *Żabka*, a popular convenience store known for its cheap coffee and hot dogs, and a little further down the apartment buildings open up to allow a first look at the prayer house. Affectionately called *Grzybowa* (mushroom) based on the old street name, at the time it was a quaint wooden structure that looked out of place surrounded on all sides by concrete complexes.<sup>1</sup> Accessible via a dirt path, I started making my way towards the building before I stopped, suddenly

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<sup>1</sup> The prayer house has now been completely rebuilt in a style reminiscent of mosques in the Middle East, though without the proposed minaret, which was a source of contention and controversy in the surrounding neighborhood. The building of the new mosque was heavily sponsored by financial support from abroad, particularly the United Arab Emirates. This was condemned by some, decrying a supposed loss of control in their own community and worrying about the effect such entwining of affairs would cause. While some interlocutors described the new mosque as beautiful, others condemned it as looking “Arab” and not having a visual relationship to the other Polish Tatar mosques left in the borders of Poland.



wondering if perhaps attending an event without previously having made contact with anyone in this community would be seen as too forward, too invasive. I hesitated, walking a few steps forward and then reversing, finally standing in the middle of the path gazing at the wooden structure. A parking lot attendant working nearby watched me, possibly questioning my motives and suspicious behaviour as I loitered in the driveway. I quickly turned on my heels and left, clutching my still empty notebook in shaking hands.

Very soon after this incident I contacted a researcher who does research with the community and through her was able to attend an academic conference on Polish Tatars, meeting a few prominent members of the group and securing an invitation to the next Friday prayer.<sup>2</sup> As I once again made my way up the dirt road, this time I felt confident about my



Figure 2: The new women's prayer area

purpose, sure about my attendance at this event. The woman I met at the conference, her short grey hair artfully arranged and with clothes fit for a stylish Sunday brunch, warmly greeted me at the entrance to the women's prayer area. She introduced me to the gathered women who excitedly asked details about my research, about where I am from, and more than once telling me that they have a relative in Chicago. The call to prayer (azan) sounded and the women, all older, pulled scarves out of their bags and lined up to pray while I sat at the back, hurriedly scribbling my observations in my notebook.

Looking back, those first few weeks were full of uncertainty as I shyly introduced myself to myriad individuals and attended events, hovering near the back as I tried to avoid disrupting the proceedings. Eventually I found my place as I attended countless prayers, lectures, holiday events, and classes, with my ever-present notebook and camera phone recording the details. With time, my novelty as an American researcher wore off and my appearance at events was taken for granted. While my first Friday prayer was spent introducing myself and my research, later prayers I attended were full of friendly chats about

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<sup>2</sup> The Arabic for Friday prayers is salat al jumu'ah, but I rarely heard Polish Tatars use the Arabic names for prayers. Rather the Polish translation was used for Friday prayer, morning prayer, evening prayer etc.

minute, everyday happenings in Białystok, about sales on the prices of produce, about the differences I noticed between Poland and America. As time passed, I found a group of friends and some sort of routine, and as I navigated my field site as both researcher and friend, I was confronted with my attempts to find, in some small way, my own space of belonging.

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This work is first and foremost about belonging, about how it sticks, slides, and settles into and onto the body. There has been a recent trend in the social sciences to increasingly focus on conceptions of identity as characterized by movement and surface, highlighting globalization, transnationalism, deterritorialization, and migration. The rhizome has become an enduring metaphor of identity in the modern age, its fluid, mercurial, and elusive nature a reaction to the essentializing discourses of the past that naturalized concepts of belonging, identity, and ethnicity. However, I do not believe we should forget the material and social ways in which attachment is forged and understood by many as deep and enduring. Probyn in her work on belonging, identity, and sexuality says that she "...want[s] to figure the desire that individuals have to belong, a tenacious and fragile desire that is, I think, increasingly performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belongings are forever past" (1996, 8). The tales told to me by participants were seeped in nostalgia, fear of loss, and uncertainty as to the future of the community.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, they highlighted the continuity of Polish Tatar settlement in Poland, the vitality of their social life, the complex ways in which they navigated their roles as both proud Polish citizens and minorities. The stories they told spoke not only of change, but of stasis, of abiding community, of roots in the land of Podlasie.

While acknowledging the work of the rhizome, I do not think we should cast aside the alluring image of the tree—its roots and depth and branches. It calls to mind not only the multitude of ways in which identity is understood by many as a steadfast pillar in their lives, but also how those very factors that forge an image of endurance betray the entwined fluidity. Roots dig for water and branches reach for other skies; water and sap move and shift within its solidity. A symbol of timeless endurance is at its heart a space of movement. To

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the phrase "community" should not be taken as an assumption of a reified entity with solidified, static boundaries. Rather, the usage of this term reflects the self-representation of Polish Tatars themselves. That being said, it should be noted that communities are never homogenous entities but are heterogenous mixes of various positionalities, which should be problematized.

acknowledge the ways that belonging and identity shift and flow throughout time does not simultaneously mean that we can ignore the ways that identity can exist as a solid touchstone for our interlocutors that is perceived as lasting through the ages. Trees and roots, soil and air, all contain elements of both constancy and change, forming a fitting metaphor through which to understand belonging and identity as temporally and spatially variable, capricious, but also rooted.

This thesis is an attempt to explore how bodily practices are the experiential substrate whereby Polish Tatars creatively express, produce and (re)present belonging. Belonging is often popularly imagined as a perceived internal self-alignment, a mental positioning of oneself within a given collective. However, I intend to look at how belonging is created in mutual relations with others, such that the body is both transformed by, and transforms, affective currents, eddies, and resonances of group membership. Underlying these varying understandings in my field site is tension between the importance of essentializing discourses such as blood and kinship, in which identity is understood as stable and passed down unchanged, and performative practices in which identity is formed through active work. I attempt to keep this friction in focus, to take seriously how the body is implicated as both the site where identity is built and through which it flows. This research builds on previous literature on Polish Tatars, attempting to move away from categorical determinations based on amorphous concepts such as ethnicity, nationality, and religion. Instead, I take the body as the lens of analysis to explore how group identity is experienced, taking seriously the body as not only a corporeal materiality but a feeling, moving, social, multilayered subjectivity. I will avoid labeling certain events, practices, or bodily dispositions as “ethnic” or “religious” and instead start from the body outward to understand how it is a substrate through which belonging is built, felt, and negotiated. Rather than positioning Bajram (Eid) celebrations, for example, as (only) religious events, I ask instead how attendance at these gatherings helps to situate particular subjects as members of a community rather than as events that are attended by pre-formed, religious subjects. By taking the body seriously during this process, I intend to move away from an understanding that positions belonging as only an affective state, but rather to come to grips with how emotions are felt and experienced through the body that is multiply positioned as a material, affective, and experiential subject.

The rest of this chapter will introduce aspects of my research that will orient the reader, laying out the foundations for the work that follows. Firstly, I will give a brief introduction of my interlocutors, the women around whom this thesis is based and who had a

profound influence on me and my research. Next, I will position myself in relation to my subject, explaining how I came to this research and how my life experiences align myself in certain ways with the people with whom I lived and studied. Following this, I will give a brief introduction to the historical settlement of Tatars in Poland and a concise description and history of the city of Białystok, where my research primarily took place. The next section of this chapter introduces some of the main concepts in this thesis, belonging and identity, describing how I use these terms in the rest of the work. After this, I briefly discuss the topic of Islamophobia, and how I plan to acknowledge and deal with the role of discrimination in the lives of my interlocutors, particularly how it relates to my participants' ability to feel a part of the Polish nation. Lastly, I preview the rest of the chapters in the thesis to allow the reader an understanding of what is to come.

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My thesis is focused and crafted around my experiences with a core group of respondents, women with whom I spent countless hours talking not only about Polish Tatar identity but about our lives—husbands, work, aspirations, and annoyances; in other words, I may use the term respondent, but I count them among my friends. I acknowledge that I like these women, and they opened their lives to me in a way I had not expected when I showed up that day in the Grzybowa mosque, humming with nerves and holding my notebook tight in tremulous hands. I follow this group of women throughout my work, focusing on their lives and experiences as a way to bring the reader along on this journey with me, which was filled with camaraderie, banter, laughter, squabbles, and uncertainty. The women, ranging in age from their 30s to 50s, all self-identify as part of the Polish Tatar community though the depth of their interest and alignment varied from profound pride to deep ambivalence about their identity and how to represent their engagement and belonging to the community.

I met Basia towards the beginning of my fieldwork and I quickly felt comfortable in her presence.<sup>4</sup> A woman in her 40s with two children, she was quick to smile and anger, her expressive eyes meaning that she could not hide what she was thinking. From our first interview she made clear her pride in her identity, explaining that from a young age her parents endowed her with a sense of the importance of being Tatar, of patriotism for Poland

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<sup>4</sup> The names of many of my interlocutors have been changed and where needed I have altered identifying information including location of origin, ages, physical, and other descriptors. Given the small size of the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie, I have taken some pains to modify individuals to abide by their desire for anonymity.

and pride in her roots. Born and raised in Białystok, she nevertheless always felt a deep need for travel, for movement, once joking with me that maybe the reason she could not sit still was because she was Tatar, making a reference to the nomadic origins of her ancestors. It was easy to fall in love with Basia, with her confidence and wit, and in spending time with her some of that confidence rubbed off on me. Alija, on the other hand, was much more ambivalent about her Tatar identity, expressing discomfort at the idea of expressing her identity as vividly as Basia sometimes did. While Alija attended important events and her only child was involved in various aspects of community life, she expressed that negative experiences made her unwilling or unable to embody her Tatar identity in a clear, outward way. On the surface she was chatty and unreserved, but nonetheless she possessed an abiding sensitivity and sympathy for others that immediately bonded me to her. Zosia, a younger woman in her 30s, had a commanding air about her. She was the kind of person who would say things as they were, a feature I much admired but that sometimes intimidated me. From a small town in Podlasie, her move to Białystok and the associated increase in Tatar friends and acquaintances allowed her to become more active in her identity and she was one of the most involved of my friends, attending most events and expressing to me the importance of representing her identity; she did not shy away from being outwardly cast as different. The last woman who was part of this core group was Julia, a woman in her 50s. A little quieter and more reserved than some of the others, she rounded out the group. Always impeccably dressed with perfectly coiffed hair, she did not announce her positionality in the same way as some of the others. It might be described as a quiet pride—she was not always involved in the community events and would not describe herself as Tatar unbidden, but when asked would not hesitate to call herself Polish Tatar. Around this core group hovered several others who would join us for movie nights, picnics, or nights out at the theatre, but these four women were the ones who shaped my fieldwork experience and formed threads that wove patterns in my research and my life.

I found my research topic in perhaps the most millennial way—on Facebook. I was friends with a man from my Polish language class at UC Berkeley, and he shared a news story about Polish Tatars on his wall, expressing surprise at the concept of Polish Muslims. Clicking on the comments, most people reacted in the same note, amazed that this small community exists. This prompted me to start thinking about why this seemed so strange, as surely there are vibrant Muslim communities in every country in Europe. I realized that for these commenters on Facebook, nationality and religion were so intertwined that being Polish

meant being Catholic, such that the idea of a Polish Muslim appeared as a sort of curiosity or even an oxymoron. This inspired me to look more closely at this community, originally to primarily investigate the connections between nationality and religion. However, once in the field, my interlocutors' steadfast alignment with the Polish nation caused my research to shift towards focusing on the interpersonal social relations within the community, investigating the role practices, relatedness, emotions, and religion play in constructing affective ties of belonging.

As Probyn writes, "I maintain that the body that writes is integral to the type of figuring I wish to do," and so it is perhaps important to note how I fit into this story (1996, 6). My interest in the subject is not only academic, but personal. My grandmother was Polish and from a young age I always felt compelled to look for my origins, to feel connected to a "culture" from which I felt that I had been detached. My grandmother was raised in the US during the 1920s, and she described a time when speaking another language was actively discouraged, when assimilation was a matter of survival. She did not teach my mother the Polish language and apart from a handful of dishes any trace of our Polish roots was largely extinguished by my generation. As a child I would constantly ask my grandmother how to say certain words in Polish, revelling in my ability to say things such as bread and apple in a foreign tongue, the syllables clunky and full of sharp edges in my mouth. During my undergraduate years at UC Berkeley, I took Polish as a language elective. Then, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Coming from a childhood raised as a Catholic which led to an early adulthood as a staunch atheist, my mother's sickness led me to a search for answers. In 2015 I converted to Islam, and while I would describe myself as a firm believer after I first converted, putting on the hijab and praying five times a day, after my mother's passing and the flow of time my belief slowly started to waiver. I hesitate to write down in words my slow loss of faith, the way surety turned to doubt and apathy. When I finally got cleared to go to the field, I was very much betwixt-and-between—I no longer covered or prayed five times a day—but I still considered myself a part of a community of believers. My faith allowed me to have a distinctive relation to my interlocutors as we bent in prayer together or discussed the difficulties of fasting, while simultaneously I was a foreigner who, like a child, needed constant explanations of seemingly obvious practices.

## A Brief Slice of History<sup>5</sup>

Tatars arrived in Poland over several waves of settlement. The first Tatars arrived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as prisoners of war, followed by a second, longer lasting migration of mercenaries who were invited by Vytautas the Great to help stave off attacks on Lithuania's Eastern borders (Bohdanowicz 1942, 163-64; Dziekan 2011, 27). The first major battle in which the Tatars fought with the Lithuanian army was in the Battle of Grunwald against the Teutonic Knights, in which several thousand Tatar soldiers crushed their opponents in a resounding victory (Dziekan 2011, 28). This battle is still romanticized today as an instantiation of the Tatar community's deep and long-lasting devotion to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and by extension the modern Polish state. In return for their military service the Tatars received land and a status equal to the Polish-Lithuanian nobility called *szlachta*, a status which remains a source of pride among many in the Tatar community today (Bohdanowicz 1942, 168-69; Boruch 2011). In the beginning of the process of settlement, Tatars did not self-identify as a unified community and were instead individuals from various tribes and states, including the Kazan and Crimean Khanates, who often spoke different languages (Radłowska 2018, 83).<sup>6</sup>

The pluralistic golden age of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the high point of the rights and freedoms granted to the Polish Tatar community (Bohdanowicz 1942, 168).<sup>7</sup> They had the same property rights as the *szlachta* and were provided with many religious freedoms, including the ability to construct religious buildings such as mosques and to conduct Islamic education (Cieslik and Verkuyten 2006, 80). This was also the apogee of population growth, with estimates placing Polish Tatars at around 100,000 inhabitants during this time, though the population numbers are disputed (Dziekan 2011, 28). However, the reign of the militant

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<sup>5</sup> While the anthropological and sociological research on Polish Tatars is limited, there is a vast amount of historical research. This brief summary does not do the subject justice and is outside the scope of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> There have been discussions within the historical literature as to which exonym to utilize, given the varied origins of the current group of Polish Tatars among various Khanates and their eventual settlement in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The term Lipka or Lithuanian Tatars was common up until World War II, during which border changes divided the group into different states. I choose to use the term Polish Tatars (Polscy Tatarzy), given that this is the preferred endonym of the community with whom I lived. For more on the discussion of names, see: (Radłowska 2018, 80-82).

<sup>7</sup> It is generally thought that Polish Tatars lost their native tongues and exclusively spoke Polish by about the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since Tatar settlement generally had a military nature, a vast majority of the early settlers were men. These men married local women, whom it is theorized, taught the children of these marriages the local dialect, thus accelerating the process of language loss. However, Dziekan cautions against this being the only factor. He points out that Polish Tatars came from different tribes who spoke different dialects and that their sacred language was not their mother tongue but Arabic, which they managed to retain (albeit in a limited form) (2011).

Catholic King Zygmunt III Vasa and the widespread religious fervor of the Protestant Revolution and Catholic Counter-Reformation created backlash against the Tatar community, including the destruction of a mosque in Trakai and a ban on building mosques (Dziekan 2011, 27; Reddaway et al. 2016).<sup>8</sup> During this time we start to see the conception of “...Poland-Lithuania as a bulwark of Catholic Christendom...” against the perceived danger of Others (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998, 150). Tatars did not have full rights unless they converted to Christianity, which opposes the common narrative today of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a welcoming, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious sovereignty (Warمیńska 1999, 60). Relations between the Polish-Lithuanian state and the Tatar community improved under Jan III Sobieski, who granted them land in the Podlasie region in return for their military service in the Siege of Vienna (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 344).<sup>9</sup> These land allotments are the basis of the villages of Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, two of the last Tatar villages left within the Polish borders. The possession of this land is often seen by Polish Tatars as the start of the solidification of Tatars as permanent members of Polish social life and points to the importance of this land within their worldview.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw vast political and societal changes. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was divided between Austria, Prussia, and Russia in a series of partitions in 1772, 1793, 1795, erasing Poland from the map for 123 years (Zamoyski 2009, 204-17).<sup>10</sup> The lands in which most Tatars lived were incorporated into the Russian Empire, where they were allowed to maintain their land and freedom of religion (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 345-46). This period in Polish history is characterized by a focus on achieving an independent Polish nation through whatever means necessary, including engagement in other European military excursions in the hope that aid would be provided in return, an ultimately vain goal (Zamoyski 2016). The intense patriotism of this time acquired an almost religious fervor, captured by the famous poet Adam Mickiewicz depicting Poland as the martyred

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<sup>8</sup> While the period including the Counter-Reformation involved significant discriminatory acts, such as the banning of non-Catholics from holding positions in the Sejm, the conflict between Protestants and Catholics was not as violent in Poland as in other countries in Europe (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998, 150-54).

<sup>9</sup> The Siege of Vienna is often used in xenophobic discourse to maintain the idea of an eternal, “clash of civilizations” narrative between Christianity and Islam. This simplistic discourse often does not include the vital contributions of the Muslim Polish Tatars to the success of Sobieski in the Siege of Vienna.

<sup>10</sup> The occupation of Poland by various entities during the partitions and Poland’s later status as satellite nation of the Soviet Union has led to a discussion about utilizing postcolonial literature and theories in the (post)socialist context. For more information, see: (Moore 2001; Chari and Verdery 2009; Cervinkova 2012), among others.



“Christ of Nations” (Mickiewicz [1832] 1974).<sup>11</sup> Identity as a Pole was tied not to exclusionary identifiers such as language or descent, but rather to the memory and longing for a free, independent Poland. During this time Muslims in the Russian Empire were subsumed into a religious organization based in Simferopol, Crimea with a Crimean Mufti at its head, although Tatars maintained the right to elect their own imams (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 345). During the times of the partitions the structure of Polish Tatar society began to diverge as a dichotomy emerged between the city dwelling elites and those in the countryside, who largely were employed as farmers and tanners (Radłowska 2018, 84; Warمیńska 1999, 62).

Various revolts in 1794, 1830, 1846 and 1863 attempted to throw off occupation, ultimately all failing. Tatar military personnel were a major part of all the revolts, with six Tatar cavalry units fighting in the 1794 Kościuszko uprising (Sakowicz 2011, 196). This has led to a commonly held connection in Poland between Tatars, military service, and expressions of patriotism, a connection fostered by the Tatar community and government narratives to this day (Bohdanowicz 1942, 171; Boruch 2011). These failed uprisings prompted leaders of the szlachta to move away from a romantic focus on freedom and instead improve the Polish people through hard work, education, and economic advancement in a program called organic work (Barnett 1958, 17). This represented a deeper change in the understanding of what constituted the Polish nation, shifting from a conception based on shared memories of the idealized Commonwealth to a more exclusionary Polish identity based on a common language and traditions (Prizel 1998, 40).

After WWI, Poland regained independent statehood and immediately leaders began discussions as to what form the inchoate Polish state should take (Stachura 1998, 65). Roman Dmowski, co-founder of the right wing Endecja (National Democracy) movement, argued for a modern nation-state in which Polish citizens were conceptualized as Polish-speaking and Catholic, with the adoption of a Polish “consciousness” as integral to the formation of a national identity (Porter 1992, 646). Interwar Poland was ethnically diverse, with approximately a third of the population claiming non-Polish descent on the 1921 and 1931 censuses, including Ukrainians, Germans, Belarusians, and Jews (Główny Urząd

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of the “Christ of Nations” found perhaps its most obvious representation in Scene V of *Dziady*, in which the Priest Piotr receives a vision of the future of Poland which heavily relies on the theme of martyrdom and messianic imagery (Mickiewicz [1832]1974, 46-48).

Statystyczny 1921).<sup>12</sup> The interwar period was a complex time of Polish history, in which a flourishing of Tatar religious and secular life coexisted with discriminatory pressure on other minority populations to accede to Polonization efforts or emigrate (Porter 1992; Prizel 1998, 62-63). Tatars formed one of the smallest minority communities in inter-war Poland, numbering about five to six thousand (Warمیńska 1999, 63). In 1925 the Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (Muzułmański Związek Religijny/MZR) was founded, and later in 1936 Islam was officially recognized by the government (Dziekan 2011, 28; Warمیńska 1999, 63).<sup>13</sup> Tatar organizations, museums, and archives abounded, and several publications were created by and for the Polish Tatar community including *Przegląd Islamski* (Islamic Review), *Rocznik Tatarski* (Tatar Annual), and *Życie Tatarskie* (Tatar Life) (Dziekan 2011, 28-29).

However, intragroup boundaries grew during this time between those Tatars living in the villages and working low-wage jobs and those living in the cities, forming a group of elites who spearheaded efforts to revive the identity of the community (Warمیńska 1999, 63). It was during this time that elites focused on discursive efforts to define the relationship between Tatars and the Polish state, emphasizing the patriotism of the community in order to reaffirm their integration as members of the Polish nation (Warمیńska 1999, 204). Simultaneously, there was an interest in cultivating relations with other Tatar groups, including aiding Crimean Tatars in establishing the short-lived Crimean People's Republic (Warمیńska 1999, 209). The immigration of Crimean intellectuals to Poland following its fall led to increased interest in the common origins of the communities, conceptualized as shared blood ties. However, there were limits to this kinship as the vision some Crimean immigrants promoted of a type of transnational Tatar unity went against the narrative Polish Tatar elites were busy highlighting of their national identity as Polish (Warمیńska 1999, 209).

A general drop in living standards due to the devastations of WWI and the uneven industrialization during the partitions meant that various communities in Poland were

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<sup>12</sup> This number is widely cited by scholars. However, it should be noted that there were numerous issues with these censuses—the 1921 census did not include the contested areas of Upper Silesia or Eastern Galicia, while “Jewish” was listed as a separate category from “Polish,” thus excluding Jews from claiming Polish nationality. The second Polish census, completed in 1931, did not include nationality and instead asked about religion and mother tongue.

<sup>13</sup> MZR was originally only open to Polish citizens and thus was inaccessible to a wide portion of the Muslim population in Poland. In response, the non-Tatar Muslim community founded Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (LM) in 2001, allowing anyone to join regardless of citizenship. Despite its official recognition by the Polish government 3 years later in 2004, many non-Tatar Polish Muslims still feel that the Tatars occupy a more privileged position vis-à-vis the state (Pędziwiatr 2011, 13-14).

competing over increasingly scarce resources, causing growing tension between social classes, regional groups, and religious communities (Stachura 1998, 70; Tomaszewski 2009, 313-14). Relations particularly with the Jewish community in Poland unravelled, as narratives spread that alleged Jewish resistance to an independent Polish state and collaboration with the Soviet Union (Stachura 1998, 74). Thus, the interwar period, while being exclusionary towards minorities such as Jews and Ukrainians, is often recalled among Tatars as a “golden period” of cultural development (Radłowska 2018, 108).

The Polish state that emerged from the destruction of WWII looked significantly different from the pre-War state—much of its physical infrastructure was destroyed and its population ravaged. Due to the widespread population movements and the significant loss of human life to genocide and war, 98% of the post-war population claimed Polish ethnicity.<sup>14</sup> The border changes shifted the nation west, meaning that only about 10% of the land in which Tatars lived remained in Polish hands, including the three settlements of Kruszyniany, Bohoniki and Sokółka (Saranowicz 2011, 90). Many of the Tatars who had been deported to the Soviet Union during the war relocated to Poland and created Tatar communities in the remaining settlements or in larger cities like Białystok or Warsaw, while others were forcibly resettled to the formerly German “Western Lands,” whose original inhabitants were either expelled or fled (Pędziwiatr 2011, 11; Nalborczyk 2009). The sparseness of Polish Tatar settlement in the Western Lands meant that communal gatherings and events were limited, impacting the ways in which Tatars in these areas were able to maintain and produce group identification(s). The death of imams and members of the intelligentsia changed the internal composition of the group and left a lacuna in religious authority (Radłowska 2018, 86; Warمیńska 1999, 70). Post-war Poland was renamed the Polish People’s Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa/PRL) and became a satellite state of the Soviet Union, starting a new saga of Polish history.

The state authorities utilized repatriation, forced assimilation, and expulsion in an attempt to foster a national identity and create an ethnically homogenous population, leading to what some scholars term the “superhomogeneity” seen today (Buchowski 2016, 53). This

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<sup>14</sup> This statistic about Poland being 98% ethnically Polish is widely cited by scholars and is consistent with the 2011 census. However, census data should be taken with some reservations, including the way it reifies ethnicity as something that “actually exists.” For example, the 2002 census asked about nationality in a way which necessitated a response of either Polish or non-Polish, thus excluding minorities from Polish identity and ignoring the subtleties of identification (Warمیńska 2013, 116). Recently ZTRP has promoted a campaign to encourage Polish Tatars to list “Tatar” as their nationality on the census in order to increase their visibility, with the slogan “every Tatar counts” (każdy Tatar się liczy) (ZTRP 2021).

transformation of the population was not only physical but symbolic, as the homogeneity of the Polish state was increasingly conceptualized as a quality to be protected (Buchowski 2016, 62). National identity was increasingly associated with a particular nexus of Polish identity and Catholicism, thus excluding the small Jewish and Muslim populations left after the ravages of WWII and the Holocaust. Around the 1950s Polish Tatars began moving to the Podlasie area, which became a center for the community and symbolized for many the solidity and historical depth of Polish Tatar connection with the historic Polish nation. Villages that had been continuously inhabited by Tatars were deserted, such as Studzianka and Kruszyniany, as people moved to the city for greater economic opportunities. In the first half of the 1970s, 200 Tatars lived in Białystok, while 20 years later there were 1800, demonstrating the postwar spatial population shifts (Warمیńska 1999, 67). Radłowska notes that, “these transformations have influenced a new system of intergroup ties between the village and the city, where inhabitants of cities create new institutions to ensure the needs of the group, during which the villages have become an important point of reference for the religious practices of the group” (2018, 87).

The Polish socialist government tended to be hostile to religious practices, though actual implementation of policies was dependent on the regime and period (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 348). Religious education was outlawed and therefore only accessible through instruction in the home (Nalborczyk 2013, 245). New imams were not given permission to travel abroad to be educated in Islamic fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), causing attrition in religious knowledge (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 348). Bierut’s leadership starting in 1947 was characterized by a strict imposition of Stalinist policies, including curbing the power of the Church. Strikes broke out in protest in 1956 and the Polish government negotiated peace in return for assuring the primacy and independence of the Catholic church (Prizel 1998, 85). Thereafter the government did not try to erase the Catholic church from Polish society, but instead positioned it as part of a private life outside of the political arena (Hann 2002, 440). The Church continued to maintain its influential role in Polish society and was regarded as a location of resistance to the communist regime, establishing its continued importance to Polish society to this day (Hann 1998, 843). Waqfs, which are properties given to a religious community in a charitable trust, were recognized by the Polish government during the interwar period but under the socialist state were nationalized, leading to further economic deprivation among Polish Tatars (Nalborczyk 2013, 245).

The 70s and 80s saw the Polish government attempt to enhance relations with Islamic countries, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, through the Polish Tatar community acting as liaisons (Cieslik and Verkuyten 2006, 80). The opening of these transnational connections led to an increase in the number of Muslim students who came to Poland to study, many of whom stayed and currently form one of the largest groups of Muslims in Poland today (Pędziwiatr 2011, 11; Saranowicz 2011, 90). Leaders of the Polish Tatars focused on relations between their community and Muslims in other countries, positioning themselves as a sort of bridge between East and West (Radłowska 2018, 109; Warmińska 1999, 212). As Górak-Sosnowska and Łyszczarz note in their article on the role religion plays in Polish Tatar identity, the attitude towards PRL was not uniform among their respondents (2018). Some pointed to the laicization of this period as a reason for weakened religiosity among Polish Tatars, while others argued that the role their community played as liaisons with other Islamic governments was a positive development (Górak-Sosnowska and Łyszczarz 2018).

The Solidarity movement and subsequent fall of the socialist state in 1989 led to a reawakening of many minority communities in the (post)socialist era, sparking a revival in language classes, religious practices, and heritage events (Buchowski and Chlewińska 2012, 25).<sup>15</sup> In 1992 the group Union of Tatars of the Republic of Poland (Związek Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej/ZTRP) was registered, a group whose goal is to research Tatar history, spread this knowledge, and produce publications (Radłowska 2018, 110). The Tatar dance group Buńczuk was founded in 1999 while the magazine *Przegląd Tatarski* began to be published in 2009, pointing to the increase in activity focused on reviving Polish Tatar group identity. The current Muslim population in Poland is estimated to be about 25,000-30,000 individuals made up of former students, businesspeople, refugees (mostly Chechen), converts, and approximately 5,000 Tatars (Pędziwiatr 2011, 11-12).<sup>16</sup> Most Polish Muslims are Sunni and follow the Hanafi madhab (school of thought), although there are small numbers of Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011, 350).

Ties between Polish Tatars and other Tatar communities in Crimea, Belarus, Tatarstan and other countries are actively cultivated by formal organizations such as MZR and ZTRP,

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of (post)socialism has been critiqued for portraying socialism as completely extinguished from the politico-economic terrain, ignoring the many continuities and ruptures that the ethnographic record demonstrates still exists. However, I feel that the term's efficacious uses outweigh the negatives. For more, see: (Chelcea and Druță 2016; Dunn and Verdery 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Most Muslims live in large cities such as Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Białystok, while a small but stable population of Tatars remain in villages in the Podlasie region.

while individuals unevenly seek and/or maintain transnational relations with other communities. Some participants with whom I spoke actively worked to visit Tatars in other countries or to preserve kin relations with Tatars, particularly in Belarus, while others were not interested in such transnational ties. Above all, however, the participants I spoke with highlighted *polskość* as a distinctive element of their identity and the importance of Poland as their motherland (*ojczyzna*). Thus, while this thesis will point out those instances in which Polish Tatar identity is influenced by transnational relations and where and how those relations are expressed, I also want to focus particularly on the lived experiences of my participants and how they represent their own identity and belonging, which is often specifically tied to the land of Podlasie and Poland. I do not deny the importance of these trans-Tatar connections, but I also attempt to accurately portray how belonging was expressed to me by my interlocutors, which was often focused on the distinctiveness of Polish Tatars as closely tied to their *ojczyzna*, Poland.

### Białystok—a City of Palimpsests

As the bus from Warsaw pulled up to the station I looked around, stalls advertising cheap mushrooms and cell phone repairs lining the dirt path towards the main street. Everything seemed smaller than expected, none of the towering skyscrapers spread about the Warsaw skyline. Taxis lined the single entryway to the station and I chose one at random, reading the address of my new apartment to him several times as I stumbled over the syllables. The ride was brief, taking me along one of the main roads throughout the city, apartment buildings, grocery stores and secondhand shops lining the street. We passed a blindingly white Catholic church, a towering statue of Jesus with several sheep lying by his feet towering over the cars lazily traversing the roundabout. My apartment building was located in the center of city, one window overlooking a busy street that leads to the main square and through the other window an abandoned building with a dirt car park was visible, the plastic sheets covering open windows flapping in the breeze.<sup>17</sup> After settling in I decided to take an exploratory stroll, making my way through a tunnel covered in graffiti which throughout my fieldwork was

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<sup>17</sup> The street on which my apartment was located was named after a Jewish resistance fighter who killed an SS officer when they attempted to empty the Białystok ghetto. He was later murdered for this act of bravery. A small plaque affixed to the side of the apartment complex, written in both Hebrew and Polish, reads “Here died at the hands of Nazi murderers on February 8, 1943, Icchok Malmed, a hero and fighter of the Białystok ghetto. Honor his memory.” This demonstrates the historic traces and fragments that are scattered about the city, testifying to the area’s complicated and multifaceted past.

often filled with young kids covertly drinking beers. Once out of the tunnel, a turn right brought me to a modest path between buildings, a popular stall selling gofry (waffles) saturating the air with the smells of deep-fried sugar and butter. Suddenly the buildings opened up into Rynek Kościuszki, the main square around which the center of the city was oriented. Night had fallen and fairy lights crisscrossed the restaurants and bars, the square covered in tables with families and groups of young people eating dinner or starting their night's carousing. Older women lined the sidewalks, their homemade canned food and baskets of forest-picked mushrooms laid out on blankets, waiting to be purchased. The town hall and cathedral, both lit up in the night, were glowing under the moon. I ate dinner at one of restaurants lining the square, ordering a plate of fresh pierogi smothered in butter and onions and a cold glass of kompot, a type of fruit juice. Sitting back, I breathed in the night air of this new city I would call home.



Figure 3: Pomnik Bohaterów Ziemi Białostockiej in Park Centralny

Throughout the 18 months of my fieldwork that first night often replayed in my head, perhaps with a tinge of nostalgia. My initial idealization of Białystok turned to a deeper understanding of the city's complicated relationship with history. Largely destroyed during WWII, the city is a mosaic of expansive new builds with aged dwellings interspersed, small plaques letting passersby know the history of the building, or more often, which buildings no longer stand. Białystok earned town rights in 1749 and was home to the famous Branicki family, patrons of the arts and sciences, who erected the palace which stands at the heart of the city today (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

The city has always been diverse, with as much as 50% of the population being Jewish before WWII (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). The Jewish population was almost entirely killed during WWII, but the city's past is still visible in commemorative plaques and the monument which was erected in the location of the old synagogue, burned down in a

horrific instance of violence.<sup>18</sup> The park in the centre of the city is currently overlooked by a towering statue reading God, Honour, Motherland (Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna) that was built over a Jewish cemetery. Often called a Rabbinical cemetery (cmentarz rabinacki) due to the number of rabbis buried there, a small plaque is the only reference to the violent paving over of Jewish history.<sup>19</sup> A short walk away from the park an Orthodox church (cerkiew) occupies a major intersection in the city, while not much further down is the church (Bazylika Mniejsza św. Rocha) that made such an impression on me my first day. The narrative of a historic tolerance of difference in Białystok, often relayed to me by Poles at the beginning of my research, was interlaid with the material (in)visibility of the often-violent historic confrontations between communities.

I chose Białystok as the main location for my fieldwork as it is the city with the largest population of Polish Tatars.<sup>20</sup> I also completed additional research in surrounding towns and villages in Podlasie, primarily Sokółka, Kruszyniany and Bohoniki. Podlasie as a region is often instantiated within Polish Tatars narratives as the physical manifestation of their long settlement in Poland and the heart of their community. Białystok is the capital city of the Podlaskie województwo (province) with 297,600 inhabitants per 2020 census data (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2020) and tends to support right-wing politicians, with 60.14% of the population voting for PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Law and Justice) candidate Andrzej Duda in the 2020 elections (Kołodziejczyk 2020). My data consists of semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, some interviewed multiple times over the course of fieldwork, chosen through the snowball method. Due to the close-knit nature of the community, this was the best way to find those who were willing to talk with me about such intimate and personal information such as religious affiliation and identity. Besides interviews, I attended numerous workshops, lectures, and events, including Friday prayers at

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<sup>18</sup> The monument standing at ul. Suraska 3A is a reminder of the horrifying events of June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941, or “Black Friday,” when invading German troops set fire to the Great Synagogue with 700-800 Jews trapped inside. This was not the only devastating event, as others were killed by gunfire; in all about 2,000 Jews were killed in Białystok on that day alone (Żmijewska 2018).

<sup>19</sup> To learn more about the problematic way that the city of Białystok has (not) commemorated Jewish spaces, including a longer discussion of the controversial conversion of the Jewish cemetery at the centre of the city to a park, see: (Polynczuk-Alenius 2022).

<sup>20</sup> The majority of the Polish Tatar community lives in the Podlasie region, particularly in Białystok, Sokółka, Bohoniki, and Kruszyniany (“Tatarzy - Mniejszości Narodowe i Etniczne - Portal Gov.pl” n.d.). According to the 2011 national census, 539 people declared Tatar ethnicity within the Podlaskie voivodeship. This number should be used only as a guidance, given the obvious issues surrounding extrapolating self-ascriptive ethnic labels on a census, along with the fact that many Polish Tatars did not feel comfortable declaring Tatar ethnicity on the census. Taken along with census information on MZR membership, it can be reasonably concluded that the majority of Polish Tatars reside within the Podlasie area (Cieciela et al. 2019).



the mosque, and celebrations. My research naturally flowed towards an engagement with those who identify as female partially due to an interest in understanding how gender influenced expressions of group identity, but also due to gender segregation at religious events that necessarily increased my interactions with women. However, while my social relations and participant-observation tended to focus on women, I did conduct interviews with men in the community, which allowed me to have a wider understanding of my research interests and how issues regarding identity formation intersected and diverged among both men and women. The COVID-19 pandemic hit about six months into my research, curtailing my ability to attend community events and moving interviews and participant observation to the digital sphere, discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

The rest of this chapter describes more clearly my interest in the concept of belonging and the ways in which this term overlaps and diverges from identity. Then, I discuss Islamophobia in Poland and the ways in which my interlocutors understood their positionality as Muslims within the wider political context. Lastly, I give an overview of the following chapters of this thesis, laying out how each chapter speaks to the wider issues of belonging and identity as experienced, crafted, and expressed through the performative, affective body.

### (Be)longing

This thesis is, at its heart, an attempt to come at some understanding, however fragmentary, of how belonging is enacted, woven, experienced, and embodied among Polish Tatars in Podlasie. Belonging is often popularly understood as a fundamental aspect of humanity and has been heavily discussed particularly in relation to psychology and sociology. Baumeister and Leary contend that belonging is a universal motivation, arguing that "...human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (1995, 522). Belonging is perhaps one of those visceral emotions that is easy to recognize in ourselves, but not easy to describe. We know instinctively the affective resonances and flows which signal our belonging to a collective, but how to analyse it? Belonging can be said to be the "thicker" feeling which connects individuals to communities, which attaches people to one another in deep, abiding ways (Crowley 1999, 22). As Probyn puts so poetically, "...belonging expresses a desire for more than what is, a yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants" (1996, 6). Thus, belonging is intimately connected to emotional relations of desire and

attachment, the attempt to feel a part of something larger than oneself; belonging is at once at the level of the individual and the collective and speaks to the ties between them. This means that in taking seriously claims of belonging we need to pay attention to the boundary work that is undertaken, as it entails external validation as to “us” vs “them,” as to who belongs to us and who does not (Yuval-Davis 2006, 204). Subjectivities are created by and through these contestations over membership.

Several researchers have attempted to break down the layers of complexity of belonging, noting that it cannot be simplified into a singularity; rather it is replete with twists and folds. Simultaneously in its widespread usage it is saturated with connotations of stability and immutability. Yuval-Davis notes that belonging entails three levels: the positionality of individuals, emotional components, and values, noting that belonging is never given and instead disputes over borders is where the “politics of belonging” lies (2006, 205). Gammeltoft, in her research on reproduction in Vietnam, notes that it includes aspects of kinship, place, and nation, as the women in her study attempted to take into consideration these different levels of attachment and possession in order to forge a certain type of subjectivity (2018). These varying aspects of belonging are important to note, as we take seriously the idea that belonging is never given, but is created, performed, and enacted in a multiplicity of socio-historically specific ways, including needing to recognize the matrices of power that may affect how belonging is enacted. As Yuval-Davis notes elsewhere, “Belonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power, where identification and participation collude, or at least aspire to or yearn for” (2004, 216). Thus, the landscape of power is important to take into consideration as it directly inhibits or supports the field in which belonging is formed.

Despite disagreements about exactly how belonging is layered, researchers point to the body and performativity’s role within its creation. As Yuval-Davis notes, “Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment. It is in this way, as Sara Ahmed points out, that free floating emotions ‘stick’ to particular social objects” (2006, 203). It is through performance that behaviours are linked with identities and as they are reproduced give belonging a sense of deep-rooted stability, which is often taken for granted by participants. By focusing on the performance of practices, I hope to bring back to discussions of belonging an understanding of the body which undertakes this work in order to not reproduce a type of Cartesian split

between a thinking mind and a passive body. Rather, I take seriously the body as the site through which belonging is felt as an affective resonance but also formed as a subject. Connecting performativity, the body, and belonging allows us to understand how these linkages can both instantiate belonging as a real, sticky substance in the lives of individuals, while also becoming twisted, malformed and changed. Throughout this thesis I attempt to highlight the tension between how belonging is thought of as stable, continuous, and deep while also acknowledging the ways in which it is an element of flux and exclusion.

We can see the importance of performativity not only in the formation of gender as was convincingly argued by Judith Butler, but also apply the concept of performativity to the process of ethnicization (1990). Ethnicity as a concept will be broken down further and problematized in following chapters, but here I refer to ethnicity as a process through which individuals are formed and situated as members of a collective, a process which is necessarily highly contextual, historically differentiated, and constrained by the contours of power. Understood through the groups' subjective understanding of ethnicity within context, it is highly variable as different communities use various characteristics as determinative of membership in the community. "The central question here is what is required from a specific person for him/her to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity. Common descent (or rather the myth of common descent) might be demanded in some cases, while in others it might be a common culture, religion and/or language. Loyalty and solidarity, based on common values and a projected myth of common destiny, tend to become requisites for belonging in pluralist societies" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 209). In some way, this characteristic is embodied, performed, enacted, thus bringing that individual into the fold of the collective and beginning the process of becoming a member, a process which is never fully completed but always in transition as individuals navigate fluctuating boundary lines of membership. Fortier looks at performance among an Italian community in London in order to understand how gendered individuals come to be part of the community through discursive politics and bodily practices. As she argues, "...practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings that mark out terrains of commonality, through which the social dynamics and politics of 'fitting in' are delineated" (2000, 2). Thus, by understanding the process in which those boundaries are created that serve to mark out "us" vs "them," we can start to try grappling with how belonging is enacted within communities, both those defined as "ethnic" and others.

It is important to point out the important ways that the concepts of identity and belonging both overlap and diverge. Youkhana notes that, “Belonging has often been used interchangeably with the term identity,” but in my work I use these as two separate concepts that are intimately connected but with some important divergences (2015, 12). Identity is perhaps one of the oldest debated terms and has stirred controversy within anthropological thought as to its analytic capabilities and definitional contours.<sup>21</sup> Brubaker and Cooper argue that the idea of “identity” no longer has analytic utility, their main reservations centering around the conflation between what they call the categories of practice, how the term is used by social actors in everyday life, and the analytic uses of the term (2000, 5). They argue that while “identity” is often conceived of in “strong” essentialist terms when used in categories of practice, analysts have either unintentionally assisted in reifying the concept or have softened it to the point where it is so fluid that it does not retain any analytic utility (2000, 11). They remain skeptical of theorists who argue for the continued use of identity, insisting that the theoretical tangle that characterizes identity can be avoided by using several possible alternatives, including “identification,” “self-understanding,” and “groupness,” among others.

Other theorists have argued for the continued use of the term despite its ambiguities. Martin Sökefeld in his article “Reconsidering Identity” argues in response to Brubaker and Cooper that the very issues that they point out about identity—its complexity and ambiguity—constitute the strength of the term (2001). The concept of identity can be useful precisely because of the dual “Janus-faced” aspect as both that essentializing form which is used in everyday practices and the constructivist approach of social scientists, allowing us to lay open the tensions and slippages between understandings of the term among various actors. Stuart Hall defends the concept of identity as well, arguing that despite the term’s ambiguities it is still useful as a conduit for thinking and analysing, albeit in a deconstructed form (1996). He defines identity as “...the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’” (1996, 5-6). His construction allows for a reading of identity that places flexibility and fluidity at the forefront, highlighting the ways in which identities both flow and stick at particular moments

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<sup>21</sup> The concept of identity, while around since the Roman times, first gained popular traction in the 1950s as a result of Erik Erikson’s work on the rise of the ego-identity and its “identity crisis.” A thorough discussion of the history of the concept of identity would be too much to cover here. For a comprehensive starting point on the philosophical and anthropological conversations around identity, see: (Wetherell and Mohanty 2010).

of articulation during which an individual is temporarily situated into a particular positionality.

I argue in line with Sökefeld that identity is still analytically useful for social scientists and replacing it would impoverish our academic language. Brubaker and Cooper's attempts to extricate social analysis from the vocabulary of the "categories of practice" in order to clarify analytical categories, while understandable in spirit, only serve to further isolate academia from the people that we study, who often understand "identity" as a real, material aspect of their existence. Hall's definition of identity allows for an analysis that avoids reifying identities and instead looks for those moments in which the fluidity of identity comes to join a particular discourse and the moment of connection, or suture, which occurs when and where an identity comes to rest—temporarily, for a moment—before breaking and flowing again.

So, while identity can be understood as the moment in which narratives are brought together to create a "suture" which positions us as a particular subject, belonging is that thicker feeling in which we feel "at home," where one does not need to "explain" (nie musisz się tłumaczyć) (Antonsich 2010, 645). I use belonging to understand those moments in which individuals are affectively aligned or oriented towards some sort of collective, to highlight not only the discursive interpellation of individuals but to take seriously the emotional ramifications of such alignments. Antonsich also points out a distinction between the affective, felt, emotional aspect of belonging which can be intensely personal, while noting belonging as a social form of exclusion—"belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)" (2010, 645). He writes that to ignore one of these dimensions is to not get the full picture, as belonging necessarily engages both the individual and community level. However, if we take Sara Ahmed's claims seriously about how emotions are not simply internal feelings that move outward in but rather have social lives, then by understanding individual belonging we are also taking into consideration belonging at the level of the community (Ahmed 2004a). The affective, caring, "home like" resonances of belonging are at once intimate and glaringly social. Thus, I take belonging to be the expression of affective ties that are understood as deep, thick, and abiding, and serve to connect an individual to one another and to a community but simultaneously, necessarily, include processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In this thesis, I try to investigate how belonging is enacted, (re)presented, formulated, and particularly embodied among the Polish Tatars of Podlasie. I contend that the performance of practices of the body gives rise to the affective stickiness which binds members together. Through this lens, we can move away from categorical determinations of amorphous concepts such as ethnicity, and instead start from the body outward to investigate the richness of belonging. I try to (re)introduce the body to analyses of belonging, as I take the body as the starting point through which we experience the world and thus is the location which both enacts and produces these affective resonances. The aim is to strike a balance between the fluidity, mutability, and temporality of identity and belonging as generally understood within academia, and the stability, depth, and thickness of these concepts as understood by many interlocutors. Following Fortier, I intend to strike a balance between analysts such as Probyn's focus on movement and surface, while taking seriously the importance of roots and rootedness for many of my interlocutors in their experience and understanding of group identity (Fortier 2000). These approaches sit in tension as I investigate the ways in which these perspectives tangle, move, and stick among my interlocutors, where belonging is at once stable and illusory.

### Islamophobia without Muslims(?)

This discussion of the intersection of identity and belonging is particularly important in the case of the Polish Tatars given their positionality as a Muslim minority living within a Catholic majority country, in which there has been a clear narrative attempt to tightly bind being Polish and being Catholic.<sup>22</sup> Most researchers on Polish Tatars rely on Warمیńska's triad of identification, namely that Polish Tatar identity consists of three interlocking concepts—nationality (Polishness/polskość), religion (Islam) and ethnicity (Tatarness/tatarskość). While this conception, particularly in relation to the connection between religion and ethnicity, is discussed in detail in Chapter One, the reader will note that polskość is not at the forefront of my analysis. This decision may be criticised, particularly in relation to the surge in Islamophobia after 9/11 and 7/7 and the increase in anti-Muslim

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<sup>22</sup> The intersection between Polish nationality and Catholicism is briefly touched on earlier in this chapter and is too expansive a subject to exhaust here. It must be said however, that the nexus between nationality (Polishness) and religion (Catholicism) is not natural, but rather the result of a specific historical narrative which erases Poland's multicultural and multireligious past in favor of a homogenizing view of the primacy of Catholicism throughout Poland's entire history. For a clear historical description of this, see: (Porter 2001).

rhetoric in Poland. However, this decision has been made purposefully in consideration of both my participants' views and my own ethical and moral obligations to the Polish Tatar community.

Islamophobia is a real aspect of life for Muslims around the world.<sup>23</sup> The literature on Islam in Central and Eastern Europe consistently focuses on Islamophobia as the most pressing matter facing Muslims today due to its steadily increasing prevalence. In 2019, the Pew Research Center undertook a survey to discern unfavorable views towards minority groups in Europe. Three of the countries of the Visegrad Group alliance (or V4), the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, all scored in the top four of unfavorable ratings of Muslims with 64%, 66%, and 58% respectively, expressing unfavorable views (Wike et al. 2019).<sup>24</sup> Pickel and Ozturk, based on a qualitative study of public opinion surveys in both Western and Eastern Europe, argue that

Islamophobia is most widespread in Eastern Europe. We can observe this phenomenon at every point in time that we studied. The high prevalence of Islamophobic attitudes was already observable in the late 1990s (23.1 %), and even its upward trend between 1999 and 2008 (+3.4 %) was most clear-cut among Europe's post-socialist nations... in general the magnitude of reservations towards Muslims was much smaller among Western European (14.8–17.7 %), Scandinavian (14.7–16.4 %), and Mediterranean (16.9–21.3 %) countries. (2019, 34)<sup>25</sup>

The European Values Survey in 2000 showed that Poles expressed disapproval towards Muslims at a much higher level than in other European country, despite their small percentage in relation to the population (Pędziwiatr 2010, 89). The nexus between low Muslim populations and high levels of Islamophobic sentiments has led scholars to identify what is variously called “platonic Islamophobia,” “Islamophobia without Muslims” or

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<sup>23</sup> Although there had been a handful of uses of the term before the 1990s, Islamophobia entered popular discourse with the publishing of the Runnymede report “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All” (1997). Despite Runnymede's attempts to create a clear definition, the term continues to be contested throughout the literature. Scholars raise issues, such as Halliday's concern that fear is directed towards Muslims and not Islam as a religion, thus proposing the term anti-Muslimism, while Erdenir calls for the term Muslimphobia to call attention to the non-religious, social aspects of the attitudes and actions currently described as Islamophobia (Erdenir 2010, Halliday 1999). While I acknowledge the issues raised by these scholars, I follow Bleich's call for a definition that reflects the core characteristics of Islamophobia without eliminating the term altogether. For more, see: (Bleich 2011; Sayyid 2014).

<sup>24</sup> While these percentages are alarming, Kalmar argues against stereotypes which lump Eastern Europe together as a collective and point to higher levels of intolerance, despite varying histories. He notes, using a similar Pew Research poll from 2016, that Poland and Hungary have largely the same levels of “unfavorable views” as Greece and Italy (Kalmar 2018a, 413).

<sup>25</sup> The regions were divided thusly- Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia; Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands; Scandinavia: Denmark, Finland, Sweden; Mediterranean: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain.

“phantom Islamophobia” (Górak-Sosnowska 2011, 18; Kalmar 2018b, 398-99). These phrases intend to capture the seemingly paradoxical situation that, while polls indicate that Muslims are one of the most disliked groups in Central and Eastern Europe, they make up only a very small proportion of the population in many of the countries.<sup>26</sup> However, these phrases simultaneously erase the existence of Muslim groups in Central and Eastern Europe who, like the Polish Tatars, understand themselves as deeply integrated with the nations in which they live.<sup>27</sup>

There are various hypotheses as to why Islamophobia may be higher in these regions, ranging from a theory that contends that Islamophobia is a new interpretation of exclusion of the Other against a backdrop of anti-Semitism, to the history of the region, particularly early engagements with the Muslim Middle East and later socialism (Kalmar 2018a). This imbrication of regional, historical reasoning, and wider global trends demonstrates the inability to determine one cause of Islamophobia in Central and Eastern Europe. Islamophobia, however it is variously defined, is over-determined and cannot be interpreted through recourse to one explanation. However, there is a sharp demarcation between the largely positive discourse regarding the native Polish Tatar Muslim communities and the generally negative portrayal of other Muslim groups (Bertram, Puchejda, and Wigura 2017). The historic Tatar mosques of Kruszyniany and Bohoniki have been turned into innocuous tourist attractions, while the attempt to build an Islamic Cultural Center in Warsaw associated with the non-Tatar run Liga Muzułmańska (LM) was met with fierce opposition, demonstrating the diversity of experiences among Polish Muslims (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017, 452).<sup>28</sup>

Before I went into the field, I assumed I would be focusing more heavily on the interplay of, in Warمیńska’s words, *polskość* on one side and *tatarskość/Islam* on the other. I assumed, based on pre-fieldwork digital ethnography, that there would be serious discussions within the community as to their positionality within the Polish nation in relation to their

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<sup>26</sup> Of the V4, Hungary’s population is approximately .4% Muslim, the Czech Republic .2%, Slovakia .1% and Poland less than .1%, based on Pew Research Center’s 2016 report, which utilized various sources including their previous reports, census data, and surveys (Pew Research Center 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Lehrer in her book on Jewish-Polish memory work in Kazimierz in Kraków notes that foreign magazines “...framed the emerging situation as Jewish Revival/Jewish Culture/ Jewish Disneyland/Jewish Discovery/Philosemitism . . . *without Jews*” (2013, 200 emphasis in original). We see a similar underlying trend here, in that minority voices are erased and subsumed under a narrative of Polish homogeneity.

<sup>28</sup> During the Cultural Center’s construction, a man shot a weapon at the building and a woman threw a pig’s head onto the property. The mosque in Kruszyniany has not been immune to hate crimes as well, with the building graffitied with an image of a pig in 2014.



identity as Muslims. However, I quickly found that their identity as Poles was not a topic of conversation because it was not in question for them. While there were times that their Polishness was discursively overdetermined, in emphasizing their long history in Poland, their military service, their birth in Poland, and their pride in Poland, overall, their Polishness did not naturally come up in conversation simply because they are Polish. Throughout this work I do note the ways in which their practices speak to their positionality as minorities in Poland, particularly in relation to their relationships with non-Tatar Poles and non-Tatar Muslims, but I did not want my work to reinforce an essentializing narrative that Polish identity is determinatively tied to Catholicism.<sup>29</sup> It is important to point out the ways that the Polish Tatar community engages with the wider population and what this says about how their identity is conceptualized, formulated and instantiated, but I want to be true to my interlocutors and their worldview, in which they “don’t feel Polish, I am Polish.” This is not just an attempt to, in some way, reflect what I saw in the field, but also an ethical stand to make clear that the continued questioning in articles, books, and other media about Polish Tatar’s affective ties to Poland reinforce a harmful narrative that they are in some way lesser Poles due to their differential status as a minority. To question their belonging to Poland is to not take seriously their own self-identification and instead reiterate their positionality as outsiders. While I do in parts of this work note the ways that community narratives invoke, interact, and diverge from wider conceptions of what it means to be Polish, I wish to dispel here a conception that Polish Tatars do not align themselves with the wider nation due to their religion.

This is not to say that there are not instances of Islamophobia or that difference does not exist between how the Polish Tatars see themselves and how they are perceived by the wider population. My interlocutors did share stories of discrimination and “unpleasant” encounters and I do not wish to downplay the seriousness of this. Particularly those individuals who are identifiable in some way as being Muslim or Tatar dealt more seriously with issues of their safety and inclusivity. However, this also needs to be held in tension with their own assertion that these disturbing incidents do not exclude them from their own understanding as being Polish. Thus, I attempt to straddle a line, on one hand not diminishing

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<sup>29</sup> Throughout my work I use the phrase “non-Tatar Poles” to refer to the section of the Polish population that do not identify as Tatar. This is a specific choice, as a reference to Polish Tatars and Poles as two separate communities would reiterate a boundary line in which Polish Tatars are not included in the term “Pole.”

the clear difficulties which some of my interlocutors expressed, while also attempting to make clear the deep, abiding, thick feelings of belonging, of *polskość*, among the community.

### Thesis Outline—What is to Come

Chapter One lays out the foundational theoretical framework underlying the overarching argument for this thesis, that Polish Tatars both experience and constitute belonging to their community through performative practices of the body, and that embodied perspective will help us to understand the affective depth and tenacity of belonging. Firstly, I take an in-depth look at the previous sociological and anthropological research on Polish Tatars, taking the reader through previous works in order to understand where my research fits into this field. I take the foundational precept, that Polish Tatar identity is constituted through complex interactions between three pillars—nationality (Polishness/*polskość*), religion (Islam), and ethnicity (Tatarness/*tatarskość*)—and problematize the way that this concept artificially separates and reifies religion and ethnicity. I briefly analyse these concepts before arguing against the commonly used approach of dividing Polish Tatar religious practices into “high” and “low” Islam, or “Orthodox Islam” and “Tatar Islam,” instead arguing for the use of Asad’s discursive tradition as a way to understand participants’ differing approaches to religion and the tension between (some) Polish Tatars and non-Tatar Muslims.

Then, I argue against the usage of the categories of religion and ethnicity, arguing that these categorical separations do not adequately represent my interlocutors’ lived experiences. Instead, I posit that a different lens may be a viable way to understand not how the community is defined, but rather how my interlocutors experience their own sense of identity and belonging. Underlying this conception of belonging is, I contend, an underlying tension between essentializing discourses of identity, namely those tied to blood and kinship (*krew, pokrewieństwo*), and performance, expressed in rituals and communal events. I believe that by taking the body as the space through which my interlocutors understand and encounter their community, we can see how these differing approaches are simultaneously held in tension. I intend to understand the lived experiences of my interlocutors and argue that belonging is crafted, (re)produced and expressed through bodily practices, which help to spread affective resonances through individuals and thus “sticking” members of the community together. In this way I hope that we can move beyond definitional categories of ethnicity and religion and try to find a way to effectively hold the multiple aspects with which

the body is layered in tension—a moving, bleeding, dancing, feeling body—through which belonging is instantiated.

While Chapter One is largely abstract and conceptual, the following chapters analyse particular bodily practices and try to examine what role they play in helping to performatively create a feeling of belonging among the Polish Tatar community.

Chapter Two examines how Polish Tatar foodways, defined as “behaviours and beliefs surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food,” work to erect group boundaries through solidifying intragroup ties through commensality, shaping representations of the community for non-Tatar Poles, and solidifying boundaries with non-Tatar Muslims (Counihan 1999, 6). Thus, foodways are agentive of both inclusion and exclusion. The bringing together of individuals in the kitchen and the iterative consumption of Polish Tatar food during holidays reiterates and reinforces group identity. Changes in food practices simultaneously show intragroup striations, as a perceived weakening of such practices, particularly among the youth, are connected to fear over the loss of identity. Foodways outside of the home such as at Tatar restaurants are connected to attempts to represent the community towards non-Tatar Poles as distinctive and united, narratively paving over cracks and fissures into a cohesive image. The upheaval in Belarus as a result of the falsified re-election of President Lukashenko and associated refugee crisis at the border brought to light considerations as to how, and who, to support (through food). Discussions as to the consumption of pork, halal meat, and alcohol show that these practices connect Polish Tatars to the wider Polish population as “Our Muslims” while simultaneously creating boundaries with the non-Tatar Muslim population, thus using the “constitutive outside” in order to establish boundary lines (Hall 1996, 3). In this chapter, food is understood as not representing community differences but rather as an agentic force which can actively craft group boundaries both within Poland and without.

Chapter Three discusses the importance of the youth dance troupe Buńczuk to formations of Polish Tatar identity. Originally one troupe started by prominent community member Halina Szahidewicz, it has now split into two competing groups. In this chapter, I speak about Buńczuk singularly to reference more generally the dance practice as founded by Szahidewicz, while also touching on the differences between the now distinct troupes. Buńczuk, is, apart from the Tatarska Jurta restaurant, perhaps the most visible representation of Polish Tatars to the wider Polish population. Firstly, I briefly analyse the literature on the

anthropology of dance, focusing on dance as not only a representative practice, but one which can enact change in communities through its bodily and performative qualities. I look at previous literature which largely analyses Polish Tatar dance through the lens of invented tradition and problematize how this term has the possibility to reify a problematic and disingenuous distinction between “invented” traditions and those practices which are left outside of this term. All traditions are, in some way, invented. Rather I focus on the ways that Polish Tatars use dance, which combines narratives of belonging to the Polish nation along with relying on elements from international, trans-Tatar relations to creatively produce novel practices. Thus, Polish Tatar dance traditions not only are used as a way to (re)present their community towards outsiders but is also an infrastructure on and through which they build and create original identity formations as both “authentically” Polish Tatar and yet paradoxically predicated on borrowings from other Tatar communities. This chapter takes seriously the proposition that dance is not “only” an aesthetic art, but is a bodily practice which does things, solidifying community solidarity and deepening affective ties through iterative performances.

Next is a short interlude, interrupting the flow of the narrative in order to briefly touch on the effects and flows of COVID both on my research and on my participants. The COVID pandemic hit about six months into my fieldwork, and thus intimately shaped not only the way I was able to conduct research, but also my own life in the field. I briefly discuss the methodological consequences of the pandemic and how my interlocutors responded, including the ways in which religious engagement moved online.

Chapter Four discusses the two most important Polish Tatar holidays—Kurban Bajram and Ramadan Bajram—along with various smaller occasions as locations in which Polish Tatar identity is discussed, negotiated, and (re)confirmed.<sup>30</sup> This chapter looks at how the body, affect, and movement are brought together in communal gatherings to strengthen ties among members and fashion an image of the group as stable and enduring, while simultaneously being sites of contestation and loss. Bringing together various literatures on ritual, holidays, festivals, and events, I analyse communal gatherings not through their intended “goal,” religious or otherwise, but rather as moments of narrative suture within the social landscape. Instead of seeing events as a (re)production of an already existing collective, I look at how these moments help to produce particular subjectivities through

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<sup>30</sup> Polish Tatars use the Polish version of Turkish names for the two high Islamic holidays—Kurban Bajram is the term they use for Eid al-Adha and Ramadan Bajram is Eid al-Fitr. Bajram is singular while Bajramy is plural.

movement and the interplay of minded bodies in space. I analyse communal gatherings as temporally dense moments in which debates about the past, present, and future of the community are litigated as cracks appear within generations and with other communities. The movement of many young Polish Tatars to major cities for economic advancement impedes the possibility of unbroken intergenerational transfer, promoting fears of dissipating group borders and distinctiveness. Debates as to the proper performance of holidays such as Bajramy highlight the fragility of these moments as locations in which identity is strengthened. Events such as the 2021 border crisis emphasize the fluid ways in which group boundaries can expand and contract in relation to novel socio-historical circumstances. This chapter will analyze how communal gatherings are not only spaces in which individuals are brought together in complicated patterns of affect, movement, and the body in order to (re)affirm belonging, but also locations of contestation and debate.

Chapter Five looks at questions of relatedness, kinship, and marriage, and how these concepts are called upon in conflicting and ambiguous ways to both uphold and contest group belonging. Firstly, I take a brief look at the anthropological literature on kinship, following the transformation of this term and how this concept is now understood—not as social explications of an underlying biological foundation but rather intricate processes which complicate simplistic narratives of blood and belonging. Then moving to the specific experiences of my interlocutors, I analyse how blood is understood to connect members of the Polish Tatar community through both knowable and uncertain relations, and through this process I argue that kinship is in some way diffused throughout the community such that the entire group is understood as “family.” Phenotypical differences, understood as being passed down through blood from common ancestors, are seen as visible representations of a distinctive community, telling of belonging without awareness. However, this picture is complicated as consanguinity is not enough to be considered part of the community but is rather a type of infrastructure through which belonging is scaffolded through iterative and citational practices. Marriage as a site of Polish Tatar future making becomes a polysemous location of debate and disagreement, as exogamous marriages are positioned as dangerous instances of encroaching assimilation. International labour flows and concerns about mixed marriages lead some young Tatars to focus on finding endogamous marriage partners, looking among Tatar communities in Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine, or through matchmakers and balls. The waning popularity of these practices, however, speaks to the

declining importance of endogamous marriage as the space through which identity and belonging is constituted and renewed.

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This work is in no way meant to be read as an explanatory manual for “the” Polish Tatars. Many articles already spell out information about Polish Tatar rituals and customs, painting them as a unified whole, a sort of “Oriental” curiosity set out of time. Rather, I hope I am able to paint a picture of a complex community, consisting of individuals with various aims and goals, which often come into conflict and are temporally and spatially contested.

At the end of fieldwork and following it several significant events occurred that affected the community in which I studied and the country as a whole. The re-election of President Lukashenko in Belarus in August 2020 was followed by waves of protest as people took to the streets to challenge what has widely been condemned as falsified election results. These largely peaceful demonstrations were violently subdued with beatings, torture, and the use of military weapons. In December 2020 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that 27,000 people had been arrested and detained since August 9<sup>th</sup> (United Nations 2020). On August 21<sup>st</sup> a protest in solidarity with the Belarussian people took place in Białystok, with reports of up to two thousand participants, speaking to the strong connections between these two countries in this border area (TVN24 2020). Białystok lies only 53 kilometres from the border crossing at Bobrowniki, while 2.53% of city residents claimed Belarussian nationality in the 2002 census (Departament Wyznań Religijnych oraz Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych n.d.). This physical proximity was brought to the national forefront due to the dramatic increase of migrants seeking entrance to Poland through Belarus in 2021, as President Lukashenko encouraged migrants to cross the EU border to destabilize the region as revenge for strict sanctions (Pempel and Kiselyova 2021). The situation for migrants in this area of dense forests and inclement weather has been deadly, as according to data from Grupa Granica (Border Group), 37 migrants have died since the beginning of the crisis, with an additional 317 missing, while there have been accusations of inhumane treatment by both Polish and Belarussian border guards (Gazeta Wyborcza 2023; Tondo and Mamo 2022).

Due to the unwillingness of Poland to accept refugees, many are stuck in the borderlands in makeshift camps, or once found, are subject to illegal “push-backs” to the Belarussian border. The state of emergency (*stan wyjątkowy*) enacted by the Polish

government restricted access within 3 kilometres of the border to only authorized personnel, therefore prohibiting the rights of doctors and journalists to oversee the situation there, though the government ended the state of emergency on July 1, 2022 with completion of a steel and barbed wire border wall (Gera 2022). The village of Kruszyniany where both the Tatarska Jurta and one of the most important mosques for Polish Tatars is located was in this area, thus not only affecting the tourism there which sustains these businesses, but also did not allow for normal functioning of the mosque. The question of whether to support the Polish border guards or the largely Muslim refugees clearly demonstrated the tension inherent in questions of community borders, as Polish Tatars were pressured to narratively place themselves exclusively within one sphere or the other.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted questions of transnational Tatar identity, as some Crimean and Ukrainian refugees made their way to Białystok. In 2014, 60 Crimean Tatars lived in Białystok and were given assistance by the Polish Tatar community, and many of them were later denied refugee status by the government despite the obvious danger for them returning to Crimea. Some managed to remain and became part of the wider Muslim community, while others were held in the refugee center in Białystok (Strzeżony Ośrodek dla Cudzoziemców). MZR put out a statement following the violent invasion and occupation of Crimea, explaining the help provided to Crimean refugees and questioning the Polish government's decision to refuse refugee status to some individuals. They wrote, "How to explain, especially to Crimean children, who already speak Polish so well and know even the Polish anthem—who finally felt safe, that these were only empty words..." (MZR 2014). Grand Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz made an appearance on Dzień Dobry TVN with a refugee from Crimea, Aleksander Lawryszew, describing the legal, spiritual, and material support for Crimeans which Polish Tatars have shown, describing them as having "spiritual ties above all, [and] ethnic ties" (Redakcja Dzień Dobry TVN 2015, 4:40). The mistreatment of some of these refugees was pointed to as a troubling signal of the Polish state's unwillingness to provide assistance to those in need, as an article by TVP about the situation declared, "Something is wrong with our Polish hospitality" (TVP Białystok 2014).

However, despite the systematic mistreatment of Crimean Tatar refugees, in an interview with a Crimean Tatar woman she emphasized to me the warmth of the Polish people she has met and particularly her happiness at encountering Polish Tatars. She described her life in Crimea and the difficulties of her early life, adding, "And under such

conditions I spent my childhood. But I won't say that it wasn't happy. From my childhood everything that I remember was happiness. Because my parents tried to do everything for us and especially for our education.” She described leaving for Turkey to pursue higher education and then coming to Poland and her comparisons between the two countries. She stated, “I feel here like in a second home.... I like the Slavic culture more. Us Crimean Tatars have in common—not in the sense of blood—but culture I will say.” She emphasized that she has not experienced discrimination in her life in Poland and instead said that Poles surprised her with the amount of knowledge they possessed of Crimea. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 put this in sharp perspective, as according to data from the vice-president of the Polish Development Fund (Polskiego Funduszu Rozwoju) Bartosz Marczuk about 1.3 million Ukrainians are in Poland to flee the deadly invasion of their country (TVN24 2022). The differing attitudes between how the Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar, and Middle Eastern refugees are systematically treated by the state demonstrate the limits of the discursive and legal framing as to who is worthy of help.

These events foreground the ways in which these discussions regarding identity, community, and group boundaries are continuously being contested and transformed in relation to wider socio-historical flux. By the end, I hope the reader will be able to understand the subtle ways in which the multilayered body is called into being throughout various practices—through eating, praying, dancing, moving—and how through this belonging is felt as a deep, binding, and yet fluid force in people’s lives.



# 1

## **A Theoretical Foundation**

Night was starting to fall over the village of Kruszyniany and clouds of moths were dancing erratically around the lights that were starting to blink on, staving off the inevitable fall of darkness in the garden. We were sitting at a picnic table outside of the hotel, our raucous voices a contrast to the silence of the surrounding empty fields and forests. We were tired from a long day of exploring the village and the nearby wilderness, discussing our plans for the rest of the weekend. There were eight of us, part of a larger group of Muslim women who meet periodically, often getting together to listen to Islamic lectures and discuss issues surrounding being a Muslim woman in Poland. This trip was more relaxed and collegial than ones I had been to in the past, as besides praying together in the mosque we mostly spent time together chatting, sitting in the wide-open fields and discussing our lives while soaking in the late August sun.

As darkness fell on the hotel and I wrapped my sweater more tightly around my body, the manager of the hotel/restaurant came over to ask our group about our food order for the

next day. A large, commanding woman, she quickly took charge as we bickered and went back and forth about what meals we were going to have and when. During the discussion she learned that two members of our group are Tatar. A big smile spread across her face. She mentioned that she had a friend who was Tatar and from him she learned that she should say that they are Poles of Tatar descent (*pochodzenie*) and Islamic religion (*wyzwanie*), in that order, and he made her repeat it three times until she knew it by heart. Upon hearing this Basia laughed and said that it is like a formula she memorized.

The manager peered around our group, wondering aloud if anyone else is Tatar. Her eyes alighted on Alija and she asked if she is Tatar, to which Alija responded affirmatively. The manager turned to the woman who organized our trip, accusing her of lying, “You said that there weren’t any Tatars, that the group will just be Polish Muslims.” One of our group pushed back, saying, “well, aren’t we all Polish Muslims?”

After the specifics of food were confirmed, the manager left and conversation again began to flow. We talked long into the night over cups of tea and eventually the long day seeped in, making my eyelids involuntarily droop. I excused myself to return to the hotel, a five-minute walk to a Tatar owned hotel down the street. The path was brightly lit by the moon, and I deeply breathed in the country air. The question kept playing in my head, are we not all Polish Muslims?

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This chapter will question and problematize the usefulness of anthropological categories of religion and ethnicity to understanding how Polish Tatars in Podlasie experience, explain, and create forms of belonging within their community. While previous literature has tended to focus on defining Polish Tatars, my work bypasses issues of definition to attempt to unpack how Polish Tatars come to feel part of a collective and what shape that takes. I argue that among Polish Tatars the phenomena often assigned to “ethnicity” and “religion” are so intertwined that it makes sense to move beyond these problematic and amorphous categories. Instead, I argue that it is practices of the body, how it moves, emotes, and consumes, that makes belonging thick, deep, and substantive. Following Ahmed’s influential work, in which she looks at how emotions both “stick” and “circulate” among individuals, I intend to look at how belonging adheres to (certain) bodies through collective and iterative practices, and how these practices are both productive of, and an effect of, belonging (Ahmed 2014, 4). This chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinning to

this argument, summarizing previous literature and breaking apart the categories of ethnicity and religion which will then set up the further chapters of the thesis that analyse the specific bodily practices which help to (re)create, form, and embody identity.

### A Short Literature Tour

There is a long and varied literature about Polish Tatars, much of it within an historical purview. It tends to focus on explaining the settlement of the various members of the Mongol Golden Horde that later became the group known today as Polish Tatars and their role in Polish society throughout history, particularly between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Warمیńska 1999, 55-56). Here I will focus on sociological and anthropological works that emphasise the community, their traditions, communal gatherings, and rituals. This is necessarily a brief discussion, but it is an attempt to sketch the differing ways that Polish Tatars have been understood by the preeminent historical works as to whether they form a distinctive community or are a religious group within the Polish nation.

One of the first major sociological works on Polish Tatars often referenced in modern day books on the subject is entitled *Muślimowie czyli tak zwani Tatrzy litewscy (Muslims i.e., so-called Lithuanian Tatars)* by Julian Talko-Hryniewicz, published in 1924. The book includes historical information about the origins of the community, religious beliefs, statistical information, and discussions of their relationship with the wider non-Tatar Polish population. Apart from detailed descriptions of the community, he argues that “Muslims kept their ethnographic separateness exclusively in terms of some religious customs,” describing these aspects which differentiate Tatars from other Poles as “ethnographic breadcrumbs” (okruchy etnograficzne) and emphasizing the integration of Tatars into the Polish nation (Talko-Hryniewicz 1924, 74). The book contains valuable information on the community during the interwar period and is often referenced in contemporary works as an influential, if dated, analysis of Polish Tatars. Here we already see as early as the 1920s a discussion of the Polish Tatars as a community primarily distinctive due to their religious differences and as primarily integrated into the Polish nation.

The next important work to be discussed is Stanisław Kryczyński’s *Tatarzy Litewscy—Próba Monografii Historyczno-Etnograficznej (Lithuanian Tatars—an attempt at an historical and ethnographic monograph)*, a deep investigation into the lives of Polish Tatars with descriptions of the history of their settlement, names, physical features,

professions, culinary traditions, religion, and more (1938). As opposed to Talko-Hryniewicz, Kryczyński focused on the distinctiveness of the Tatar community, highlighting how they formed a discrete, separate group from the wider Polish nation and identifying them as an ethnic group. He argues that they form an ethnic group due to their religious beliefs that have caused them to maintain a separate community from others. In an introductory note from the author, he says, “The monograph, written from this point of view, does not exhaust the whole issue, of course, but does, in my opinion, provide a certain aspect to the issue of Lithuanian Tatars as a Turkish ethnic group” (Kryczyński 1938, IX).<sup>31</sup> Thus, we have from the very beginning of sociological analyses of Polish Tatars disagreements as to the definition of the community due not only to terminological ambiguity, but differing views as to which aspects should be highlighted in determining the extent to which Polish Tatars differ from the non-Tatar Polish society.<sup>32</sup>

Moving to the postwar period, Piotr Borawski authored several articles and books on Polish Tatars, calling them alternatively an ethnic group or national group, using the two terms interchangeably (Warمیńska 1999, 74). He argues that Tatars are an ethnic group with a distinctive national identity separate from the wider Polish population due to their religious practices and history, connected as “one nationality of Lithuanian Tatars ...related in terms of language with the Turkic-Tatar peoples” (Borawski 1978, 66). The book *Tatarzy Polscy, Dzieje, obrzędy, legendy, tradycje* written by Borawski and Dubiński is heavily based on Kryczyński’s book, confirming the distinctiveness of Polish Tatars as a group and arguing that religion is what allows them to maintain a separate community (1986).

As opposed to Borawski, Jasiewicz argues that “[A]nalysing the features taken as ethnic determinants, I would like to show that the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars in the 20th century, and probably also earlier, were already an ethnographic group on the complicated Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian ethnic, cultural and religious borderland” (1980, 148). He uses a definition put forward by Roman Reinfuss, in which an ethnographic group is “a group of people residing in a specific territory, distinguished by certain cultural features, possessing awareness of the distinctiveness of these features and building a sense of group separateness

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<sup>31</sup> All translations of works written in Polish are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>32</sup> Most of these early works do not define what they mean by “ethnic” or “ethnographic” group, but rather emphasize that ethnic groups form a separate community while ethnographic groups are highlighted as being members of the larger community. Thus, as Radłowska points out, it can be hard to form comparative judgements between the works given their lack of terminological specificity as especially during the interwar period, the terms ethnographic and ethnic were often used interchangeably (Radłowska 2018, 29-30).

on it” (Jasiewicz 1980, 148). He argues that the feeling of separateness in an ethnographic group cannot be too strong, and he contrasts this with an ethnic group, which has features such as a language, ideology, and does not identify itself with any other groups (Jasiewicz 1980, 148-49). He postulates that Polish Tatars do not form an ethnic group due to the absence of their own language and lack of differentiation in professions from the rest of the Polish population, instead differing only in their religious practices (Jasiewicz 1980, 151-53). He notes that the process of becoming a modern-day religious community has begun, pointing to assimilation with the wider Polish nation which at the time was seen as irreversible (Jasiewicz 1980, 153, 156).<sup>33</sup> This viewpoint has some proponents including Kamocki in his 1993 article “Polish Tatars as an ethnographic group” (“Tatarzy polscy jako grupa etnograficzna”) in which he asks, “who are they actually: an ethnic group, that is, a nation, or at least a nationality, or an ethnographic group, that is, a part of a nation? And if a part - which?” (1993, 47). His answer, similar to Jasiewicz, is that they form an ethnographic group due to their connection to Poland and lack of differentiation except through religion (Kamocki 1993).

Possibly the most important piece of sociological literature on Polish Tatars, and the one with which this chapter will engage more fully, is Katarzyna Warmińska’s landmark book *Tatarzy Polscy: Tożsamość Religijna i Etniczna* (Polish Tatars: Religious and Ethnic Identity) published in 1999. In it, she begins by analysing the state of the field, including summarizing some of the above works and dividing the prominent researchers into two positions—either pro-assimilation (proasymilacyjne) or propluralist (propluralistyczne) approaches. By pro-assimilation she refers to a position which focuses on the gradual losing of distinctive characteristics by the community and integration into the wider Polish public, which includes researchers such as Aleksander Miśkiewicz and Janusz Kamocki, while the propluralist (propluralistyczne) approach focuses on the characteristics which distinguish the community as constituting a separate group, to which she belongs (Warmińska 1999, 77,

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of assimilation is often used in the literature discussing Polish Tatars and is not always clearly defined. Contextually, it often refers to a process in which a group, once defined as distinctive from the majority, through a process of acculturation stops possessing features or exhibiting practices which set them apart, leading to a loss of distinctive identity and complete inclusion into the majority. In the past this was often perceived as an irreversible process. Researchers today see assimilation and acculturation as processes which are multi-layered and unpredictable, often affecting the dominant group as well as that group undergoing acculturation processes. It should also be noted that communities are not passive or submissive during these transformations but possess agency in either fighting back through nativist movements or actively choosing to acculturate for various reasons. While there are issues with the term assimilation, I use it throughout this text as this is the term Polish Tatars themselves use to describe this process (asymilacja).

143). She believes that the underlying basis of this rift is a differing focus on “objective” versus “subjective” features, such as the group having its own language (Warمیńska 1999, 143).<sup>34</sup> For example, she believes that “...it is more essential the way in which subjects perceive the lack of possessing their own ethnic language, than the fact that they don’t possess such a language” (Warمیńska 1999, 143). Later on in this chapter I will further explore the concept of objective and subjective features as determinative of (ethnic) identity, but Warمیńska argues that the group’s subjective feelings of separateness from other communities or self-ascription as part of an ethnic group should be taken into account. She points out the terminological ambiguity often utilized in the above-mentioned works, in which ethnographic, ethnic, and even national identifiers are used interchangeably (Warمیńska 1999, 84). She argues that the Polish Tatars constitute an ethnic community, saying that not only must certain features be taken into account such as the “primacy of ethnic ties (derived from blood relations),” physical features, and practices such as endogamy, but also contextual factors such as how the group perceives itself in relation to other communities (Warمیńska 1999, 85, 224).

The most important aspect of her work that has been consistently utilised in other literature since its inception and which constitutes the basis of how Polish Tatar identity is understood today is her postulate that Polish Tatar identity is made up of three interrelated elements. She writes, “Describing the issue of the ethnic and national identity of Polish Tatars I focus on the analysis of the mutual relation between three spheres of meaning of the following ideas: “muzulmańskość” (Muslimness), “tatarskość” (Tatarness), and “polskość” (Polishness), which in my opinion constitutes the key to understanding the way in which members of the researched group construct their feeling of their own distinctiveness” (Warمیńska 1999, 143). This triad of identification has formed the basis of most literature and research touching on Polish Tatars since its creation, and later in the chapter I will discuss not only its applicability to the community today, but its analytical suitability to the discussion of belonging.

The last researcher to be mentioned in this necessarily brief summary of the relevant literature is Karolina Radłowska and her book *Tatarzy Polscy: Ciągłość i Zmiana* (Polish

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<sup>34</sup> The concept of an “objective” feature is a slippery one, as even something such as a language which may seem to be able to be empirically checked has its own pitfalls. For instance, what constitutes a language and what constitutes a dialect is more of a political than a scientific distinction (McWhorter 2016). I use the terms objective and subjective here as Warمیńska uses them in her original analysis.

*Tatars: Continuity and Change*) (2018). Similar to Warmińska, she argues for an understanding of group dynamics which takes into account both so called subjective and objective features, pointing out that identity is always in flux and in a process of becoming (Radłowska 2018, 41). Her text focuses on those elements that have allowed Polish Tatars to maintain a distinct group identity throughout time (she uses the term “long-lasting group” “grupa długiego trwania”), while also focusing on aspects of change in accordance with her understanding of identity as constantly shifting in relation to geopolitical and other societal changes in the lives of individuals and the community (Radłowska 2018, 71). She adds two important pieces to Warmińska’s theory. Firstly, she argues that “...the contemporary identity of the Tatar community is undergoing transformations from a traditional religious identity in the direction of an ethnic-cultural identity” (Radłowska 2018, 189). One of the reasons for this is, as she points out, that the old stereotype that “Every Muslim is a Tatar and every Tatar a Muslim” is no longer true, due to increased immigration and political involvement of the non-Tatar Muslim population in Poland (Radłowska 2018, 189). She argues that religion is no longer the most important aspect of Polish Tatar identity but has been influenced by other elements such as “primordial ethnic ties and new symbolic resources, constructed around aspects connected with culture, memory, territory and language” (Radłowska 2018, 160). She does note however, that for the majority of her subjects, religion and ethnicity remain “tightly connected and not exclusive” (Radłowska 2018, 189).

Another addition which she makes to the existing literature is a division, based on work by Antonina Kłoskowska, into singular and dual identity types. By singular identity, *tożsamość jednostkowa* (pojedyncza), she means that the individual forms their identity around a singular trait, often “genealogic criteria (Tatar) or national/citizenship (Polish), sporadically cultural (Tatar or Polish)” (Radłowska 2018, 189-90).<sup>35</sup> She says that the most common of these identifiers used by respondents was connected with Polishness, which she suspects may be due to assimilation pressures (Radłowska 2018, 190). Responses did vary based on the positionality of the respondent, and people were more likely to be singularly connected to *tatarskość* in the Białystok region and during times of crisis (Radłowska 2018, 190).<sup>36</sup> The dual identity, *tożsamość podwójna* (złożona), is more common and refers most

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<sup>35</sup> Note that Tatar and Polish are signifiers of both a national and a “cultural” identity.

<sup>36</sup> She describes the banning of ritual slaughter by the Polish government during her fieldwork and said that it was often a point of conversation among her respondents, arguing that the boundaries of the Polish Tatar community were more rigorously expressed during this time of conflict (Radłowska 2018, 191).

often to an identity based on the “ethnicity” “Tatar” and “nationality/citizenship” “Polish,” which the author notes are not exclusive categories (Radłowska 2018, 191). In summary, she argues that the contemporary identity of Polish Tatars “...is undergoing transformations from an assigned identity, determined by a religious factor, to an ethnic identity, constructed around both traditional and constructed cultural resources, and so an identity of choice (from singular identity to a dual identity)” (Radłowska 2018, 193).

The reliance throughout the extant literature on the concepts of ethnicity and religion as the lens through which to analyse these phenomena associated with identity (re)formations and transformations is one which I would like to investigate further. Do these terms analytically serve the given context, and if not, what is the alternative?

### An ethnic religion? Religious Ethnicity? The Utility of Terms

Given that the triad of identity (religion, ethnicity, and nationality) is the basis of most of the contemporary work on Polish Tatars, this may be a good starting point into a more in-depth discussion of the previous literature and how my work challenges this model. There is a reason this triad of identity formation is widely referenced in the literature; as noted in the opening vignette it has become a sort of formula many of my respondents were quick to cite. In many discussions with my interlocutors, I started out asking them to describe themselves (“Kim pan/pani jest?”) in order to understand their self-identification. The overwhelming response that I received reflected these three categories in a clear way, for example “I am a Pole, a Muslim and a Tatar.”<sup>37</sup> The order would change; sometimes my interlocutors would say that the order in which they answered did not bear any significance, while others would emphasize that the order represented the strength of attachment to that particular element. Radłowska notes that the order for her respondents often had meaning and would vary depending on factors such as location of residence or age (2018, 191). These responses certainly lend credence to this triad of identity formation, demonstrating that many Polish

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<sup>37</sup> While the overwhelming majority answered in this way, there were a few notable answers. One Polish Tatar woman living in England responded that she is a Muslim, Pole, mother, wife, daughter, student, an educationalist in the making, and while she isn’t British, she belongs to England in some way. When I asked if the order is important, if Muslim should come first, she said no, but that the others are embedded and depend on the situation but that she is Muslim “always and forever.” Thus, while speaking about the majority responses it is always important to remember that groups are made up of individuals and are never homogenous, containing varying responses and approaches to the issues discussed.



Tatars see their identity through a varying mixture of nationality (*polskość*), religion (*muzułmaństwo*), and ethnicity (*tatarskość*).

As seen in the opening vignette, Basia noted that this was a type of formula that she learned to say from a young age, while the hotel manager recalled that a friend taught her that specific response. The origins of the uniformity in answers is, I believe, a result of attempts to assert belonging to the Polish nation in the face of the popular narrative which anchors Polishness within Catholicism. This corresponds to what is discussed in the introductory chapter as the overdetermination of Polishness among Polish Tatars, such that they feel the need to continuously assert their inclusion in the national body through narratives of patriotism and citizenship, and make this relationship clear in their self-ascriptive identity markers.

However, both Warمیńska and Radłowska agree that not every respondent utilized all three of these categories in their auto-identification. Warمیńska notes that all of her participants agreed that *polskość* was an integral part of their identity, but that the exact relation between the other two elements varied. She divides her interlocutors into two groups; the first one that she subsumes under the name Tatar Muslim or Muslim Tatar (*Tatar muzulmanin/muzulmanin Tatar*) utilizes what she refers to as both religion and ethnicity to describe themselves, but individuals differ as to the emphasis put on each of these aspects (Warمیńska 1999, 145). The second group she calls Muslims (*muzułmanie*) as they define themselves exclusively through Islam, disregarding the importance of *tatarskość* to their lives and instead referring to a connection with a wider, Polish Muslim community, or *ummah* (Warمیńska 1999, 147-49). She notes that this group is by far a minority, and most respondents use both Islam and *tatarskość* to construct their identity. This seems to reflect Radłowska's division into singular and dual identities as a way to understand the diverse ways that members of the community understand their own positionality(s).

One interesting piece of this division into singular and dual identities, or Warمیńska's *Tatar muzulmanin* and *muzułmanie*, is the way in which these responses were given to researchers in the course of research conducted on the subject of Polish Tatars. In other words, *muzułmanie* were still included as possible respondents and members of the community despite only identifying themselves through a religious facet. This points to some underlying connection, external or internal, conscious or not, to *tatarskość* for either the respondent or the researcher. However, Warمیńska does note in relation to this *muzułmanie*

subgroup that some respondents actively negated their tatarskość, while for others there was such an overlapping of what she categorizes as religion and ethnicity that it cannot be clear that those who define themselves only as “Muslim” are not also including in this conception aspects of tatarskość (Warمیńska 1999, 151). This may be due, as the researcher notes, to the “ethnicization of religion,” though this term is not fully fleshed out and is left as a titillating flash of what seems to be one of the underlying tensions in these discussions about Tatar identity—the exact relationship and definitional contours between these categories of religion and ethnicity within this particular context.

As both Warمیńska and Radłowska acknowledge, ethnicity has a multitude of definitions within anthropological and sociological literature, with little consensus. As Cohen notes, “Writers generally take it for granted that the term refers to a set of named groupings singled out by the researcher as ethnic units. Membership in such groups (defined subjectively and/or objectively) are then shown to have an effect on, or correlation with, one or more dependent variable(s)” (1978, 385). In other words, researchers have preconceived notions of which communities form ethnic groups and define ethnicity through either objective or subjective categories as appropriate to the given context. This debate, as to whether ethnic groups or communities should be based on “objective” criteria (those elements which an outside observer might see) or “subjective” criteria (based on the native community’s self-identification), is common in discussions of ethnicity (Munasinghe 2018, 5). Frederick Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) pushed the subjectivist view to the forefront, as he argues in the introduction that “The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969, 15). Thus, the focus is shifted away from essentialized (“objective”) trait lists towards the relationship between and among groups. Despite the subjectivist centralization of borders and interactions as opposed to the content of the group boundaries, many definitions of ethnicity still point to real or imagined kinship ties as a defining factor of ethnicity (for example: Cornell 1996; Connor 1993; Weber 1968). Focusing on boundaries as opposed to the “cultural stuff” enclosed helps us to analyse ethnicity as contextual and not a pre-given identificatory formation but does not fully help us understand why “ethnicity” is formulated separate to a more general “identity.” Researchers who use ethnicity as an analytic concept often seem to assume that ethnicity functions differently in some way, inferring that it automatically contains deeper emotive ties than other identifiers or that it necessarily involves ideas of kinship.

Radłowska in her discussion of ethnicity as a concept and how it applies to Polish Tatars, emphasizes that “objective” and “subjective” criteria should be taken into consideration, as “objective” criteria are important in so far as they are understood as important for the community in question, though such criteria can change temporally and contextually (2014, 158). Following Barth, she argues that the group’s subjective feeling of separateness and the boundaries that are formulated in relation to others are an important aspect to the formation of ethnic identities, or I would add, identities in a broader sense. Cebula in his writing on Polish Tatars pulls from previous writers and says that “Ethnic identity is based on the feeling of a group community and is strengthened by bonds of residence, kinship, language, religion, common history and ancestors, as well as customs and traditions. As it has already been shown in previous studies (including by Prof. Katarzyna Warmińska from the mid-1990s) the identity of the Tatar community was based on two main pillars: Islam and the awareness of the common ethnic origin” (2016, 117). If we focus here on how the extant literature treats “common ethnic origin” as an example of *tatarskość*, we begin to see a picture of what this literature means by ethnicity within this context. Warmińska describes the elements of *tatarskość* as endogamous marriage practices, ethnic ties, customs, phenotypical characteristics, customs, an endonym, and a shared past (1999, 153). She emphasizes the role of blood ties and the idea among her interlocutors of the importance of pure blood (*czysta krew*), while simultaneously noting that her interlocutors were divided as to whether pure blood was in reference to ethnic ties or religion (Warmińska 1999, 154-55). Radłowska refers to similar elements, noting the importance of primordial ties (common ancestors, common blood, phenotypical features), while pointing out how “other symbolic resources” including “culture” have been used to attempt to strengthen the distinctiveness of the ethnic group (2018, 188). She describes *tatarskość* as “...an a priori feature, given from above, assigned, obvious” (Radłowska 2018, 161).

Thus, while the given researchers understand that ethnicity as a concept or category is amorphous and difficult to define cross-culturally, they do attempt to understand what ethnicity signifies within the community in question. Elements which are seen as “assigned” or “primordial” such as blood or phenotypical features are included along with “cultural” features, though it is unclear exactly their role in strengthening ethnic boundaries. As will become clearer later on in the chapter, my work sidesteps the question of defining “ethnicity” to rather understand how individuals experience belonging to a community, a community

which is already seen by some of my interlocutors as distinct and bounded.<sup>38</sup> While many of my interlocutors would describe their community as ethnic (*etniczna grupa*), I prefer to utilize the vocabulary relating to identity given the dangers of reifying ethnicity and elevating it to a concept that automatically confers emotive ties upon members. Rather, following my interlocutors' explanations to me, I prefer to focus on the practices which I believe help to both deepen affective ties and simultaneously formulate group boundaries through their performance.

By focusing on this process, I attempt to show how aspects such as relatedness, religious performances, and food practices, among others, are not actions which flow from an already instantiated collective but rather help to build and suture a particular subjectivity in place. This follows my respondents' own representations to me, in which ethnicity was sometimes used as a definitional phrase in response to my own questions as to the nature of the group but did not constitute a major organizational aspect within their lived experiences. Rather, they continuously emphasized the importance of rituals, traditions, and practices as constitutive of their identity(s). In this, I follow Mandel's critiques of the reification of ethnicity within much anthropological and sociological literature, which prompts her to prefer "...the language that privileges process (ethnicization, de-ethnicization) to the idioms of fixity often linked to "ethnicity"—something economistically held, accumulated, constructed, structured, circulated, and ultimately essentialized" (2008, 21). While I understand the impetus behind the usage of sociological and anthropological theories on ethnicity which have been utilized in the past with Polish Tatars, I prefer to focus on the practices that both shape and produce emotional depth to membership in a collective group without automatically conferring the title of "ethnic" to that relationship. I take into consideration the historical trajectory and contours of power that shape the social landscape in which this process occurs. Bringing in an affective lens allows us to look at this process not as neutral, but as an element in people's lives, which can be ambiguous, meaningful, or painful. The usage of the concept of "ethnicity" is not an explanation, but rather the doorway to more questions.

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<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that the community is bounded; as noted in later chapters there are transnational connections to Tatars in other nations, including Crimea and Belarus, and boundaries are always in flux, fluid, and contested. Rather, I am concerned here with how my interlocutors represent their own community as "closed."

It is to this end that rather than being concerned with the definitional contours of the group, I rather ask how the affective body is implicated in the creation of belonging to the given community. Instead of defining issues such as blood, relatedness, or practices a priori as belonging to either an “ethnic” label or “cultural features,” instead I look at how all of these elements, through a particular historical framework, are positioned as parts of a whole process in which community belonging is shaped, formed, and contested.

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The second piece in the triad of identification is religion, which among Polish Tatars is overwhelmingly Islam. Perhaps without exception, researchers and respondents point to religion as the way that Polish Tatars have been able to remain a distinctive community within the majority Catholic Poland.<sup>39</sup> As one respondent noted, “The Tatar identity therefore results only from religion and what has been built on it.”<sup>40</sup> The connection between being Tatar and being Muslim is one of the most analysed in the extant literature, generally being pointed to not only as important religious beliefs and practices that bring members together, but also as a clear marker of identity.

It should be noted that groups are heterogenous amalgamations of individuals, and as such there are exceptions to the tendency noted here and in other works that examine the extended and complicated intertwining of Polish Tatar identity with Islam. I asked my participants about the possibility of being a Polish Tatar Catholic or Orthodox Christian, but I was told that in Podlasie such examples are practically not heard of.<sup>41</sup> For example, one interlocutor said, “The whole Tatar ethnicity relies on Islam,” while another noted that “A person who is Catholic but admits to Tatar origins (*pochodzenie*) practically does not exist.”

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<sup>39</sup> According to the statistical analysis included in the *Religious Denominations in Poland 2015–2018* published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), as of 2011 the Polish population is 93.7% Roman Catholic. Data are collected with the help of surveys which are sent to religious authorities each year. As with any statistic, we should be aware of its limitations and take its results with reservations (Cieciela et al. 2019, 82).

<sup>40</sup> I focus here on Podlasie, as this is where I did my fieldwork and had relationships with the Polish Tatar community. Given that Podlasie was often represented to me as a centre of Polish Tatar life, it is possible that the relation between religion and group identification discussed here is understood differently in other locations. Some of my interlocutors who grew up outside of Podlasie and then moved there later described a type of awakening or process of learning more about their origins that was not possible in the areas in which they lived, where there was not a Polish Tatar community with which to engage.

<sup>41</sup> A similar response was proffered when given the suggestion about someone being Tatar and atheist, although overwhelmingly when asked about an individual not being Muslim, the assumption was that they would be Catholic. I speak of the relationship between Islam and Catholicism as these were the options through which my respondents conceptualized their choices. Górak-Sosnowska and Łyszczarz in their article argue that their interlocutors quite clearly connect Islam and *tatarskość* such that conversion is determinative of a loss of identity (2018).

Another interlocutor noted, “I have never seen someone who would be a Tatar and a Catholic simultaneously. I have never seen such a person. They are either a Catholic, or a Tatar.” However, one respondent I spoke with said that he used to think that being Tatar and Muslim were indivisible, but later he changed his mind and realized that being Tatar and being Muslim are two different things, that being Christian does not exclude you from being Tatar. One interlocutor who was very clear about the role Islam plays in understandings of group identity explained that when someone is Catholic they do not say that they are Tatar, but rather they say that they have Tatar origins. This seems to be a sort of distancing, in which such an individual is not an active member of the community but is rather somehow aligned due to ancestral connections. This issue of the relation between categorical determinations of religion and ethnicity is explored further later in the chapter, but it is important to note that while the majority of peoples may have a particular viewpoint, opinions in a community are never homogenous.

Islam as practiced among the Polish Tatars is often analysed in the academic literature through the lens of a distinction between a “pure” Islam as derived solely from the Quran and sunnah (the way of the prophet), and Islam as practiced and experienced by the community, which contains aspects of Christianity and remnants of paganism. For researchers and some members of the community, the celebrating of Catholic holidays in various ways, such as having a Christmas tree in the house or painting Easter eggs, is seen as an example of the influence of the Catholic majority, while practices such as the consulting of *chamał* to check auspicious days for events such as weddings are seen by researchers as examples of shamanic practices harkening back to the group’s historical ties to the steppes.<sup>42</sup> For those with whom I spoke who participated in practices such as reading *chamał* or putting up Christmas trees, these were generally seen not as religious in nature but rather either secular celebrations or Tatar traditions. Warمیńska references Gellner’s division into high and low Islam, with high Islam being understood as a religious practice by the elites who take the literal reality as imbued in the Quran and sunnah seriously and “low Islam” as characterized by symbolic and mystical practices (Warمیńska 1999, 87). She notes that Gellner describes a pendulum swing, as there are periodic pushes to clear accretions away from the “low Islam” and bring it into alignment with orthodoxy (Warمیńska 1999, 87). She describes a dichotomy in religious practices “...as the difference between beliefs and rituals expressed in religious texts and

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<sup>42</sup> A *chamał* is a Polish Tatar prayer book with descriptions of prayers, religious rites, and traditions. They are often written in Polish with Arabic letters.

commentaries, and actually realized faith and ritual practice in specific Muslim communities” (Warمیńska 1999, 100).

In reference to the concept of “orthodoxy” in Islam, she goes on to say that it cannot be determined universally but must be observed within the context of community and what is considered orthodoxy and heterodoxy by respondents. To illustrate this, she references Geertz in *Islam Observed*, noting that Geertz points out the diverse ways that Islam is referenced, experienced, and practiced within varying contexts, showing that what is “correct” practice within one community may not be within another (Warمیńska 1999, 101). She ends by saying that her goal is to analyse “Tatar Islam” and its role in setting ethnic boundaries into place (Warمیńska 1999, 100). She concludes that there is a dualism in Tatar Islam, with one aspect of it coming from “Islamic traditions” while the other originates from Tatar religious practices (Warمیńska 1999, 110). She notes that this is confirmed by her respondents, as they refer to some practices as “Islamic” and some as Tatar, and she points to the importance of Islam as a way to mark out the ethnic boundaries of the community (Warمیńska 1999, 110).

It would be helpful to take a brief moment here to look at how the “anthropology of Islam” has been constituted in order to understand where this particular analytical lens of the division between high and low Islam was created and how we might understand the concept of “Tatar Islam” within it. Geertz’s *Islam Observed*, referenced by Warمیńska in her discussion of religion among Polish Tatars, was one of the most influential anthropological pieces to explicitly deal with Islam not as one piece of a larger cultural whole but as the explicit subject of analysis (1968). He argued that anthropology must take seriously how Islam is actually practiced within various societies and pay attention to the variety of interpretations within Islamic communities, going on to compare religious beliefs and practices in Indonesia and Morocco and identify differences due to the historical and societal conditions into which Islam was transplanted (1968). El-Zein in his work a few years later responds to Geertz’ understanding of Islam, arguing that the underlying supposition in Geertz’ theory is still a universalized Islam, as “each individual experience contains the universal characteristics assigned to the religious form of experience and those particular shared meanings which recall an entire tradition of Islam” (el-Zein 1977, 232). El-Zein in an attempt to move beyond the popular conception expressed in *Islam Observed* argued that we must stop looking for those universal characteristics which presumably connect these various Islam(s); he argues that Islam cannot be taken outside of the fluid, complex situation in which it exists. Any flow or change is necessarily frozen in the moment of analysis, thus inhibiting

the possibility of understanding religion as it is actually experienced. In the end he proclaims, “‘Islam’ as an analytical category dissolves as well” (el-Zein 1977, 252).

The question at this point for many researchers was how to understand the relationship between what is understood by believers as a universal religion and the differing ways that local communities experience, understand, and practice this religion. For one to simply argue that there are multiple Islams, all correct in their own way is, “. . . in essence, to make a theological claim, one most Muslims would not only deny but, they rightfully argue, anthropologists have no business making” (Launay 2004, 5). The seminal work of Talal Asad in his *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* attempted to move beyond this issue through the discursive tradition, which seeks to understand how a given Muslim community relates to the Quran and hadith (sayings of the Prophet), arguing that Islam is a tradition (Asad 2009, 20). He says that tradition does not mean a practice which is passed down unchanged through generations but must include the possibility for change. He defines tradition as consisting of “discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a *past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a *future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a *present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions)” (Asad 2009, 20 emphasis in original). Thus, in order to understand Islam within a given context, Asad promotes looking at the moments in which Muslims are inducted as Muslim within the community and the associated arguments about how to correctly practice, perform, and inhabit Islamic traditions. Arguments as to orthodoxy, as Asad notes, have always been a part of Islamic traditions and must be looked at in relation to power within the community—who has the power to determine between “right” and “wrong” practices (Asad 2009, 22).<sup>43</sup> Here “orthodoxy” does not refer to some universal code of what “Muslims” as some generalized group believe to be essential to Islam, rather as Anjum puts it, orthodoxy “with a lowercase o” consists of how power helps to formulate not only the debate itself but what allows the debate to take place (Anjum 2007, 666).

I take Asad’s concept of the discursive tradition seriously, as it allows us to move beyond a division of Islamic practices into two levels, “high” and “low” or “great” and

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<sup>43</sup> Asad doesn’t make a distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, arguing that “correct practice” is often based on rules taken from doctrine (Asad 2009, 22).



“little.” Apart from the derogatory connotation involved in the words themselves, doing so involves the researcher into a determination of what is constituted by the two terms. This is itself a very controversial question as it is essentially a theological determination of what constitutes “correct practice,” and why Warmińska attempts to sidestep the issue by explaining that we must take orthodoxy within the particular social situation and look at what our respondents determine is “Islamic” and what is not. She argues that her respondents themselves express a dualism between practices which are “Islamic” and those which are “Tatar.” However, this dualism still props up a division between “Great” and “Little” traditions, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Additionally, if we simply take it for granted that “Islam” is what our respondents say is “Islam,” we are left with a situation in which “[t]here are everywhere Muslims who say that what other people take to be Islam is not really Islam at all” (Asad 2009, 3). Instead of looking at Islam within the Polish Tatar community as a division between “Islamic” practices and “Tatar” practices, which in its very essence defines Tatar practices as being outside of Islam or looking at Polish Tatar religious practices as simply a local version within a web of multiple islams, I believe it would be worthwhile to see these discussions as forming distinctive discursive approaches to the foundational texts. This is a subtle change but an important one, as it allows us to analyse the wider discourse on Islam and its place within my respondents’ community, Poland, and their lives, and allows us to focus more closely on the socio-historical currents which allow this debate to take place and the power relations that are imbued within it.

One aspect of religious practice by Polish Tatars as noted by both Warmińska and Radłowska is that while most interlocutors define themselves as Muslims, the actual state of practice among the community is quite low. What they mean by practice is the fulfillment of obligations such as the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and going on Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. My interlocutors expressed varying relations to this concept of practice. Some of those who did consistently fulfill such obligations decried the “lack of knowledge” or lax “practice” within the community, while others simply stated that while they understood the imperative to practice the five pillars, they did not do so personally. Warmińska notes that when she asked her respondents who a real Muslim is, they often noted religious obligations such as praying five times a day, fasting, or not drinking alcohol, rules which they often do not follow themselves. She said that a majority of her respondents did not fulfill the key obligations of being Muslim, despite knowing that they should (Warmińska 1999, 112). She concludes that “Having awareness that they ‘aren’t real [Muslims]’ their religious identity is

based above all on tradition, on Tatar Islam” (Warمیńska 1999, 112). The takeaway for Warمیńska is that Islam is above all an ethnic marker, signaled by the relationship between “Tatar” traditions and “Islamic” traditions and the lack of religious practice by her interlocutors. However, I believe that there is another perspective, one that allows us to understand the role that practices, belief, and religion play in these wider discussions of group identity formation. I argue that it may be worthwhile to see both the “lack” of practice among some interlocutors and “Tatar traditions” as a particular discursive positioning towards Islamic tradition, which is a result of the socio-historical conditions of the community. This shift allows us to move beyond too strict a focus on religious fulfillment in order to take seriously those who try, but ultimately do not uphold their own standards.

Many of my older interlocutors are consistently involved in the social calendar of the community, such as going to the mosque for Friday prayers, attending religious lessons, and participating in Bajram celebrations, though often without an understanding of either the Arabic being spoken or being able to pray on their own. As early as 1938, Stanisław Kryczyński wrote “Due to lack of their own liturgical schools, not knowing Arabic and being separated from the rest of the Muslim world, the Lithuanian Tatars know their religion only superficially. In the major things they do not differ from other Muslims, but they also contain elements alien to the spirit of pure Islam, drawn either from the shamanistic beliefs once characteristic of Turks-nomads, or from the beliefs of the local Christian population” (Kryczyński 1938, 173). This supposed “superficial” or “lack” of knowledge was mentioned several times throughout my fieldwork. For instance, one day I was at Friday prayers when I noticed that the imam announced sunnah prayers (optional extra prayers that can be done before or after obligatory prayer). I had never heard them announced in the other mosques I had attended, so I asked the woman next to me if this was a common occurrence. She said that because Tatars do not know their religion, they need to have such things announced for them.

During the early days of the socialist period in Poland during which many of my older interlocutors spent their formative years, religion was not publicly expressed but rather practiced in the home. Due to the lack of imams after WWII religious schooling was limited; some of my interlocutors described religious lessons operating in private homes with the most knowledgeable person in the area teaching, while others noted that their experience of religion was passed down only through parents or grandparents. Thus, instead of a relationship directly with the text of the Quran, many of the older community members’

religious schooling was through the intermediary of a parent or family member who passed information down through generations. The notion of “correctly” performing an Islamic tradition was not in relation to the literal evidence of a hadith (a saying of the Prophet) for example, but rather was a recollection of an earlier performance by a family member, the correct performance of which would inculcate not only an Islamic identity but a Tatar one. Thus, we see the linking of these identity(s) such that the performance is successful because it follows the path outlined by antecedents in the community, even if it would be considered “incorrect” by Muslims raised within a different tradition. Thus orthodoxy, by which I mean the power and authority to determine a successful performance, was linked to a tradition’s transmission (whether real or imagined) throughout time, not necessarily to its textual evidence.

An example may help to show this more clearly and demonstrate how this slight change in perspective can help us to understand the differing ways that religious analysis is utilized within this community. As part of my research I attended religious classes in a nearby small town run by a religious leader and several older Polish Tatar women. The religious leader who had training in Muslim centers of teaching and madrasas (Islamic schools) was helping the women to learn the basics of Islamic practice such as the five pillars, the six pillars of faith, and how to make wudu in order to pray.<sup>44</sup> There were often conflicts between the leader and the women, as the way that they were used to practicing religion came into conflict with what the leader determined was “correct.” The leader would often back up his point using hadith or surahs (chapters) from the Quran, often having to explain that rules were applicable despite them being challenging to abide by. For instance, he explained that the difficulty in obtaining halal meat was not an excuse to eat non-halal meat, and if it is not available then a vegetarian option is the most appropriate. The women would sometimes reject such explanations, often referencing the fact that they lived in Poland, which made it difficult to fulfill obligations. They often said that the way they do things are how the Tatars have always done them, mentioning their parents or grandparents as the progenitors of their knowledge. For those who consider “Tatar Islam” as heterodoxy, this form of persuasion is not effective because the Quran and sunnah are the only sources of authority. Thus, the argument that “we have always done it this way” has no sway.

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<sup>44</sup> Wudu is a form of ablution which must be done in order to be in a state of cleanliness to pray. In brief, it consists of washing the face, arms, head, and feet in a particular order. Without wudu prayer is considered invalid.

What we see in this anecdote is not an example of “Tatar” Islam and “great” or “high” Islam, but rather two different discursive traditions. For many of the older Polish Tatars, their relation to Quranic texts and the way that they practice Islam is related to the past transmission of such knowledge through members of the community, knowledge that for some is seen as in danger of being abandoned in the future and so should be maintained by the community today. For the religious leader, the rationale in his arguments were based directly on Quranic texts that due to his schooling he had the ability to read and was shaped through a past spent in centers of Islamic knowledge. The conflicts I saw were based on two different forms of argumentation, which take as their base two forms of knowledge, thus bringing into relief why they were not able to agree. Instead of seeing these as two different Islams and thus as totally distinct, “the various local orthodoxies the anthropologist studies are not disconnected and isolated—and change comes more often from outside than from within the local discursive boundaries” (Anjum 2007, 670). Orthodoxy for some among Polish Tatars is not separated from the Holy Texts but is created through a relationship to them that is often mediated by imams, parents, and tradition, which places it in direct conversation (and tension) with those who have direct access to the text and who were brought up, not in a *different Islam*, but in a different *discursive relationship* towards those texts.

Asad notes that argumentation has always been a part of the Islamic tradition and discussions among Polish Tatars as to what it means to be a Muslim or “correctly” practice does not exclude their integration as part of the universal ummah. Rather, this is a normal aspect of Islam and has been a part of Islamic tradition since the beginning. “Belonging to a tradition doesn’t preclude involvement in vigorous debate over the meanings of its formative texts (even over which texts are formative) and over the need for radical reform of the tradition...Nor does the attempt to adapt the older concerns of a tradition’s followers to their new predicament in itself dissolve the coherence of that tradition—indeed that is precisely the object of argument among those who claim to be upholding the essence of the tradition” (Asad 2003, 195). There are some voices within the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie who express concern over the tendency of some members to not fulfil perceived obligatory demands, such as the five daily prayers or fasting during Ramadan. This tended to be generationally differentiated. The older generation with whom I had contact tended to hold more strongly to traditions which were, as they understood it, passed down by their parents and grandparents. Younger Tatars, who were often raised with institutionalized religious

schooling with teachers from other traditions, including the Middle East, tended to be more likely to push for a cleansing of religious practice from perceived accretions. “Some representatives of the younger generation, those who decided to cultivate Tatar traditions and religion, protest against various deviations from Muslim orthodoxy. They demand the purification of the rites and the return to the correct principles. This, in turn, causes the indignation of the older Tatars, for whom these Arab customs are foreign and contrary to the centuries-old tradition” (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016a, 100).

Thus, we see here the complex interaction between and among members of the Polish Tatar community as to “correct practice,” some defining it through the transmission of knowledge through community members, while others point to an understanding of Islam through texts and “cleansed” of what they see as cultural “accretions.” These arguments are not necessarily specific to Polish Tatars, but rather are part of wider debates among practitioners as to how to practice and understand Islam, arguments that have been integral to Islam from the beginning. By using Asad’s formulation of the discursive tradition, we are able to see more clearly how my respondents experience religion within their daily lives—through relations with other Polish Tatars and the transmission of religious knowledge through trusted intermediaries—and we can therefore take their religious practices seriously without resorting to defining their beliefs and practices as outside of “high” Islam.

While there are discussions within the Polish Tatar community as to how to practice Islam, the tension with the non-Tatar Muslim population in Podlasie is largely based on an understanding that they want to “purify” religion as practiced by Polish Tatars, decrying it as non-Islamic. Pawlic-Miśkiewicz, a Polish Tatar academic and activist in her own right and the wife of the Grand Mufti of Poland, writes that “Some people have doubts whether we are still Muslims—such voices are already appearing. Because our life is to this extent European, Western” (2016a, 101). The tension between the communities can be shown in an anecdote explained to me in English by an interlocutor who had Polish Tatar roots but grew up in the south of Poland. She described coming back to Podlasie to visit family where she was staying with her male cousin, when two foreign men arrived at the house. She says,

But these guys when they arrived they only addressed him and they didn't look at us, and I was curious to ask some questions to these guys and I tried but they never paid any attention and they didn't take food offered by my aunt and for me it was probably the first time I encountered guys of more fundamentalist approach, and I...we all sensed that it is not our culture. When they left after two hours of talk [of] how to be a proper Muslim we all laugh[ed] because they were so...they were wearing white

jalabiyas and they were so different and not having any respect that they came to a reality that is different and may offer something too, but imposing their vision of true Islam, and it is like a rule many such encounters end up like this. It is what I heard.

The language of purifying Islam from accretions, of returning to some “pure” form of religion outside of culture, is not ahistorical but rather is an understanding of Islam which has its own particular history and trajectory.<sup>45</sup>

This is not to say that all relationships between non-Tatar Muslims and Polish Tatars were tense, as to do so would focus only on those moments of discord without also acknowledging that there are relationships and friendships between those within the wider Muslim community in Białystok. I met a man after afternoon prayers at the other mosque in Białystok, often referred to as the “Arab” mosque since it was run by Muslim League (Liga Muzułmańska) and primarily attended by non-Tatar Muslims. We struck up a friendship and over several meetings he told me about how he immigrated to Poland from a country in the Middle East, about the beauty of his country before the war, his experiences in Poland, and his understanding of the relationship between the Muslim communities here. He told me that Polish Tatars are influenced by Christianity, but that he feels that the most important aspect to him in being a Muslim is to be a good person (*dobra osoba*), and so he refrains from judging others. He told me about his experience going to university in Poland and how he would have long conversations with Catholics about their religions, noting that everyone should try to come together to “find commonalities.”

Most of my interlocutors, while acknowledging that they did not fulfill the religious obligations that they felt were the basis of Islam, nevertheless described themselves as Muslims. Their rationale often focused on the particular situation of Polish Tatars as living in a majority Catholic country and the difficulties they faced. One respondent noted, “...but after all we live in Poland. Praying five times a day is hard to do because we work and we can’t take a break every time we need to pray. We can’t keep all of the traditions because we live in Poland.” Many younger respondents or those in their 30s and 40s knew more of the specificities of religious obligations than the older generations, due to increased organization surrounding religious education post 1989. However, the knowledge that they should fulfil an obligation did not mean that they did so. They often described Polish Tatars as having a more

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<sup>45</sup> For more on this, see Roy’s *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* in which he discusses globalized Islam, which is an attempt to divorce religion from culture (2004). He argues that it is a result of a historical context in which processes of modernization and Westernization have set the stage for this particular understanding of Islam to take hold.

“liberal” view towards religion, specifically due to being “European,” juxtaposed by many of them with the “Orthodox” attitude of the Arabs living in Poland. Many respondents described religion as a private matter between someone and God, and thus we should not judge someone’s faith based on outside characteristics such as fasting or dressing modestly. As one interlocutor noted in relation to the adherence of religious rules regarding food, “it should be up to each person’s conscience as to whether they drink [alcohol] or not. Of course, according to the Quran it isn’t permissible, but it is an individual decision.”

Rather than simply viewing this as a lack of religion or performance, we can see a particular relationship between the respondents and religious texts, one in which the texts are not to be literally implemented in their lives, but rather should serve as a general model of morality. Many of my respondents who did not regularly “practice” religion or who routinely fell short of fulfilling religious obligations noted that for them the most important thing in being a Muslim is to simply be a “good person.” Schielke in his article on religious practices in Egypt during Ramadan, argues that scholars of Islam often look for those moments in which morality is fulfilled, when piety is achieved, rather than moments in which respondents fall short (2009). He calls for studies on ambiguity, as respondents struggle between different moral registers and shifting focuses and values (2009, 528). In a similar vein, Oustinova-Stjepanovic in her work with Roma Muslims in Macedonia, argues that agency is often taken in a positive formulation that associates it with action, a move which prioritizes moments in which things happen as opposed to also noting those moments in which desire, will, and action are not aligned (2017). Her research follows a dervish lodge and their attempts at reform. The leader of the lodge expressed frustration at the inability for the lodge members to live up to religious expectations, a difficulty which Oustinova-Stjepanovic notes was often laid at the feet of “...the ethno-nationalist and racialized definition of the ‘Gypsy’ personhood” (2017, 347). A focus on the achievement of moral and ethical expectations does not allow, as she argues, the ability to see respondents as whole humans who often try, but fail (2017, 350).

Similarly, failure to act upon certain religious prescriptions by some Polish Tatars has been seen by some as evidence of a weakness of religiosity in this community. For instance, Warمیńska notes that one of her interlocutors said that “I am not [a real Muslim] yet, but I try all the time” as evidence in a wider discussion of the indifference many of her respondents showed towards religious practices (1999, 112). While some Polish Tatars who align themselves more closely with Islamic practices from the Middle East indeed see the

lack of praying or fasting as signs of failure or weak understanding of religious principles, I believe that the bigger question is how those respondents who do not pray understand their own practices. For those with whom I spoke, the focus was on the fact that they were “trying.” For example, one respondent noted that while they did not fast during Ramadan, they did not listen to music during this period as their way of upholding a different spirituality during this holy time, while another respondent told me that he did not drink alcohol during Ramadan. I think these responses clearly show that many individuals do attempt to bring their practicing in line with their understandings of what it means to be a good Muslim. They may not be successful (yet) but are attempting to live their lives in a moral way nonetheless, a way that may look different to moral lives as understood by Muslims raised in other traditions. For many, Islam represents a more generalized moral code which allows them to be a “good person” while simultaneously upholding practices that could be interpreted as “incorrect” or “impermissible” by other Muslims.

Both Warmińska and Radłowska spend considerable time in their research looking at the relationship between ethnicity and religion among Polish Tatars. Warmińska divides the community into three groups—one which treats Tatar and Muslim as synonyms, the second who sees these two as closely intertwined, and the last who only defines themselves through Muslimness (Warmińska 1999, 145). She states that “... in the minds of the vast majority of respondents, the relationship between ‘Muslimness’ and ‘Tatarness’ is inseparable. To be a Muslim in Poland is to be a Tatar, and to be a Polish Tatar is to be a follower of Islam” (Warmińska 1999, 221). Radłowska makes similar divisions, saying that for some of her respondents religion is an unconditional element of being a Tatar, the majority say that religion is one of the elements of being a Tatar, while a small group say that religion is not a determinant of being Tatar (2018, 114-15). Radłowska argues that her research has shown a change from an identity more centred on religious identification to a focus on ethnic identification, with the younger generation more clearly defining religion and ethnicity as separate categories (2018, 193). She notes that the religious factor is not weakening, however, and reiterates that her research backs up Warmińska’s theory of a triad of identification. Łyszczarz, another researcher of Polish Tatars, also notes that “the Tatar sense of belonging to one’s own group is complex, therefore it is built by the ethnic factor (Tatarness), strongly associated with national and ideological (Polishness) and religious (Muslim) elements” (2015a, 69).



In my own research, I encountered something similar, in that many of my interlocutors would explain either in casual conversation or in interviews the intricate and detailed ways that their experiences of being Muslim and Tatar are knit together. While there were occasional individuals who denied religion a role in group identity, this was few and far between, with the overwhelming majority confirming that religion and *tatarskość* are connected for Polish Tatars. One of the respondents in Radłowska's work says, "it is difficult to distinguish what is Tatar and what is Muslim, because they are related to each other" (2018, 115). Similarly, one of my respondents said, "While there are Tatars who are Christians, once someone isn't Muslim they tend to say that they have Tatar origins instead of saying that they are Tatar, because really to be Tatar... Tatar identity and religion are one." Many of my respondents said that it would be impossible to tell what aspects of Polish Tatar society are based on Tatar traditions or religion. One of my interlocutors explained that religion and identity are irrevocably combined, interlacing his fingers and holding them in front of me as a clear demonstration.

Warمیńska agrees with this, saying that ethnicity and religion are so interlocked that respondents do not acknowledge a difference between them (Warمیńska 1999, 151). Pawlic-Miśkiewicz in her writings is clear about what she perceives as the role of religion in the construction of group belonging, arguing that being a Muslim is a necessary condition to being a Tatar (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016a, 98). The intertwining of categories was such that there is a "complete merger into a single concept of what a researcher might define as ethnicity and religion. For speaking about their customs, the respondents directly mentioned those related to Muslim practice in one breath" (Warمیńska 2016, 94). In another interview with a respondent, we were discussing mixed marriages when they said that "Unfortunately there are mixed marriages. In these situations, the children need to choose which path they will take, either Catholic or Tatar." Here we notice, if taken literally, that Catholic as a religious term was used while Tatar, instead of Muslim, was used to represent my respondent's community. This could be an indication that religion is such an integral part of their community that Tatar means Muslim in their lived experience. Warمیńska even questions her own analysis in which she divides the community including a group which only identifies as Muslims, as she notes that we cannot say that they were referring to religion exclusively and not ethnicity (Warمیńska 1999, 151). When I was interviewing a young Tatar man, he said that it was not necessary to be Muslim to be Tatar, so long as they participated in community events and traditions. When I asked what traditions he had in

mind, he mentioned the Bajramy, especially. When I pointed out that these could be seen as religious practices given that they are the celebration of an Islamic holiday, he noted that indeed most Tatar traditions rely on religion. Here we clearly see how as an outside researcher I had an imported preconception that Bajramy would be considered a religious tradition, whereas for the young man it did not make sense to divide the celebration in this way—it was an instantiation of both *muzułmańskość* and *tatarskość*. Thinking about this interview, this moment, made me start questioning the way in which these concepts may be combined in ways I did not expect.

For many of my interlocutors, Islam and *tatarskość* are so intertwined, that the loss of one piece stands for the loss of another. While one cannot become a Tatar, it is possible to lose the identity of a Tatar. “From birth I feel Tatar and I think that a Polish Tatar is one who was born in a Tatar family, has parents, Tatar grandparents and is a Muslim. However, a person who has been Catholic for a long time, let’s say that their parents were already Catholic. I cannot say that he is a Polish Tatar, he has roots (*korzenie*) only.” For this person, being an active member of the Polish Tatar community, belonging to the community, is tied to an expression of Islamic religious practices such that a Catholic can only be said to have Tatar roots. Thus, an examination of Polish Tatar identity through the lens of ethnicity, if we understand ethnicity as a category which includes the aspects listed by Warمیńska as referring to blood ties or ancestors, cannot be the whole picture.<sup>46</sup> The religious element as described by this interlocutor is seen as an integral piece, such that losing their religion or refusing to participate in these communal events is tied to a loss of identity. As noted Polish Tatar researcher, Michał Łyszczarz, says, “Changing religion is commonly regarded as a violation of the tradition and will of ancestors who — against the constant pressure of the Christian environment — persisted in the Muslim faith. The respondents also indicated that the Tatars who left Islam and converted to another faith very quickly lost contact with the community” (2013, 263). In an interview I conducted with prominent Polish Tatar Maciej Szcęsnowicz there was a similar attitude. We were sitting at the table in his restaurant, drinking steaming mugs of tea and eating biscuits. The interview was casual, and our conversation was wide ranging. During the course of our talk, I asked him if one can be a Tatar Catholic, which he denied, saying that a Catholic and a Tatar are different. A few minutes later I asked if someone could become a Tatar, which he interpreted as a question regarding religious conversion (i.e. can one become a Muslim). He said that “it is possible to

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<sup>46</sup> Questions of kinship, relatedness, and blood are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

convert, but I don't tolerate this, because you were baptized in such a religion and simply you should be buried in this religion." Here we can clearly see the integral relation between Tatar identity and being Muslim, such that conversion is seen by some as a turning one's back on the community.

Both Warmińska and Radłowska mention an "ethnicization of religion," but it is not clear exactly what this process entails. Warmińska notes that religion can be an integral part of identities characterized as being ethnic, pointing out that for many Polish Tatars as well as non-Tatar Poles, religion is closely intertwined with nationality, such that for example Pole and Catholic are seen as synonyms (Warmińska 1999, 54, 135). Mitchell in her article on the relationship between ethnicity and religion, points out that "...religion has predominantly been cast either as an ethnic marker or as something that supports the primary category of ethnicity" (2006, 1136). She argues that rather than religion unilaterally supporting ethnicity, ethnicity and religion can and often exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship (2006, 1137). If we take seriously one respondent who said, "the entirety of Tatar ethnicity is based on Islam," then we see a situation in which Islam does not simply prop up respondents' understanding of *tatarskość* but is implicated in its very existence.

If it is true firstly, that the categories of ethnicity and religion are themselves difficult to define and amorphous in their edges, and secondly that these very categories among Polish Tatars are so interwoven and mutually dependent that they are inextricable, then it begs the question whether it is analytically useful to base Polish Tatar identity on the conceptualization of the triad of identification (*muzułmańskość*, *polskość*, *tatarskość*). Should we not take our respondents' worldview seriously, in which Islam and *tatarskość* are intimately connected, intertwined, and for some, indistinguishable? To do this would entail stepping aside from our assumptions of the bounded character of the theoretical concepts of ethnicity and religion and rather ask how these ideas are woven into the life experience of our respondents. What I try to show here is that the creation of a community that for some is understood as ethnic is a process which binds individuals together through practices which can be uneven, variable, ambiguous, and meaningful.

To be clear, I am not saying that these categories do not exist within the worldview of the Polish Tatars, nor that there are some respondents who would deny the inalienable nature of Islam and community identity, as any group is always made up of individuals who have heterogenous life experiences and varying understandings of group identity. However, it was

clear in my fieldwork that these categories correspond and overlap in serious ways. If we imagine the triad of identification (*polskość*, *muzułmańskość* and *tatarskość*) as building blocks of identity, blocks which rest on one another, what research shows is an understanding in which Islam and *tatarskość* are more like organic organisms, growing and weaving together such that no scalpel can separate them. Thus, it may be useful to utilize a different analytical lens, one which looks more closely at how Polish Tatars experience their relationship to the wider community. I am not saying that Warمیńska's determination of the triad of identification is wrong, nor am I saying that it has no analytic utility. Rather, Warمیńska and Radłowska's works are important insights into the question of what Polish Tatars are—in other words their determination seems to be that they are a distinctive group which is constituted through complex and differing interactions between ethnicity, religion, and nationality. I intend to ask a different question: instead of *what*, I ask *how*. I want to understand how my interlocutors experience belonging to a community, one which is already instantiated and made real in the minds of those who belong to it. I take for granted their membership and instead investigate what gives that group belonging such deep, affective ties and how members understand their relationship to the collective. I contend that Polish Tatars experience belonging to their community through practices of the body—a moving, bleeding, dancing, eating body—and that embodied perspective helps us to understand the affective depth of belonging beyond abstract categories.

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An underlying tension in these discussions is a fundamental dualism between understandings of identity through essentializing discourses, in other words features which are seen as inherent and inexorable (in this context often associated with blood ties) and performativity in which identity can be formed, gained, or lost. Discourses of kinship and descent are simultaneously created through the performance and practice of that identification and thus can be either propped up or undermined. Similarly, religion is simultaneously transmitted through blood relations (in the case of Islam for Polish Tatars, it is passed through the father) while also having an element of choice in the performance (or lack) of those religious beliefs. Thus, this tension between understandings of identity as essentializing discourses and performativity is integral and will be explored in the later chapters of this thesis. This tension is not static, but rather can flow, change, and fluctuate as it flows from pole to pole as understandings of identity shift temporally and spatially. The moments in which identity sticks or is “sutured” in time, only to release and flow again, are the places in

which we can take a closer look at how identity is instantiated and made real. These instances that bring particular narratives together in a moment in time and form Polish Tatar subjectivity(s) will be investigated to analyse how belonging is instantiated through bodily practices such as eating, dancing, praying, and events such as Bajramy, marriages, the COVID pandemic, and the refugee crisis in Belarus. These moments will be investigated to look at how they help to constitute an identity which feels deep and abiding, and yet is temporally in flux and contains within it the possibility for change.

The idea of performativity that I use here and through the following chapters is based on Butler's influential assertion that gender achieves its appearance of stability through repeated performative acts (Butler 1990, 33). They define performativity "...not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 1993, 2). It is through the repetition of acts that both an appearance of stability is achieved and the possibility for resignification occurs, thus accounting for both stasis and change. While *Gender Trouble* focused primarily on gender, their theory can be used to understand the formation of subjects in other positionalities such as nationality and class (Butler 1993; Fortier 2000, 5). Performativity can be employed to understand the complex, mutually constitutive interactions between both everyday practices and performative events, which maintain communities through (re)productions of common events, rituals, and histories but also create those communities as subjects (Fortier 1999, 42). While at times in *Gender Trouble* Butler uses both terms interchangeably, in a later interview Butler distinguishes between the idea of "performance" and "performativity" saying that "the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject" (Butler, Segal, and Osborne 1994, 33). For my uses, I understand performance to be the unitary moment of an act whereas I take performativity to be the process, the iterative, citational performances which create identities through the sedimentation of those acts.

I feel that the concept of performativity in my work on Polish Tatars in Podlasie is an important element as in previous academic works the performance of events such as Bajramy seems to be understood as an expression of an underlying, already existing identity. I am interested rather in how such practices not only represent the community as a collective with boundaries (borders which can be upheld or transgressed) but also how through those performances the very identity they are said to be an effect of is created. Discourses of blood (krew) and descent (pochodzenie) are brought into contact and conversation with performativity to understand how community is understood and constituted as a collective with shape and depth. As one interlocutor responded when I asked if I could become a Tatar,

“You will not be a Tatar because you still have to get to know all these traditions, the history, to begin to identify and think our way... because right away, no, you can’t.”

This duality is clear, as my respondent noted that being a Tatar is not only about family or descent but is made through practices and understanding the traditions of the community. Barbara Pawlic-Miśkiewicz explains this clearly, as she writes, “Of course, the religion itself does not determine Tatariness, biological belonging is important as well. While everybody can become a Muslim, which is a consequence of the egalitar[ian] nature of Islam – one cannot become a Tatar, only be born as one. Although one should ask the question whether the genes themselves are enough to give the word ‘Tatar’ its meaning, or it is only the undertaken efforts and activities that fully constitute an individual. Religion and observance of its principles, performing, are strictly connected with the notion of ethnic identity and self-identification” (2016b, 375). Thus, we see here very clearly the tension between biology and performance which underlies Polish Tatar belonging, a mutually interacting relationship in which both features influence one another. Elsewhere, Pawlic-Miśkiewicz pulls directly from Butler’s use of Simone de Beauvoir’s phrase “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” and states that “...tweaking the words – ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a Tatar’” (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2018, 28). To assert that aspects of identity are performed does not imply that they are fake or have less of an affective influence on the subject, but rather it acknowledges the ways in which subjects are not a priori given as members of a community but rather interpellated in place as subjects through discourse and practices. Pawlic-Miśkiewicz’s own use of Butler in her writings about her community highlights the importance of communal gatherings and practices to the future-making of the group, a fact which is made all the more poignant when taking into account that she is not only an academic in her own right but is also an influential community leader. Her own use of Butler then, enables us to see that performance is highlighted by Tatars themselves in conceptualizing their own understandings of the process of identity formation.

Often when speaking with my interlocutors about their community and their ties to it, what struck me was the emphasis put on bodily practices as the substrate upon which belonging is not only overlaid but interwoven. I want to understand how Polish Tatars experience belonging to a community, taking their self-ascriptive membership for granted and instead investigating what gives that group belonging such deep, affective ties. I contend that Polish Tatars experience belonging to their community through performative practices of the body, and that embodied perspective will help us to understand the experiential, affective depth of belonging beyond abstract categories.

## “I am Polish, but I feel Tatar,” The Role of the Affective Body in Crafting Belonging

As noted briefly in the introduction, belonging is often thought of within popular culture as an internal state or perception—I feel a part of this community and thus I belong—but rather I posit that it is through practices of the body that belonging is made affectively manifest for individuals. Belonging does not simply exist or appear but is created through work, which comes to be felt as a natural effect of these practices. Individuals can belong to multiple communities as once, but those affective resonances are not the same everywhere, for everyone, at all times. Polish Tatars would often explain their belonging to Poland with the phrase, “I don’t feel Polish, I am Polish,” whereas, as I will explore more below, they often explained their positionality as members of the Polish Tatar community by saying, “I feel Tatar.” I believe that it is not that feeling is somehow lesser, but that the evidence used as an infrastructure upon which that belonging is built differs. Whereas Polishness is based on external credentials—I have a Polish passport, I was born here—Tatarness is based on an internal alignment or orientation towards the Polish Tatar community. This alignment is not natural, or given, but rather based on practices and bodily dispositions that help to create these affective resonances and flows.

At its heart then, this thesis attempts to move beyond previous literature on Polish Tatars based on categorical assumptions of ethnicity and religion in order to understand how belonging is formulated, shaped, and experienced among Polish Tatars in Podlasie. Contemporary literature on belonging conceptualizes it as the “thicker” feeling that functions among individuals who either self-identify or are conscripted into group membership, allowing them to feel part of an affective community (Crowley 1999, 22; Yuval-Davis 2004). Some researchers argue that feelings are not only individual affairs but rather move among bodies to facilitate the relation between the individual and the collective as “an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes, and disjunctures,” and in some ways are constitutive of the bodies themselves (Ahmed 2004a; Stewart 2008, 3). As introduced in the previous chapter, I take belonging to be a “feeling at home,” a type of thick, affective resonance or flow that helps to align bodies with other bodies (and exclude others). The phrase of “feeling at home” is a good one to think through, as it allows us to understand more fully what it means to take seriously the role of the body in belonging (Antonsich 2010, 645). To “feel at home” is not simply an intellectual understanding but it is a release, a slow exhale,

a relaxing of the muscles, a deep sigh, a letting down of hair, in other words the feeling of being at home engages the entire body in its understanding.

The so called “affective turn” has been an attempt to move beyond disciplinary boundaries, to get at the intimate, felt lives of our participants, which had previously been understood as part of an inaccessible psychological interiority. There is a wide variety of approaches to affect, with some researchers such as Massumi distinguishing between affect and emotions, regarding emotions as able to be linguistically contained, whereas affect is associated with unbounded potential, virtuality, and precognitive processes, while others have argued that affect does not have a subject whereas emotions do (1995; Grossberg 2013).<sup>47</sup> Ngai, on the other hand uses the terms almost synonymously, while also noting that she treats affect as “less formed and structured than emotions” and “less ‘sociolinguistically fixed’” but still primarily referring to the same processes (2007, 27). While I understand the reasoning behind why some scholars choose to distinguish emotions and affect in this way, some of these divisions reinscribe dualities which this work intends to avoid, such as that between mind and body, and the positioning of affect as presocial or asocial effectively ignores the histories that are fundamental to understanding what affect/emotions do. Not only this, but according to some feminist scholars this distinction ignores a history of feminist analysis on the relationship between emotions and politics and instead focuses on affect as opening new, exciting realms due to its association with psychology, critical theory, and neuroscience (Martin 2013, Åhäll 2018). This approach discounts the culturally specific contexts in which science is produced and posits affect as a universal, masculine understanding over and above emotions, which are perceived as intimate, personal, and feminized (Ahmed 2014, 207). Thus, I use the words emotions, feelings, and affect interchangeably, to understand those felt forces, resonances, or flows which move individuals and both shape and are shaped by our experiences, both named and unnameable. I believe that paying attention to affect is a unique way to try to come to a fuller understanding of the ways that social beings inhabit their worlds, to move beyond the separation of mind and body to take seriously the potentialities, but also the happiness, jealousy, fear, and connections that can shape our lives in real ways. I take inspiration from Ahmed who discusses emotions as “impressions” to get at how emotions necessarily involve relations between and among subjects and objects and to highlight that emotions necessarily contain traces of their social histories, which “allows us to

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Martin’s interesting article on the limits of affect theory as it is defined by Massumi and similar theorists, in particular the (mis)use of psychological case studies (2013).



associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace” (2014, 6).

In my discussion of affect, I follow Ahmed’s description of the “stickiness,” or binding properties, of emotions to think through the ways that emotions circulate between individuals and create certain alignments or orient certain bodies towards one another (2004a, 119). She argues against an understanding of emotions as being contained or internal to an individual, in what she calls an “inside out” model of emotionality (2014, 9). Instead, she convincingly argues for an approach in which emotions circulate and gain meaning through the flow between and among individuals, a model which posits that “[e]motions are always relational, they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such objects” (2014, 8). She notes that emotions are not ahistorical or free floating, but rather are shaped in relation to the bodies they come in contact with, socio-historical circumstances, and contours of power (Ahmed 2004a). Emotions can bring people together, but also be forces of exclusion, as she describes the outpouring of patriotism and fear in the US after 9/11, which worked to not only create an imagined “us” as Americans but also worked to exclude certain individuals from this imagining (2004a).

Following these theorists, I intend to look at belonging as an emotional or affective current or resonance that not only binds but helps form the very boundaries between me, us, and them, that it is said to be an effect of (Ahmed 2014). When discussing *tatarskość* with my interlocutors, I was struck by the ways that these attachments expressed themselves not only as related to practices such as Bajramy, or shared descent, but also how feeling was a sort of quiet, underlying infrastructure. For one woman, feeling was the most important part of her identity, as she said that “I feel that I am Tatar (*czuję się ze jestem Tatarką*). Sometimes people do these family trees and find out they have Tatar roots or something and they will say ‘I am Tatar.’ That is not a problem for me. The most important [thing] is that they feel that identity.” To focus on affect is not to discount the other factors that my interlocutors have noted help to build their Tatar identity, such as foodways (discussed in Chapter Two) or dance (discussed in Chapter Three). Rather, to take belonging seriously allows us to look at the ways that identity, the narrativization of self in relation to a variety of positionalities, is not an intellectual, theoretical exercise but rather has meaning, has feeling for people, which can impact their lives in serious ways. To describe the joy at upcoming Bajram celebrations, or the “satisfaction and pleasantness” of eating iftar dinners with family, or the “feeling” of

being Tatar, does the work of aligning certain bodies with an imagined collective, which then forms boundaries of belonging.

To focus on feelings or affect is not to ignore the role of the body in both its formation and its aftereffects. Rather, to take seriously the body and its place in these practices that help to craft and spread affectivity is to understand the layers of meaning with which the body is overlaid. As Ahmed notes, "...if we take 'the body,' we need to refuse any assumption of the body as a material given that operates at one level, in order to understand 'the body' as a trace of the collision between different levels: this body feels, it is mine (psychic), this body is read and interpreted (textual), this body is touched by others (social), this body is written as 'the body' (theoretical/ philosophical), and so on" (2009, 20). Thus, the body is not only the physicality of the flesh that travels to visit events, that consumes food, or moves in certain ways to music, but is at the same time the affective, feeling body which through these practices is formed and forms community. It is to take into account the multiple levels with which the body is layered, to look at how embodiment and performativity produce affective shockwaves, effects, and ripples in the formation of belonging without reinscribing a Cartesian dualism that separates the body from feeling and thought.

The approach I take to the body is inspired by the paradigm of embodiment, elaborated by Csordas who builds on practice theory (particularly Bourdieu) and phenomenological approaches (such as that of Merleau-Ponty) to collapse the mind-body dualism and see that "the body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (1990, 5). Csordas does not see the body as a pre-cultural given, but rather seeks to understand how the body becomes culturally objectified and through this process, attempts to break down dualisms inherent in much of anthropological literature (1990). I take inspiration from this understanding to look at the body not as a tool or base upon which societal expectations or restrictions are laid, but rather as the space through which subjects experience the world. As Merleau-Ponty argues, "...far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body" (2002, 117). To move beyond abstract categories of ethnicity and religion is to take seriously the ways that my interlocutors move through and experience their world, to pay attention to their motility as they attend (or not) events, as they toil through the manual labour of making kołduny, as they sweat through arduous dance choreography, as they live in and encounter the landscape of Podlasie. This is not just another analytical approach, but rather a tuning in, or towards, the

lived experiences of my interlocutors to take seriously not how they conceptualize their identity, but how they live it.

The importance of practices, of doing, of movement, was consistently mentioned to me by my interlocutors in discussions about group identity. In an interview, I asked my participant what it means to him to be Tatar. He sat and thought for so long that I almost started to move on, but eventually he said, “I have never really thought about what it means to be Tatar, I just feel Tatar (czuję się Tatarem). If someone says that they don’t feel Tatar no one else can tell them—you aren’t Tatar—they feel Tatar...it isn’t necessarily blood or ancestors, but do we have something in common? Do you go to events and participate in the community?...the most important thing is that feeling, that I am Tatar.” Here we can see how identity and belonging is connected to doing and to feeling, to being involved in the community. Thus, this thesis will look at how these various events and practices help to shape an understanding of Polish Tatar identity, to understand how the experiences of my interlocutors help to shape, and are shaped by, embodied belonging.

Feeling was often portrayed by my interlocutors as the element that holds the complex aspects of identity in balance. In an introduction to the magazine *Tatar Review (Przegląd Tatarski)* the editor, Musa Czachorowski, wrote this interesting note to the reader

Recently, in a commentary under a text about Tatars, some gentleman wrote: ‘Musa Czachorowski is a Tatar  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{8}$ .’ I would say it's not bad proportions, considering the centuries of living on Polish soil. However, referring to a greater or lesser amount of blood is not enough. I am a Tatar with heart and mind, which, taking into account the ratio of the average weight of my heart and brain to my total body weight, makes me a Tatar about  $\frac{1}{40}$ . Is that small? A lot? (2020, n.p.)

As we can see here, Czachorowski pushes back against this reader who tries to use blood as a sole determinate of group membership, saying that referring only to blood is “not enough.” Instead, he buttresses his claim to identity by pointing out that he is Tatar “with heart and mind,” solidifying his identity by pointing to his internal feelings of being Tatar, something which cannot be gainsaid. A respondent of mine pointed this out, saying that “Feeling is very important, no one will take that away from us, because nobody can check—how can you say that you are, or feel, I don’t know, Polish? Who will tell you no? Who will forbid you? How can one forbid a feeling? Nobody can be prevented from feeling part of some society. That is one’s own subjective, inner conviction about it and no one can forbid it, because how? Right?” Thus, we see here that emotions are put at the forefront of identity and belonging, precisely because they are unable to be questioned. Instead of conceptualizing emotions as

existing inside individuals and then moving outwards towards others, feelings rather shape the very boundaries of subjects and objects. I take seriously the way that “affect produces sensations which follow models of movement and flow across thresholds that cannot be contained within the boundaries of discrete subjects and objects” (Reynolds 2012, 123). Rather by looking at affective flows, waves, and resonances we can look at how it is able to connect individuals but is never reducible to them.

Not everyone in the community expressed their feelings regarding their identity and group membership in the same way. The pride some of my interlocutors felt of their belonging to the Polish Tatar community was heartfelt, deep, and abiding; they would speak emphatically of the long history of the Tatars in Poland and their ancestors’ military sacrifices for the nation. These respondents were one end of a spectrum, on the other side of which were those for whom membership held more ambiguous feelings. Some older respondents expressed the shame felt in their younger years and the fear of attempting to hide their identity in PRL for fear of retribution. Others did not express strong connections to their identity in their everyday lives, with events generally constituting an important moment of affective charge, connecting members despite ambiguous feelings throughout the rest of the year. Thus, these communal events serve as touchstones that emotionally integrate the community and help to situate members into a web of belonging. As Sara Ahmed notes, “Emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments” (2004a, 119). This is an understanding of emotions in which they are not just passive, individual, private affairs but rather have the ability to enact changes and bring into being forms of belonging. Thus, if we take seriously the body as the complex site of interactions of various intensities, flows, and convergences of materiality and affect, we can begin to understand the ways in which identity is experienced and enacted among Polish Tatars beyond abstract categories.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to build the theoretical foundation upon which the following chapters are built. Firstly, I summarized some of the major sociological and anthropological research on Polish Tatars, painting a picture of the current state of the field in an attempt to place my own work within this formation. Then, I described and broke down the major

theoretical tendencies which prevail today, namely what I call the triad of identification, or the postulated breakdown of Polish Tatar identity into three separate but mutually influenced categories of nationality (polskość), ethnicity (tatarskość) and religion (muzułmaństwo). I argue that while this is one way to analyse identity, the intertwining of ethnicity and religion and the problematic nature of these very categories is a reason to look for another direction of analysis. Underlying the discussions of how identity is configured among Polish Tatars is, I believe, a tension between essentializing discourses such as blood and origins, and practices such as communal gatherings and other community rituals. I believe that this tension can be fruitfully explored by putting the body as the focus of analysis; the body holds these in tension at once and is a way to understand the complex integration of elements into an identity that is at once both fractured and whole, stable and fluid at the same time. Rather than starting with abstract categories such as ethnicity or religion and adapting them to the ethnographic situation, identifying which elements fit into which category, I start from the practices themselves to find out how they work to create a community. I believe that foregrounding the body—as a physical, material, social, affective subject—allows us to understand how belonging is formed within the Polish Tatar community without taking such belonging for granted, instead using bodily practices as the substrate upon which affect sticks and holds community together. As one Polish Tatar told me when I asked about what it means to be Tatar, “One must feel, one must feel something.” It is from this place of feeling that the rest of the chapters flow.

## 2

### Of Kinship and Kolduny, Food and Family



*Figure 4: Bowls of potato and minced beef ready for dumplings*

“Roll it like this” Basia instructed me, pointing to the dough in my hands. I was sitting in my friend’s flat on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of a large, gray apartment complex in Białystok. Outside was rainy and cold, but inside was warm and the smell of freshly brewed coffee permeated the air. We were gathered around the table in my friend’s living room, which was covered in big bowls of mashed potatoes mixed with hard boiled eggs and herbs, and another glass bowl piled high with raw minced beef spiced with copious amounts of salt and pepper. In front of each of us was a long, coiled piece of dough, which I was

instructed to cut into pieces and roll on the table until each piece formed a little ball.

Flattening each ball with a rolling pin, we spooned various fillings into each dough envelope to make either kartoflaniki, Tatar potato dumplings, or kołduny, Tatar meat dumplings. While kartoflaniki do not have any special design, kołduny are sealed with a distinctive pattern around the edge called ząbki, or little teeth. I was desperately trying to make the delicate folds, but my fingers seemed to just leave large, ungainly marks in the soft dough.

Basia grabbed her dough and piled raw beef high in the middle, then folded it in half and sealed it with quick, sure movements. “It was said that a Tatar girl was ready for marriage when she was able to make ząbki on her kołduny” she told me, to the agreement of the three other women



Figure 5: Two examples of ząbki on kołduny

seated around the table. “I guess I won’t be getting married anytime soon” I joked, throwing my dough down with exasperation and declaring that I will just be making kartoflaniki for the rest of evening. “Here, let me show you” Alija suggested, leaning over and walking me through the steps. “That’s not how I learned to make them! My mother told me to do it like this” Julia said, demonstrating. This led to each woman folding their disc and arguing for the supremacy of their method. Hours later after continuous rolling and filling, punctuated with endless cups of steaming coffee, tea, and bits of gossip, we sat down to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Boiled meat kołduny for my friends and a plate piled high with vegetarian kartoflaniki for me, we all sat down for our meal. Alija tore the edge off the kołdun, slurped the juices from the inside and plopped the rest in her mouth, while I enjoyed a salty, pillowy potato dumpling slathered in melted butter.<sup>48</sup> While the storm continued outside, we whiled away the night with full bellies and lively conversation.

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The importance of food cannot be overstated, as not only is it a biological and nutritional necessity for human survival, but it is also intimately formed by social practices. Researchers have noted the way that the identification of food as either edible or non-edible is not purely a biological question, but rather is contextually dependent and interwoven with the social context in which it is produced and consumed (Fischler 1988). As Mintz argues,

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<sup>48</sup> Singular kołdun, plural kołduny

“For us humans then, eating is never a ‘purely biological’ activity...nor is the food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning” (1996, 7). Food is not only imbued with social values, but is eaten by an individual and digested, literally broken down by and into the body; food is both intimately personal and inherently communal (Buckser 1999, 192; Fajans 1988, 155-60). Food practices can give us an insight into the ways in which social boundaries and identity formations are changed, shifted, and (re)formed through the symbolic meaning surrounding its production and consumption at both an individual and group level.

Food practices not only symbolically function within communities to signal information such as group belonging or social strata, but rather food can act as an agent in affecting change in group boundaries. Fajans writes, “Food is not just a symbol or metaphor for social and cultural processes (e.g., in its transformation from raw to cooked) nor simply a signifier that reflects or embodies aspects of a culture. Food is not only transformed, it is transformative” (1988, 143-44). It is this transformational aspect of food which is of interest here—the way that it has the ability to not only strengthen communities through the shared bodily experience of eating, the gustatory, sensual, affective qualities of the meal, but also how it is transformative of identity itself. Sutton in his influential study of food in the Greek island of Kalymnos persuasively argues for a connection between eating, the body, community, and memory, such that the act of eating temporally ties individuals together through memories of past meals to an imagined future commensality (2001). Through its individual and communal aspects, food can shift what it means to be a part of a community and what it means to be left outside of it. In this way, an analysis of food practices will pay attention not only to its material role as sustenance for the body and its symbolic aspects, but as a transformative and sustaining force for identity and belonging.

The role of food in producing, transforming, and enforcing understandings of group identity has a long history in anthropology and sociology, particularly within the United States and among migrant communities (Holtzman 2006, 366; Brown and Mussell 1984). Brown and Mussell note that “Mainstream Americans frequently use foodways as a factor in the identification of subcultural groups and find in the traditional dishes and ingredients of ‘others’ who eat differently from themselves a set of convenient ways to categorize ethnic and regional character” (1984, 3). We see here the role food can play in serving as a boundary marker to determine who forms a cultural “other” as symbolically marked through food. This has a particular salience when other forms of markers indicating group identity



have broken down such that the choice of cuisine serves a larger role in highlighting difference (Buckser 1999; Gans 1979). Not only can the consumption of a particular cuisine represent membership in a distinct group to outsiders, but it works internally to tie individuals together as a collective from within through its gustatory, olfactory, and sensual aspects. Avieli describes how, “The tens or hundreds of millions who consume ‘national dishes’...taste, smell and feel the food which they imagine their compatriots to be eating at the very same time, thus adding a material dimension to the process of imagination, attributing it with a sense of reality and removing it from the realm of fantasy” (2016, 145). This is especially important in terms of migratory communities in which a nexus of social ties connects individuals differentially to communities “back home,” members of their group in their new location, and non-members with whom they cohabitate. Researchers have looked at how food preparation, specialty grocery shopping, consumption, and food remittances can create a space for migrants in which food can be variously narrativized as something to be protected or adapted to new environments, sensorily experienced as places of nostalgia, and/or recreate “things past” in the face of political upheaval (Abbots 2016; Ben-Ze’ev 2004, 145; Chapman and Beagan 2013; Mankekar 2002; Parasecoli 2014). While food is an important factor in the creation of a group identity, including one which is understood as “ethnic” by members, the way in which food is utilized is various and not pre-determined.

The changes inherent in the processes of modernization and globalization have made an individual’s ability to pick up and choose aspects of identity markers such as specialty foods at the marketplace or ordering items online from across the world easier, allowing the construction of identity(s) through consumption (Buckser 1999). Buckser states, “The act of eating involves a physical incorporation of a cultural constructed item; eating ethnic dishes emphasizes the purported physical reality of ethnic affiliation. And with a proliferation of manufactured ethnic foods, such symbolic statements can be made with increasing ease” (1999, 204). The choice of specialty foods over other types, made increasingly accessible, can be seen as a decision that outwardly marks an identity that is chosen rather than outwardly ascribed. As Mankekar notes in her research on Indian grocery stores in the San Francisco Bay Area, the purchase of specialty items in stores that attempt to phenomenologically replicate an image of the community “back home” is an important factor in the creation of a multi-layered identity in which food consumption and purchases create a complicated network between and among identities (2002). She argues that these grocery

stores become complex nodes of gender, class, and transnational ties, in which the items they sell produce varying affective registers ranging from nostalgia, to fear, to ambivalence.

However, the agency for an individual to choose a food understood as identifiable to certain communities should not be taken for granted; the ability to choose food can be a privilege not always afforded and societal expectations regarding what are acceptable foods and what are not is historically and contextually formulated. Differences in what is deemed as “proper” food or the “correct” way to eat can inspire feelings of embarrassment or shame, highlighting the ways that foodways are always contextually delineated and affectively experienced through differential power structures (Searles 2002, 72-73). Some foods are delineated as “other,” somehow outside of the norm, thus situating those who consume such foods as external to the boundaries of acceptability. Long in her article on culinary tourism notes how food can be used to create and lend support to existing stereotypes for minority communities, noting in relation to American Southern cookbooks that they “...tend to use stereotypes and negative imagery of these populations, presenting their food as consisting of ‘trash animals,’ such as opossums, groundhogs, throw-away parts of animals (squirrel brains), unusual grains and fruits (hominy, persimmons), and using unhealthy cooking techniques (everything fried in lard)” (Long 1998, 185). Thus, despite the increasing availability and production of specialty foods that can be used to maintain, (re)produce, and/or transform forms of identity among communities, the positionality and power differentials which shape the community’s relation with others with whom they live must be taken into consideration. The choice of food is not made outside of constraints, but is rather intricately tied up into questions of power, boundaries, and representation.

Polish Tatar food has seen a revival following the fall of the socialist state and throughout the 90s, with a proliferation of workshops, restaurant openings, and cookbooks (Radłowska 2013, 185). An analysis of this community’s foodways allows for a look into the way that these practices surrounding food work to thicken bonds of relatedness and group identity while serving as boundary markers. As Karolina Radłowska notes in her article on Polish Tatar food practices, “Food is not only an exterior distinguishing feature of a group accenting its distinctiveness and identity, but is also a factor that maintains internal bonds” (Radłowska 2013, 188). The maintenance of internal bonds is particularly vital now, a time in which community boundaries are seen by my interlocutors as increasingly amorphous due to emigration and a decline in endogamous marriage, leading many of my older participants to voice fears that soon Polish Tatars will be fully assimilated, a community “only in the history

books.” Thus, while Polish Tatar food is increasingly visible in the public sphere, there is simultaneously a concern that such practices are no longer being passed down from generation to generation.

The importance of food in defining, maintaining, and strengthening Polish Tatar identity and enabling the community to persist despite being a small minority within a majority Catholic country was repeatedly emphasized to me throughout my fieldwork and in literature. As Barbara Pawlic-Miśkiewicz points out, the role of cuisine in Polish Tatar identity is highlighted, “especially in [a] situation when the intergenerational transmission lacks songs, dances, costumes or language” (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b, 373). In my first interview with Dagmara Sulkiewicz, a prominent Polish Tatar activist and religious schoolteacher, she noted “Now we are talking about Tatar traditions but [the] only... Tatar tradition was cuisine, Tatar cooking. Only.” Here she is alluding to the loss of other Polish Tatar practices, such as the Tatar language, and the recent provenance of other traditions such as Polish Tatar dancing, thus pointing to the importance of food as a practice that is seen as holding a direct line to an ancestral past which is in many ways lost. Polish Tatar cuisine was often spoken about by participants in a way that highlighted the temporalities of the practice, in which its transmission through (female) generations in some ways created a scaffolding upon which Polish Tatar identity leaned and which enabled its persistence throughout time. *Kołoduny* in particular were pointed to as emblematic of Polish Tatar traditions—little boiled dumplings traditionally filled with (non-halal) mixtures of beef or ram and fat, laboriously cooked by Polish Tatar women and served particularly on Fridays, family occasions, or religious holidays such as *Kurban Bajram* or *Ramadan Bajram*. An analysis of the production and consumption of *kołoduny* allows for an understanding of how food helps to define the contours of the community through commensality, shared labor, and the bodily knowledge needed to “correctly” consume the dumplings, while simultaneously pointing out the complex interweaving between group identity ties and striations such as gender and generation. Polish Tatar food within the home helps to strengthen forms of relatedness, while culinary practices in the public sphere create a reified image of the Polish Tatar community, with visible borders that can, sometimes, be transgressed.

However, food practices do not only connect individuals but also expose cracks and highlight boundaries around and between different religious communities. The consumption of alcohol and pork among some Polish Tatars and the general apathy towards eating halal meat serves to connect Polish Tatars to non-Tatar Poles, while highlighting boundaries with

the wider Muslim population. The attitude towards, and consumption of, these particular foods as indicators of a lenient religious outlook assist in transforming Polish Tatars from “Muslims” to “Our Muslims” and weaves them into the cloth of an imagined Polish nation. Simultaneously, these practices serve to highlight the boundary between Polish Tatar Muslims and the wider Muslim community in Poland, in which religious dietary restrictions are more rigorously followed. Thus, foodways can be seen as a resource in both creating internal consistency and external distance, working not only to symbolically mark difference, but to actively (re)make bonds of kinship and community.

This chapter will analyse foodways as an important factor in the creation of Polish Tatar identity, serving as a boundary marker which simultaneously connects members and excludes others from inclusion into the community. Taking seriously both the materiality of food and its symbolic role as sustenance, this chapter will look at how food helps to foster forms of belonging through its consumption and production both in the home and outside the domestic sphere. Firstly, this chapter will look briefly at the history of Polish Tatar food and its public revival in the 90s, placing current food practices within their wider historical context. Then, I examine Polish Tatar foodways with particular attention paid to its production and consumption in the home, mosque, and restaurants, focusing on the dispositions and bodily practices that are called into being and how they serve to create certain subjectivities. Lastly, I show how these processes help to bring into being contextual identities that both strengthen social ties and connect individuals to the community and nation, while also creating disjuncture(s) within the wider religious collective. This chapter will analyse Polish Tatar foodways as being transformative of group identity—both sustaining intragroup affective connections of community and belonging, while bringing to light cracks and fissures surrounding identity, religion, and gender.

### History of Tatar Food

As noted in Chapter One, the origins of the Polish Tatars reach back to the Golden Horde of the Mongolian steppes, settling in Poland in several waves of immigration throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Bohdanowicz 1942, 163; Dziekan 2011, 28). Due to the Tatar’s nomadic lifestyle, their food was heavily oriented around meat consumption and fatty dishes, with horse and ram historically forming the majority of their diet. However, their consumption patterns changed upon settlement in the borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth, with the substitution of beef for horse and the gradual inclusion of more vegetables (Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2012, 15). Throughout time, overall food practices tended to converge with their neighbours such that contemporaneous Polish Tatar food does not largely differ from the wider non-Tatar Polish population except for holidays and family events, in which Polish Tatar dishes are prepared, shared, and consumed as important traditions (*tradycja/tradycje*) in maintaining social ties (Radłowska 2018, 174).<sup>49</sup> Recipes for dishes such as *kołduny* are described as being transferred from grandmother to mother to daughter and form a vital aspect of various rituals, including religious holidays such as Ramadan Bajram, Kurban Bajram, Aszura, and funerary rites.<sup>50</sup> After the fall of the socialist state and the transition to democracy, Polish Tatar traditions were said to experience a rebirth or “ethnic revival,” in which individuals and organizations showed an interest in (re)discovering cultural practices, including dancing, cooking, and language (Cieslik and Verkuyten 2006, 80; Radłowska 2018, 171).<sup>51</sup>

One of the major figures within the “ethnic revival” of the Polish Tatars in the 90s is Dżenneta Bogdanowicz, whose restaurant and public persona have amplified the visibility of Polish Tatar cuisine regionally, nationally, and even internationally. *Tatarska Jurta*, the restaurant she opened in the small village of Kruszyniany, which was once jokingly described to me as being “at the edge of the world,” has become arguably the most popular Polish Tatar restaurant in Poland. Not only has the restaurant been consistently featured in TV programs, but it was also famously visited by then Prince Charles in 2010. In addition to founding the restaurant, Dżenneta also created *Sabantuj*, an annual harvest festival, which attracts tourists from across Poland and the world (Radłowska 2018, 173). *Sabantuj*, a summer pre-harvest holiday popular in Tatarstan, was not traditionally celebrated by Polish Tatars and is rather a

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<sup>49</sup> I use the word *tradition* here as my interlocutors used it. While I understand the problematic connotations with this word, in that it assumes an unchanging passage of knowledge and practices throughout time, I also take seriously my interlocutor’s usage of this term to describe their own social conduct.

<sup>50</sup> Dishes such as *kołduny* were consistently referenced as integral to family lunches after religious celebrations at the mosque on the two Bajram holidays. *Kompot*, a drink made of dried fruit occasionally with rice, is traditionally made on Aszura. Polish Tatar food is also given to mourners at a funeral and at the ceremony marking forty days after burial, such as *halwa* or rice with milk and butter.

<sup>51</sup> Tatar language classes were run in 2012 and, after a break, in 2016. However, many of my interlocutors stated that the loss of the Tatar language, which has not been spoken by Polish Tatars since about the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was not a cause for concern (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b, 351-52). A large majority of my interlocutors expressed that there was no need to try to re-establish a separate language for various reasons, including pointing to the lack of opportunity to speak it outside the home, the richness of other traditions which serve to provide a fruitful base upon which to build Tatar identity, and a historical justification that the original Tatar settlers often spoke different dialects such that the choice of a Tatar language today would not necessarily be the same language spoken by their ancestors.

borrowing that has been adopted by Dżenneta as an event to showcase Polish Tatar cuisine, dancing, and sports such as horseback archery. Apart from Tatarska Jurta, as of 2017 there were four Tatar restaurants in Poland, while a new restaurant opened in Białystok in 2020 during the second Covid lockdown (Goździewska-Marszałek 2020; Radłowska 2018, 173). The increasing popularity of Polish Tatar food outside of the home seems to have been accompanied by a reduction in the everyday cooking of Polish Tatar food within the home, often blamed on the time intensive nature of the dishes. Thus, while producing and consuming food was often noted by my interlocutors as an important moment in which Polish Tatar identity is reiterated and (re)produced, most of my participants rarely ate Polish Tatar dishes on an everyday basis, but rather reserved such dishes for family events or holidays.

### Food as Connection

#### *Production in the Home*

While my interlocutors described several dishes as traditional among Polish Tatars, *kołduny* were mentioned the most often, accompanied by memories of rolling out dough in their mother's kitchen or, for the younger generation, eating their grandmother's *kołduny* on visits home. These recollections were often sensorily rich descriptions of the sweaty work involved in beating the dough, the warmth of the kitchens as batches were boiled, or the mouth-watering way the salty fat drips from the ready dumplings. While *kołduny* are similar to Polish dumplings (*pierogi*), they differ in that meat *pierogi* are filled with cooked pork while *kołduny* are made with raw meat, usually beef or mutton, along with added fat. Due to the time intensive nature of this dish, they are often made with others in an assembly line with friends, neighbors, or within the family unit. This is a time for togetherness—for chatting, gossiping, and coming together through shared labor and anticipation of the finished dish. One interlocutor, a young professional in her twenties, described making *kołduny* with her family as a time of laughing together and talking about their day or events in the community. While members of the family unit are often busy, cooking is a time in which dispersed individuals meet together in the kitchen which is a space “not only...where meals are prepared, but also as a factor uniting the family and the community. The culinary tradition is carefully preserved in Tatar houses. Not without importance is also the symbolic meaning of the table, the kitchen, which unites people” (Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2012, 7). It is there that family members, friends, and neighbors share in the manual, time

intensive work of making kołduny, thus solidifying bonds with close relations through physical togetherness, mutual labor, and the cyclical nature of holiday meals. Luce Giard in the *Practice of Everyday Life Volume II*, artfully describes the mundane, repetitive, but meaningful interactions that take place during cooking, saying that “In each case, doing-cooking is the medium for a basic, humble and persistent practice that is repeated in time and space, rooted in the fabric of relationships to others and to one’s self, marked by the ‘family sage’ and the history of each, bound to childhood memory just like rhythms and seasons” (1998b, 157). The act of “doing-cooking” brings individuals together, repeated throughout time, solidifying these memories and affective ties through each iterative performance.

Not only does the production of these food items bring members together through physical proximity, but the choice of item to make aligns the often-intergenerational group with the wider Polish Tatar community. Pierogi are similarly time intensive and popular, but by actively deciding to make Polish Tatar dumplings instead they are using the interior, private space of the kitchen to connect with the community. This not only strengthens the bonds of those present but helps to pass on this knowledge to the younger generation and create a subjectivity in which the cultivation of such traditions is valued. As Kelly notes in her work on traditional food among descendants of Norwegian immigrants in the upper Midwest, “...it can also be in the kitchen that a sense of self is developed, an identity with production is created and a contribution to the community fostered” (2001, 29). For my Polish Tatar participants, discussing the making of food was often referred to in multiple senses—providing food for the household, the gustatory properties of Polish Tatar food as being particularly tasty, the importance of continuing Polish Tatar traditions in general, and especially passing those onto the younger generation. A sense of layering is present, as not only do the individuals have the agency to choose which dish to make, but that choice connects spatially disparate households and temporally aligns them with an (imagined) Polish Tatar community of the past and future.

While some of my interlocutors mentioned male family members helping in the making of kołduny, the symbolic nature of these dumplings within the Polish Tatar community is firmly intertwined with gender and gendered expectations of a woman’s role within the family and wider community. One day in the early spring, when the winter chill had not yet loosened its hold, I was holed up in the warm kitchen of one of my interlocutors. An older woman in her 70s, with gray curly hair and eyes that disappeared into her cheeks when she smiled, had invited me to her house for pierogi and tea. While we huddled in the

warm, cramped kitchen space, the window cracked open to let in a breath of chill air, she related to me the importance of kołduny when she was younger. She recalled when she was a young girl, and she and some of her girl friends were invited by neighbors to a nearby house to make kołduny. The older women observed them as they carefully crafted the dumplings, particularly the way they sealed the dough. My interlocutor noted that as she made delicate, little ząbki one of the older women touched her on the back and said that she was now ready for marriage.<sup>52</sup>

“But it isn’t like that anymore” my interlocutor sighed, “the younger generation do not care as much about cooking or spending time with family and want to go to Warsaw or the West and make money.” This was a common refrain, sometimes in exasperated tones or sometimes matter-of-factly, that aspects of Polish Tatar identity that used to be vital in determining someone’s place within the community no longer carry the same meaning. The size of ząbki in kołduny no longer determine someone’s eligibility for marriage and modern workdays make daily Polish Tatar food production from scratch more difficult. Younger Polish Tatar women often said that it just was not possible to work full time, take care of children, and also come home and make the same dishes that the older generation could do. I was told that making kołduny, kibiny (oven cooked meat dumpling made with yeast leavened dough) or pierেকaczewnik (a multi-layered, rolled dish often filled with meat) were the work of hours and that balancing work, family and cooking was no longer possible. The decreased emphasis on producing Tatar food (tatarskie jedzenie) within the home on a daily basis and the increased availability of pre-made food, including Tatar dishes, means that holidays became extraordinary spaces in which such culinary traditions are cultivated and with which they became associated, over and above the everyday.

Sutton, in his work on food and memory in Greece, notes a similar change in the community he studied away from homecooked items towards buying ready made goods. He relays a story in which he “...asked the woman why she did not bake the cookies [and] she insisted that the store-bought cookies were of good quality and she simply didn’t have time to spend fussing over baking. Here, as elsewhere, what is being lamented is not a changing food

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<sup>52</sup> Generally, my participants noted that kołduny should be small and have tiny, delicate ząbki around the edge. However, smaller kołduny are more time intensive to make, so some women expressed that they make them bigger for the sake of time and after all they “taste the same.” Another participant said that his mom makes large kołduny and he prefers them that way because they remind him of her. While small kołduny are the “preferred,” in order to work around increasingly limited time frames the physicality of the items have changed. This transformation has fewer ramifications than it may have in the past, as marriageability is no longer determined by cooking ability.



practice, but a changing lifestyle that people feel that they have little control over” (2001, 65). The refrain, especially from older respondents, that the youth were not interested in learning how to cook Polish Tatar dishes is not only about a desire to pass on a useful skill, but also is interwoven with a wider concern that Polish Tatar traditions are changing as signified in the movement of Polish Tatar dishes away from the household and increasingly ensconced in public restaurants. Some of my interlocutors noted with ill-ease that catering businesses are increasingly used to fill the tables at weddings and funerals, whereas in the past the community would be called upon to help share the cooking load. Despite Polish Tatar foodways being consistently mentioned to me as emblematic of Polish Tatar identity, shifts in work-life balance, the time intensive nature of the dishes, and the lack of necessary skill sets have made it difficult to have these dishes be everyday practices, instead being saved for special occasions or holidays.<sup>53</sup> Memory and temporality are connected and interwoven in that foods which connect to a past remembrance of Polish Tatar lifeways have not only changed in relation to neoliberal shifts, but are more emotionally charged as the vehicle through which identity will be pulled into the future, one that is seen as increasingly insecure.

The particular skills needed to create the perfect *zabki* or the well rolled *pierekaczewnik*, while perhaps no longer as meaningful in relation to the choice of spouse, still speak to a level of bodily skill and knowledge which is cultivated among those who cook Polish Tatar food. None of the Polish Tatar women I spoke to used cookbooks to make their food, despite the fact that at least one Polish Tatar cookbook has been published by MZR.<sup>54</sup> Each woman with whom I spoke about cooking described being taught by their mother, with recipes learned by heart and skills honed throughout childhood. Throughout my fieldwork I was given the opportunity several times to cook Polish Tatar cuisine with friends,

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<sup>53</sup> A handful of Polish Tatar women told me that they attempted to make Tatar dishes more frequently for their families, but they were a minority. Some of those women also said that they make it a priority to ensure that their children know how to make the most important dishes. However, most women stated that they would make such food when they had extra free time or more generally for special occasions.

<sup>54</sup> *Przysmaki z jurty: Tradycyjne Przepisy Kuchni Tatarskiej (Yurt Delicacies: Traditional Tatar Recipes)* was published by the MZR in 2012 and consists of information about Polish Tatar culinary history, religious culinary prohibitions, and extensive recipes accompanied by photos. None of the women I spoke with had the book or used it, preferring to use family recipes or more often cooking by eye. The level of detail in the recipes and the description of Islamic dietary restrictions suggest that the book was meant for non-Tatar audiences. Appadurai's text "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India" notes the ways that cookbooks have been used in India to craft an image of a national cuisine, one which is rooted in the particular socio-historical context of India's colonial history (1988). More generally however, the publication of a Polish Tatar cookbook is an assertion of their specific foodways as an integrated cuisine. Moreover, the inclusion of a section on Islamic dietary restrictions is an explicit statement as to the importance of Islam in Polish Tatar identity.

interlocutors, and as part of a workshop.<sup>55</sup> My first attempts to create the dough for kolduny were less than successful, the pliable mass in my hand feeling strange and utterly foreign. At one stage Zosia told me, “Don’t be scared of the dough, it won’t bite. My grandma once told me that you are done kneading the dough when you are sweating.” When she took over the kneading process from me, I could see what she meant. I had focused on my hands, slightly moving the dough forward and back in a rocking motion, but when she kneaded her whole body was invested in the movement, rocking the table violently. This skill was not taught through classes or cookbooks, but rather the passing on of skills from mother to daughter, shaping bodily practices which led to the creation of the perfect dough. Giard reminds us of the role of the body in cooking, “Whether it is done with a tool (chopping an onion with a small knife) or with the bare hand (kneading bread dough), the technical gestures call for an entire mobilization of the body, translated by the moving of the hand, of the arm, sometimes of the entire body swinging in cadence to the rhythm of successive efforts demanded by the task at hand” (1998a, 202). The act of cooking then, does not only compel the body through smell and taste, but rather works through the entirety of its movements to pass on a particular type of knowledge, food reminding us of the “tangible world, visceral bodies, and definite places” (Parasecoli 2014, 426). This gendered labor provided by women to feed their families and their communities speaks to the bodily work that many Polish Tatar women provide through cooking, tying food intimately together with gender, family, and community bonds.

Polish Tatar food practices are temporally and spatially continuous and yet simultaneously shifting, understood as a tradition transferred through generations unchanged and yet increasingly passed over by the younger generation for quicker meals.<sup>56</sup> However, while Polish Tatar food may not be cooked as frequently by younger Polish Tatars, it is certainly readily consumed. Many times, a younger interlocutor would tell me excitedly that

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<sup>55</sup> The culinary workshop which was part of a wider ZTRP project “Tatar Traces in Multicultural Sokółka and Surroundings (“Tatarskie ślady w wielokulturowej Sokółce i okolicy”) was attended exclusively by older women, with some Polish Tatars and non-Tatar women. The workshop consisted of making kibiny and bielusz, both dishes which are considered traditionally Polish Tatar. The woman who ran the workshop, the daughter-in-law of an important member of the community, often had to contend with the participants explaining how they make it differently at home. She explained that the way she cooks is based on “tradition,” because it is important to pass traditions onto the children because that is the way Polish Tatars last. The discussion surrounding the “correct” way to cook particular dishes recalls the concept of “authenticity.” Abarca notes that the push for “authenticity” works to limit the agency of individuals to play with recipes within given cuisines, and she argues for the use of the term “original” instead (2004).

<sup>56</sup> While there are certainly members of the younger generation who actively cultivate Polish Tatar traditions and foodways, this does not appear to be a majority of those who self-identify as Polish Tatar or as having Tatar roots. Based on my observations during fieldwork, the trend tends to be towards the younger generation having less interest in cultivating culinary traditions.

their mother or grandmother had made kołduny, describing them in detail. Especially for those who no longer lived in Podlasie, these shared meals of Polish Tatar dishes were a way to connect more fully with their nuclear family and feel united with the wider Polish Tatar community, which is especially visible in Podlasie. No matter with whom I spoke, the presence of food as an aspect of Polish Tatar identity seemed to be relatively constant within the imagination—and the stomach—of the Polish Tatar community.

### *Consumption*

Throughout my fieldwork I had lengthy discussions with Polish Tatars of all ages about the best size of kołdun, who makes the tastiest ones, and the correct way to eat them. The proper way to consume the dumplings involve certain movements of the body, which serve to not only heighten the gustatory aspect of the dish but are also a visible, bodily indicator of someone's position inside or outside of the group. When the topic of Polish Tatar food came up in conversation with friends and acquaintances, I would often be asked if I have ever eaten kołduny before. Being vegetarian, I said that I had not, which was always accompanied by an expression of regret and more than once a suggestion that I eat meat just this once. Interlocutors would often mime how to correctly eat them, explaining that if they are made correctly and eaten as they should be, then one first bites off part of the dumpling, allowing the hot, fatty broth from the meat to pour out, which you can gather on a spoon and drink.<sup>57</sup>

There is a correct bodily comportment in eating this dish, which was explained to me by interlocutors and is clearly described in a short story written by famous Polish Tatar poet and ambassador to Kazakhstan Selim Chazbijewicz entitled “About Kołduny” (2012).<sup>58</sup> In it, he describes how a Tatar hosted a Tsarist general, and he decided to serve him kołduny. “The general didn't know that first one bites the top of the kołdun and then drinks the juice, which during the cooking has gathered inside and only then one eats it completely. So, he bit it in half and the hot juice spurted out, staining the uniform and tsarist insignia. In this way the

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<sup>57</sup> This is similar to Georgian khinkali, which are held by the “tail” and bitten open to reveal the juicy broth inside. While modern khinkali can use various fillings, kołduny are only made with meat. Kartofflaniki, a Polish Tatar potato dumpling, is vegetarian but does not have the same edge closure or affective resonances as kołduny.

<sup>58</sup> Selim Chazbijewicz is a well-known commentator, professor, ambassador, former imam, and remains a controversial figure among Polish Tatars. He is a supporter of the right-wing Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party (Law and Justice) and has publicly argued against Poland accepting refugees from the Middle East, saying that they represent a threat to Europe and Polish Tatars. In an interview with Radio Olsztyn he said, “We will all be lumped together” (“Wszyscy zostaniemy wrzuceni do jednego worka”) (Radio Olsztyn 2015).

Tatar kołdun fought with a Tsarist soldier” (Chazbijewicz 2012, 15). It is through knowing the correct way to eat kołduny, the proper bodily comportment required, that the Tatar in the story was able to trick the General into staining his uniform as a subtle sign of rebellion. Understanding how a food is to be eaten and cultivating the bodily knowledge required in its consumption is one way in which group boundaries are generated through food. Thus, the food does not only act symbolically to represent a community but rather actively works to separate community members from outsiders.

As noted earlier, food does not only work to define community boundaries through bodily comportment, memory, and representation, but it physically breaks down and is digested in the body, compressing the line between individual and group, singular and communal, insider and outsider. While attending a large gathering of Polish Tatars, I was eating and chatting with the guests sitting next to me at the table. I was particularly enjoying a certain rice dish and was eating it with relish. In relation to a nearby conversation regarding my research, I responded that I am not a Tatar. My friend sitting across the table replied with a big grin on his face, “Keep eating like that and you will be.” While this was said in jest, it nevertheless points to the ways that “we are what we eat,” and that it is through consumption that we are in some ways transformed. From health gurus telling us to eat clean because our body is a temple, to religious leaders stressing dietary restrictions for the good of our soul, food is often seen as indicative and transformative of one’s identity. In Fischler’s study of the relation between the physical, biological, and nutritional aspects of food and how they relate to food as socially embedded practice, he argues “To incorporate a food is, in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all or some of its properties: we become what we eat. Incorporation is a basis of identity. The German saying, ‘Man ist, was man isst’ (you are what you eat), is literally, biologically true; the food we absorb provides not only the energy our body consumes but the very substance of the body, inasmuch as it helps to maintain the biochemical composition of the organism” (1988, 279). The food an individual chooses to consume breaks down in the body both physically and metaphorically, remaking identity through its integration. Perhaps while one cannot *become* a Tatar through eating, one can *continue becoming* a Tatar, focusing on the continual and processual identity making work that community members undertake.

## *Outside of the Home*

Food practices are not just confined to the domestic sphere but are an active part of Polish Tatar life in the culinary field and within the mosque. This section will look at two particular examples of Polish Tatar foodways—restaurants and *sadoga*. Both demonstrate how the sharing of food helps to bind communities together, but also allows us to examine how Polish Tatars represent themselves to non-Tatar communities, because as Stuart Hall reminds us, “identities are...constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1996, 4).

As discussed earlier, Polish Tatar restaurants are a relatively new occurrence and are



Figure 6: Figurine outside of Tatarska Jurta

As discussed earlier, Polish Tatar restaurants are a relatively new occurrence and are tied to the “ethnic revival” of the 1990s, when the fall of the socialist state allowed a more active recognition and flowering of minority identifications. Tatarska Jurta, the restaurant founded by Dżenneta Bogdanowicz in the village of Kruszyniany, is perhaps the most widely known Polish Tatar restaurant in the region. Visitors are welcomed by an imposing gate, guarded by a wooden statue that is painted in the image of a Mongolian hunter.<sup>59</sup> The entire complex is expansive, consisting of the restaurant, a museum, a yurt, and a field with horses, all sitting across from the building site for the new Tatarska Jurta that is still under construction.<sup>60</sup> On a warm summer’s day the modest village is packed with cars and buses full of tourists coming to see the long standing Polish Tatar mosque, eat lunch at the Jurta, buy knick-knacks from the stalls that line the side of

the road, or take pictures.<sup>61</sup> Large speakers blast Tatar music, though the specific country of

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<sup>59</sup> The statue of the Mongolian hunter is a reference to the origins of the Polish Tatars among the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan. While this narrative proposes a linear descent of Polish Tatars from the Golden Horde, the Polish Tatars did not have a cohesive identity at this time and rather were an amalgamation of individuals from various tribes, who did not always speak the same language. It was only after settlement in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that a collective identity formed. However, this narrative continues to hold emotional sway.

<sup>60</sup> This building is being rebuilt on the ashes of the previous Tatarska Jurta, which was destroyed in a fire on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. While the official cause of the fire was faulty electrical work, there were rumours that the fire may have been set on purpose by those opposing the Polish Tatar minority. While there is no official evidence of tampering, the fact that this rumour spread shows that there are fears of violence and discrimination simmering under the surface of the narrative of unproblematic tolerance towards Polish Tatars.

<sup>61</sup> The mosque in Kruszyniany is one of two mosques left within the current borders of Poland built on the land given to Polish Tatars by King Jan III Sobieski. The mosque in Kruszyniany was built in either the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is a popular tourist attraction.

origin is not clear. The main restaurant area is set across the way from a small museum, which is filled with Qurans, chamaił, Tatar clothing and prayer outfits, and even a life size horse statue.

The Tatarska Jurta is primarily set up for a non-Tatar Polish audience—most of my interlocutors said they do not go there on a regular basis and Dżenneta said that she rarely gets international Muslim guests.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the focus is on educating non-Tatar Poles about Tatars, as Dżenneta says her goal is “to show that Poland is multicultural, multi-religious, and show that we live here somewhere on the borders of Poland.” The image of tatarskość that is shown through Tatarska Jurta and Sabantuj demonstrates a representation of Polish Tatars as both intimately Polish and yet appealingly foreign. The museum on the property is filled with artifacts and poster boards about Polish Tatar dedication to the Polish nation through their assistance in fighting for Polish independence, thus solidifying for guests the “Polish” aspect of Polish Tatars.<sup>63</sup> This is held in tension with representations of Polish Tatars as foreign or distinct from the rest of the wider population; the yurt, horses, and blaring music all work to sensorily place the visitor in a space that is phenomenologically set apart from the surrounding village.

Cieslik and Verkuyten in their article on hybridity among the Polish Tatars, use discourse analysis to identify two narratives that are publicly utilized, in which a factual retelling of military history helps to align Polish Tatars with Poland, while a symbolic, sensorial narrative is used to call back to an oriental past (2006). They write that “...the prevalent message is nostalgia for the Eastern world, its beauty and mystery, or the glorious past of Tatar warriors. The exoticism of the Middle East is often an inspiration for Tatar poetry. The vivid symbolism of the east, the images of tall minarets or of the rising sun, is reflected in Polish Tatar poems. Similarly, oriental motifs, like Tatar warriors on horseback in the steppe, beautiful girls with black eyes and black hair, are also poeticised in lyrics” (Cieslik and Verkuyten 2006, 86). Cieslik and Verkuyten argue that the oriental narrative employed by Polish Tatars lack specifics, but rather amalgamate various symbols to create an

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<sup>62</sup> One day I asked Basia how she felt about tourists coming to Kruszyniany, eating Polish Tatar food, and taking pictures of their mosque. She said that she was proud to show her culture and did not have any concerns about “cultural appropriation.” This reflects generally what other Polish Tatars expressed to me, that they were not concerned with others engaging in Polish Tatar practices but rather were proud to show their life to non-Tatars. However, this line gets blurred when talking about individuals representing themselves as Tatar when they do not have Tatar origins. The complicated relation between practices and blood ties is explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>63</sup> For more information on Polish Tatar involvement in fights for Polish independence, see: (Konopacki 2018).

exotic image. The Tatarska Jurta does something similar, as it emphasizes through its displays the military exploits of Polish Tatars while the music and architecture imply a connection to the “East” of the steppes and the Golden Horde. Polish Tatars often use the term “oriental” (orientalny) to refer to their own past, and this calling back to their ancestor’s origins on the Steppes hundreds of years in the past could be seen as a type of “auto-orientalism” or “self-orientalism.” Various post-colonial researchers have noted the way that communities use auto-orientalism, including towards economic aims such as promoting tourism, strategic tactics around racist restrictions, and agentic moves within global political hegemonies (Yan and Santos 2009; Umbach and Wishnoff 2008, Ong 1999, 80-81).<sup>64</sup>

The use of the term “oriental” was used often by my respondents to describe both themselves and their community, usually within interactions with non-Tatar Poles. For instance, in the dance performance described in more detail in the following chapter, the MC of the evening, a Crimean Tatar woman, described the Polish Tatars as oriental but living in Poland, describing an “oriental style of life” (orientalny styl życia) of “mizars (cemeteries), mosques, and Islamic traditions.” In another situation, I was speaking with an interlocutor about tourism and their thoughts on non-Tatar Poles visiting Tatar mosques and cemeteries. They responded that Poles see Tatars as “oriental,” but my respondent appreciated that people are interested in their culture. The use of the word “orientalny” (oriental) as opposed to “wschodnie” (Eastern) also points to the intentional narrative connotation of a certain mystique. This could be seen as a strategic way to assert their right to exist within a majority Catholic culture, thus resisting pressures to acculturate through the protection of an image of essentialized foreignness. Tourists at the Tatarska Jurta are welcomed to not only consume Polish Tatar food, but to actually (temporarily) become Polish Tatar



Figure 7: Cardboard cut-outs located on the premises of the Tatarska Jurta

<sup>64</sup> The use of “self-orientalism” in order to manage identity can be understood through de Certeau’s division of “tactics” and “strategies.” Tactics are understood as those practices and actions which individuals do in order to engage with, appropriate and/or subvert the strategies put in place by “subjects of will and power” (de Certeau 1984, xix). “Self-orientalism” in this way can be seen as a tactic that minorities can use in order to navigate the narratives of the majority.

themselves through cardboard cutouts which are placed on the premises. A Tatar man stands, holding a bow and arrow ready to shoot, while a Tatar woman wears a heavily decorated dress, holding its length away from her body. On a busy day tourists can be seen queuing to put their face in the cutout, snapping pictures for Instagram and then leaving. Whereas the cutouts imply some temporality, in which identity is put on and then discarded, the food acts slightly differently in which through its consumption it becomes a part of the individual, *tatarskość* which is knowable through the body.

Culinary tourism, in which individuals who are considered “outsiders” eat food that is associated with another community, is an ambiguous practice. Long argues for the positives associated with it, saying “...culinary tourism, utilizing the senses of taste, smell, touch, and vision, offers a deeper, more integrated level of experiencing an Other. It engages one’s physical being, not simply as an observer, but as a participant as well” (Long 1998, 182). While Long argues that such practices can be used to help subvert conventional ideas of identity and can thus be “counter hegemonic,” others question the depth that such culinary tourism provides, in which it can coexist with racism, orientalism, and other structures of domination (Hage 1997). In the case of the Polish Tatars, they use culinary tourism to their own ends, to assert their right to exist “on the borders of Poland,” and as a way to economically take advantage of their positionality. Thus, the connections forged through food do not always lend themselves to a “positive” reading through commensality and kinship, but rather can be ambiguous and allow for a multiplicity of conflicting readings.

Tatarska Jurta, while being perhaps the most famous, is not the only Polish Tatar restaurant in the Podlasie region. During the COVID pandemic a second restaurant opened in Białystok called Halva.<sup>65</sup> Founded by Lilla Świerblewka, the restaurant is located in an unassuming building outside of the city center. After walking through the plain glass doors however, one is greeted by an expansive and carefully decorated room filled with prayer caps, old tea pots, Turkish style hanging lamps, old black and white photos of women cooking, and prayer rugs hung from the ceiling to look as if they are flying. Świerblewska described wanting the restaurant to function as a sort of cultural center to show Polish Tatar culture to non-Tatar Poles not only through cuisine, but also historical nights and dance recitals. Due to the restaurant’s location in Białystok as opposed to a small village, more of

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<sup>65</sup> Halwa is the name of a popular Polish Tatar confectionary considered a necessary addition to the table at special gatherings. It is made of equal parts flour, butter, and honey and is particularly time consuming to make. This is a similar to confectionary found in Turkey and the Middle East.



my research participants patronized Halva than Tatarska Jurta on a regular basis. The food is similar in both locations, though some of the names of dishes have been changed.<sup>66</sup>

Lilla Świerblewka has been in the news recently as she has been helping care for migrants from Belarus on the eastern border of Poland by providing food (without pork) through her restaurant, collaborating with other charities to provide sustenance for migrants on the border (Reuters 2021). In an international news article about her efforts to help the refugees, she states, ““As Muslims we should be helping, regardless of religion or where the person is from. We should just be helping those in need”” (Reuters 2021). Maciej Szcześnowicz, the leader of the Muslim community in Bohoniki near the border, has been supporting both the border guards and the migrants with collected supplies and food provided by his local restaurant, including soup which he cooks daily and gives to the border guards. He hung a banner on the local mosque in support of border control saying, “Thank you for your service and protection of our border” (dziękujemy za waszą służbę i ochronę naszej granicy) which was critiqued by some in the community, including prominent Polish Tatar Michał Adamowicz, saying that you cannot support both sides in the conflict. In an interview with Polskie Radio, he responded to this criticism saying, “We are supporting both migrants and law enforcement, every human being” (2022, 7:50). This controversy shows the underlying tension as to what aspect of identity to highlight, as supporting the border guards is seen as a turning back on fellow Muslims, while emphasizing ties to a pan-Muslim community is associated with fears that Polish Tatars will be considered as separate to the wider Polish nation. The use of food to help both migrants and border guards opens up questions of commensality and the politics of belonging that the sharing of food can both promote and hinder.

These Polish Tatar restaurants in Kruszyniany and in Białystok serve as locations in which food is used to produce a narrative of Polish Tatar identity for a non-Tatar Polish audience, in which Polish Tatars are shown as being different, but not too different—a type of familiar alterity. In order to be packaged for a non-Tatar audience, identity needs to be modified and pared down, cracks within the whole are paved over to make an image of a unified whole. This is not to say that this process is inherently disingenuous, but rather all

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<sup>66</sup> Dżenneta applied and was granted the title of a traditional specialty for her dish *pierekaczewnik*, meaning that it is granted protection through the European Union. Due to this, restaurants are only allowed to use this name if the dish is made to the exact measurements as Dżenneta’s. Therefore, other restaurants use alternative names for the same dish, such as *cebulnik*.

identity formation is a contextual process of becoming in which certain aspects are chosen and others discarded. “[Identities] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field” (Hall 1996, 4). As Hall points out, all identities are crafted through a process of narrativization, but to say that identities are formed and created is not to deny that they may feel real to interlocutors or to deny the ramifications that may arise as a result of those narratives. If identities are constantly fluid and in motion, we need to look for those moments in which identity is “sutured,” in which a particular subjectivity is called into being. The construction of certain foods as being representative of Polish Tatars and the selling of these items to non-Tatars within environments constructed with particular phenomenological sensitivities allow the food to both represent a community and to foster a temporary tying of outsiders to the community. The use of Polish Tatar foodways outside of the domestic sphere to construct an image of a unified Polish Tatar community at the boundary lines of *polskość* and *tatarskość* not only demonstrates the strength of these practices to construct images of group belonging but brings to light the ambiguity of these moments.

Polish Tatar foodways do not only include foods that are discursively marked as “traditionally Tatar,” but also utilize non-Tatar Polish foods in practices that work to solidify the group at the nexus of community identity and religion. The practice of *sadoga*, which comes from the Arabic *sadaqah* or charity, is a common practice after Friday prayers or important religious holidays. While in other Muslim communities *sadaqah* is defined more generally as almsgiving and can refer to physical offerings or even a smile, within the Polish Tatar community it refers to the practice of sharing food items with other members for the sake of an intention, whether for a deceased person, for someone’s health, or other desirable goals. In the past I was told that *sadoga* was a way to distribute wealth and food to impoverished members of the community without anyone needing to ask for assistance. Traditionally *sadoga* is small food items such as yeasted rolls, fruit, or sweets, and are given in sets of 40. While in the past people often baked their goods, now the items are frequently bought in grocery stores. Customarily one should not refuse *sadoga* if it is offered and one should not say thank you for it. Before Friday prayers *sadoga* is placed near the *minbar*, or pulpit, and after prayers have finished the congregation prays over the items with the imam,

which consists of spreading their hands towards the goods and pronouncing a set formula of prayers (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b, 356).<sup>67</sup> When asked about the specifics of why certain practices were an aspect of sadoga, for instance why you should not say thank you after receiving it, my interlocutors were not able to give an answer. Rather, they expressed that sadoga simply entails certain customs, the “reasoning” behind it is not necessary. Anyone can bring sadoga for any intention, and I was told that often when you bring items you will leave with many times more, in other words, sadoga multiplies.

The practice of sadoga is an instance in which food—not food specifically marked as Tatar but rather food common to the majority—is brought into a community space and is made Polish Tatar through the practice of sharing. The community prays together over the food, reaffirming a common religious belief, which is then followed by consumption of the items, thus in some ways taking that community intention into oneself. Sutton notes that food works particularly well as a conduit for memory as when we share items, we not only remember the last time we shared food but also can look forward in the future to the next time of shared consumption (2001). Indeed, he notes that “food may be a particularly powerful medium exactly because it internalizes the debt to the other” (Sutton 2001, 46). There are several important aspects of sadoga that can be teased out. Firstly, sadoga as a gift is given not towards one particular person, but rather is given to the community as a whole, to all those individuals who are congregated. Secondly, since there are oftentimes multiple people who give sadoga, the roles of giver and receiver are combined in one event. Lastly, since multiple people give sadoga, the giver will often receive more food items than they gave. Since sadoga as a gift is given towards those at the prayer, it diffuses and solidifies the social relations between the giver and the community. Reciprocation is often fulfilled in the same event when there are multiple sadoga givers, thus every giver is also a receiver, meaning that reciprocity is already self-fulfilled at every event. Sadoga acts in a slightly different way than the giving of an individual gift or the hosting of a dinner, as the social ties that are enacted are spread throughout the entirety of the present group. The gifts that one gives and receives are generally similar—often a small candy that can be purchased at the local supermarket. This reiterates not only the equality of the community (no one gives a gift that is much larger than another) but also confirms the communitarian aspect of the practice;

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<sup>67</sup> For a more detailed description of the specifics of sadoga, see: (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b).

when reviewing ones sadoga at the end of the day, one does not remember individual, alienable gifts but rather the entire community is encapsulated in the accumulation.

The concept of the gift is most famously associated with Marcel Mauss, in which he tried to understand gift exchange systems. He used the Maori concept of hau to argue that the “spirit of the gift” is what compels gift exchanges to take place, in which part of the person gets mixed up with the gift and so the item must be returned in order for the person to be whole again (Mauss [1954] 2002). Malinowski, on the other hand, argues that it is the principle of reciprocity that encourages the exchange of gifts, in other words the expectation that one will receive a gift in return (1926). Both of these approaches contain an understanding that gift giving, while seemingly voluntary, is actually governed by inherent rules which dictate who, when, and what gets exchanged. Annette Weiner argued that the focus on the principle of reciprocity within much of anthropological literature implicitly uses a Western, rationalist perspective. She interestingly argues against the principle of reciprocity as the defining factor in gift exchanges, saying, “[w]hat motivates reciprocity is its reverse—the desire to keep something back from the pressures of give-and-take. This something is a possession that speaks to and for an individual’s or a group’s social identity and, in so doing, affirms the difference between one person or group and another” (Weiner 1992, 43). While the above authors focus on inalienable gifts, those which are in some way intimately connected to an individual, Cheal notes that modern gift economies are based on the exchange of alienable goods, and in fact must be in order to be considered a gift (1988, 10).<sup>68</sup> By understanding how and why gifts are exchanged, they can tell us more about the community in question. Instead of seeing gifts as economic in function, affectivity is tied into the act of giving such that relations and gifts are intimately connected (Cheal 1988). As Sherry Jr. notes in his discussion of gift-giving, “Those to whom we give differ from those to whom we do not give. Those from whom we receive may differ still. Gifts are tangible expressions of social relationships” (1983, 158).

Not only do gifts tell us about social relations, but they are active agents of change and thus are implicated in affective shifts in giver and receiver. The practice of sadoga, while on the surface a simple exchange of confectionaries, shows how small alienable gifts,

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<sup>68</sup> Weiner notes that food makes ineffectual inalienable objects in exchange systems as it is eaten or rots, and thus only exists in memory (1992, 38). I argue that the exchange of alienable food items in the practice of sadoga makes it a stronger carrier of meaning for social relations as it is not an individual who is inalienably inherent in the item but rather the commensality of the individual with the group that helps to solidify bonds.

indistinguishable from others purchased from the grocery store, symbolically serve to connect the giver to the receiver(s), the community. Since reciprocity is fulfilled often in the same event, these gifts work less as items compelling future reciprocity, but rather as moments which do memory-work, tying communities together with temporalities of future commensality. Indeed, Holtzman argues that food is "...an important engine for the construction of intense bodily memories" (2006, 365). The food received from sadoga is often not consumed at the event but rather later in one's own home, thus moving those social ties formulated during the sharing to a future-date, stretching sociality into the future. These webs work to affectively craft subjectivities as members of the community both in the past and the future, a community that is located on the fault lines of various positionalities.

While restaurants are a space in which food that is discursively marked as Polish Tatar is marketed towards those outside of the community, sadoga is an example in which non-Tatar foods are brought into the community. Thus, they act in some ways as mirror opposites of each other, one in which food moves away and one in which food moves inward. This dichotomy works because of the way that certain foods are narrativized as Polish Tatar foods and thus capable of symbolically carrying representations towards non-members, while in the practice of sadoga the commensality, even of common foods, is enough. Abbotts, in her work on migrant communities and food, cautions against researchers who work with minority communities reifying and dichotomizing certain foods as "from here" or "from there," and points out a multitude of ways that majority foodways can be upheld, subverted, and/or transformed by minority communities (2016, 119-20). Polish Tatar foodways outside of the home complicate this simple dichotomy of "our food" and "their food," as foods that are not considered traditionally Polish Tatar are incorporated while "Polish Tatar" dishes are marketed outwards, becoming an important way that they situate and classify their group identity in relation to others.<sup>69</sup>

Food, or particular dishes, being held up as representative in some way of certain communities is a dynamic that plays out very vividly in the post-Soviet republics. Alymbaeva looks at the relationship between certain dishes being associated with, and becoming symbols of, Central Asian countries (2020). She investigates the creation of "national cuisines" in

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<sup>69</sup> For a fascinating read on the role of food in the making of Inuit identities, see: (Searles 2002). As part of his article, he argues that the enjoyment of certain foods that are considered unpalatable by non-Inuit is a way to mark their group identity as separate from Whites, thus showing the ways that foods can be used to classify "us" and "them."

Soviet cookbooks and combines this with digital research of the dishes plov and beshbarmak, in which she sees that certain dishes are connected to given nationalities. She says that, “Central Asian countries are thus attempting to claim their national dishes as a means of also claiming their independence from their previous subordination in the Soviet Union” (Alymbaeva 2020, 125). We see here the tight ties between politics and food, in which by claiming a certain dish as theirs, communities symbolically assert their independence and put forward a specific narrative in which ownership of a particular dish gives power, prestige, and a way to market an identity towards non-members.

Thus, Polish Tatar foodways both in the domestic and public sphere serve to solidify inter-group connections and highlight group boundaries in relation to the wider Polish population. Counihan argues that “[e]ating together lies at the heart of social relations; at meals we create family and friendships by sharing food, tastes, values, and ourselves” (1999, 6). Through production and consumption of Polish Tatar food in the home, bonds of relatedness with both immediate family and the wider community are (re)established, while simultaneously revealing differences along the lines of gender and generation. Polish Tatar food, often conceptualized as being traditionally passed from generation to generation and thus working to temporally tie the community together in a vertical line, also works in a horizontal sense to weave spatially dispersed Polish Tatars into a community as those who live or work far away return home for family meals or community events. Food practices outside of the home, including in restaurants and in the mosque, work both through commensality and representation. Sadoga allows the community to reaffirm communal goals and the act of exchange binds everyone together through shared consumption and reciprocity, while Polish Tatar restaurants demonstrate the ways that identity is formed not only in relation to intragroup practices but also intergroup expectations. It is the latter that will be the focus of the next section.

### Food as Disjuncture

While Polish Tatar foodways serve as a way to strengthen relatedness within the group and solidify conceptions of Polish Tatars as a reified, bounded community, confirming and enacting forms of belonging, they also serve to delineate between communities. Thus, food practices are not only inward facing but also work to define the perimeters between and among Polish Tatars, non-Tatar Poles and non-Tatar Muslims. This section will look at how

religious regulations on the consumption of alcohol, pork, and halal meat are engaged with in a way that serves to connect Polish Tatars to a certain conception of the Polish nation while simultaneously disrupting relations with the wider Muslim population.

Polish Tatars throughout history have overwhelmingly been Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school and as such there are certain religious limitations on food and drink. Alcohol is generally considered by most Muslims to be haram (unlawful) due to its intoxicating nature, and prohibitions on its consumption are not strictly followed by Polish Tatars.<sup>70</sup> “Hundreds of years among the local population, for whom alcohol is an inseparable element of meetings, games, rites of passage, have made it that Tatars do not avoid [alcohol]” (Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2012, 11). When I spoke with my participants about whether or not they consumed alcohol, I was often told that Polish Tatars are Polish, and therefore they drink because it is a part of the national culture to which they belong. As Mintz argues, “...consumption is always conditioned by meaning,” and we can see here the consumption of alcohol is taken in some way as being indicative of belonging, such that abstaining is a separation from the collective (1996, 7). While sometimes my participants explained Polish Tatar drinking habits to me in terms of assimilation (*asymilacja*), most regarded drinking as an integral element of Polish social life and so to refrain from it would single oneself out as being different, an outsider. One respondent discussing the issue of alcohol said that at social events someone might say, “oh you don't drink? Be careful, because he doesn't drink.” When I discussed my research with non-Tatar Poles, they would often state that Polish Tatars are “our Muslims,” pointing to the fact that many do not strictly abide by Quranic dietary prohibitions, including rules regarding pork and alcohol. Here, alcohol serves as a boundary marker of belonging to the Polish nation. However, a minority of my interlocutors did not drink alcohol and they often tended to be more devoted to strictly following other religious precepts as well. At several events I had both non-Tatar Poles and Polish Tatars insist to me that I should drink, because without eating meat or drinking it would be difficult for me to truly experience Poland. Thus, consumption is tied to understanding such that it is only through bodily experience that I can “know” my subject.

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<sup>70</sup> Alcohol is generally considered haram due to the Quranic reference to intoxicants in 5:90. However, this does not mean that alcohol was never a part of Islamic history. Rather, the more recent focus among some Muslim groups on the eradication of alcohol consumption is part of a specific historical context. For an interesting opinion article on this, see: (Diab 2011).

Pork is generally not consumed by Polish Tatars, though it is not unheard of for people to eat it, especially if they are guests at a Christian household with the incumbent pressure to adapt eating habits to one's surroundings. Barbara Pawlic-Miśkiwicz notes that in the past rules regarding the consumption of pork were more strictly followed, but due to issues of food supply during WWII and throughout the socialist period, Polish Tatars began eating pork (2016b, 371). Therefore, we can see how the eating of religiously restricted foods is due to practicalities as well as a pressure to conform to the foodways of the majority. Polish celebrity chef Robert Makłowicz visited Dżenneta at the Tatarska Jurta to film an episode of his show, in which they demonstrated how to cook several Polish Tatar dishes (2021). While cooking mohlik, a lamb peritoneum stuffed with potatoes, lamb meat, and onions, Makłowicz mentions that Dżenneta's dish seems to be a Polish Tatar version of the regional dish *podlaskie kiszka ziemniczana*, which is a type of mashed potatoes and bacon wrapped in pork intestine. Dżenneta quickly stops him, responding that they do eat pork, "We eat it, we eat it. We are Poles, we like everything" (2021, 13:08). In conversations however, some of my interlocutors disagreed with her representation of Polish Tatar eating habits, expressing that Polish Tatars do not consume pork products.<sup>71</sup> What we see is not only a diversity in opinions regarding the positionality of Polish Tatars towards religious and cultural dietary prohibitions, but also questions as to how to publicly represent Polish Tatars to others. Makłowicz's program with Dżenneta, which at the time of writing has 910 thousand views, is a massive platform through which non-Tatar Poles are able to engage with Polish Tatar foodways. The pressure to assure Makłowicz that Polish Tatars "are Poles" and thus their eating habits are not foreign but rather align to Polish foodways, can be seen as an attempt to soften the boundary line between them, to align Polish food with Polish Tatar food, or Polish bodies with Polish Tatar bodies. However, the attempt to create a specific, coherent narrative belies the underlying diversity of opinions and inability to instantiate a monolithic group identity.

This episode and wider disagreements over public representations of Polish Tatar foodways points to the power of food to create, strengthen, or break group boundaries, and to align certain groups with others based on food practices. Dżenneta's response to Makłowicz's blanket statement regarding the consumption of pork among Polish Tatars was to point to

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<sup>71</sup> One thing all my interlocutors agreed on is that *kołduny* are never made with pork but with mutton or beef. In fact, this is the aspect that most clearly differentiates *kołduny* from Polish meat pierogi, which are made with cooked pork.



national belonging—Polish Tatars are Poles—thus tying religious prohibitions regarding pork to inclusion in the Polish nation and demarcating those who do not eat pork as outside of that boundary. Food operates on multiple levels—defining, enacting, and changing the contours of belonging at the intersection of community, national, and religious identity(s). Questions as to whether to adhere to rules that mark oneself as being religiously “other” has precedence in other countries as well. In France, pork soup began being used by a far-right group as a symbol of belonging, in which the choice of whether or not to consume it was seen as a marker of religion, and thus, national identity. This soup kitchen gave out meals regardless of socio-economic status, with religion being the primary deciding factor (Smith 2006). In Inquisition era Spain, food was often used find “crypto-Jews,” or Jews who had apparently converted in order to avoid execution, but still practiced Judaism in secret. “In the eyes of Christian society, a *converso* revealed his continued adherence to his former religious roots via his social, cultural and dietary habits, such as ...the eating of unleavened bread and a refusal to eat bacon or pork” (Rawlings 2019, 179). Thus, we see a historical trajectory in which food is positioned as symbolic of national and religious belonging but also as a potential site of danger.

Consumption of pork seems to be a marker of the imagined national body, such that it becomes a site of discussion and controversy as to its absorption into the culinary practices of Polish Tatars. Mandel, in her book *Cosmopolitan Anxieties*, discusses Turkish migration to Germany and the ways in which they are positioned as foreigners within a social landscape shaped by the traumatic histories of Jews within Germany (2008). She mentions how food is one way in which the relation between Jews and Turks is imagined within popular consciousness and therefore situated outside of German belonging. She describes how pork is (generally) not consumed by Muslims and Jews, and yet historically through anti-Semitic stereotypes and pamphlets pigs have been associated with Jews. She goes on to note that garlic is associated with foreignness, such that the consumption (or not) of garlic is in some way symbolic of a particular alignment with Germanness. She writes, “While many contemporary Germans do cook with and consume garlic, it is nonetheless true that garlic remains the fetishistic repository of cultural stereotypes about foreign populations in Germany” (Mandel 2008, 136). In some ways similar, the consumption of pork, a major ingredient in Polish cooking, assumes an overdetermined position as a marker of inclusion into the national body and the decision to abstain from it, a symbolic marking of an outsider.

Beyond the issue of whether to eat pork or consume alcohol, the question of whether or not to eat only halal meat is less controversial. The overwhelming majority of Polish Tatar Muslims in Podlasie do not regularly eat halal and do not see it as a religious necessity. It is not widely available in Białystok and in order to have consistent access to it respondents would need to drive to Warsaw to purchase it in bulk, about a 2-and-a-half-hour drive. Many of my interlocutors explained that they would consume halal meat if convenient, but they would not go out of their way to purchase it, particularly given its higher cost. This attitude towards eating halal meat was at odds with some of my other interlocutors in Białystok, including non-Tatar Muslims and Polish Tatars who more strictly follow Islamic precepts; for those individuals, eating halal meat was seen not as an option, but as a necessity. One participant who describes himself as religiously practicing said that it is “better for the soul to only have good meat.” Here we see that not only is halal meat indexed as “good meat,” but also the relation between consumption and the soul.

Those Tatars who did only eat halal were often seen by others as too “Orthodox” or “Arabized,” equating following religious precepts with being other than Polish. These two terms were often used almost interchangeably and make clear the indexing of following certain practices with annulling a Polish Tatar identity and aligning them with “Arabs,” who were often portrayed as foreign and “other.” Buckser looked at kosher eating habits among the Jewish minority population in Denmark and how their decision as to how to observe religious dietary rules was a way in which they expressed their individual understandings of Judaism and the role of nationality and religion in Danish identity (1999). He says that dietary rules are “...one of the most important ways through which ideas about contemporary Jewish identity and membership can be expressed. In a community with amorphous boundaries and little consensus, eating arrangements provide one of the few venues in which Jews can work out and make visible their ideas about their relationship to Judaism and to each other” (Buckser 1999, 193). Similarly, the choice of whether or not to consume exclusively halal meat demonstrates various understandings of the role of religion in relation to Polish and Polish Tatar identities, one in which Polish and Muslim belonging are set up in a dichotomous relationship.

Not only does the consumption of religiously restricted items such as pork mark oneself as being “Polish,” it simultaneously separates oneself from the wider non-Tatar Muslim community who tend to follow rules regarding food, prayer, and dress, much more rigorously. As Hall notes, in order to function, identities need to have an outside, something

that is left out. “Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected. Every identity has at its ‘margin’, an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it ‘lacks’” (1996, 5). For the Polish Tatars, in many ways their identities are defined through what is left “outside” or in the “margins,” in which “our Muslims” are contrasted with “those Muslims.” The pressure among some Polish Tatars to not overtly express Islamic beliefs in public may be tied to a desire to separate themselves from other Muslims due to Islamophobia, fear of which increased in the years following the events of 9/11. In the past among the older generation the word Tatar was often used synonymously with Muslim, even if the person in question came from the Middle East. However, this practice of using “Tatar” for all Muslims has largely decreased in recent years, possibly due to the larger numbers of non-Tatar Muslims in Poland or, as one of my interlocutors suggested, an attempt to distinguish Polish Tatars from other Muslims.

### Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to describe some of the foodways of Polish Tatars and demonstrate how their practices serve to both strengthen intragroup ties through the production and consumption of food within the domestic sphere, restaurants, and mosque, and to demarcate lines between Polish Tatars, the non-Tatar Polish community and non-Tatar Muslims. The process of making Polish Tatar food, often reserved for holidays and special occasions due to the time intensive nature of the dishes, serves to reaffirm community bonds through the physicality of being together and the manual knowledge required to form the dishes, particularly *kołduny*, into the right shape. While strengthening social bonds within the community, these dishes also point to the multilayered nature of belonging, in that belonging is crosscut by various axes of gender and age. The consumption of these dishes points to the bodily dispositions necessary to eat these “correctly,” thus defining those who do not know how to eat them as outside of the community. The increase in Polish Tatar restaurants speaks to how identity is narrativized for the wider population and cracks are smoothed over to create a monolithic group identity. *Sadoga* and the way that divisible food stuffs are cyclically shared among the community in an act of both religious and societal meaning

demonstrates one of the myriad ways that food enacts belonging not only symbolically, but actively.

Foodways do not only serve to build and strengthen bonds within the Polish Tatar community, but also are constructive of boundaries between and among the wider non-Tatar Polish population and non-Tatar Muslims. The consumption of alcohol, pork, and halal meat works to include Polish Tatars into a national image of Polishness, in which these acts are seen as somehow constructive of national identity itself. Simultaneously, this works to sever connections with the non-Tatar Muslim population in the area. While many Polish Tatars still see themselves as part of a wider ummah, the dividing line between Polish Tatars and other Muslims is at times stressed, particularly in relation to arguments over how strictly to follow certain religious prescriptions.

While the connection between food and identity is not a new idea, literature within the last 20 years has increasingly attempted to show how food is not only symbolic of certain types of identity, but rather can work as an agent to precipitate and enact change. “Food, in other words, does not merely symbolize or represent in the static sense but rather moves, penetrates, and transforms. People use the various characteristics of food to enact changes in themselves and their world” (Fajans 1988, 165). The connection between belonging and foodways among the Polish Tatars in Podlasie demonstrates how food is utilized by a minority community to define group boundaries, not only using recipes that are seen as traditionally Polish Tatar, but also integrating non-Tatar food into community practices. Exploring more deeply the way that dishes are incorporated into the group allows us to have a deeper understanding of how identity is formulated and practiced among Polish Tatars.

### 3

#### **“I do it to show my culture”: Dance and Representation**

The auditorium, a grey, non-descript building located in the outskirts of Warsaw, was beginning to fill up with people. I had arrived with the dance troupe on the bus from Białystok and waited in the audience while they prepared for the performance, the glare of the setting sun through the large windows throwing patterns on the floor. The chairs helpfully placed two metres apart were soon filled and an overflow crowd formed at the back of the room, their loud chattering filling the hall as we waited for the event to begin. Our host for the evening, a Crimean Tatar woman elegantly dressed in a black, belted dress and an embroidered fez, stepped on stage to welcome us to their “Night of Tatar Culture” (Wieczór Kultury Tatarskiej). The evening was to be a showcase of Polish Tatar dancing, an example of intercultural dialogue hosted by the non-profit Dunaj whose goal is “participating in building bridges between communities, promoting cooperation, partnership and service to society through intercultural dialogue and discussion” (“O Fundacji” n.d.). A prominent

member of the Polish Tatar community stepped on stage to introduce the dance troupe and to describe the history of the troupe and the Polish Tatars as a group, with particular emphasis given to their long settlement here, their military involvement in fighting for Polish independence, and their status as full members of the Polish nation, finishing with the oft-repeated phrase, “We don’t feel Polish, we are Polish” (Nie czujemy się Polakami, jesteście Polakami). This phrase, often used in public spaces, clashes with how my interlocutors often related to me their relationship with *tatarskość*, which was often framed as “I feel Tatar.” Feeling and being, both enacted in overlapping ways to describe the complicated web of their identity within multiple frames of belonging.

With the lights dimming, the performance began.

While I had already attended several exhibitions and practices, the dance as performed on stage with music, lighting, and costumes was still impactful. The music blared out of loudspeakers as the performers glided on stage—the men in trousers with long-sleeved white shirts worn underneath embroidered velvet vests, while the women wore floor length embroidered velvet dresses with a fez and veil covering their head. The songs alternated between faster and slower tempos and group and couple dances, with our host describing each song before its performance to give the audience an idea of its origin and meaning. The last song of the evening was *Ey Güzel Qırım*, which our host explained is an emotional one for her and other Crimean Tatars because it discusses the loss of a homeland due to the unlawful Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea.<sup>72</sup> As the first few notes threaded through the air *Buńczuk-Tatarski Zespół Dziecięco-Młodzieżowy* took to the stage, holding hands and singing the by now familiar song. I snuck a peek around me, and the audience seemed entranced by the performance. As the last notes tapered off and hung in the air, the crowd erupted in applause. Our host thanked us for allowing them to “show our traditions” and share with us “our religion, songs and dances,” and invited us into the lobby for hot, Crimean Tatar food.

By time I made my way to the table it had been picked clean, much to my stomach’s dismay. I tried to ignore its angry rumbling by filling my time wandering the hall and

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<sup>72</sup> “Oh Beautiful Crimea” is a song about the deportation of Crimean Tatars from their homeland. A small portion of it was incorporated into Jamala’s song “1944” in the 2016 Eurovision competition. Some Russian politicians spoke out against the song, with Russian MP Elena Drapeko claiming that, “This is partly a consequence of the propaganda war of information that is being waged against Russia” (Walker 2016). The use of this song within the *Buńczuk* repertoire is a clear indication of the trans-Tatar ties cultivated by Polish Tatars.

gauging the crowd's reaction. Pieces of conversations floated past me in the crowded room, one woman expressing her enjoyment at getting to "experience another culture" while a couple next to me had a vibrant discussion as to why the dancers wore fez "if they weren't Turkish." As I walked by some older women from my group, I noticed they were in deep discussion with a woman I did not recognize. I stopped to join the conversation and was informed that she was a local who thought she might have Tatar origins. She peppered the women from my group with questions as to their family history and roots, eventually realizing that they might be distantly related. The women exchanged contact information as we were informed that the auditorium was closing. As the last remaining audience members slowly sauntered into the night, we packed up our things and trudged back onto the bus. It was hours yet to home and surrounded by the soft sounds of the motorway and a few, muted whispers about the successful show, I let my eyes close.

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Another time, three months later. I received an invitation from Alija to her apartment for a party, which I happily accepted. It was cold outside, almost -25 degrees Celsius, and the opportunity for a get together in the warm company of friends was a welcome respite from the quietness of the winter evening. As always, the dinner table was overflowing with various types of foods, *kołduny* of course included, along with vegetarian salads thoughtfully made just for me. After stuffing ourselves with dinner, the empty plates were replaced with an entire table of sweets, cakes, biscuits, halwa, which we somehow found room in our stomachs for. Starting with one of the children, one by one we got up and started to sway to the music blasting from the TV. We began with the most popular disco polo songs, dancing in pairs and twirling our partner, while eventually as the night progressed we expanded to popular Polish pop songs of the last 20 years to even a Metallica song (which I joyfully headbanged to).<sup>73</sup> By the end of the evening we were all breathless and hot, laughing at each other's dancing and avoiding the trip home through the cold as long as possible.

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<sup>73</sup> Disco polo is a popular type of music in the Podlasie region, associated with upbeat tempos and simple lyrics, often about love. One of disco polo's most popular singers, Zenon Martyniuk, was born in a Podlaskie village and the evidence of his continued legacy can be found in the mural of him painted on the side of an apartment building in Białystok, the recent movie made about his life, and graffiti near my residence naming him "king of disco polo." Disco polo's popularity was a topic of discussion during my fieldwork due to the 2020 release of a biographical film about Martyniuk that was produced by the public broadcasting company TVP and the contentious transformation of a local high school into a technical school for disco polo. The controversy around the genre largely has to do with its stereotypical "simple" beats and lyrics and its perception as largely supporting the current ruling right-wing party, PiS. For an interesting discussion of disco polo's changing popularity and its association with right wing politics see: (Łuczaj 2020).

I did not go into the field planning to write about dance; I knew I wanted to write about issues of identity and community building, but it was not until I started to attend events that the importance of Buńczuk was impressed upon me due to the troupes' integration with community events and its visibility, particularly at gatherings oriented towards the wider non-Tatar community. Along with the Tatarska Jurta, Buńczuk is perhaps the most widely known element of the Polish Tatar community within Poland and even internationally, as the troupe travels quite extensively across the country and the world to give demonstrations and present concerts. As noted researcher of Polish Tatars Michał Łyszczarz states, "The goal of the group is above all the promotion of Tatar culture through dance and reciting of Polish patriotic poetry" (2015a, 74). In speaking with members of the Buńczuk dance troupes about their motivation to join, I was often told that they have a desire to "show others our culture," particularly because "we lack a language." Dance was seen as a space in which they could demonstrate their uniqueness, a forceful statement against pervasive fears of assimilation and loss. These dance troupes, while promoted as examples of the vibrancy of the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie, draw inspiration from other Tatar communities such as the Crimean Tatars to creatively adapt and integrate their music, choreography, and clothing into something new, a syncretic practice which is paradoxically used to buttress claims of cultural longevity and authenticity. The opening statement at the "Night of Tatar Culture" introduced the group firstly by highlighting their polskość, accentuating a long history of settlement and involvement in Polish military history, while simultaneously pulling from transnational Tatar practices to present a specific narrative as both patriotically Polish and alluringly foreign, a type of familiar alterity. As I later argue, this does not mean that Polish Tatar dance is not "authentic" but rather all traditions are creatively adapted to new socio-historical circumstances. Through this we can analyse how Polish Tatar dance practices use bodily movement to formulate boundaries, which are concurrently emphasized and downplayed in particular ways. In the introduction to the book *Music from the Yurt: Following Traces of the Tatars (Muzyczna Jurta- śladami Tatarów)* published by MZR (Muslim Religious Union) in both English and Polish, the Grand Mufti Miśkiewicz writes, that the "...material will take you on a journey into the world of [the] Orient, the representatives of which have been a part of the Polish society for over 600 years. I wish you then that during listening you see before your eyes true to life yurts of wanderers, quiver on the back, the tramp of horses, the sound of wind and a handful of steppe sand" (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011,



23).<sup>74</sup> The rich, descriptive language draws a picture in front of the readers' eyes, engaging not only the aural experience but a sensorial one which seems to harken back to a mythic time, discursively placing Polish Tatars as a type of alluring foreignness at the heart of the Polish nation and history.

It is here, with the "sound of wind and a handful of steppe sand," that I would like to begin to convey a picture of the role of music and dance among Polish Tatars, a group in which dancing at the informal level does not largely differ from the wider non-Tatar Polish population, and yet one in which dancing was consistently pointed out to me as an important aspect of their positionality as a separate, distinct community. Originally one troupe that was started by prominent community member Halina Szahidewicz, it has now split into two competing groups. The dance troupe Buńczuk, apart perhaps from Tatarska Jurta, is the most visible representation of Polish Tatars to the wider Polish population, often traveling across Podlasie, Poland, and Europe. This chapter will focus less on choreography and the specific dances in the repertoire of the two dance troupes and instead analyse dance performances as sites of the production of meaning. I understand these performances as social events in which Polish Tatars both represent and produce variable understandings of identity and belonging through the movement of the body in space, both on the stage and on the road.<sup>75</sup> I am interested here in "...dance as a medium and as a context of social action" (Cowan 1990, 18). Much as Cowan uses dance in order to explore how this practice is interwoven with gender and larger societal rules and expectations in Greece, this chapter will use dance performances as a location in which to unpack the role of body, performance, and affect in cultivating intergroup boundaries and intragroup solidarity (1990). This chapter will look at the role relations with other Tatar groups play in crafting and maintaining Polish Tatar dance, which on one hand is held up as representative of a local identity, while also being intimately informed by transnational Tatar practices, creating original, creative identity formations.

As distinct from Cowan's analysis of dancing in Greece, in which dance took place at a variety of locations including informal locations such as dance parties, I will be focusing exclusively on formal dance performances constructed and performed for an audience.

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<sup>74</sup> As the book was published in both English and Polish, I am using their own English translations for the text.

<sup>75</sup> Music and dance will be analysed in this chapter in an interwoven manner, as the music Polish Tatars listen to on an informal, personal basis does not differ to other non-Tatar Poles, but rather Tatar music is most often used in relation to Buńczuk to create an image of a distinctive community with its own music and dance traditions. Music, as Martiniello and Lafleur note, "...is accordingly a process through which groups negotiate their identity with others" (2008, 1193). Thus, analysis of music will go hand in hand with the discussion of dance performances as a way that Polish Tatars both affectively experience their own subjective understanding of Polish Tatar identity and at the same time craft an external image for non-Tatars.

Nahachewsky in his discussion on participatory and presentational dance, divides dance into four categories: reflexive dance, participatory dance, sacred dance, and presentational dance (1995, 4). While researchers use various other categories in which to analyse dance such as Hanna's categorization into therapy, social dance, religious dance, and theatrical performance, or Hoerburger's division of folk dance into first and second existence, I find Nahachewsky's division helpful in my discussion of Polish Tatar dance practices (Hanna 1987, 55-56; Hoerburger 1968, Nahachewsky 1995). This allows me to focus the attention of analysis not on the reflexive and participatory dance that I partook in within my friend's living room, but to focus on the presentational dance of the two Buńczuk troupes as they relate to the narrativization of a cohesive Polish Tatar identity. I focus here on Buńczuk and their performances as it was the practice that my interlocutors pointed to as indicative of the vitality of their community and was often a topic of conversation after Friday prayers or at other social gatherings.

Discussions regarding Polish Tatar music and dance focus almost exclusively on the dance troupes Buńczuk and many of them analyse the phenomenon through the lens of "invented tradition." As pointed out in *Music from the Yurt*, "The Polish-Lithuanian Tatars today, as well as in old times, like to celebrate, and the awoken awareness and pride from their ethnic autonomy resulted in the fact that they tried to create their own artistic ensembles that would present Tatar music and dance (which was a difficult challenge due to the lack of their own folk creative works)" (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 29). Buńczuk was founded during the "ethnic revival" of the Tatars in the 90s and its recent provenance has led to the academic focus on invented tradition as the lens through which to analyse these practices and the role of Buńczuk in curating an image of "Tatariness" for non-Tatar tourists. The idea of invented tradition, developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their book *The Invention of Tradition*, refers to a specific socio-historical transformation of modernity and has a tendency to be taken out of context and too liberally applied (1983). Outside of academia, the word "invented" is often understood as synonymous with fake or inauthentic, particularly when used in relation to practices that are outward facing or created for tourism, which can be seen as a derogatory qualification by academics for the groups involved (Linnekin 1991). This chapter will dig deeper into the association of "invented tradition" with Polish Tatar dance and problematize issues of authenticity, in which presentational dances for outsiders are questioned as inauthentic representations of groups rather than as creative expressions of hybrid identities. I follow after Bruner, as he attempts to analyse performances created for tourists "...not as simulacra but as contemporary rituals

offered in a particular political and touristic context, in order to understand the mechanisms of production, the artifices of display, and the contemporary meanings not only for the tourists but also for the performers, the producers, the agents, and all those involved in the touristic presentation” (2005, 4). Dance created by Polish Tatars in order to express community pride and represent themselves to tourists will not be considered copies of some authentic past, but rather as original works of art created in the contemporary moment shaped by (trans)national geopolitical forces and expressing the hopes, concerns, and desires of those who participate.

### The Anthropology of Dance

Dance, defined here generally as “a patterned movement performed as an end in itself,” has long been a part of anthropological literature, going back to fathers of the field such as Malinowski and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (Wulff 2018, 1).<sup>76</sup> However, in these works dance was often discussed in relation to ritual and religion, and it formed part of a larger discussion of the social system, which was seen at the time to make up a cultural whole (Royce 1977). It was not until the 1960s and 70s that anthropologists began to focus on dance as a subject within itself (Reed 1998, 504). Adrienne Kaeppler, one of the important names within the study of dance, described the subject as late as 1978 as an “esoteric” part of anthropology (1978, 32). Some of the early anthropologists of dance, including the aforementioned Adrienne Kaeppler, Judith Hanna, Gertrude Kurath, and Joann Kealiinohomoku are responsible for breaking ground on the subject and not only recording the choreography of dances in minute detail, but also looking at the cultural context and symbolic aspects of dance within various communities (Reed 1998, 505). The contribution of these dance studies to wider anthropological knowledge may lie not only in the detailed choreographic descriptions and information regarding various styles of dancing, but also in acknowledging dance’s dualistic relationship to society—it is not only a way to artistically represent a community and its values, beliefs, customs, but also has the ability to affect society itself (Wulff 2018, 8).

In this chapter, I attempt to understand the ways that dance is not (only) a medium to express already held beliefs, movement patterns, and traditions, but is also a force which

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<sup>76</sup> There are a variety of definitions of dance, ranging from more specific and thus excluding some ranges of movement, to more inclusive. I feel that this definition is largely accepted by many of the authors quoted here and sits in the Goldilocks zone of specificity. It is worth noting that Adrienne Kaeppler argued that many “Western” definitions of dance may exclude some non-Western movement patterns (1985, 93).

transforms, collides, and brings diverse bodies into alignment. Baines in her work looks at site dance as a location in which bodies, dance, and place are brought together in way that can change how communities view themselves and their neighbourhood. She argues that "...site dance offers a deeper understanding to audiences (or insight) about their own actions, associations, and meanings attached to these sites; it awakens viewers' embodiment and potential agency in these places, and, by extension, empowers a community by demonstrating ways to affect change in the places of their everyday lives" (2016, 2). She provides an example in which choreographer Anna Halprin presented an outdoor community dance on Mt. Tamalpais in response to multiple murders that happened there, the violence transforming the mountain from a space of leisure and adventure to a site of danger. Through the dance, in which women visited the sites of the murder, and the apprehension of the murderer only a week later, the mountain was reclaimed (Baines 2016). While Baines focuses on site dance specifically, we can see here the power of dance to enact change, which is intimately tied up with the movement of bodies within space. For Polish Tatars to dance not only at festivals that are marketed as heritage events but also at concerts, presentations, and events across Poland is to make a powerful, visible statement about their status within Polish society. I would argue further that these dance practices actively position Polish Tatars as Poles, claiming these spaces through the body and thus challenging dominant narratives of belonging to the Polish nation.

Thus, it can be said that dance is not "only" an aesthetic art but can also be a form of political participation and an economic opportunity, particularly for minorities who may be excluded from popular forms of governance or economic systems (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008, 1192). Dance can be particularly salient for those groups for whom tourism is an important source of revenue and a format through which they can compose narratives of their own community. However, questions and politics of authenticity are often brought into play when discussing tourism, as "authentic" practices are often set into a dichotomous relationship with locations and items that are seen as catering towards tourists (Cohen 1988). Daniel in her work on dance within a tourist setting notes that far from being inauthentic, "...the dance is often an exact simulation; a re-creation of a historic past; a contemporary manifestation of inventiveness within traditions and among styles; a holistic and multisensory phenomenon that often communicates to tourists and performers at a fundamental level" (1996, 781-82). In other words, dance performances for tourists maintain the same characteristics, breadth, and depth of other artistic pursuits and cannot simply be analysed through the lens of (in)authenticity or pre-emptively understood outside of context. Rather, I

understand Polish Tatar dance practices as original works, creatively utilized by troupe members to present a particular narrative of belonging to tourists, one which locates Polish Tatars within a type of familiar alterity, working to bodily and affectively connect them with other Tatars within Poland and without.

This chapter will analyse Polish Tatar dance performances and the dance troupes Buńczuk in an attempt to understand how this particular bodily practice helps to not only represent the community towards outsiders, but also transform and enact certain understandings of community identity(s) as constructed through the performative body. Firstly, this chapter will take a brief look at the history of (Polish) Tatar music and dance in order to understand the socio-historical conditions in which it resides. Then I will interrogate the concept of “invented tradition,” the lens through which Polish Tatar dance is often understood, and I will deconstruct the problematic associations of “invented” as being less than “genuine.” Next, this chapter will analyse representation and performance, and how dance is a way for Polish Tatars to narratively situate themselves within the complex landscape of modern-day Poland. I look at how dance practices help to develop affective understandings of belonging within the group while simultaneously pulling from other Tatar traditions, thus creating a vibrant tension between Polish Tatar locality and Tatar transnationality. Lastly, this chapter will attempt to bring these threads together to understand the specific ways that dance, performance, and the body work through affective shockwaves, effects and ripples to craft belonging among Polish Tatars.

### History of Music and Dance Among Polish Tatars

The music of Polish Tatars was recently discussed in the book *The Musical Yurt*, referenced above (2011). It was published by MZR in association with Ansambl Peregrinus, a musical group from Wrocław who recorded a CD of Tatar songs which they arranged, sourced, and adapted from various Tatar communities including Bashkir, Kazan, Crimean, and Mongolian groups (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 18). The book, published in both English and Polish along with a record, is wide ranging and discusses the history of (trans)Tatar music, Polish Tatar music specifically, and musical traditions such as balls and Buńczuk. Ansambl Peregrinus is interested in intercultural dialogue and their music is described as “a journey in space and time,” including musical elements of the Middle East, Sephardic influences from the Middle Ages, 17<sup>th</sup> century Christian Europe, and current Polish folk music (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 34). The focus of their

album is on the Eastern origins of the Polish Tatars, describing the CD as enabling the listener to follow along in Marco Polo's steps and travel through the territory of the Golden Horde, describing the origins of Tatar music as a "fusion of Turkish, Mongolian or Finno-Ugrian elements" (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 24, 38).

However, the detailed and vivid descriptions of Tatar music is later contrasted with information that Polish Tatars do not have their own musical traditions; any specific musical style was lost through the years and the same music is played at Tatar balls as at parties among non-Tatar Poles (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 29). As one of my participants pointed out, Polish Tatars danced or enjoyed themselves "...to Polish music, unfortunately," describing dances such as the Polish mazur, polka, and tango. The publication toes a line between specifying certain musical types and genres as being an aspect of Polish Tatar life, while acknowledging that as recently as the inter-war period Polish Tatars did not have a musical tradition that differed from the wider population (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 29).

The publication emphasizes the origins of Polish Tatars on the steppes, building a unified version of history that posits a direct lineage between the modern-day community and a mythologized version of a nomadic past. In a commentary to one of the songs, the book includes a poem by Polish Tatar poet and diplomat Selim Chazbijewicz entitled "A Tatar Dream" ("Tatarski Sen") which reads,

A Pole and a Tatar live inside of me  
One wears a maciejówka and the other one- a krymka.<sup>77</sup>  
In a dream, they sharpen their sword in the same way  
Crazy with poetry, on the steppe of Kipczak  
I fight with a [Tatar] sword for the Great Poland  
A wolf fur coat from Lithuanian forests  
Fits them both in the same way. (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 40)<sup>78</sup>

We can see how particular symbols are called upon to create vivid images for the reader, representations that are seemingly used to contrast the Tatar and the Pole. Material items and places are alluded to in order to craft a seemingly essentialized view of identity—these figures wear different hats, live in particular regions, and thus the body is called upon as the place upon which identity resides. However, we also see the ways in which these images are

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<sup>77</sup> A maciejówka is a type of hat that was common in Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, while a krymka is a type of Asian cap, in the past was often worn by Polish Tatars during prayer.

<sup>78</sup> The poem is given in English and Polish and is not my translation. The Polish text reads "Mieszka we mnie Polak i Tatar/ Jeden nosi maciejówkę drugi krymkę/ Szablę w snach ostrzą tak samo/ Szalony poezją na stepach Kipczaku/ tatarską szablą walczę o Wielką Polskę/ Wilcze futro z litewskich lasów/ leży na obu tak samo"

discursively positioned as analogous as well—they sharpen their sword in the same way and the wolf coat fits them both—alluding to their underlying similarity. The author tells us that a Pole and a Tatar live inside of him, simultaneously, positioning himself as not only both Polish and Tatar, but rather they are intimately intertwined in his very conception of self. A tension is clear within the CD and the published booklet between Polish Tatars represented as inherently a local community living in “the Great Poland,” but also part of a global collective enmeshed with the “steppe of Kipczak.”

The book also touches on the history of dance troupes among Polish Tatars, explaining that in the interwar period some members of the community tried to create amateur artistic groups, but others considered them to be against religious mores and traditions (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 11). Later, during the 1970s and 80s Maciej Konopacki, a well-known leader of the community, attempted once again to put together a Polish Tatar musical group. However, due to fears of exposing community members’ group affiliation and the possibility of discrimination from the socialist government, the attempt was boycotted by the community (Szahidewicz 2015, 10). It was not until 1999 after the democratic transition that Halina Szahidewicz, the leader of the Białystok religious community, created the Polish Tatar musical troupe Buńczuk (Szahidewicz 2015, 11). The group originally focused on singing Polish songs with musical accompaniment, particularly those which spoke in some way to the Polish Tatar community, such as the Crimean Sonnets by Adam Mickiewicz or other verses by contemporary Polish Tatars Selim Chazbijewicz and Musa Czachorowski (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 13). Thus from the very beginning, the creation of the dance troupe was predicated on complicated interactions between explicit connections with Poland and other Tatar communities, particularly the Crimean Tatars, speaking to the ways in which Polish Tatar identity is tied to communities across borders.

Not everyone immediately warmed to Szahidewicz’s idea to put together a youth troupe, but she was stubborn about creating the group, pointing to her upbringing as being influential in her decision. As she writes in the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary book about the troupe, “At home, my parents used to say: ‘You must be proud of the fact that you are a Tatar-Muslim and Polish citizen. This obliges you to act with dignity and remember that all these terms constitute your identity and are equally important’” (Szahidewicz 2015, 10). This pride in her identity led her to persevere against initial community reluctance and push for the establishment of the dance troupe. One of the stated goals of the group is that the children get to know and become familiar with traditions, or as some of my interlocutors have explained

to me, it is a way to dance as “Tatars dance” and “get to know better the traditions of their own ethnic group” (Michalowski, Miśkiewicz, and Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2011, 33). Buńczuk was primarily made up of 6–25-year-olds who came from the Białystok area and was conceptualized as a space for young people to inculcate community pride and knowledge of traditions in the face of perceived dangers of assimilation.<sup>79</sup> Dance classes were originally run by a Crimean choreographer, but students later received guidance from an artist from Bashkortostan and a choreographer from Chechnya, again pointing to the importance of trans-Tatar flows of people, knowledge, and labour (Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 412). The group quickly became popular among Polish Tatars and gained recognition among the wider non-Tatar Polish population, famously performing for the Prince of Wales in 2010 and at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw in 2011 (Szahidewicz 2015, 33).

Buńczuk was left to Ewa Jakubowska in 2012, but issues arose when she made the controversial decision to separate the troupe from its association with MZR and instead connect it with the Fundacja Tatarskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne (Tatar Cultural Society Foundation), which was made particularly for this purpose (Łyszczarz 2015a, 75-76). Due to the controversy, the group was divided into two separate troupes which still exist today: Buńczuk-Tatarski Zespół Dziecięco-Młodzieżowy (Buńczuk-Tatar Children and Youth Group) which has been run by Anna Mucharska since 2014 and the Tatarski Zespół Taneczno-Wokalny Buńczuk (Buńczuk Tatar Dance and Vocal Group), which is run independently from MZR (Łyszczarz 2015a, 76; Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 407).<sup>80</sup> Buńczuk-Tatarski Zespół Dziecięco-Młodzieżowy through its connection to MZR has more of a religious focus, with some Quranic recitation occurring in between dances in addition to highlighting more amateur dancers, as anyone without regard to skill or previous experience can participate. Tatarski Zespół Taneczno-Wokalny Buńczuk tends to be more professionally focused and does not include explicitly religious material (Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 414). The use of the name Buńczuk for both troupes causes some confusion, and community members tend to have loyalty to one of them, often referring

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<sup>79</sup> Buńczuk is the name for the flagstaff that was carried in war by the 13th Wilno Uhlan Regiment, a Polish Tatar military division. Therefore, the name recalls both a Tatar history and leans heavily on a narrative of Polish patriotism and Polish Tatar involvement in the military (Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 412).

<sup>80</sup> Similar to the approach taken by Łyszczarz in his article “The importance of the youth song and dance group ‘Buńczuk’ for cultivating Tatar ethnic identity” (“Znaczenie młodzieżowego zespołu pieśni i tańca ‘Buńczuk’ dla kultywowania tatarskiej tożsamości etnicznej”) I will try to avoid any favoritism shown towards either of the groups and will generally speak of “Buńczuk” as a reference to the groups in general as founded by Halina Szahidewicz (2015a). I did interviews with members of both groups and do not intend this chapter to speak towards my personal feelings as to the politics and rift between the groups.



to the troupe they do not support as “the second Buńczuk.” The split in the troupe is symbolic of a larger discussion within the Polish Tatar community as to the foundational boundaries of identity, in which elements coded as “ethnic” and/or “religious” acquire various meanings and importance.<sup>81</sup> For example, the inclusion of Quranic recitation in one of the Buńczuk groups and its association with MZR calls upon a more explicitly religious infrastructure of group identity. Funding for the groups come from several sources, including the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji), the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship (Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Podlaskiego), and the Municipal Office in Białystok (Urząd Miejski w Białymstoku) (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016c). The funds must be applied for annually, covering the recording and publishing of their CDs and performances.

### Invented Tradition

Among the well-known authors who research Polish Tatars, music and dance particularly as related to Buńczuk are often couched in terms of “invented tradition” as put forward by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Radłowska in her article about Buńczuk’s role in establishing notions of Tatar identity, points to the dance troupe as an example of “invented tradition” due to the lack of generational transfer involved in their musical practices (Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 410; see also Radłowska 2018). This term “invented tradition” originates in Hobsbawm and Ranger’s text and the original definition is that an invented tradition “...is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1983, 1). They specify that the importance of their term lies in the tradition’s creation, either “actually created” or those which come about from a “brief and dateable period” (1983, 1). Despite its current widespread usage, Hobsbawm linked this term to a specific socio-historical context in which modernization in Europe was connected to an increase in the formation of traditions, coupled with those traditions’ perceived connection to a long and illustrious past (Babadzan 2000, 133). An example given in the second chapter by Hugh Trevor-Roper looks at Highland tradition, including the famous tartan kilts often popularly associated with Scotland, as an example of traditions that were created during the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>81</sup> These terms are of course not exclusive and are problematized and covered in-depth in Chapter One.

as part of a set of specific socio-historical conditions (1983). Trevor-Roper notes the political situation of Scotland vis-à-vis British violence and the later role that industrialization and the myth of the “noble savage” played in crafting the connection between the tartan and “Highland culture” (1983).

Similar to the historical work that Trevor-Roper did in pointing out the specific socio-historic context in which highland “traditions” such as the tartan were formulated as historical relics emblematic of a golden past, many authors within the Polish Tatar literature point to the lack of distinctive musical traditions in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the creation of Buńczuk in 1999 as a clear indication of an “invented tradition” symbolic of a rich historical connection with the Eurasian steppes (Radłowska 2018, 170; Szahidewicz 2015, 9). The stated goal of Buńczuk is to shape and build community identity; as Łyszczarz points out, “In the intention of the creator, the group was to become not only an artistic institution, but also a platform bonding the ethnic community and a space where the young generation would be brought up in the spirit of attachment to tradition” (2015a, 73). This connection between the founding of Buńczuk and attempts to strengthen intragroup bonds is reminiscent of one of the types of invented traditions, in which traditions work on “establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 9). It is in this sense that most of the literature points to music and dance among Polish Tatars, specifically Buńczuk, as an attempt to create a feeling of pride and, as Halina Szahidewicz points out, to integrate the younger generation of Polish Tatars and encourage them to take an active part in the community (Szahidewicz 2015, 9). In the introduction to Szahidewicz’s book on Buńczuk, the Grand Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz puts it succinctly, that “Our ‘Buńczuk’ is a cultural phenomenon consisting in the recovery of lost heritage, in its reconstruction, or better: in assimilating the values from the Tatar world of song and dance” (Szahidewicz 2015, n.p.). Two things should be noted here: first the work that “our” does in laying claim to Buńczuk as belonging to and representative of Polish Tatars as a whole, and secondly how the musical tradition is shown here not only in the light of revival, reconstruction, or recovery, but also an attempt to actively promote relations with the wider Tatar world beyond Polish borders in the here and now.

While I understand the impetus for using “invented tradition” in relation to Buńczuk given the troupe’s recent provenance, my issue with the concept of invented tradition, besides its widespread application beyond the authors’ original conception, is that it creates a problematic underlying distinction between “invented tradition” and those traditions left outside of this term. Invented tradition is defined as having a falsified deep historical past, but

anthropology has moved beyond ideas of cultures as bounded, static units in which traditions and customs are passed down without change throughout generations. In fact, as Handler and Linnekin point out, "...the ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life..." (1989, 41). To base an analysis on invented tradition assumes that there is such a thing as its opposite, tradition which has been continuously practiced and passed on, and that that difference is meaningful. However, traditions everywhere are constantly being reconstructed, revitalized, and (re)created, such that the concept of invented traditions loses its significance. Perhaps the better question is not whether Buńczuk and Polish Tatar dance in general is an example of invented tradition, but rather look at what role this practice has within this particular community and pull apart the work that dance does in order to consolidate images of the community as a whole and assume a mantle of authority.

As shown in the Miśkiewicz quote above, Buńczuk is referred to as a reconstruction, a revival; however, (re)constructing something does not infer that it is an exact copy, rather it may follow the guidelines, outlines, or foundations of what came before. As Bruner notes in his discussion of performances for tourists, often analysed through the lens of (in)authenticity, "there is no simulacrum because there is no original" (2005, 5). Each act, each performance is one that should be analysed as constitutive in its own right, not only in reference to a past to which it may or may not be a "truthful" representation, but rather as instances of creative imbrication. No one with whom I spoke seemed to portray Buńczuk as containing a tradition which has been passed on through the generations unchanged; rather it is very clearly referenced as a creation of a particular person at a particular time, which through the performative body works to suture subjectivities as both inherently Polish and simultaneously tied to transnational Tatariness. Rather than delineating these practices as "invented" in order to call attention to their recent creation by Szahidewicz, I follow my participants in calling them simply traditions. In doing so, I take seriously my interlocutors' views that Tatar practices—not only dance but also food and communal gatherings—have been passed down throughout generations or have their origins in the recent history of the community, without delineating between the two. I follow Murawski in his article on Zaryadye Park in Moscow and his calls for ethnographic realism, in which he states "...anthropologists are well equipped to produce substantive, reflexive ethnographic realism(s)—ones that treat the (un)reality concepts (or vernacular realisms) of our interlocutors as theories in themselves rather than as nuggets of emic curiosity to be endowed with analytical value only after being thoroughly churned through Latourian, Foucauldian, or Deleuzian black boxes" (2022, 475). To take seriously the ways in which our respondents

experience and represent their worlds, including how dance can at once be a “reconstruction” and a tradition simultaneously, is to give them the power to show us their world.

The determination of a tradition as “invented” can sound to some, particularly outside of academia, as a pronouncement about a certain activity or event’s legitimacy or authenticity. As Theodossopoulos points out, “In popular use, ‘invented,’ understood as ‘made up’ is juxtaposed to ‘authentic,’ understood as ‘genuine’” (2013, 348). The idea of authenticity can be particularly thorny, as it contains in it a value judgement, that for something to be inauthentic means it to be false, a fake. Handler notes that “assertions of authenticity always have embedded within them assertions of identity,” and thus must be taken seriously (2015, 251). Anthropologists have to be very careful using words such as “invented,” “genuine,” or “(in)authentic” precisely because they are pronouncements that can have very real effects on the communities we study. While there is a space for an historical understanding of traditions and whether time has created accretions or subversions, the determination of whether or not a tradition has changed is less important than how a tradition is constructed within a particular context and understood by our interlocutors.

The paradox at the heart of Polish Tatar dance practices is how they are held up as both distinctively Polish Tatar and yet they are predicated on the incorporation of practices from Tatar communities transnationally. The use of Crimean Tatar dance outfits, choreography from other Tatar and Turkic musical traditions, and reliance on trans-Tatarian choreographers point to an intimate intertwining between Polish Tatar and other Tatar traditions. The bringing together of various Tatar practices across space and time within dances as danced by Polish Tatars speaks to an embodied memory of a joint Tatar past in which the communities were not separated, but one. This contributes to a sort of memory work that appeals to an imagined past and is oriented towards a future in which such dances are representative of, and help to create, a particular Polish Tatar subjectivity. The creative work in combining dances from various Tatar peoples is undertaken by Polish Tatar dance leaders, with inspiration taken from dances found on YouTube and designed into choreography with help from dance teachers from Crimea, Bashkortostan, and Chechnya. Therefore, we could understand this as an artistic work painted by a Polish Tatar brush, while the dances are undertaken by Polish Tatar bodies. The participation of community members being in the moment, in the movement, with other Polish Tatars inscribes this practice with an affective depth which produces resonances of community despite, on another level, being “invented” in the recent past and relying on practices from other locations. This practice plays with the concepts of “(in)authenticity,” originality, and invention, pointing to the ways

that traditions are always incorporating new material and are in the process of becoming.

### “I do it to show my culture”: Representation and Dance

I met Krystyna in the centre of town at a café known for its sweets. I ordered a hot chocolate as I sat down, but I did not have to wait long before she walked in. With long dark hair and a quick smile she quickly put me at ease, and I felt as if I was talking to a friend rather than someone I had only met once at a dance rehearsal. I had originally planned about an hour for the interview, but we ended up talking for hours as the conversation flowed. She told me all about her life and involvement in Buńczuk. She described how she got into the troupe when she was young and told me about the dances that they do, that they are not “Polish Tatar” dances, but it still is worthwhile to be a part of the group because at rehearsals she is together with other Polish Tatars and the trips they take help to build rapport among them, “which is the most important thing.” As we sipped on our rich, sweet drinks and the clanking of glasses and laughing of the patrons around us continued, she leaned in and said, “I can show my own culture and I can show that I am a Tatar, and it has been so from generation to generation, and I am proud of it.” After the interview as I made the short way back to my apartment, I thought about our conversation and considered everything that she said. It was clear the importance of Buńczuk to her life and to the way that she expressed her belonging to the Polish Tatar community. Even if the dances or choreography were not “Polish Tatar dances” but were rather crafted through creative incorporation of transnational Tatar elements, it was through dancing that she was able to show her connection and pride in the community and demonstrate this to others. This section will discuss the ways in which dance among Polish Tatars is used to show their community to outsiders, presenting a particular narrative of familiar alterity while making a statement about their right to belong to the Polish nation. Simultaneously, dance works inward to build affective relations and stick members together, thus actively (trans)forming understandings of identity.

As discussed earlier using Nahchewsky’s terms, Polish Tatar dancing is an example of presentational dance as opposed to participatory dance, and thus the dances are made to be shown, not just experienced. Buńczuk, in both of its iterations, has performed all over Europe and in many different contexts, but generally to a non-Tatar audience. The desire to “show” or “represent” Polish Tatars to a foreign audience does not exist in a vacuum, but can be tied to the wider context regarding the view of minorities in Poland and the divisive political debate surrounding multiculturalism (wielokulturowość, multikulti). To put one’s community

on stage is to make a statement about one's presence, as a community among many to which attention must be paid. In Podlasie, a region which was once highly diverse but still has a strong minority presence, the ability for Polish Tatars to have a visible art form has political salience (Durydiwka and Kociszewski 2013, 94-95). In my discussion with Halina Szahidewicz, she mentioned various religious communities and the importance of coexisting, noting that she does not like the word "to tolerate." When I asked why, she responded, "Tolerance? Because someone must tolerate. I like you, so I don't tolerate. It isn't important for me if you are a Catholic or Muslim or Baptist or Jew. For me it isn't important. So if I tolerate, it is because I must. No, I coexist. For me coexistence is important in Poland and in the world for various religions with one another, different races, different colors of skin and different people in general."<sup>82</sup> This tolerance of difference is never politically neutral, but rather is closely connected to power and discourses which accept or deny certain types of difference. As Wemyss notes in her insightful article on the concept of tolerance and racism in East London, "... 'tolerance' can be best understood as the conditional withholding of force by those at the top of what I refer to as a 'hierarchy of belonging'" (2006, 215). In other words, to tolerate something is to deal with something unpleasant, as Szahidewicz notes "if I must," whereas she points out that the goal is to coexist, to live together despite (or perhaps due to) religious differences. Taken in this light, *Buńczuk* and its visible nature as a representation of Polish Tatars shows their ability, and right, to "coexist" and not just be "tolerated."

The narrative that *Buńczuk* presents to non-Tatar Poles is one of a distinctive, "oriental" community, a narrative which on one hand does not upset dominant ideas about the role of minorities in Poland but also puts their "otherness" on display. Both iterations of *Buńczuk* utilize Tatar costumes, often styled after Crimean Tatar dance outfits, along with songs and choreography taken from other dance traditions. The choreography is not always copied wholesale but adapted and mixed such that the presentation on stage speaks to a Polish Tatar creativity scaffolded on the practices of a transnational Tatar community. The narrative of Otherness only goes so far however, as the groups tie together various threads of identification through reciting poems that include both Polish and regional Polish Tatar authors, as well as the use of both Polish and Tatar languages in their concerts (Abłażewicz-Górnicka and Radłowska 2021, 414).

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<sup>82</sup> The word Szahidewicz used, "współżyć," implies closely living together and having positive relations with others. Thus, my English translation as "coexist" should be taken as the conception of living together in harmony, rather than the more neutral understanding as simply living in the same location.

When I met with Halina Szahidewicz in her apartment, a cosy flat filled with pictures, prayer beads, and other countless mementoes of her long life and involvement with Buńczuk, she told me that, “I tried to make it possible for young people to save their own identity, a feeling of identity—family, regional, and above all national. In order to remember about the country in which they live, because we are Muslims, Tatars, but Polish citizens.” We see here the importance of demonstrating and maintaining these particular aspects that she views as integral to Polish Tatar identity, which are tied together throughout Buńczuk’s repertoire and performances. There is a balancing act implicit in their representations—as distinctive from the rest of the Polish nation but only in ways which are not dangerous to their inclusion into the collective. The weaving together of (transnational) Tatar dances and songs with some texts in the Polish language make a political statement about their integral position as members of the wider nation at the same time as demonstrating themselves as a distinct community worthy of respect.

It could be argued that the performances undertaken by Buńczuk or the festivals at which they play such as Sabantuj, do not go far enough in pushing for a radical form of acceptance, but rather may contribute to the “folklorization” of different communities that reduces differences to “safe” subjects (Wiącek 2019, 150). Buchowski and Chlewińska state that “otherness” is acknowledged in Poland as long as “...it is practised in the private sphere or as an exotic custom, i.e. it implies activities that do not interfere with their image of the world and do not jeopardise the idea of a homogenous community and a sense of security based on cultural familiarity” (2012, 5). These questions are seen in Hann’s article about the Lemkos, a small group living in southern Poland, variously considered an ethnographic group by Reinfuss, by some in the community as part of a wider Ukrainian minority, or as a distinctive community themselves (Hann 2009b, 179). Hann notes that “Lemko identity may come to mean little more than occasional trips to grandfather’s village, a noisy weekend at a festival, and perhaps more or less token observance of certain religious holidays within the family,” elsewhere noting that the ability to show dances and other traditions to the majority group provides recognition within “very narrow limits” (Hann 2009b, 184; Hann 2009a, 20). The question is then to what extent practices such as Buńczuk allow the non-Tatar community a deeper understanding of Polish Tatars and affect their ability to be accepted as full-fledged members of the Polish nation? For the non-Tatar Poles with whom I spoke, many of them had personal experiences with Polish Tatars both within an everyday, personal setting and often through attending a festival such as Sabantuj or through dining at Tatarska Jurta. They often expressed to me that “our Muslims” are patriotic and that they enjoyed

seeing demonstrations of their dance and food practices. To what extent this approval goes beyond a “folklorization” of Polish Tatars it is difficult to say, but what was clear to me is that for the Polish Tatars who engaged in such activities, the ability to “represent their culture” to outsiders was a cause for pride and celebration beyond the instrumental effects that such practices may engender.

Buńczuk’s performances not only construct a unified narrative for non-Tatar Poles but help to create a Tatar community identity through the calling into place of particular discourses of culture and traditions. The goal of the troupe is often described as getting to “know” or having “awareness” of one’s identity or culture, something which is highlighted as particularly important for the younger generation. In the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary book on Buńczuk, Szahidewicz writes “...one of the goals behind the formation of the team was to strengthen the sense of their own identity of the young generation of Polish Tatars, to educate in action, among others, through respecting family traditions, learning about the history of our own and well-known families and learning about the tradition, including patriotic ones, of our own group...” (2015, 22). Thus, we can see how Polish Tatar dancing serves as a way for participants and those Tatar members of the audience to discover their identity tied to ideas of history and traditions, which is understood as able to be gleaned through the act of dancing. Theodossopoulos in his article on dance and self-awareness among the Emberá of Panama, notes the resurgence of some forms of dance due to the increase of tourism in the area and how this affects the role of dance among the Emberá themselves (2022). Dance is an important aspect of enticing tourists to their specific village and the author notes it is quite popular among those who witness it, with the special costumes and vivid movements providing a spectacle to not only watch, but participate in (Theodossopoulos 2022, 122). Not only has dance provided an economic benefit, but has also improved representations of the community abroad, such as photographs of the dancers being described using their preferred endonym (Theodossopoulos 2022, 131).

Despite the very different context, there are many overlaps between these two cases, including the role that these dances serve to create an image of the community for outsiders and craft a particular discourse in which variety and variance is smoothed into a unified image for tourist consumption. However, the aspect I would like to highlight is how these dances, despite ostensibly being “for” tourists, help to construct, define, and work on self-awareness among the dancers. “Gradually, their engagement with their dances has contributed to an increasing awareness of what the local dancers themselves see as constituting an Emberá identity” (Theodossopoulos 2022, 133). Participants in the two



Buńczuk troupes and those who were involved in the founding and propagation of Buńczuk focus on the ability for participation to help to “get to know” or have an “awareness” of one’s culture. In the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary book on Buńczuk, a section asked members to reflect on their time in the troupe. One couple said that “By learning Tatar dance, we were able to get to know our culture better and at the same time spend time with friends” (Szehidewicz and Szehidewicz 2015, 44). Thus, the revival and (re)construction of these dances, as constituted for a foreign audience, also contribute to the internal awareness of the community themselves.

Given that Polish Tatars did not have their own musical tradition upon which Buńczuk was based, the foundation of dance resources seems to be predicated upon ties to other Tatar communities across the borders, particularly with Crimean Tatars and places such as Tatarstan, communities which Selim Chazbijewicz in his reflection in the same publication describes as, “also in fact two different nations, covered by a common name, differing in geographic location, language, folklore, music” (Chazbijewicz 2015, 53). Despite differing in many ways, there is still some feeling of trans-Tatar connection which is able to be leveraged to scaffold identity and help Polish Tatars feel belonging, pride in their heritage, and stronger intragroup ties. “The youth singing and dancing group, founded in 1999 from the initiative of Halina Szahidewicz, thanks to the rather attractive form of transfer united the Tatar community around key values and cultural symbols. ‘Buńczuk’ makes easier the ethnic auto-identification of Polish Tatars” (Łyszczarz 2015b, 60). Thus, we can see the work that these practices of the body do to suture into being a particular subjectivity which draws on *tatarskość* in both local and global contexts. The bringing together of the younger generation, spending time together, meeting other Tatar youth at events such as Sabantuj, all serve to strengthen the understanding that Polish Tatar dance participants have of their own identity as members of the community—one which is not *both* Tatar and Polish but rather a creative interweaving of the two *at the same time*. Thus, music and dance form a particular intersection at which some of the boundaries of identity may lie – both betwixt and between intragroup bonds and intergroup representation.

Much of the literature on Polish Tatar dance focuses, as I did here, on the political and identificatory related aspects of the practice—the ways in which it presents a certain image of *tatarskość* to those outside of the community, serves as a touchstone for those within it, and helps to create bonds and pride in their heritage. Buńczuk in some ways can be seen as an example of how communities actively and creatively work to forge their own traditions, histories, and manage their relations with other communities. Instead of analysing Buńczuk

as a natural offshoot of an ethnic group wanting to represent their community, a view which assumes an already existing underlying substrate of ethnic ties upon which to draw, we can look at Buńczuk and music and dance more generally as a way in which identity both shapes and is shaped by the work of its members through the performative body.

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It was a warm day in Warsaw as the assembled crowd huddled around the plaque on the wall of the Muslim cemetery, eagerly awaiting its reveal. The plaque was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw and to honor the Polish Tatars who participated in the battle. I had gone to the event on a bus with a group from Białystok and we all milled around the Muslim cemetery, some individuals reading the gravestones while others performed the ritual of sielam for family members.<sup>83</sup> Buńczuk was there to recite poetry to help commemorate this event. All of the members were wearing the colourful, velvet costumes I had seen before, and they all carefully studied the paper their poem was written on. However, one of the members had his memorized and as his turn came up he slightly stood out from the rest, his bright blue eyes roaming the crowd as pronounced his speech with intensity. As he spoke he moved his body with the words, not in choreographed moves, but rather to accentuate the underlying message. Looking back on my notes from the day I wrote, “While I didn’t understand some of it, it still made me feel something, emotional, pride almost? Despite the fact that I’m not Tatar, it conjured something inside me.” Recalling that moment made me consider how performances can be moments saturated in emotions, for those participating and the observers as well, and to think through the role of these atmospheric reverberations.

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Here we see the ways in which Buńczuk’s presentations, which mix choreography, music, and poems, are emotionally replete events that connect the dancers to each other and to the audience through the experiential, moving body. The emotions that I felt watching the performance speak to the ways in which dance practices engage the senses of the audience, resonating in the moment. As philosopher Sheets-Johnstone puts it so aptly, “When a dance is *there* for us, we intuitively know that it is there; something alive and vibrant is happening on the stage, and as we are totally engaged in our experience of that happening, we too are alive and vibrant: we have a *lived experience*” (2015, 1 emphasis in original). The question

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<sup>83</sup> A ritual greeting for the dead performed at a cemetery. Sielam is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

remains however, of why dance has become so vital to understandings of Polish Tatar identity in Podlasie. Previous to Buńczuk's creation in 1999, dance was not understood as an important medium for cultural expression among Polish Tatars but is now one of the most visible representations of the community. My own initial reluctance to analyse Buńczuk, due perhaps to my own frightful lack of dance ability, was followed by an understanding that in discussing practices of this community I would be remiss to leave dance out; it is a particular medium which engages both the participant and the viewer through its affective, kinaesthetic, visual, and aural aspects in a unique way. Previous analyses of Buńczuk have perhaps not emphasized enough the role of the body in dance; after all Buńczuk is not a group presenting lectures or seminars but is a dance troupe, and yet the theory and anthropological understandings of dance have been missing.

Specifically, this is a type of knowledge produced through and by the body, which manufactures bodily affects which should be taken seriously. Besides the ability "to get to know one's culture," many dancers dance for the joy of it, for simply enjoying the pleasure of moving one's body. Halina Szahidewicz in her book pointed out the creativity of her dancers, despite being amateurs, who "...not only mechanically recreated dances to specific music and recited without thinking, but they did it with understanding, in full awareness of their own identity, the place in which they live and what they represent with themselves" (2015, 27). Not only are the dancers performing their given roles and choreography, but they are active agents in its presentation and creation, doing it with feeling. Sheets-Johnstone notes similarly, that dancers do not simply automatically repeat certain movements, but rather are unified with the dance such that there is a "unique interplay of fluid, ever-changing forces, a dynamic and cohesive flow of energy" (2015, 3). For the Buńczuk dancers then, not only are they recreating and representing dances which have been creatively formed from other Tatar communities, but through their movement they are embodying an experience which flows through them and connects to the audience. This is more than these dances serving as representations of *tatarskość* to non-members or a way to learn more about their community and its history, but is a "*lived experience*" which has affective flows, tides, and resonances for all those involved.

Not only is the audience watching, but they are active participants in the moment. Reynolds in her work on kinesthetic empathy notes how viewers are engaged in the energy flow created by what she calls the "dance's body," creating embodied, affective responses in the viewers. She argues that "...the dance spectator can be invested as both subject and object in a shared materiality and flow of choreographed movement across dancers' bodies"

(Reynolds 2012, 129). For Reynolds, the affective embodied response is not limited within an individual, but rather flows across and between viewers and dancers connecting them. If we take this idea seriously, we can imagine how Buńczuk's dances are able to bridge between spectators and the dancers to produce affective ripples which stick bodies to one another, perhaps hinting at why dance specifically has become one of the chosen mediums through which to experience and buttress identity formations among Polish Tatars.

Feeling, and the importance of dancing with understanding and emotions, was mentioned quite consistently, such as Katarzyna Warmińska who wrote in the 15th anniversary Buńczuk book, "Such activities undertaken by group leaders (leader), not always understandable at the beginning or accepted, as a consequence, bore fruit in the form of broadening the spectrum of Tatariness, with another dimension, carrying not only important values for the members of this community, but also feelings and emotions" (Warmińska 2015, 53). The emotions built through dancing, for those participating and those watching, emotions that stick and bind people together in deep, affective ways, need to be acknowledged. The founder of Buńczuk, Halina Szahidewicz perhaps said it best, when she described a presentation of some of her young members, "I saw that everything was authentic, that it flows directly from a child heart" (2015, 11). The role of the heart, of emotions, of the body in expressing this through dance should not be forgotten.

### Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the dance troupe(s) Buńczuk as founded by Halina Szahidewicz as a practice that works simultaneously on multiple levels, to not only represent Polish Tatars as a community but also to build the group as a collective in the world through deepening affective ties among members and pulling inspiration from transnational Tatar groups. The representation of Polish Tatars on stage both within Poland and abroad assists in promoting the vibrancy and uniqueness of their group, provoking questions of the "superhomogeneity" of Polish society (Buchowski 2016, 53). However, rather than analysing dance as a practice which flows from an already existing entity, I take dance to also be creative and conducive of forms of community and boundary making, binding members together. Through dancing with one another members strengthen ties, noting that through this they "learn more about [their] culture." This process is paradoxically predicated on integrating forms of dance, costumes, and choreography from other Tatar communities, a process which can be understood through the lens of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). However, I argue against this

term's efficacy in this context as I believe that it artificially creates a dichotomy between "invented traditions" and those left outside of this boundary. Rather, I posit that the importance of a practice lies not only in its historical trajectory, but also in its contemporary meaning to the community. Polish Tatar dance is a creative imbrication of Polish Tatar originality, bodily generation through choreography, and transnational ties, which work to adhere members together through feeling. This chapter argues that dance does not only represent a collective as a pre-formed subjectivity, but also looks at how dance actively shapes groups and forges connections, bringing together the individual and the collective through the affective, dancing body.

## **It Will Be Beautiful Yet: COVID Interlude**

I first remember hearing about COVID over Turkish tea and Polish biscuits in the main room of the Białystok prayer hall. After Friday prayers we would take a folding table and open it in the middle of the room, moving the chairs once set up for prayer and setting them around the table to ensure everyone a clear reach of the generous helping of biscuits. Small glass cups would be filled with piping hot Turkish tea, and we would discuss news in the community or the world, ranging from where to buy the best priced turkey meat, to the increased bus ticket prices, to the type of fruit growing in someone's allotment. Mostly women stayed, but occasionally one or two men would join us, gender segregation not being a norm for Polish Tatars. Sometimes non-Tatars, usually Turkish foreign exchange students, would stay after prayers but they often sat away from us in the larger men's section and spoke among themselves, the complicated Polish language serving as too high a barrier for communication.

It was at one of these tea sessions that I first remember hearing about COVID, the women sharing whispers and rumours of a spreading sickness, news stories in which an illness that was not well known was claiming lives. Things changed quickly; as cases skyrocketed and people began to take this new threat seriously, businesses began closing and weekly gatherings I used to attend like Friday prayers and religious study sessions were postponed or cancelled. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I wrote in my field notes that I was having difficulty with loneliness as contact was increasingly restricted, and I was struggling with how to move forward in my research. At the end of that entry I wrote, “I hope this blows over soon.”

Now three years on from that entry and several lockdowns in, my naïve hope stands in stark relief to what we have come to know. The descriptions in my fieldnotes of empty aisles in the grocery store and memes about toilet paper shortages almost seem to come from a different world, one in which it made sense to hoard Spirytus, a particularly strong Polish vodka, to use as an anti-COVID hand sanitizer since it could not be found in stores. Fear not only of the illness but of border shutdowns, of being separated from friends and family in a country in which I had just started feeling comfortable, seems to drip off my fieldnote entries. So in a thesis which talks about belonging and community, it only makes sense to talk about those moments that call that surety into question, when the bonds of community are strained. In a time in which contact was restricted, how did communities try to rally around their members, particularly those most vulnerable to COVID? How did individuals deal with the loneliness of lockdowns? How can responses to COVID shed light not only on communities, but on the researchers studying them?

This interlude is an attempt to briefly look at how the COVID pandemic affected my interlocutors among the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie, how they dealt with the change in life routines that it brought on, and how this methodologically affected the research that I was able to produce in this very particular historical context. Shortly after COVID became world news, I noticed that academics were quick to discuss its effects, flows, and affective responses, ranging from analysing bread making during the pandemic to the conspiracy theories which abounded, particularly as the vaccine came into production (Davies 2021; Sobo and Drażkiewicz 2021). Conferences quickly popped up discussing the pandemic from every angle and references to COVID in publications were legion. Perhaps this chapter does not break new ground—it is passé to point out that in many ways sociality transferred to the digital sphere—but I rather hope that this section can capture in resin a sense of time and

place and demonstrate not only how a certain community dealt with a crisis, but what my reaction as a researcher has to say about anthropology and the ethics of our research.

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In reminiscing about my time in Poland at the beginning of the pandemic, what sticks out most to me is the aurality of it, the shift from sound to nothingness. My apartment was located in the city centre of Białystok, perhaps a 5-minute walk from the stary rynek (old market), the open square in which I had dinner the first night I arrived in Białystok. The stary rynek was always buzzing with conversations, laughter, and music. During hot summer days the many ice cream stands would be overflowing with families and children running around the plaza, faces plastered with sugary residue, while during the night the clubs which lined the outside of the market would come alive with crowds of students from the local university. My life revolved around movement, often going to the nearby mall where my gym was located, or to the prayer house for Friday prayers or religious lessons, or on the weekends to a nearby town or village for an event sponsored by MZR (Muslim Religious Union) or ZTRP (Union of Tatars). I would often return to my apartment after a long day and flop exhausted on the couch, only to have a friend pop by for pizza or phone to ask if I fancied a walk.

For a little while Poland remained COVID case free—or at least that is what was reported on the news.<sup>84</sup> On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the first official reported case of COVID was announced and a short while later on March 12<sup>th</sup> the country entered its first lockdown. All nonessential businesses were closed, and grocery stores implemented social distancing rules.<sup>85</sup> WhatsApp groups with my interlocutors and friends were busy with conversations regarding the virus, how to protect ourselves from it, and speculations over what to expect. There was fear of food shortages, and so I was advised to quickly go to the nearby grocery store to have enough food to last two weeks. Once there I was confronted with empty shelves,

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<sup>84</sup> TVP (Telewizja Polska) is the public news network and is widely considered to support the ruling party PiS. Thus, some of my interlocutors expressed doubt about the government's publicized case numbers and the news' treatment of these numbers as fact. "A recurring theme of [private media] criticism was that the 'state is purposely hiding the numbers' to enhance its chances of winning the elections, in part by lifting the lockdown quickly. The state's rush to run elections at a time when health risks were still high only enhanced public suspicion of its motives" (Sobo and Drązkiewicz 2021, 68).

<sup>85</sup> Some researchers have started using the term "physical distancing" instead of "social distancing" in an attempt to make clear that despite being apart physically, people are still able to come together socially in other ways, including through online interactions. I choose to continue using the phrase social distancing as this was the term used in Polish during my fieldwork (dystans społeczny).





Figure 8: Empty shelves in Biedronka, a popular grocery store

as most of the rice and pasta were gone, leaving me with the less desired canned goods. Leaving the house was only allowed for essential purposes such as going to the pharmacy, and friends told me of instances in which they were stopped by the police and asked why they were outside of the house. MZR responded quickly to the pandemic, announcing via Facebook that Friday prayers and religious classes were cancelled. Thus we entered the first lockdown, in which cases in Podlasie were still low compared to other countries and counties, but fear and uncertainty ran high.

As has been commonly noted, the social distancing rules and physical restrictions forced sociality to move online. This reflects what happened during my fieldwork; as the lockdown dragged on past what was first imagined as a short quarantine period into a months long complete change of life, people increasingly relied on online communication and media platforms to talk, make plans, and engage with community members.<sup>86</sup> MZR continued to actively post on their Facebook page, encouraging people to read the books and leaflets published by their organization while the public observed the stay at home orders, showing an attempt to maintain religious engagement despite the required closing of their place of prayer. The lockdown also coincided with Sha‘ban (Szaban), the month in which it is customary to prepare oneself spiritually for the upcoming holy and demanding month of Ramadan. Through an announcement on their Facebook page and WhatsApp messages circulated through the community, MZR encouraged people to pray salawat (salawat), a salutation to Muhammad, at home and send the number of prayers said to an imam with the goal of reaching one million prayers.<sup>87</sup> I was told that not only were Muslims in Białystok involved in this campaign, but that Muslims from Belgium, Russia, and Ukraine were also sending in their prayers, thus pointing to the ways that the Tatar Muslim community in Białystok has attachments far beyond state borders.

<sup>86</sup> In the beginning of the lockdown to encourage people to observe social distancing rules, the hashtag #zostanwdomu (stay at home) was popularized. The film “Home Alone” (Kevin Sam w Domu), perhaps the most popular Christmas film in Poland, was shown in March by Polsat instead of its regular programming on Christmas Eve, with the message “Be like Kevin, stay at home” (“Bądź jak Kevin, zostań w domu”).

<sup>87</sup> The salawat in Polish reads: Allahumma salli ala sajjidina Muhammadin ʔa ala ali sajjidina Muhammad, or in English, Bless, O Allah, Muhammad and the people of Muhammad.

The speed at which the community was able to shift religious practices and forms of relationship building once done in person to the online sphere shows the creativity with which people responded to the pandemic and the novel situations in which we were placed. I was told that the older members of the community were particularly well represented in this attempt, sending in multitudes more prayers than the younger members of the community. This active participation of the older generation in praying the *salat* MZR posted shows a desire to be involved, particularly since the lockdown and closing of prayer houses affected the elderly more directly as many of them expressed difficulty or an inability to pray by themselves. The lockdowns of course had widespread effects, as lessons which I had been attending in the nearby town of Sokołka, Arabic lessons at the prayer house, and religious lessons for children were all put on hold. We did find ways to continue in some way, as the leader of the Arabic class asked us to practice our Arabic at home and send him WhatsApp voice messages with our homework so that he could correct our pronunciation, while religious lessons for children were moved online.<sup>88</sup>

The attempt to maintain community among the Muslim population in Podlasie during lockdown was particularly important because social distancing orders continued into Ramadan. My only experience of this holy month among the Polish Tatars was thus unprecedented, and so in discussions with my interlocutors we often discussed how Ramadan looked in the past and how it was different in 2020. They often pointed to Ramadan as a time in which the community would come together for *taraweeh* prayers at the prayer house, followed by *iftar* (communal dinners) often lasting late into the night.<sup>89</sup> Many of my participants described this as a time of togetherness, fondly remembering eating communally with other Muslims and praying together into the night as motivating them to a higher level of religious devotion. Some interlocutors expressed that Ramadan during lockdown was more difficult, as they did not have the external motivation of other community members to rely upon. Perhaps in an attempt to counterbalance this, MZR announced on their Facebook page

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<sup>88</sup> I was told that students were given tasks similar to what they would have done in lessons, such as having to learn a certain *surah* by heart, and then they would discuss it via WhatsApp or messenger. This did not work perfectly for all students, as some did not have access to reliable internet. Thus, it should be noted that while many aspects of life moved online during the pandemic, we cannot assume that everyone has equal access to that online world.

<sup>89</sup> Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and is the most holy, consisting of fasting from sunup until sundown and is a time of spiritual reflection. Many mosques including the prayer house in Białystok host *iftar*, or a dinner for the breaking of the day's fast. *Taraweeh* prayers are special prayers in the evening of Ramadan, consisting of 8-20 *rakats* (units of prayer) and extended readings of the Quran. These prayers can be long and last until midnight.

set times in which to perform taraweeh prayers so that everyone would be able to pray together temporally while still physically separated, pointing to the ways in which community bonds were stretched and yet maintained through the online world. Ramadan Bajram did end up taking place in a very reserved fashion, as only a handful of people went to the mosque at Bohoniki where they were required to stay outside in the rain and were advised not to bring sadoga, the food offerings which are brought by Polish Tatars to Friday prayers and especially during Bajram celebrations.

The pandemic brought physicality into stark relief and the inability for the body to move in ways that were previously taken for granted, as I consciously attempted to maintain distance from others in the grocery store or on the sidewalk. I noticed a longing for physical contact in a way I never thought of before, as faces on a screen felt like a poor substitute for in person meetings. I felt a vast lacuna between life in the past and current attempts to keep up with my friends, family, and participants through online resources. Whereas in the past I had been an avid runner and was often busy with research events outside of my apartment, my life had been reduced to days spent on the couch in the living room and nights sleeping in my bed. On March 6<sup>th</sup> I wrote, “My movement across Poland has been cut to movement between soft surfaces in my apartment.” This change in physicality was noted by my interlocutors, particularly my older participants, as involvement in community events stalled and their lives were curtailed by their apartment walls. The government closing of forests, popular walking spots for many in the Podlasie area, signalled the extremity of the situation as even open, wild places were positioned as dangerous sites of infection.<sup>90</sup> Many participants noted the loneliness and boredom of being stuck at home, separated from family and community, despite actively attempting to cultivate these relationships in an online form.

The shift in the aural landscape of my field site was palpable as COVID restrictions continued. My morning routine was calculated by the sound of the police car driving by my window, announcing a state of epidemic and telling us all to stay indoors for our safety, while my nights were signalled by a lack of sound, as the laughing and yelling of people leaving the bars or clubs of the stary rynek faded and left emptiness in its stead. The nights were silent now, as people stayed inside and only ventured out for essential items during the day. One

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<sup>90</sup> From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, access to forests and national parks were forbidden due to fears regarding people congregating in these open areas. However, the RPO (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, Commissioner for Human Rights) issued a statement on April 7<sup>th</sup> that the government’s restriction of access to forests has no basis in the law and suggested a repeal (Derda 2020).

evening I decided that I needed a short walk around my block, as the strain of staying inside all day was both mentally and physically draining. The night was cool on my face and the sky clear. As I exited an alleyway, I saw the massive Galeria Jurowiecka mall that was once a hotspot of movement and life, now locked up with dark, empty windows staring out onto the street. I turned up the next road to make my way back towards the stary rynek, which was the first time I had seen it since the lockdown began. As I wrote in my notes, “The normal bustling square was dark and deserted except for two teenage girls sitting on a bench in face masks. Two Turkish restaurants were open for takeout. The dark, empty storefronts were haunting. Written on the door on one restaurant was ‘jeszcze będzie pięknie’ (It will be beautiful yet) and I thought that was really nice.” As time went on and the writing slowly started to chip away, I did not know whether I found the image reassuring or haunting.



Figure 9: Writing on the restaurant door, "It will be beautiful yet"

The views of my participants as to how the government handled the pandemic were mixed. Some thought the politicians were acting unconstitutionally by imposing rules such as mask wearing, while others felt that they had not done enough to protect citizens' health. The presidential election that was to be held May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, was a constant source of conversation, along with the ever-changing COVID restrictions. There were heated discussions among my interlocutors and commentators in the media as to the propriety and legality as to when to hold the election, how long to postpone it if it was not going forward on the original day, and the possibility of using obligatory voting by post to avoid health concerns associated with going to polling stations. Eventually an agreement was struck between political leaders and the first round of voting occurred on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and the second round on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Theories abounded as to how harmful the virus actually was, the numbers of cases, and as conversations about the vaccine came to the forefront, the safety of it.<sup>91</sup> As restrictions were lifted on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June there seemed to be a break, as life

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<sup>91</sup> Given the socio-historical post-socialist context of Polish politics and the public's uncertainty of the government's good faith in looking out for their needs, these "conspiracy" theories are found not only on the

returned to some semblance of normality.<sup>92</sup> However, as restrictions were lifted cases rose, and soon we were in the midst of a second lockdown. This pattern was noted not only in Poland but more generally. “Responding to the emerging direct costs of lockdown, restrictions often loosened—but too early, only to be tightened again regionally or nationally when spikes of new infections occurred” (Wahlberg, Burke, and Manderson 2021, 8). While some once again donned masks, others resisted attempts to go back into lockdown and on October 10<sup>th</sup> a protest in Białystok and other Polish cities against mandatory mask wearing demonstrated public resistance against continued restrictions. The first COVID vaccine in Poland was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2020, and the vaccine’s arrival sparked lively conversations with my interlocutors, as some vowed to get it as soon as it was available, while others were dubious about its origins and safety. Discussions about the effect the pandemic was having on businesses were widespread. In a follow up interview I conducted with Dżenneta of the Tatarska Jurta, she explained that her businesses were temporarily closed, and the pandemic had had a “tragic” effect. However, she remained hopeful that the situation would improve and said that together with her family, “we can get through it.”

Thankfully, I was able to escape the virus and no one I personally knew had long term effects from the illness. This is not to say that the Muslim community in Podlasie was left unscathed. The leader of the Muslim League (Liga Muzułmańska w RP) Mufti Nedal Abu Tabaq passed away on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 from COVID. I had personally only met him once, but from those who knew him he was a kind, open, honest man who worked tirelessly for interreligious dialogue in Poland. My own experience of lockdown was firstly marked by boredom, later by loneliness, and as time went on, by ethical dilemmas regarding my work and my place in Białystok as a foreign researcher. Originally my fieldwork was primarily done via the anthropological method of participant-observation, with additional research done via semi-structured interviews. The very nature of my research required personal contact in close spaces, the very type of interactions that were restricted during this time. As the first lockdown lasted from March into April, I decided to move more into the digital space, analysing Facebook groups and performing interviews via phone, WhatsApp,

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fringes but are given certain weight. “Although since 1989 the government has changed often, Polish suspicion towards authority abides regardless of who is in power. In this context critical questions and theories that might be labelled as conspiracy theories are given space as a valid form of political engagement” (Sobo and Drażkiewicz 2021, 78).

<sup>92</sup> The news outlet *Gazeta Wyborcza* asked readers whether the government was right to lift most of the restrictions. Readers were mixed, with 44% agreeing with the relaxing of restrictions and 56% disagreeing with the statement.

and video calls. However, the more difficult ethical and methodological issues came later, as COVID still abounded and yet my participants, with some exceptions, returned to everyday life. I would get invitations for events, some which I knew would be more COVID conscious and some in which I knew that social distancing would not be observed. As time went on and life in the community resumed a normal pace, I had to question my ability to return to my position as a researcher and what the ethical ramifications of such a move would be. In one of my entries, I note that I had a dream in which I was in a mall with several of my older participants, and suddenly I realized that I was not wearing a mask or social distancing. I wrote that “I was hit with a wave of panic, thinking that I needed to move away from them.” The pandemic had even entered my subconscious.

Questions as to what communal gatherings I should attend, or if I should attend them at all, was at the forefront of my mind. Ethical issues have always been a part of anthropological research, as we struggle to ensure that the research we do is not exploitative of our participants, and the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief questions of why we do the research that we do. As Olson notes, “Our field is a ‘high touch’ endeavour, requiring the formation of relations, building trust, negotiation—no matter how you spin it, anthropology is not a six-feet-apart scenario” (2021, 170). I felt this clearly in my attempt to reorient my research methodology, as in person interviews and traditional participant-observation were no longer options. I began to ruminate on the necessity of in-person contact for my research in a situation in which contact is either unlawful or immoral.

As lockdown progressed and it became clear that the temporary lockdown was not so temporary, there was an attempt to discuss how to do anthropological research given the new parameters, with a push towards using the digital sphere as a way to continue research during lockdown (Miller 2020). It is true and perhaps banal to point it out now, “yet it is true that a greater share of human sociality will move online, that this will reshape offline socialities, and that anthropology must take this into account” (Boellstorff 2020). The popularity of online movie viewing parties, group Zoom calls, WhatsApp group messages, working from home, and online shopping certainly gives weight to the assumption that in lieu of the possibility of in-person meetings people were able to make other forms of sociality and daily living through the online sphere, as MZR attempted to do for the religious life of Polish Tatars in Podlasie (Wahlberg, Burke, and Manderson 2021, 17). However, while digital research certainly has its space and something special to contribute, it should be noted that people interact differently in the digital space versus in person. Many of my interlocutors are

older and so setting up video chats or trying to use applications like Facebook or Instagram either were not good substitutes or simply were not possibilities. For a foreign researcher, phone calls with spotty service and lack of body language made communication much more difficult when conversations were being had in a secondary language. In a discussion of the effect of COVID on anthropological research, Navaro notes some things to reflect on, including "...the intrusion of screens between people, the impossibility of eye contact on Zoom, the difficulty of deciphering the meaning of what has been said because of its mediation by online technology, and the inaccessibility of affective and tactile clues that make conversations robust and understandable at a deeper, embodied, perhaps non-discursive level" (2020). This is not to say that digital ethnography does not have a place, but it is important to take into account the important differences that are emphasized through various methods of research.

Beyond simply modifying our toolbox to include more digital options, as researchers we should use this time to really self-reflect on our research and to question why we do what we do when the stakes for our health and our participants' health are higher than ever. As Ramos-Zayas notes, "The current era may be a good moment to rethink how we orient ourselves and our research, to discover what is really needed, rather than being self-indulgent, and to focus on what is relevant" (2020). As I struggled to decide how to do my research during the lockdown and as I reflect on my time in Poland, I think as researchers more than ever we need to think about our interlocutors' needs and what we can do to orient our research not only in order to increase anthropological knowledge but also to practically help the people with whom we work. The effects of a worldwide pandemic have only emphasized more strongly how anthropologists must advocate for their interlocutors and ask what good can come from our work beyond collecting knowledge.

Reflecting on the ways that Polish Tatars reacted, engaged with, and understood the COVID pandemic demonstrates how sociality moved online, but also its limitations. While MZR engaged creatively with the government restrictions, posting chutbahs (Islamic sermons), prayer times, and literature for community members to read, watch, and engage with online, there was simultaneously a strong reaction to the loneliness and isolation that was prompted by the pandemic lockdowns. In conversations with my participants, there was a repetitive refrain as they decried the inability to meet with friends, the imperative to sit at home, to being "locked up at home." The speed with which many interlocutors returned to social life when restrictions lifted and yet danger remained high, speaks to the way that

activities, events, and meetings remain an important facet of their life, one which was not able to be satisfactorily moved to the online sphere. The online chutbahs that were originally recorded as a way to keep the community together online despite being stuck inside are still published every week on the MZR Facebook, a testament to the enduring aftershocks of that time. Sitting in the comfort of my home in 2023, it can be difficult to remember the fear and uncertainty that reigned during the early months of the pandemic, but what is clear is the resilience and creativity with which the community dealt with those unprecedented times.



## 4

### **Communal Gatherings: Affect, Temporalities, and Togetherness**

The mosque filled up quickly. By the time we arrived the cramped women's section was already full, and we are told to make prayer lines in the courtyard of the small, wooden mosque in the village of Bohoniki. Rugs were laid out in a bricolage of colour with chairs interspersed for those less able to stand. Everyone was dressed in their best clothes, generally suits for the men and trousers or skirts for the women, with meticulously done hair and makeup. Abayas and hijabs were visible here and there in the crowd. The imam informed us that we needed to separate by gender—we had all prepared as if to pray in one integrated group. While some had come to participate in the prayer, many were watching from the back or sitting on benches scattered about the property. Children ran around noisily playing with one another, a fact that perturbed one of the organisers who reminded people several times to move into the designated praying area. The azan blared out over the loudspeakers, prompting everyone to move into position. We sat in preparation behind one of the imams who was

there to serve as an example for us to follow, a critical step when many of the older in the congregation do not know how to pray on their own.

The prayer passed quickly, and the crowd soon began milling around, exchanging the traditional greeting “z Bajramem” (with Bajram) and handing out sadoga in the form of candies and sweet buns. People clasped one another, laughing and chatting with friends and family they had not seen in a long time and inquiring after those who could not make it. After almost a year living among the Polish Tatars, I was familiar with many of the faces I saw. Still, the closeness of bodies and loud conversations permeating the air was overwhelming, and I peered around for Zosia who I knew would be there with her husband and oldest child. She was standing near the courtyard gate in long black trousers and a sea green blazer, and her eyes crinkled in delight as she saw me. Perhaps seeing my confusion as the crowd started to disperse, she explained that next will be the sacrifice, and then most people will either walk or take the short drive to the nearby mizar (Muslim cemetery), and finally return home for lunch with close family.

I glimpsed one of the local imams who had befriended me early in my fieldwork, and he escorted me to the open field across the road from the mosque where the sacrifice would be taking place. As we began walking in that direction we exchanged pleasantries with Magda, Agata, and other women from the Islamic group I frequented and others that I knew by face, if not by name. As we came upon the field, the bull had already been prepared for the sacrifice, tied but with one of its legs left free, while the ram was being led out of the trailer behind me. I watched the sacrifice—no photography allowed—attempting to maintain an open mind and understand the spiritual significance of this moment while still finding it hard to watch the bull dying on the ground in front of me. I chose not to stay for the cutting and dispersal of the meat, instead choosing to meet friends at the mizar to observe the ritual of sielam.

Down the road past a handful of wooden houses, then a left turn down a tree-lined dirt road sits the mizar. Set back in the middle of an open meadow, I was used to the only sounds being the wind and the occasional bird call, but in this moment the space was alive as family groups wandered among the graves, cleaning weeds from the gravesites and huddling around tombstones to perform sielam. People used this time to catch up with family or friends and to (re)affirm connections to loved ones, both living and dead. I took the opportunity to be a researcher and set up several interviews for the following week.

The crowd slowly dissipated as people left to have lunch with their families. I headed to Zejnab's house, one of the older women I knew from my fieldwork, for the holiday meal. Happy to finally be inside the warm comfort of a home after several hours in the cold, we shared generous helpings of tea, freshly baked apple cake (szarlotka) and shots of vodka. We talked about who was present at the prayer, who could not make it, what people wore, but we mostly talked about change. She reminisced about the past, about picnics held communally by the mosque and the shared food and conversation. It is just not the same anymore she would sigh, before changing the subject. I stayed late into the evening before returning by bus to my apartment, winding through the darkened fields and forests of rural Podlasie.

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This vignette paints a picture of my experience of Kurban Bajram in Bohoniki and the ways in which community, affect, and movement are called upon within holidays and other events in meaningful, and sometimes ambivalent, ways. This chapter will discuss the two most important Polish Tatar holidays, Kurban Bajram and Ramdan Bajram, along with various other heritage events, religious holidays, and rituals as locations in which Polish Tatar identity is discussed, negotiated, and/or (re)confirmed. My interlocutors impressed upon me the vital role that holidays and communal gatherings have within Polish Tatar life, and so they are important moments in which to analyse how their iterative qualities work to “suture” identity, belonging, and affect together into a narrative of cultural continuity and stability (Hall 1996, 5). Affective relations are strengthened through bodies in contact and the coming together of dispersed individuals to a location rich with community history, pointing to a thick nexus of bodies and earth and roots. However, in practice, there is always instability and the possibility of change and subversion. Holidays and group events are also locations in which identity is contested and broken down, in which there is a *lack* of performance. Older participants noted the ways in which celebrations of Bajramy have changed from community wide moments of sharing to meetings of nuclear family units, while smaller events such as Friday prayers or czyny (acts of cleaning the mizar) are attended by predominantly older women, thus demonstrating a stratification that belies the understanding of these gatherings as solidifying group cohesion. While holidays and group events are traditionally analysed as locations in which group identity is enacted and confirmed, I will explore the ways in which they are also locations of instability, contestation, and loss.

This chapter will look at how community events help define, clarify, solidify and question group boundaries and formations of identity through the performance of affective, moving subjects who both shape and are shaped by these communal moments. The calendar of events put on by various organisations geared towards the Polish Tatar community is rich, including but not limited to Friday prayers, Bajramy, conferences, lectures, book publishing events, dance recitals, food workshops, balls, and calligraphy classes.<sup>93</sup> Most of these events were sponsored by MZR (Muslim Religious Union) or ZTRP (Union of Tatars) with some organized by the Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku (University of the Third Age) or, in the case of Sabantuj, the Tatarska Jurta.<sup>94</sup> While varying in nature from formal to informal celebrations and organised with various goals from explicitly religious, to educational, to social, all of these events were understood as moments in which the spatially distanced Polish Tatar community was able to come together and in some way reaffirm ties to the broader group. What I will call throughout this chapter “communal gatherings” refers to events or moments that are organised or scheduled as set apart from everyday life, in which the target audience is the public, Polish Tatar community at large as opposed to “rites of passage,” which are privately addressed to a specific, nuclear family unit.<sup>95</sup>

Through utilising a lens of embodiment and group affect, this chapter will analyse how communal gatherings work as sites of identity management, locations of deep, affective resonances, and spaces of contestation and debate. Thus, I will not be organising events based on the stated “goal,” meaning that there will be no division between events that some interlocutors may classify as “religious” and others which may be termed “cultural events” or “festivals.” To do so would reify religion as something which exists as a separable category

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<sup>93</sup> Due to space limitations this chapter will not be able to speak about every type of event, but rather I will focus on those events which were described by my interlocutors as the most affectively resonant, those which call into place a particular “Polish Tatar” subjectivity.

<sup>94</sup> Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku (University of the Third Age) is a national group which organizes events for the elderly, specifically for pensioners (those in their “third age” in other words, past their economically “productive” years). While not a “Polish Tatar” organization, prominent and very active Polish Tatar Lila Asanowicz organizes educational classes about Polish Tatars through its Sokółka branch. There is a sizeable Polish Tatar community in Sokółka due to its proximity to Bohoniki and greater economic opportunities.

<sup>95</sup> My focus on large scale, community wide events as opposed to “rites of passage” means that certain events which may be considered important Polish Tatar family rituals are necessarily glossed over. Similarly, practices such as sunniet (circumcision), are not discussed in this chapter as they are no longer widely practiced. Popular up to the interwar period, sunniet was often performed by a member of the Jewish community but after the devastation of WWII this practice quickly waned due to a lack of qualified individuals to perform it (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2018, 161-163). In the course of my own research, I was told that this practice is no longer performed and is now more commonly associated with non-Tatar Muslims.

and not a practice that is interwoven, though sometimes unevenly, into individual and social existence.

This chapter will firstly describe how such communal gatherings are understood within the extant anthropological literature, examining the concept of “ritual” and “event” and the terms’ limitations and applicability to my field site. Then I will analyse the importance of communal gatherings to Polish Tatars and how these spaces were understood by my interlocutors as temporal sutures which both induce and signify belonging to the community through thick, affective ripples, effects, and flows. This section will examine the complex intertwining of performativity and affect through the body to try to understand how these events are experienced and understood by my interlocutors as places in which belonging is deeply felt. Lastly, this chapter will look at communal gatherings not only as places in which belonging, continuity and stasis are embodied, but also as sites of debate, rupture, and contestation, focusing on how these gatherings have perceived to change throughout time and the role that transnational relations and current events have had on the community. This chapter will attempt to understand how these communal gatherings both help to tie the community together and enact bonds of belonging, but also are locations in which the (lack of) performance highlight tensions, cracks, and fissures within images of a cohesive whole.

This emphasis on communal gatherings overlaps with several areas of anthropological literature, such as those focusing particularly on rituals, holidays, events, or festivals. Much of the work on Polish Tatars divides communal gatherings based on the stated goal of the event, with events such as Sabantuj analysed through a “cultural festival” lens, while Bajramy, azan, and other events are seen as religious rituals (for example: Radłowska 2018; Warمیńska 1999). Once at the forefront of anthropological thought, ritual was discussed by many of the most significant anthropologists, including Durkheim, Geertz, Radcliffe-Brown, Leach, Levi-Strauss, and Turner, among many others (Durkheim [1912] 1995; Geertz 1973; Radcliffe-Brown 1965; Leach 1968; Lévi-Strauss 1994; Turner [1969]1996). While the definition of ritual varies among the researchers listed, in a most general way, it tends to refer to some activity set aside from everyday practice, in which ritual is understood as existing on one side of a dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Geertz defined it as “some sort of ceremonial form...[in which] the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another,” while Leach chooses a perhaps more circumscribed definition of

ritual as, “a body of custom specifically associated with religious performance” (Geertz 1973, 112; Leach 1968, 521). While my focus is on events which in some way represent a break in the flow of everyday life—they are scheduled and attended by people from different households—a focus on “ritual” as variously defined would limit my scope to that which my interlocutors may describe as religious in nature.<sup>96</sup>

Instead, I intend to move beyond a focus on “rituals” or “cultural festivals” to highlight the “event.” I follow after Kapferer in the analysis of an event “...that goes beyond conventional perspectives of the event as representational of the social or of society and, instead, as a moment or moments of immanence and the affirmation and realization of potential” (2015, 2). Thus these events, or communal gatherings as I call them, include rituals (rytuał/rytuały) such as sielam, holidays such as Bajramy, and other gatherings such as lectures, book events, and workshops because they are all important, ephemeral moments in which the spatially distanced Polish Tatar community come together, before dispersing again. These are moments which not only represent understandings of their collectivity, but also help to actively fashion what it means to be Polish Tatar in the current socio-political climate as an “affirmation and realization of potential” (Kapferer 2015, 2). This analysis follows Duffy and Waitt’s analysis of festivals as “...in fact, a paradoxical thing; festival events function as a form of social integration and cohesion, while simultaneously they are sites of subversion, protest or exclusion and alienation. It is precisely this paradoxical nature that creates the festival’s socio-spatial and political significance for notions of community and belonging” (2011, 55). While Duffy and Waitt’s work focuses on “festivals,” they maintain the same analytical foundation that I hold in this chapter, in that events are not simply representations of the world but also produce new meanings through the process (see also: Leal 2016). An analysis of communal gatherings in general allows me to locate these events as both sites of thick, affective movement which produce deeply felt resonances of belonging, while simultaneously being spaces in which discussions regarding age, religion, and the effects of transnational economic flows affect the ways in which Polish Tatar identity is made manifest in these moments.

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<sup>96</sup> I speak in generalities here, as a summary of the anthropological work on ritual is far beyond the scope of this chapter. There are wide discrepancies between how various anthropologists define ritual, and this work is not intended to delve into the debate but rather to move the focus away from categories such as “religious events,” “religious rituals, or “cultural events” in discussions of Polish Tatar social life.

My analysis of events attempts to look at them as complex, multifaceted interactions of individuals that cannot be reduced to one understanding but rather entail ritual, festival, politics, religion, and socialization in complex ways. Fibiger, in his analysis of the Shi'a observance of Ashura, uses a similar approach as he tries to see how participants interact and understand Ashura outside of narrow limitations of religion and politics, instead looking at the work these occasions do within social terms (2015). "In this view, 'Ashura is an annual festival that creates an opportunity to get out and about, to see the processions as cultural performances, to meet people, and to feel an attachment to one's community'" (Fibiger 2015, 32). Fibiger pays attention to the complexity of events in which participants had multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings of Ashura that united political, religious, and social motivations for participating. Similarly, I would like to understand communal gatherings among Polish Tatars as complex interactions of individuals who bring different interpretations to the field, and simultaneously create an important scaffolding upon which contemporary Polish Tatar identity is built.

To demonstrate the reason for such a move, let us take a brief look at the communal gatherings of Ramadan Bajram and Kurban Bajram, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, often analysed in the literature on Polish Tatars as religious rituals. The actual moments in which participants are engaged in practices that are described as "ritual" by informants are quite small in relation to the field of other interactions that take place during the day. Besides the prayer there is the milling about afterwards, the giving of sadoga, meeting friends and family at the mizar, and the family dinners afterwards. All of those moments are sites which constitute identity, one that temporally changes and shifts in relation to the individuals with whom one comes into contact. Thus, a too narrow focus on the "ritual" at the heart of Bajram or a focus on these events as "cultural festivals" loses the personal interactions which I posit are at the heart of these junctures, the instances which both tie individuals together into a community but also are the sites of differentiation and change.

Throughout this chapter I focus generally on the way that the physicality of bodies together helps to affectively effectuate forms of belonging, something close to what Durkheim called "collective effervescence." In short, Durkheim refers to collective effervescence as a type of synchronous affective state that happens when a community comes together to perform a ritual, and it is through physical interactions and simultaneous movements that connections are forged (Durkheim [1912]1995, 217-18). Durkheim notes that these feelings come from "outside ourselves" and are impressed upon the individual, thus

serving as a glue which helps to hold the community together ([1912]1995, 213). Duffy and Waitt note something similar in their discussion of belonging and festivals, saying that “Festivals are therefore, significant to the emotional cultural politics of belonging: they bind people together through joy, but also may playfully question or more forcefully challenge who belongs” (2011, 47). They argue that emotions circulate between and among bodies, leading to various bodily “orientations” towards greater intimacy with the collective or away in feelings of exclusion (Duffy and Waitt 2011, 48). These feelings are often connected to some location, often the place where the festival is held, such that these feelings slide between bodies and place in complicated ways (Duffy and Waitt 2011, 47-48). This complex web of bodies, place, and movement, and the affective qualities that these moments capture, disrupt and (re)create is the focus of this work, looking broadly at group identity formation through communal gatherings and how belonging is confirmed and/or denied.

This chapter will focus on the participants and the ways in which their attendance at communal gatherings not only shapes their orientation towards the group, but also shapes the events themselves and by extension the community, highlighting the processual and shifting nature of the relationship between participants and groups. I will focus less on the organizations which host these events and the politics that are involved in allocating funding, organizing the schedule, and running the actual events than on the participants who engage with and experience the events themselves. That is not to say that such information has no bearing on how these events are structured in order to shape narratives of group belonging, but I want to move away from an understanding of participants as simply passive consumers of events, towards looking at how attendees work to actively mould and (trans)form events and their positionality in relation to the group. I follow Leal’s understanding of the festival/ritual, “...one in which the ritual is not merely a reflection of something that already exists but rather the site where something new is produced” (2016, 586). These occasions provide rich, distinctive spaces in which to look at the dynamic way that group identity is formed, acknowledging the multiple forms of engagement that participants may undertake and how they may understand their relation to the communal gathering, and by extension, the group. While most of my interlocutors emphasized the importance of events, and particularly Bajramy, in the production of Polish Tatar identity, not everyone was involved or placed as much emphasis on engaging with the community in such a public way. My analysis of communal gatherings acknowledges the role of the individual in its formation and the



multiplicity of roles, perspectives, and points of view which reflect the inherent complexity in any understanding of identity and belonging.

### “A Sort of Electricity”

Throughout discussions with my interlocutors about Polish Tatar identity and how group belonging is enacted, transformed, and understood through traditions (*tradycje*), my participants consistently pointed out the integral part that communal gatherings play in crafting forms of identity. Events such as Dzień Aszura (the Islamic holiday of Ashura), Miękkid (Islamic holiday for the Prophet’s birthday—Mawlid), book premiere events, the annual conference Letnia Akademia Wiedzy o Tatarach (Summer Academy of Knowledge about Tatars), calligraphy classes, Sabantuj (harvest festival—discussed below), czyn, Friday prayers, and balls were commonly described as a demonstration of the rich social life of Polish Tatars. In an interview with Dżenetta Adamowicz, wife of the president of ZTRP, she said, “I feel Tatar when there are different events, funerals, and such, because then it is necessary to correctly know how to preserve the rituals and so forth, everything. So, in this moment, yes. But on a daily basis I don’t think that I am a Tatar. I am a citizen [of Poland].” This points to the critical role that communal gatherings play in providing touchstones for the community, particularly for those members who do not actively feel connected to a (Polish) Tatar identity on a daily basis. If we assume that identity is contextual and certain aspects will be highlighted in specific situations, we can see these events as spaces in which *tatarskość* is brought to the forefront. As Jaeger and Mykletun point out in their article on festivals and identity formation, “The festival facilitated interactions that helped in developing an extended self—a social identity or a social self” (2013, 220). It is this social identity that is formulated in interactions with others which helps to foreground certain understandings of Polish Tatar identity(s).

As stated previously, there are many communal gatherings that are staged for the Polish Tatar community, but the events most often mentioned by my interlocutors as vital to community formation and affectively resonant are Bajramy. Kurban Bajram, dedicated to the willingness of the prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his only son and the holiday (*święto*) described in the opening vignette of this chapter, and Ramadan Bajram, the celebration at the end of Ramadan, are frequently regarded as the most important holidays for Polish Tatars. As Warمیńska notes, “Almost all of the faithful gather, and participation in [Bajramy] is the

most common element of the religious practice of the members of the studied group” (1999, 116). Here we see Bajramy coded as part of a religious practice, and while many of my interlocutors would certainly describe aspects of these events in religious terms as instances of allegiance to the Muslim faith, this does not capture the entire complexity of the event. Beyond the prayer that happens at the beginning of the day, these gatherings also work to integrate individuals into a community by serving as touchstones for a physical togetherness and thus generate a “thicker” feeling of belonging to an affective community (Crowley 1999, 22).

At the Kurban Bajram I attended, many of the assembled did not participate in the prayer but rather gathered to be near the action and visit others in the community, and therefore were nevertheless engaged in a shared practice and space, focused around the prayer happening at the centre of the group. In Durkheim’s explication of collective effervescence, he describes the importance of physical unity during a ritual, that through making the same movements there is formed a sort of “electricity” ([1912]1995, 217). The collective focus on the practice happening in the centre, the attention paid to those praying through the hushing of voices, the corralling of the playing children, meant that even those who did not pray were nevertheless part of the lived experience of the event. The invocations by my interlocutors of the “joy” (*radość*), “emotions” (*emocje*), and “aura” of Bajramy recall in some ways Durkheim’s electricity as a type of affective flow that, through the physicality and iterability of these events, create them as moments of “suture” as subjectivities are situated as Polish Tatar throughout the everyday turbulence and flow of positionalities.

In my discussions with Basia about the upcoming Kurban Bajram, she mentioned a family member who was not particularly interested in developing a connection to *tatarskość* in everyday life, but who always attempted to come to Bohoniki for Bajramy to foster connections with other family members and friends. For this individual, Bajramy are locations in which the community is highlighted above and beyond the everyday, constituting spaces which (re)engage aspects of identity despite not having a clear connection to this identity in their mundane life. Grand Mufti Miśkiewicz captured the importance of these events clearly in our interview, saying that “Only in extraordinary situations [religious and ethnic identity] was recalled, but during the holidays it was tangible, right? Because parents were gathering, right? It was necessary to go to Bohoniki, in Bohoniki is this holiday prayer, there is this religious aura, spiritual aura, next a visit to the cemetery, to the mizar, memories of the deceased, then later holiday lunch, right? Exchange of information, what is happening

in the society, both religious, private, but also ethnic.” We see here the complicated linking of social practices and space, overlaid and interwoven with sensations but not determined by them. Thus these moments of communal gatherings, particularly Bajramy, can be understood as important locations in which group identity is formulated in complicated, multifaceted ways, and made “tangible.”

My interlocutors described communal gatherings in affective terms, particularly Bajramy, as “joyful” or “happy” times, often in reference to the possibility of spending time with relatives. In an interview with Adam, a younger man I knew through Zejnab, we discussed his family’s Bajram traditions. “There is simply such an internal feeling that Bajram is coming, and that you should be glad of this, that we will go to the mosque, pray, go to the mizar, meet with family whom we have not seen in a long time, right? In my opinion it looks like this. It is mainly about an internal feeling, that joy, from these Bajramy.” These events are places of happiness, which affectively spread through those participants not only on the day but is heightened through anticipation of the moment of coming together. My participants specifically described the joy of the day not as due to an external knowledge of the importance of this day in the larger calendar of events, but rather in reference to the actions my interlocutors would undertake during Bajramy—praying, seeing relatives, going to the mizar, and celebrating with a holiday lunch. As Sara Ahmed notes about affect, “It is not just that we feel for the collective (such as in discourses of fraternity or patriotism), but how we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically ‘takes shape’ only as an effect of such alignments” (2004b, 27). Following Ahmed, I assert that the joy described by my interlocutors is sticky, binding (certain) bodies together through such “alignments,” and thus are not only effects of collectivity but actively constitute the community itself.

This aspect of communal performance is crucial, as it is through these embodied movements that connections are strengthened, both physically and temporally. The annual, repetitive nature of many of these communal gatherings—the aforementioned Bajramy, balls, czyny and conferences—lends a sense of continuity to understandings of identity. As Pawlic-Miśkiewicz notes, “In fact, celebrating [holidays] makes the identity of a Polish Tatar stronger every time” (2016b, 355). There is an understanding here that the continued, cyclical performance of these holidays directly impacts identity, not only to maintain it but in fact to “strengthen” it. Thus, events which can be seen as representations of individuals’ (already formed) identity and membership in a community are also the spaces that help form the

circumstances in which that individual is interpellated as a member of that group. As Judith Butler points out, “Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject” (1993, 95). Iterability is the key, because it is the repetitive participation in communal gatherings which lends a sheen of stability and homeostasis to conceptions of group boundaries and individual identity(s) within the community, and which produces a particular subjectivity. Pawlic-Miśkiewicz in fact references Butler’s theory of performativity in her own book on Polish Tatar identity, stating “Tatar identity does not have another ontological status than the one ascribed to it by various acts that constitute its reality” (2018, 28). She privileges the performance of Polish Tatar traditions over and above biology as constitutive of belonging, going so far as to state that with a lack of performance “...the term [Tatar] becomes meaningless here and now” (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2018, 28) The iterative nature of these locations means that they are also the very places in which identity can be challenged, (re)negotiated and/or lost.

The rest of this chapter will analyse communal gatherings as performances that are vital to the production of belonging within the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie, both as instances of continuity and as locations of instability and change. Not only are these gatherings affectively dense and “stick” bodies to one another in differing constructions than everyday practices, but they bring spatially dispersed individuals together in a way which both solidifies and constitutes identity formation. At the same time, anxiety surrounding change and a lack of performance leads to questions regarding Polish Tatar temporalities and future-making. Increased Muslim immigration and the refugee crisis brings issues of group boundary making into sharp relief, showing tensions between performance and biological understandings of identity. Analysing communal gatherings allow us to take a deeper look at the work that is undertaken to attempt to stabilise community and the anxiety that can be produced when identities are not as firm as they may first appear.

### Continuity and Stability

Holidays and other events are often understood within public imagination and academic literature as locations in which identity(s) is formulated, constructed, and reproduced as stable and continuous. They represent a space in which the fluidity of everyday life and its

associated insecurities and multiplicity is congealed into a moment of stasis, however brief that moment may be. As Esman points out in her work on Cajun festivals, “Festivals like other kinds of public rituals, reflect and reinforce the social order and the important values of their host communities” (1982, 199). For many of my interlocutors, the iterative quality of holidays and other communal gatherings were seen as an example of the stability of Polish Tatar cultural heritage, that as long as participants knew how to celebrate Bajramy, azan, and other communal rituals Polish Tatars would not “disappear from the earth.” However, rather than simply being representations of an underlying continuity, active work is undertaken to create these moments as being representative of a stable identity. Quinn in her work on art festivals notes that “in creating opportunities for drawing on shared histories, shared cultural practices and ideals, as well as creating settings for social interactions, festivals engender local continuity” (2005, 928). By pointing out the repetitive nature of these events through history, Polish Tatars are able to single out these events as a representation of the strength of their community as active participants throughout their 600-year history in Podlasie.

References to earth and place were reoccurring throughout my fieldwork, as my interlocutors stressed Podlasie as a place that had been given to Polish Tatars by Jan III Sobieski and thus symbolic of the integration of Polish Tatars within the history of Poland. In his chapter on anthropological understandings of the “event,” Kapferer argues that “The place or space of events is not inert or mere background setting (context)—it is itself active in the event” (2015, 20). Therefore, it is important to investigate the role that Podlasie occupies as a central location in which communal gatherings are held. Many people travelled from afar in order to attend events such as Bajramy in the villages of Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, even from abroad, because those moments of collectivity were seen as such vital instantiations of belonging. This movement was not only inward towards Podlasie, but also sometimes outwards towards events held in other areas. These events, generally lectures, workshops, or Buńczuk performances, would often be held in Warsaw, about two-and-a-half hours away by car or bus, or some even further such as Gorzów Wielkopolski.<sup>97</sup> This type of movement—away from Podlasie to participate in events held in other areas of Poland—was generally undertaken by individuals highly involved in community planning and organizing, such as

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<sup>97</sup> Gorzów Wielkopolski is located in Western Poland, about 7 hours by car. Thus, going there represents a large time and monetary investment. There was once a Polish Tatar community there, but most have either moved to Podlasie or no longer identify as Polish Tatar. The religious community there (gmina) as organized by MZR was closed in 2012 (Nalborczyk 2019, 44). Currently there are six religious communities operating in Poland: Białystok, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Gdańsk, and two in Warsaw.

Zosia or Basia. Thus, we see here two types of movement with varying levels of emotional, temporal, and monetary investment. While the various other communal gatherings occurring throughout Poland were popular among those who were very active in the community, it was Bajramy that were continually highlighted as central to the Polish Tatar event calendar, and heart, of my interlocutors.

While conceivably Eid/Bajram prayers could take place anywhere there is an imam, for many Polish Tatars Bohoniki and Kruszyniany are symbolic locations in which these prayers are held due to the historical depth of Polish Tatar settlements in those villages.<sup>98</sup> In my conversation with Dżenneta at the Tatarska Jurta, she told me that when it is Bajram “those who can, come then to Podlasie. Podlasie, Kruszyniany, Bohoniki, they are such a Mecca and Medina of our Polish Tatar Muslims, such a substitute when for example we can’t go on pilgrimage [Pielgrzymka/Hajj] then they come here to the mosque in our village in order to pray, meet with family, with friends.” As Alija told me one morning, as we were sitting on a balcony, drinking coffee and looking out over the stillness of Kruszyniany, “You’re not a Tatar because, well, you aren’t from here, in Podlasie.” In many ways Podlasie has a metonymic relationship with *tatarskość*, in which Podlasie stood in for the whole Polish Tatar community.

However, this relationship between land, bodies, and movement is not the result of a linear trajectory, but rather occurred due to the active work of Polish Tatars to create their community in the face of population dispersal. Many Polish Tatars lived in the *kresy* region of Poland (areas of modern-day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) and due to the border change after WWII many Tatars were “repatriated” to Poland, often to the so called “Recovered Lands” (*Ziemie Odzyskane*) or chose to move across the newly created Polish borders in order to avoid staying in Soviet controlled Belarus. In these areas Polish Tatars were spread out and found it difficult to maintain endogamous marriage patterns and perform communal rituals. Many of those who were either deported from their homes in the *kresy* region across the new Polish borders or chose to make the difficult journey eventually settled in the Podlasie area as it was a region where Polish Tatars had lived for hundreds of years. Through this process of (sometimes traumatic) immigration, it became a sort of centre of life for the community. Despite the narrative that Polish Tatar existence is tied or rooted to Podlasie based on continuous settlement near Kruszyniany, routes of movement undertaken

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<sup>98</sup> To my knowledge there are other Eid prayers which take place in other locations, such as Gdańsk, but for my interlocutors Bajram prayers were synonymous with a trip to Bohoniki or Kruszyniany.

either by choice or forced deportation were the preconditional “routes” for those “roots” to be formed.<sup>99</sup> We can see the ways in which movement and place are implicated and held in tension, as on one hand it is through immigration and movement that identification is enacted, performed, and strengthened, while on the other hand place-ness and the roots of Podlasie as a centre of tatarskość are highlighted as constitutive of identity.

This image of closeness and stability that is cultivated through physical proximity and affective connections is contingent upon the movement of dispersed community members making the trip back to Podlasie for these communal holidays, particularly as increased numbers of Polish Tatars leave Podlasie for Warsaw or the “West” for increased economic opportunities. As Ahmed notes in her work on collective affect, “Contingency is linked then to proximity, to getting close enough to touch another and to be moved by another...Hence movement does not cut the body off from the ‘where’ of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies – indeed, attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others” (2004b, 27). While this proximity enables forms of affective connection, it must be noted that this stability is temporary in nature, as those who come to these villages also eventually must leave to go back to their homes (though, sometimes, carrying frozen bags of kołduny). Thus, the coming together is always overlaid with the eventual necessity of the dispersion of the community, though the ties are never totally broken. The moments which allow the possibility for moments of identity suture also are the very spaces that allow for fissures of instability.

One moment in which this connection between land, identity, and communal gatherings is exemplified is during sielam, a ritual greeting of the dead that occurs during visits to the mizar and is an important aspect of Bajram celebrations.<sup>100</sup> Sielam is a practice in which family members encircle the grave of their loved one, touching the dirt with their right hand, while one member reads a short prayer, either out loud or silently. During Bajramy especially, the mizar is busy with groups of people wandering the grounds, giving sielam at

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<sup>99</sup> The phrase “roots and routes” has become a popular way to think through issues of place, movement, and identity, but owes its origins to Paul Gilroy’s influential book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), in which he analyses the effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through a lens of diaspora and hybridity. This concept was further popularized by James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997).

<sup>100</sup> Sielam comes from the Arabic salaam and can be performed anytime someone visits a mizar. However, it is an important part of Bajram celebrations. Barbara Pawlic-Miśkiewicz says that one of the ways that Polish Tatars differ from other Muslims is how they care for the graves of their close family, including visiting them often and giving sielam (2016a, 99).

the graves of family members and exchanging greetings with people they see. Warmińska, described the role of holidays as “...primarily a factor integrating the group. The holiday time spent together does not only give the opportunity to renew and cultivate family ties, which was pointed out by respondents. It also allows you the experience of a community not limited to people gathered ‘here and now,’ but regarding the entire cultural tradition. In this sense, the experience also concerns the ‘mythical’ presence of the ancestors, which strengthens the sense of identity” (1999, 118). While she was discussing holidays more generally and not just the practice of sielam, we can see this aspect of the calling into place of multiple temporalities particularly clearly in this moment. Participants are connected not only through the maintaining of connections with family and friends through the exchange of pleasantries and gossip at the mizar, but also connected vertically through time to those already passed. This event is richly woven with multiple temporalities—through the “here and now,” the past, and as will be discussed later, the future.

The ties between participants in the communal gatherings are solidified through the intercorporeality of sharing close, bodily space; however, it is not only the physicality of flesh, space, and land that creates bonds of relatedness, but also the exchanging of information among and between individuals that allows participants to feel connected to one another despite distance throughout the rest of the year.<sup>101</sup> At these events people often discuss other community members whom they both know—what they are doing, where they are living, and what changes have been made in their lives since they last saw each other. This was particularly evident during COVID, in which face-to-face meetings were banned for several months and contact was in many ways severed. Gossip, as an embedded discourse which Van Vleet describes as “a creative endeavour in which relationships and meanings are negotiated among many co-authors who have specific histories of interaction with each other and with the protagonists of their stories,” is highly dependent on the context in which it takes place (2003, 500). Given the small size of the Polish Tatar population in Podlasie, the community is able to call upon the histories of individuals within conversations, situating each conversation within a wider network of past interactions. I found this out quickly, as conversations with

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<sup>101</sup> Intercorporality is a term coined by Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, referring to resonances that bodies within close physical proximity share. “The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and the intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person’s intentions inhabited my body and mine his” (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 215).



my interlocutors would often refer to other community members whom I did not know in a flurry of last names and family connections.

Given the current locality of many Polish Tatars living throughout the Podlasie region and Poland as a whole, these communal gatherings provide vital opportunities to update information about other group members and thus (re)assert the community as an entity with boundaries. Knowledge of who married whom, what event they went to, and how they were raising their children, are ways that members were able to assert those boundaries, such as in discussions of which children had the azan and which were baptized. Leal in his chapter on the role of festas among the immigrant Azorean community in the States noted similarly the role that these events played in bringing together members who did not interact on an everyday basis and therefore (re)constituting their identity as Azorean (2016). These moments allowed for a creation of “collective identity” despite “loose or sporadic” contact (Leal 2016, 590). The Polish Tatars, those individuals who frequented every lecture or Friday prayer to those who only attended Bajramy, were able to connect through gossip at those events to integrate themselves in a meaningful way, buttressing connections despite varying commitments to frequency of contact. I was frequently told that Polish Tatars are a “mały krąg” (small circle) and gossip is an indispensable part of community life, with Basia likening it to a form of Facebook, a network to keep abreast of everyone’s life and thus, to connect them.<sup>102</sup>

I was often told by my interlocutors that the Polish Tatars are a closed group (zamknięta grupa), while many stated that within recent years they have started to open (jesteśmy teraz bardziej otwarci). While some did not agree with this assessment, stating that Polish Tatars have been in Poland for hundreds of years and so have always undergone a process of assimilation (asymilacja), what we see here is at its heart a question as to the permeability of community borders. The very words used, open/closed, imply walls or borders which keep others out (and certain people in). Referring generally to interactions with non-Tatar Poles such as marriages, there were differing opinions as to how this increased “openness” should be understood. For some of my interlocutors this was seen as a positive effect of the increased engagements many individuals and Polish Tatar organizations have

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<sup>102</sup> Gossip in Europe and North America has often popularly been seen as a practice restricted to women. While my key interlocutors were women, I did have interactions with men at larger communal gatherings in group situations. Participants in conversations such as those outside of the mizar on Bajramy would include all genders and would often involve discussions and gossip about other members of the community, thus pointing to the ways that gossip is not necessarily predetermined as to gendered participation.

undertaken with those outside of the community, such that Polish Tatars are now a more visible segment within the Polish social landscape. For others, this openness signalled a dangerous diminishing of borders, signs of a creeping assimilation. One interlocutor, despite disagreeing with the idea of Polish Tatars as ever being “closed,” noted that there was a change after Poland joined the EU and emigration became easily accessible, leading to increased international migratory flows as young people searched for better economic opportunities. The return, or not, of individuals to Podlasie to celebrate communal gatherings thus makes these events highly contested, ambiguous sites of meaning, either as signals of the continued vitality of the group or indicative of loss.

For the communal gatherings discussed so far, the intended audience for participation was the Polish Tatar community. However, some events were organized with a particular aim to represent “the community” for outsiders. The most popular event for tourists is probably Sabantuj, a village harvest festival created by Dżenneta Bogdanowicz and briefly mentioned in Chapter Two. When discussing the origins of this festival, Dżenneta said, “At first I chatted at the table, then later I fed [guests] and chatted. Later I stated that it is necessary to give guests something more, something like...because there were only religious holidays...there were not such cultural holidays. I was the first to start doing such a holiday.” Dżenneta makes a distinction here between religious and cultural events, seeming to imply that religious holidays are not for guests, but rather it was necessary to create something new in order to appeal to the tourists in Kruszyniany. Holidays such as Bajramy then, are positioned as being part of a border between Polish Tatars and others, such that participation in them signals community membership. Sabantuj is described by Dżenneta as a space where she can “show Poles our culture” through physical interaction. Body, movement, and affect come together in order to portray a non-threatening image of Polish Tatar belonging to Polish history and the current Polish nation. “For example Sabantuj, the King of Poland gave land...that a person who sees this, reads it there, reading does not reach him, right? But if he sees it, it will touch him more than the written word for example, right? Conferences are great, but they are directed to a specific group, and here through fun, these kids, games, parties, competitions, Tatar kids, Polish kids, have fun together, together compete with each other, get to know each other, touch each other, it is important to be with one another, touch each other, talk to one another, right?” As seen here, the importance of bodily connection and intercorporeality is highlighted as the way in which to strengthen and deepen connections

between and among people, not only within the community but as a way to cultivate intergroup understanding.

Sabantuj occupies a different space among my interlocutors than Bajramy, for example, as it is primarily situated as a representation of Polish Tatars towards outsiders rather than an affectively dense community gathering. When I spoke with my interlocutors about Sabantuj, it was often referred to as an event for tourists, not as a Polish Tatar tradition for Polish Tatars; meanwhile Buńczuk which also is in many ways a practice oriented towards non-Tatars was not discussed in this same way. The difference between the two seems to be predicated on the intention behind the practices, as some interlocutors determined that the event is a way to increase business for the Tatarska Jurta through the hosting of Sabantuj. While certainly Tatarska Jurta is economically involved in Sabantuj, in our conversation Dżenneta stressed the non-economic advantages of bringing Polish Tatars and non-Tatar Poles together. In this she seems to follow an understanding that by making oneself visible and touchable, understanding and tolerance will follow.

However, for some Polish Tatars, the linking of economic and social intentions creates an uneasy tension that calls this holiday's positionality into question. Comaroff and Comaroff in their book *Ethnicity, Inc.* explore the intricacies of the "identity economy," noting how communities and corporations can commodify identity to produce new relations and representations with the world around them in multifaceted, sometimes ambiguous, ways (2009). For example, they note that the San were able to use tourism to craft a self-representation, supplanting negative stereotypes of their communities that others may hold. "They were seen, and reciprocally were able to see themselves, as a named people with a 'tradition and a way of life.' In other words, a culture" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 11). Such commodification of community identity can heighten and solidify group boundaries, enforcing a view of culture as being the property of a cohesive, bounded whole (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 15). For many of my Polish Tatar interlocutors, this mixing of economics and heritage made it such that Sabantuj sits outside of "authentic" tradition, a type of culture on show which presents a commodified image of "Polish Tatar culture" as a unified narrative, despite heterogenous views as to its utility for the community. From attending Sabantuj, to decrying it as simply for tourists, to acknowledging the work it does in promoting Polish Tatars, to arguing that it presents superficial views of their community, Sabantuj was a space of contestation regarding how Polish Tatars should represent themselves, and what form that should take.

### “Only Tatar on Bajramy”

Holidays were generally expressed to me by research participants as temporal locations in which Polish Tatar identity is maintained and knowledge about the correct bodily dispositions entailed in the performance of these events were understood as passed down through generations. My interlocutors expressed that it is through the continuation of communal traditions such as Bajramy, azan, marriages, and burial rites that the Polish Tatars have maintained their sense of distinctiveness in relation to the Polish Catholic majority.

Warمیńska writes, "Many respondents have a strong belief in the invariability and continuity of their religious traditions and the need to cultivate them" (1999, 125). Many Polish Tatars worked hard in order to maintain and impart this knowledge as expressed through communal gatherings, expressing concern at alterations in the content and participation in these events. They noted with dismay the unequal participation of Polish Tatars in these communal gatherings, seeing in this a dangerous outcome of acculturation as some of the younger generations are only “Tatar on Bajramy,” while others referenced attempts to “clean” (odczyścić) Polish Tatar traditions from religious practices which some non-Tatar Muslims see as incorrect behaviour—signs of a lack of religious knowledge and accretions from the long history of interactions with Catholic neighbours. Others mentioned more subtle changes relating to a perceived increased fragmentation and striation within the community, often accompanied by expressions of nostalgia that things were better in the past. Esman notes that while festivals are often seen as instantiations of cultural stability, they “...can provide an important clue to the degree and kinds of sociocultural changes, stresses, and conflicts within the groups that stage them” (1982, 199). This section will discuss these types of change, and how they relate to community identity and feelings of group belonging.

While the communal gatherings looked at in this chapter such as bajramy, balls, lectures, czyny and other events are organized specifically for a “Polish Tatar community,” the actual participation in these events was highly variable. Some interlocutors attended every event that they could, while others only attended significant holidays, often Kurban Bajram and/or Ramadan Bajram. While most of the interlocutors I spoke with affirmed these events as visible, tangible touchstones for the broader community, I was often told that everyday life gets in the way of active participation. Having a job, children, or caregiving responsibilities make it more challenging to take part in the many activities or social events which I, as an

anthropologist, had the privilege to attend. This was often the reasoning I was given as to why the primary attendants at many of these communal gatherings were older women. “They have time” Basia shrugged, when I asked her about what seemed to be an overrepresentation of older women at the events I was attending, in which I was often the youngest in the group. And while many of the women were retired and so would have more expendable time away from jobs or child-rearing duties to allow for greater participation, I believe a secondary part is to play.

For many of the women in their 60 and 70s with whom I spoke, there was an earnest desire for increased knowledge about Polish Tatar history or religious knowledge, such as how to correctly pray the five daily prayers. As mentioned in previous chapters, due to the death of imams during WWII and the laicization of life in PRL, knowledge was mainly passed down generationally with some religious classes informally held in local houses (Nalborczyk 2013). For most of the older women with whom I spoke, there was a longing to learn more now that the circumstances allow them. Among the Polish Tatars, leadership roles and involvement in community life has never been circumscribed by gender, and Nalborczyk notes that in 2018 two of the religious communities (gmina) of the MZR (Muslim Religious Union) were led by women, though as of the time of this writing only one leader of the six gmina is a woman (Nalborczyk 2019, 39). Throughout time women have had active roles not only as religious leaders, including jobs such as organizing religious education for children, hiring imams, and ensuring functioning of the mosques or prayer halls in their gmina, but also as individuals attending communal gatherings. Thus these gatherings are spaces in which these women can actively garner knowledge about their community, religion, and history in a way that asserts their importance outside of labour or the family. The women I spoke with at these events were active shapers, organizers, and participants in events and programs and would often push back on information they did not agree with, as seen in the religious classes discussed in Chapter One. They did not simply accept interpretations, but rather asserted their positions as arbiters of their own religious and cultural knowledge, ensuring particular understandings of Polish Tatar practices based on past traditions while simultaneously actively seeking more insight into religious expectations, customs, and community history.

While most communal gatherings were largely attended by older women, participation by younger Polish Tatars tended to be highly polarized, with some intensely involved while others expressed ambivalence about the role of *tatarskość* in their everyday lives, more sporadically attending communal gatherings. One particularly warm summer

afternoon I went on a drive around Podlasie with a young man whom I knew through another participant. We visited a local lake and then bought ice cream from a small corner shop before making the drive back to Białystok. We got stuck in traffic and started talking more about my research, Polish Tatar sociality in Podlasie, and his intermittent participation in community life. When I asked him more about why, he said that he was not ashamed of being Tatar, but he was not proud. When I pressed, he said, “You should be proud of the person you are and what you do, not the fact that you are a part of a community,” later adding, “something to be proud of would be being Tatar and doing something for your community, and working for other Tatars.” For this young man, the existence of a Polish Tatar identity is not enough to inspire pride, but rather the actions one takes as a result of that identification. He associated active participation in communal gatherings with pride in one’s identity and community, an identification with a community that he was “happy” with, but “did not highlight.”

This young man and others like him expressed uncertainty about the role of their identity in everyday life, and yet many of them still attended Bajram celebrations, coming back to Podlasie from Warsaw or even abroad to participate, seeing in those moments a sort of touchstone for their community belonging. There were also young people who questioned the given understandings of the role of tradition among Polish Tatars, particularly in relation to religious interpretations. The religious education of the young Polish Tatars today differs dramatically from the experience of those who grew up during the period of state socialism, as the religious education is more standardized and support/materials come from various sources, including educational manuals from Turkey and instructors from areas in Central Asia and Crimea.<sup>103</sup> Some of these young people, raised on materials created in a very different socio-historical context than my older interlocutors, tended to emphasize religious understandings as part of a “global Islam” separated from cultural specificity (see: Roy 2004). Here we see a vivid generational conflict in what role religion should play in Polish Tatar identity and indeed what religion *is* to them.

This tension between religious understandings can be seen in the participation of some Polish Tatars in “Christian” traditions such as putting up Christmas trees for Christmas or painting eggs for Easter. For the Polish Tatars who engage in such practices, there is no

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<sup>103</sup> Most of the books I saw that were used as teaching materials in the religious education for children were published by MZR with the support of Turkish publishing houses, such as Erkam, and funds from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (Ministerstwo do Spraw Religii Republiki Turcji).

contradiction for them between such “non-religious” practices and their faith, while others both within the community and without point to this as an example of their lack of religious knowledge. One interlocutor said of a Christmas tree that “it isn’t a religious symbol. It is traditional,” before further explaining that it is a shame for children to not have a Christmas tree when all their friends do. In some ways this type of attitude lends credence to what the detractors say, such practices are an example of the acculturation of Polish Tatars after hundreds of years living in Poland. However, for those I spoke to who did decide to have Christmas decorations or participate in Easter celebrations, they saw this as an example of the flexibility of their identity formations, that they can inhabit multiple positions at once—Muslim, Polish, Tatar, lover of Christmas. For some, putting up a tree is not a sign of dangerous assimilation or lack of religious knowledge, but rather a creative reshaping of expectations and active work at the nexus of various positionalities outside of stringent rules and boundaries.

This shift in understandings of religion and tradition is apparent in communal gatherings as there has been an active, conscious shift to align behaviour more closely with the religious practices common among non-Tatar Muslims. One interlocutor described to me how Bajram services have changed, which he understood as due to pressure from other Muslims to bring Polish Tatar practices into alignment with those of other communities. He explained that he feels there should be an acknowledgment of the differences between communities saying, “We are Tatars and we are different.” This type of change is particularly important to the older generation, many of whom do not know how to pray on their own and so often the only opportunity they have to pray is communally during Friday services or Bajramy.<sup>104</sup> These alterations to the ways that older interlocutors remember celebrating Bajram include a move away from using roosters as sacrifices during Kurban Bajram in addition to the bull and ram, and no longer leading the bull around the mosque seven times before the sacrifice, a nod to the perambulations around the Kaaba in Mecca performed by pilgrims during hajj. Some members of the Polish Tatar community and non-Tatar Muslims have said that there is a lack of evidence of these practices in the sunnah (the Prophet’s actions and traditions) and so are examples of Christian accretions. One of my interlocutors decried these shifts, saying, “And now people are starting to move away from this, they say

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<sup>104</sup> My interlocutors generally did not distinguish dua and salat, words in Arabic that have very different meanings. Dua are personal prayers, said at any time and in any language, while salat refers to the five daily prayers that are said in Arabic and during specific time frames. Instead, my interlocutors used the noun or verb for prayer (noun- modlitwa, verb- modlić się).

why this rooster? And...well...so slowly little things escape first, right? And then, why do we need a bull? It will come to that, right?”<sup>105</sup> These changes in how the community performs communal gatherings points to tensions between Polish Tatars and the wider faith community in which friction can occur as to “correct” practices, indicating differing discursive traditions as discussed in detail in Chapter One. This conflict between those who want to hold firmly to traditions as understood as being passed unchanged throughout time and those who want to shift to align Tatar practices with other communities reflects an opening of dialogue with non-Tatar Muslims who have increased in size and visibility in Poland since the fall of state sponsored socialism. For some, these alterations signal an increased religious knowledge, a righting of tradition in alignment with the Quran and sunnah, while for others these changes are perceived as a dangerous sign of weakening borders and the loss of cultural distinctiveness.

Another change in communal gatherings described to me by my interlocutors was a shift towards events as meetings of nuclear family units. When I was sitting in a café with Krystyna, the young girl I met for hot chocolates in the city center, we started discussing generational differences. She described communal gatherings in the past as opportunities in which everyone would come together as a community. “For example, celebrating holidays, earlier like I heard, I never experienced this, that people met for the holiday in mosques, and it still is, but also that later they had picnics, sat down, baskets, blankets, right? And in front of the mosque they sit down...and there everyone celebrated, and now mainly people go to their houses and celebrate there, organize balls, so the situation changes, the environment changes.” When I discussed this with Zejnab, the older woman who invited me to her house for Bajram dinner, she expressed disappointment with these changes. “Nothing is the same as it used to be” she lamented. As another older participant put it, “And it is already evident that everyone, everyone celebrates rather more...maybe with family.” Generally my interlocutors seemed to describe a fragmentation from a celebration of the community together, with communal picnics and shared food at the mosque, towards a focus on the nuclear family as the unit in which holidays should be celebrated.

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<sup>105</sup> In 2012 the Constitutional Tribunal in Poland announced that ritual slaughter without the prior stunning of the animal was not in line with the 1997 animal rights law. In Bohoniki this ban was not followed, while the Muzułmanska Gmina Wyznaniowa (Muslim Religious Community) in Kruszyniany decided to uphold the ban, the leader Bronisław Talkowski saying, “We gave up ritual slaughter in order not to create confusion and to respect the law. We are citizens of this country and we believe that the law must be obeyed.” In 2014 the ban was lifted through the efforts of Tatars who claimed this law interfered with their freedom of religion (Cebula 2016, 123).



Nostalgia, feelings that things were better before, is certainly not unique to Polish Tatars. The prevalence of nostalgic discourses among my interlocutors was relatively consistent, with even younger people sharing these feelings on behalf of their older relatives. Krystyna told me that now people only meet “from funeral to funeral, [meeting] with others. Because it is really that rare. Really,” while in discussions with Alija she told me that I should have done my research 20 years ago, because then there were many balls and other meetings among the Tatars. While there is a schedule full of events sponsored by MZR and ZTRP, the feeling that people in the community do not meet as often as they once did, or that the manner in which they meet has changed, was highlighted. This nostalgia finds particular resonance when coupled with the uneven participation among the community, such that Bajramy become overdetermined as the space in which Polish Tatar identity is (re)confirmed. David Berliner describes nostalgia, “...as a specific posture vis-à-vis the past seen as irreversible, a set of publicly displayed discourses, practices, and emotions where the ancient is somehow glorified and considered lost forever, without necessarily implying the experience of first-hand memories” (2015, 21). For my purposes, the importance here is that the past is seen by many of my interlocutors as something that is lost, and never to be regained, in which control over their community and religious practices seem for some to be dissipating. For others, nostalgia prompted them to put a high value on inter-generational transfer, such that there was a type of equation that if knowledge lasts, their community will last. Thus the importance of including the younger generation in communal gatherings and religious education, and the fierceness of debates over understandings of religious traditions seems to hold such deep, affective resonances because for some they speak to the future viability of the Polish Tatars as a distinctive community.

The nostalgia that I encountered for the past, particularly among my older participants, was often tied to reminiscences about socialism and the life that they led. While the social calendar and visibility of Polish Tatars exploded after the fall of the socialist state, that is not to say that in PRL the community was unable to come together. Despite official condemnation of public religious expressions, individuals still found creative methods for making community in private households, such as praying together, holding religious lessons for children, or simply dropping by each other’s houses for tea. The generational difference in religious knowledge such as how to pray the five daily prayers was often pointed to as a result of this period, in which religious instructions were not institutionalized in the same way as it is today. For many of my older participants however, they expressed fond memories of

the past. One older man with whom I spoke put it poetically, saying, “Yes, the shelves were often empty, but people were happy. Everyone was the same and had the same. People were drunk and singing in the streets, and no one would tell them to be quiet or to stop. Now there is no singing. Just drunk people in the streets who no one cares about.” My interlocutors would often discuss a perceived lessening of the bonds connecting people, decrying an increased focus on earning money, a claim which some laid at the feet of pervasive American influence.

This is not to say that everyone expressed longing for the old system, and even in the midst of nostalgic recollections people pointed out flaws, describing the empty shelves and long lines characteristic of life in PRL. However, these issues were often spoken about in joking terms, discursively lessening its seriousness. Once when I was on a forest walk with a friend, she relayed a joke that her mother told her in which people were waiting in a long line and someone asked them, “‘What are you waiting for?’ The people said ‘I don’t know, but at least it is something!’” In another situation, I was at a communal gathering speaking with a group of men and the topic of socialism came up. They spoke about the sense of community engendered, but also the scarcity that was intrinsic to everyday life. They joked, “In the past we had money but nothing to buy, but now there is everything to buy but no money!” The narratives that people used to discuss this period were not homogenous, but rather imbricated issues of equality, scarcity, and belonging into a multilayered narrative. Pine, in her work on the effects of post-socialism on gender in Poland, argues that nostalgia has as much to do with the present as it does with the past, saying “I think this should be taken partly as an invocation of a past in order to contrast it with, and thereby criticize, the present... When people evoked the ‘good’ socialist past, they were not denying the corruption, the shortages, the queues and the endless intrusions and infringements of the state; rather, they were choosing to emphasize other aspects: economic security, full employment, universal healthcare and education” (2002, 111). While the so-called ethnic revival of the 90s placed Polish Tatars within a more visible position and allowed them to institutionalize religious knowledge and gatherings in a public way, these narratives of nostalgia nevertheless held sway, pointing to underlying concerns regarding future-making in an uncertain world.

This is not to say that communal gatherings only involve Polish Tatars, but rather the ways in which “others” are either included in these spaces or excluded speak to the importance of communal gatherings as spaces in which belonging differentially flows, sticks, and shifts. Certain events were considered by my interlocutors as “Tatar,” such as Bajramy,

and while Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are certainly celebrated by non-Tatar Muslims in the Podlasie region, to my knowledge participation in the prayers in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki is predominantly Polish Tatar Muslims. Other holidays such as Mielud, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, are more widely celebrated within the faith community at the prayer house in Białystok. Such events show more clearly the interactions with non-Tatar Muslims and the effects of such interplay.

At the Mielud event that I attended, I and several other individuals were invited up to recite a poem or story about the prophet, while afterwards one of the religious leaders did a quiz game with the children to check their knowledge about the prophet. Later we retired to the back of the mosque where a tent with tables was set up, covered with plates of apples and peaches, bread, tomato and onion salad, and hearty dishes of pasta and meat. We sat gender segregated, which I was told was not common among Polish Tatars until recently due to the influence of non-Tatar Muslims and Crimean Tatars. This type of gender segregation only occurred in events in which there was a mixed audience, with Crimean Tatars and non-Tatar Muslims. For the Polish Tatars with whom I spoke about this, gender segregation was generally not seen as "correct" or desirable but was rather understood as an imported, "Orthodox" religious practice. Groups of Crimean Tatars, Polish Tatars, and non-Tatar Muslims milled about, chatting individually to one another, but the communities were still visible in the ways in which individuals dressed, in the clusters of conversations that tended to form among those who knew one another and spoke one another's language. This is certainly not to say that anyone I observed was rude or non-accommodating to others, but rather it was an instance that showed the ways that these group boundaries manifested during an informal situation, in which boundaries were porous and crossable by individuals, and yet groups formed, adhering certain individuals to one another in ways which were fluid, changeable, and yet visible in moments as bodies coalesced, stuck, and shifted again.

Questions as to how far community lines can be stretched were evident during the refugee crisis, which reached its peak in November 2021 after I had left my field site. In a discussion with WNet, Grand Mufti Miśkiewicz recalled previous help given to refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Caucasus, saying that Polish Tatars support such refugees no matter their religion, "as long as they are [actually] refugees," before reaffirming the need for safety in Poland and along its borders (Radio WNET 2021, 4:38). Two refugee men, one from Syria and another of unknown origin, were given burials in the mizar in Bohoniki, a practice largely reserved for members of the Polish Tatar community. Maciej

Szczęsnowicz in his interview with Polskie Radio, said that he wanted to show that the Polish Tatar community is not “indifferent” (obojętni) to the suffering of the refugees and wanted to show this through respecting burial in accordance with their religious beliefs. The burial of the men in the mizar is a gesture of honor, while simultaneously the support shown for the border officers by some Polish Tatars caused controversy within the community, demonstrating the tension between the emphasis put on the “Polishness” of Polish Tatars and the privileging of concerns of the nation-state, or the highlighting of universal religious ties connecting a global Muslim ummah. We see here the complexity of how belonging can move and expand in relation to novel circumstances, embracing non-Tatars within the space of the mizar, while simultaneously discursively positioning Polish Tatars as Polish through the reiteration of narratives regarding Polish national defense.

### Conclusion

This chapter analysed communal gatherings among Polish Tatars in Podlasie as events in which individuals come together to affirm their social ties through affectively rich, intercorporeal moments that represent the social landscape as thick, abiding, and stable. Each iterative performance of these communal gatherings is understood by many in the community as a visible manifestation of the vibrancy of their community, temporally buttressing the community against fears of assimilation and loss. However, these very moments which seem to confirm and stabilize community are also the moments in which that identity can be changed, modified, and/or transformed. These events are not only spaces where bodies move together, touch each other, and confirm one another, but also are moments in which particular discourses of history, identity, and religion are brought together. Changes in the performance of events such as Bajramy bring to light tension between Polish Tatars and non-Tatar Muslims as contestations over correct religious practices and traditions highlight fears over a loss of control and progressive assimilation.

The fear regarding the ability for the Polish Tatars to continue as a distinctive community was intimately connected to the performance of traditions and the intergenerational passing on of knowledge. While perhaps tatarskość cannot be gained, it can certainly be lost through a lack of performance. The anxiety and fear that the borders around Polish Tatar identity will dissipate through a gradual breaking down of intergenerational knowledge transfer was a common theme for many of my interlocutors. Several community

members I spoke with, including Krystyna, discussed the importance of passing on these traditions to the younger generation and thus they put an active focus on inculcating the values, rites, and traditions that they found as intimate to the performance of Polish Tatar identity. Another interlocutor, Adam, told me

And since I was a little boy, my parents were taking me, or mainly, as I mentioned earlier, my grandfather, who had a lot of influence, took me to czyny to see what it looks like and to just keep cultivating [identity], so that it would never disappear, never disappear, that is the point. I also try to take an active part in social activities and I also try to appeal to my friends, to people of my age to do the same, because if let us assume one of us has children, when such a moment comes, then that our children also take part in it, so that it goes from generation to generation.

These events are seen as vertically tying generations together through time, such that events temporally work to craft identity through knowledge transfer, particularly seen as done through the nuclear family. As one interlocutor pointed out, “Alone traditions disappear. In a family, traditions stay.” In the next chapter we will turn to the role the nuclear family and kin play in the wider production of Polish Tatar belonging.

## 5

### “It’s better to have one God in the home”



Figure 10: Headstone in the mizar in Studzianka

One hot July, my friends and I took a road trip to the small village of Studzianka for “Days of Tatar Culture in Studzianka” (Dni Kultury Tatarskiej w Studziance), an event organized by the Development Association of the Locality of Studzianka (Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Miejscowości Studzianka). Studzianka is located in Eastern Poland and at one point was home to a Polish Tatar settlement, but as I was told, Tatars no longer lived there. The village had a mosque until 1915, at which point it was converted into a school, its materiality a vibrant testament to the complex past of the region. After getting lost on the way taking a detour to an old mizar, we

finally arrived in the afternoon and went to the first event. It was located in the local mizar, which dates from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is no longer an active cemetery but is registered as a zabytek (monument) and therefore is protected by law. Located next to a river, the mizar is dotted with trees and the soft gurgling sounds of the water mixed with the whispering of the leaves among the graves. Kids and families wandered among the headstones with their crayons and pieces of paper provided by the event's host to make grave rubbings. Basia stopped to say sielam, and after an hour examining the headstones which contain various combinations of Polish, Arabic, and Russian language markings, we went sightseeing and prepared for the main event of our evening—river kayaking.<sup>106</sup>

While my fear of water made me nervous about the prospect of kayaking, I was excited to see the river that straddles the village and experience the landscape in a novel way. Recent rains had swollen the river past its banks and spread across the surrounding grass lands while storks (bociany) searched for frogs among the reeds. The soft fall of our paddles and the cacophony of frogs serenading us from the banks were the only sounds accompanying our kayaks as we sped swiftly down the river. As darkness started to fall the moon hung low overhead and the sky spread its inky blackness without city lights to break its expanse. Disaster suddenly struck as a semi-submerged bridge blocked our way and tipped one of the kayaks, dragging the passengers into the rushing water. The leader jumped into action and saved the couple, only for a second submerged bridge to cause complete chaos as several kayaks, including those holding my friends, were dragged to the bottom of the river. After an extended rescue mission our group was left safe on the riverbanks, and eventually we were herded—wet and shivering—to a nearby house to wait while the leader tried to recover the lost kayaks.

We found ourselves in someone's house, whose I am still not sure, as an older couple handed us steaming mugs of tea and thick blankets to wait until transportation was organized to take us to the anticipated end point of the trip. We chatted endlessly, recalling who did what and arguing about the exact turns of events, and some of the employees of the kayak group sat with us and joined in. As the theme of the chaos on the river died out, we started getting to know the employees. One of them mentioned that he does archery and will be organizing archery for the Days of Tatar event tomorrow.

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<sup>106</sup> Much of the historic material culture of Polish Tatars, including some gravestones and religious texts, are written in the Polish language but using Arabic letters.

“Are you Tatar?” Julia asked, looking him up and down.

“I think so, but I’m not sure. I haven’t done any research into my family tree.”

“Well, you definitely have Tatar roots” Basia chimed in, “Tatar blood is strong, and you can see it in your face because of your features.”

He shrugged, saying that he was not sure, but promised to show us how to shoot arrows at tomorrow’s event, like the Tatar warriors used to do.

“We’ll be there,” we promised.

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Months later at another impromptu impreza (party.) We were sitting around the table at one of our frequent get togethers, empty bottles of sodas and juices crammed together on the sticky surface. Kids were playing in the other room and the occasional laugh or screech would float into the living room, mixing in with our raucous voices to add to the overall din.

“So, wait a minute,” I asked, holding the potato chip I was set to pop into my mouth, “you’re related to Aleksander?”

Laughs erupted around the table, as I looked around my friend’s faces to judge if they were being serious. I had already been living among the Polish Tatars for a year, and I was constantly surprised by the family relations which were only now becoming clear to me. I had received a boon in the form of a family tree a participant’s family member had been putting together reaching back to the 1800s, and I was given permission to use her tree to start making my own. I had reoriented myself with the terminology and kinship symbols I had not used since my Introduction to Social Anthropology class in my undergraduate studies and put together a sprawling poster board with information to understand the intricate interlacing of group members. I was constantly trying to figure out how to portray on this 2D sheet the complexity of the relations around me, as constant criss-crossing lines connecting disparate branches of the tree complicated my efforts to create clean, straight lines, a result of the intense pressure towards endogamous marriages.

Hesitantly, not knowing if I would offend or if the words would translate to Polish, I asked, “Have you ever heard of the six degrees of Kevin Bacon?” (*sześć stopni od Kevina Bacona*). I explained that it is a type of game where you can connect anyone in Hollywood



back to Kevin Bacon within six steps. “I think you could do the same with Tatars” I proffered tentatively, which was met with laughter around the table.

Conversation moved on, but it made me consider the oft-repeated refrain among Polish Tatars—we are one big family (*jesteśmy jedną dużą rodziną*)—and the ways in which blood ties, family, and marriage practices are brought together in complicated and interweaving threads to constitute belonging for some, while excluding others. What role does relatedness play in how Polish Tatars experience group identity, and how is the body implicated in its constitution?

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This chapter will look at concepts of relatedness among Polish Tatars in Podlasie as they relate to how group boundaries are drawn and belonging in the community is conceptualized and affectively shared among members.<sup>107</sup> For most of my participants, *tatarskość* is understood and experienced through discourses of origins, ancestors, and blood, such that *tatarskość* cannot be gained but is already given through one’s roots and is considered visible in the body. The understanding that most Tatars are related (*spokrewnieni*), sometimes through known direct lineages and sometimes simply assumed, means that kinship becomes in some ways diffused through the community such that family is expanded to include the entirety of the collective. The exact relationship between individuals is not always known or highlighted, but rather being related in some way allows descent to be a sort of infrastructure upon which identity is built. Kinship is not the only way that belonging is understood however, as blood is not enough to consider someone Polish Tatar; rather practices, rituals, traditions, and knowledge are seen as the ways in which identity is realized, strengthened, and made tangible. Those do not participate in the community are often said to have Tatar origins (*tatarskie pochodzenie*), as opposed to being Tatar. While conceptions of kinship, blood, and descent are vital to understanding how Polish Tatars experience group belonging, kinship is never pre-determined and arises through a complex process as some are included and others are excluded from forms of relatedness. These ambiguous discourses of relatedness move and flow among individuals, connecting Polish Tatars to each other and Tatars across borders, but never singularly determine

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<sup>107</sup> While there is no direct translation for “relatedness” in Polish, it is most closely covered by the term “*pokrewieństwo*” (kinship, relationship), which is based on the word for blood, “*krew*.” Thus, the term already contains within it an understanding of the connection between kin relations and blood. *Pokrewieństwo* was often used by my interlocutors to refer to Polish Tatars, “*wszyscy jesteśmy spokrewnieni*” (we are all related).

belonging; rather they serve as a scaffold upon which practices and performances buttress affective ties.

Marriage for many of my participants was seen as one of the most important practices that helps to constitute group belonging through the joining together of community members, while it was also mentioned as one of the major spaces of flux and transformation. Endogamy was seen by some of my participants as a way to ensure the survival of the group because it allows for a reproduction of Polish Tatar identity within the family through blood ties and intergenerational knowledge transfer, while the increasing prevalence of exogamous marriages was seen as a troubling blurring of group boundaries. For some, mixed marriages (marriages between a Polish Tatar and a non-Tatar Pole or a non-Tatar Muslim) are seen as a source of danger, an increasing “openness” which calls into question Polish Tatar future making as a distinctive community. For others, they signal increasing possibilities for other ways of life and connections with other groups. The discussions throughout my fieldwork regarding mixed marriages generally centred on the children of such pairings, and whether they remain part of the community or become “Catholic;” in this way these children can be seen as both a bridge between communities and as potential sites of disruption. Marriage practices will be discussed as polysemous locations of continuity, controversy, and innovation, as temporal shifts in practices point to complicated interrelations with transnational labour flows and relations with other Tatar communities across borders. This chapter will analyse the social geographies of (re)producing relatedness through marriage and the contours of blood and kinship as they relate to the creation of identity and belonging among this particular community of Polish Tatars in Podlasie.

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The concept of kinship is one of the oldest and most well-trodden in social anthropology, forming one of the basic building blocks of most early anthropological works. A particular focus for the early functionalists and structural-functionalists, they focused on kinship as a biological product of descent and the nuclear (heteronormative) family unit, drawing intricate kinship charts to understand how rules regarding marriage, joking relationships, and property were determined. Kinship was understood by these anthropologists as particularly important in small-scale societies, in which it was seen as the structure which held these communities together in the absence of governmental and state institutions. Kinship in “Western” societies however, was seen as immaterial to economic and

political landscapes, relegated to the private sphere and its associations with women. In the 1960s Levi-Strauss focused on marriage rules, seeing marriage as a form of exchange in which the exogamous transfer of women by men was a fundamental social rule which helped to determine intragroup relationships (Lévi-Strauss 1969).<sup>108</sup> This focus on patterns, positions, and terminology fell out of practice as anthropologists moved away from kinship as a primary object of study.

Starting in the 1980s, anthropologists began looking at kinship again but in a different light, with Schneider's work influentially recontouring the field of study. His initial work subjected American kinship to symbolic analysis, showing how it is underpinned by relations between substance and code, or "nature" and "law," which are brought together in marriage and sexual procreation (1980). His later work, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, argued that anthropological analysis largely upholds this Euro-American viewpoint of the role of procreation in kinship, an underlying assumption which is not held everywhere (1984). Thus, he questions the very basis for cross-cultural analysis of "kinship" as like is not being compared to like (1984). More recent work in kinship has looked at the effect of new reproductive technologies on notions of relatedness and questioned the division of nature/culture in which kinship relations are seen as cultural interpretations of biological facts (see, for example: Carsten 2000, Strathern 1992a, 1992b). Following Edwards, who describes her interpretation of kinship as "...require[ing] both the biological and the social: it emerges from an interplay between the two, rather than from the social elaboration of natural facts," I intend to investigate the ways that narratives of blood relatedness are constituted, utilized, and become socially acceptable ways of determining group belonging, in which kinship becomes a interrelated process rather than an elaboration of pre-determined biological surety (Edwards 2000, 28).

The privileging of blood as a material, symbolic, metaphorical element in discussions of relatedness, and particularly in relation to groups which are ascribed (by themselves or others) as "ethnic," is a controversial topic. Donna Haraway decries the narratives in which blood gets tied up with kinship, saying that "I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and 'the family', and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope...Ties through blood - including blood recast in the coin of genes and

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<sup>108</sup> Levi-Strauss has been critiqued for the way in which women were treated in this formulation as a "gift" from one man to another, with no analysis of the agency of the women themselves in the exchange.

information - have been bloody enough already” (2018, 265). While I understand Haraway’s frustration with the way that blood(y) discourses have been connected to kinship in a way which essentialises forms of belonging, thereby excluding other ways of establishing relatedness, what of those times when our interlocutors understand relationships through descent, roots, or blood? How can we take the views of our participants’ seriously, while also noting the ways that such narratives can be wielded in dangerous, exclusive forms? Discussing the role of blood and descent in conceptions of group belonging can be tricky to navigate; as Nash notes in her overview article on what she terms geographies of relatedness, “The familiar presence of inheritance in the ways in which identity, embodiment and relatedness are imagined and made sense of contrasts strongly with the now familiar academic language of identity as contingent, fluid and fragmented” (2005, 458). This chapter attempts to navigate a precarious line between taking seriously narratives of blood and kin as knowable, biological formations, while also attempting to understand how the very infrastructure of the debate is differentially understood, constituted, and expressed.

Despite the kinship chart I made in an attempt to stabilize on paper the relations around me, this chapter is not primarily about “kinship” in the sense of the anthropological forefathers, determining patrilineal descent or matrilineal residence. Rather, I am particularly interested in the way that questions of relatedness play into the politics of group belonging, as Polish Tatars conceptualize themselves as “one, big family” in which both close and distant kin are brought together to create a group tied together by affective and blood bonds. This “big family” (*duża rodzina*) at the community level was placed at a different level than nuclear families however, as nuclear families were held up as the source through which traditions and cultural knowledge flow, in which identity is instantiated. Thus, we see how these bonds of descent, kin, and relatedness, converge and diverge in varying ways, diffused throughout the community but nestled and concentrated in particular areas. Relatedness connects the “*duża rodzina*,” but it is the relationships formed in the nuclear family, particularly between mother and child, which re-establishes and reconstitutes identity.

However, these discussions of blood and relatedness, while on the surface seemingly speaking to visible borders, ties which bind, and continuity, always already contain aspects of ambiguity that can destabilize these identity formations. Marriage practices are a space of temporal flux as endogamy is increasingly eschewed in favour of mixed marriages, inciting strong feelings from my interlocutors as these practices speak to an increasing “openness” of the community towards others, representing for some a dangerous source of instability.

Marriage practices bring up questions of the porousness of group boundaries and relations between Polish Tatars and the other communities both within and across Polish borders, questioning how far group boundaries can stretch and if blood is enough. Thus, this chapter will not only analyse discourses of blood, descent, and roots and how these terms are constituted, but also look at how relatedness is built upon a complex infrastructure of both kinship ties and practices as experienced through the body. Roots are the ties that bind but also spaces of equivocality and movement, allowing moments of resignification. At its heart, this chapter attempts to follow the flows of blood, family, and marriages through the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie in order to understand more fully the ways in which these relations are constituted, reproduced, and questioned.

### From blood and bone

It was a muggy summer day in Białystok, and it seemed like the entire city was in the stary rynek. The sun was shining down on us with an intensity that made sweat run down my back, while I looked around desperately for shade. Basia, Alija and I determined that ice cream was a necessity on such a scorching day. After we got our snacks, we stood around chatting while I tried to catch the rivulets of melting ice cream before they fell on the pavement. I noticed that many of the women around me were dressed up, wearing heels, sun dresses, and full faces of makeup, while in comparison I had thrown on a shirt and the only pair of jeans that did not need to be washed. I made an offhand comment that Polish women are very beautiful. Basia responded that they are, but she is not a Polish woman. My eyes immediately widened. “But Polish Tatars always say that they are Poles, so what do you mean?” She thought for a moment and replied that she is not totally a Polish woman, she has different facial features and eyes, so she is different.

This moment is instructive in a multitude of ways. First of all, it points to the complexity of identity, as Polish in this vignette serves as a signifier for nationality (after all, Polish Tatars are Polish, are they not?) while also coding for phenotypical appearances associated with the Polish nation. Thus, Basia is able to, in one context, affirm that she is Polish, while in another question her ability to completely belong to the signifier “Polish” due to phenotypical differences. The role of appearance among Polish Tatars, associated with blood, kinship, and descent, was noted by my interlocutors as a complex representation of their place both within their community and particularly in relation to the wider non-Tatar

Polish population. Such phenotypical features, it is important to note, speak to relations of power as it through socio-historical circumstances and relations of power that certain features are chosen to be representative of a people and signifiers of difference.

Many of my interlocutors described the strength of Tatar blood (*krew*) in relation to physical features, explaining that certain characteristics are often expressed through generations, even when Tatar ancestors are far in the past. The stereotypical Tatar rysz (features) were often described to me as almond shaped eyes (*skośne oczy*), high cheekbones (*wysokie kości policzkowe*), and a dark complexion (*ciemna karnacja*). My respondents would tell me that they could tell who was Polish Tatar simply by looking at their face, even if the person themselves were not aware of any Tatar origins. In one interview, my interlocutor started by saying that she is full Tatar (*pełna Tatarka*) and it is very visible with her, but sometimes it is not very clear if someone has mixed blood. She then continued, “But most Tatars have mixed blood, because the Tatars came over hundreds of years ago and married Polish women, so in a way everyone is mixed. The Tatar features (*tatarskie rysy*) are strong though. You can be walking down the street and a Pole walks by, a Catholic, and you can tell that they are Tatar because of how they look.” This quote demonstrates one way that blood and descent are called upon in narratives of belonging—as phenotypical features which betray identity despite unawareness of one’s roots, understood as visible through the body. Warمیńska agrees, as she says that a majority of her respondents said that you can recognize a Tatar by appearance only (1999, 161).

Appearance and phenotype would often be recalled in relation to blood, kinship, and descent, understood as passed from generation to generation through shared ancestors. Oftentimes interlocutors would say that they are Tatar “*z krwi i kości*” literally meaning from “blood and bone” but closer to the English phrase “flesh and blood,” or referring to those who did not have any mixed marriages in their family tree as having “pure blood” (*czysta krew*). One of my respondents explained it thus, “If our ancestors were, so to speak, pure blood, or flesh and blood Tartars, as they say, the entirety is Tartar, there were no mixed [marriages]... that a mother was, I don't know, Orthodox, Catholic and that's it. All of my ancestors, as far as I know, were pure blood Tatars.” All of these terms were utilized to mark a clear connection to a Polish Tatar identity, one which was imagined as deriving from direct descent from the first Tatar ancestors who immigrated to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. For those who specifically qualified themselves as having “pure blood,” they used two forms of evidence as a foundation for this

claim; some mentioned having family trees (rodowód was the term used most often, also occasionally drzewo rodzinne) back to as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while most were able to list family members in their tree who were “pure” Tatar, often mentioning Tatar parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents on both sides. Krystyna told me a story about when she was in a class and the professor asked if any of the students could name their ancestors, and she was the only one in the class who could name up to her great-great-grandparents. Those who considered themselves “blood and bone” Tatars were often proud of this fact, informing me that their ancestors were members of the szlachta (nobility) or referring to their family’s role in military exploits, but it did not necessarily mean that they looked down or mistreated those who were “mixed” (mieszany). Some interlocutors noted that due to the long-term settlement of Tatars in Poland, most individuals have some “mixed” blood due to the common early practice of Tatar soldiers marrying Polish women. As will be discussed later, “mixed” blood or the number of nameable Tatar ancestors were often not the determining factor of identity, but rather a base infrastructure upon which practices were positioned and thus gained importance.

Shared roots (korzenie) and origins (pochodzenie) serve as a way for the community to imagine that other community members are knowable and discernible. The widespread practice of keeping a rodowód or older family members knowing the family tree by heart has the effect of allowing other members to quickly place individuals within a grid of already existing relations and thus, in a way, verifying claims of Tatar identity. This was clear in the vignette at the beginning of Chapter Four, in which at an event in Warsaw two members of my group were stopped by local woman who was interested in her family origins and had completed extensive research, made more difficult by the changing of names as family members emigrated from the former kresy region. By giving a last name and some other identifying details, the women she was talking to were able to place her in relation to others whom they know, realizing in the process that the woman may have been related to one of them through distant kin in Belarus. Through the way that kinship is understood within this story—as relatedness passed down directly through ancestors and aided by the previous pressure towards endogamous marriages—family is conceptualized as a knowable web of relations, a pre-determined, non-porous tree of kin.

In practice, however, this is not so clear cut. Knowledge of family histories was not equally and evenly held, and kin relations were more often fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. I was told stories of individuals who were introduced to family members they did

not know they had, placing relatedness as a sort of web *out there*, waiting to be discovered. For example, in an interview with an older gentleman and his wife as we sat in their cosy apartment covered in family photographs, he told me “When I was young and we would go somewhere to Bohoniki or to a wedding, and some aunt would say... ‘I’m your ciocia (aunt).’ I was very surprised, where did this aunt come from? And this one would say, and ‘I’m your wujek (uncle),’ and ‘you didn’t know?’” Other participants would tell me that they were related to someone, but they were not sure about the exact nature of the relation, only that some sort of blood tie existed. In a conversation with a young woman, her long hair cascading over her shoulders as she leaned in conspiratorially, “Aladin is the brother of my father, in other words my uncle. So everyone is somewhere related. I call Halina my aunt, from what I know she is our aunt. With Agata I am also in some way related but in some degree slightly further, but like I say everyone is one big family and sometimes it is hard.” After our interview I hastily added the information she told me to my kinship chart, tracing the intersecting lines with my finger as I tried to commit this new information to memory. Here we see two different levels of relation—one which is imagined as knowable and discernible, she is able to name her relation with this person—uncle, aunt. However, later she notes that she knows that she is in some way related to Agata but is unable to state exactly how they are related, only that it is a more distant degree than her named relatives. I understand this as a type of diffusion of relatedness; what I mean by this is that such unnameable kinship ties were taken seriously as a way of tying individuals together within an extended family group, but the specificity of the relation was less important than the fact that *some* relation exists. These diffuse kinship ties work to situate individuals as members of the same group and thus part of “one, big family” connected through ambiguous ties to other individuals as part of the collective. This provides a sort of veneer of stability to understandings of group identity, as not only do Polish Tatars imagine themselves as connected through joint history, religion, and residence, but every Polish Tatar may in some way be related to one another. This serves to expand familial obligations and affective responsibilities throughout the community.

The role not only of blood and kin, but also of phenotypical differences, served as markers of community belonging, working to create a narrative of knowable, discernible boundaries. As noted earlier, many Polish Tatars expressed that they were able to “tell” who was part of their group based only on appearance. As Warمیńska notes, “...in the opinion of a majority of my respondents, Tatars differ from others with outer appearance, which consists



of one of the many ingredients of their feeling of separateness, not connected with religion. In this context it is possible to say that anthropological features are an important element setting out boundaries of this community” (1999, 163). On its face, such a “race-kinship congruity” paradigm in which kinship is associated with certain phenotypical features can appear troublingly essentializing (Wade 2012, 79). However, as Lehrer notes in her work on Jewish-Polish relations in Kazimierz, “Experiencing one’s body as different—different in historically and culturally specific ways that may run counter to dominant stories of community belonging—is another kind of memorial practice, one that points to more complex vectors of identification” (2013, 111). While Lehrer’s work speaks to the past trauma of the Holocaust among Jews in Poland and thus a different context, I believe that the sentiment still stands. In Poland, where popular narratives create a nexus in which national belonging is fastened to Catholicism and by extension certain physical traits, the ways that Polish Tatar bodies are brought to the forefront of identity formations speak to the importance of complex identifications which are not only deeply felt, but understood as visible on the skin. While these tatarskie rysy are interpreted in variable ways by my interlocutors, ranging from pride in their appearance to embarrassment, it is still clear that acknowledging their bodies as different is a statement about their visibility as members of the Polish nation, a proclamation which is undertaken with various levels of affective resonances among members.

The distinctive Tatar features not only serve as a marker of identity, understood as a bodily apparent sign of origins and roots, but also speak to issues of power and discrimination within Poland. While most of my respondents emphasized the cooperation and understanding between non-Tatar Poles and Polish Tatars, this view was held alongside numerous stories of unpleasant (*nieprzyjemny*) interactions with individuals. One respondent told me that her sister had a more difficult childhood due to her features, telling me that her sister had the “Tatar cheeks and eyes,” while another described her child being called names during school. Another participant said that when she was younger, she was called “Chinese” by other school children, while another respondent said that her nephew found it difficult to date Catholic Poles as they lost interest when they found out he is Tatar. Despite these stories of issues with the wider non-Tatar population, a majority of my interlocutors chose to highlight the positives of living within Poland and described such examples not through the concept of discrimination (*dyskryminacja*), but rather pointed to them as “unpleasant” interactions with individuals, often noting that children do not know any better. It is possible that highlighting moments of cooperation and understanding instead of issues of discrimination and prejudice

is instrumental, as it allows them to narratively position themselves as full members of Poland and thus not singled out for discrimination. Taking my interlocutors at their word, however, means to take seriously the proposition that for a majority of them, they feel treated as full members of the Polish nation. Moments which through my personal lens I considered discrimination (for example, an instance in which one woman was called “Eskimo” due to her features) were generally described as solitary confrontations with hateful or ignorant individuals, thus allowing them to both call out this behavior but also not set it at the feet of the population as a whole.

While narratives of blood, descent, and phenotypical features can on the surface seem to provide a clear, visible certainty in which identity formations can occur, when analysed closer the proposed surety begins to look blurrier. Many of my respondents, while speaking of blood as an aspect which ties Polish Tatars together, simultaneously noted that very few, if any, Tatars had “czysta krew” (pure blood) anymore. One interlocutor told me, “It is harder now because people are mixed. Now no one has pełna krew (full blood), in other words full Tatar. That's why we say with Tatar pochodzenie (origins).” While the concept of consanguinity was used to define a community understood as collectively related as either knowable or uncertain kin, what I refer to as diffused kinship, this was simultaneously held with the view that these blood ties are in some way diminishing. Connected to the issue of mixed marriages, discussed in more detail below, my interlocutors often described the current state of the community through a narrative of loss—Polish Tatars are all related (spokrewnieni), and yet that relatedness is ever diminishing, the future unsure. This issue was complicated further when I was discussing with one interlocutor about whether someone could become Tatar. He mentioned that he had recently been watching a program about Genghis Khan and he had sired so many offspring, that most people probably have some amount of Tatar blood even if they are not aware of it. He used this story to emphasize the difficulty of using blood as a foundation upon which to build identity, as what value do blood ties contain if people are not aware of them? Here we can see two instances in which the value of blood as an infrastructure of community belonging and identity were questioned—as an ever-diminishing base in which everyone is, in some way, mixed, and simultaneously as a too widely distributed resource, rendering community borders too amorphous. These instances highlight the contingent and variable nature of blood and descent as elements through which kinship is constructed, as who to recognize as kin is no longer a pre-determined biological surety but rather a process and active choice.

Coming from the US, I was quite familiar with the popular American conception of ethnicity through percentages—my grandmother was Polish and so from a young age I self-identified as a quarter Polish. I understood my identity as a quantifiable, numerical calculation, one which caused me embarrassment as a child because I often felt that my “insufficient” descent did not justify my abiding interest in Poland. This type of understanding of blood and identity through percentages was not reflected among my interlocutors. I remember one afternoon when I met a couple for an interview in a small town about two hours outside of Białystok. It was a sweltering summer day and we sat outside in their garden, eating chocolates and drinking tea. When I tried to ask about the children of a Catholic and Tatar pairing as being “half-Tatar,” the husband did not know what I meant. I reproduce the conversation here, as it is instructive of these issues under discussion:

Kajetan: There's no such thing as half Tatar, or half something. There is a Tatar, or not a Tatar. Because in fact, generation after generation is Tatar.

Róża: But they say for example, there is a Muslim mother and Polish father, that I am half Tatar because the mother is a Muslim and father Catholic, that's why Pani [Ms. Kelsey] said that.

Kajetan: Okay fine, but that's not how it should be. If you were born a Tatar, you are a Tatar. If you had a baptism, you are a Christian and not a Tatar, a Muslim. So you are either that or that. There is no such thing.

Róża: These people who look, like she said [earlier], for these origins, these roots, they say things like half Tatar, because in the past people didn't say that. That I am Tatar. Have you ever heard something like I am half Catholic or half Orthodox? I've never heard something like that. I don't know where they got that half Tatar.

There are two aspects I want to highlight in this exchange, which are enlightening for the issues at hand. Firstly, for these interlocutors a Polish Tatar identity is uncompromising—one is either a Tatar or they are not and thus only ancestors “generation after generation” can constitute belonging to the community. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we see here how identity is simultaneously tied to practices, to be baptized is tantamount to leaving the community, while being Muslim is seen as integral to identity formation(s). This points to a clear tension underlying the issues of identity and belonging that has been explored throughout this thesis, namely the relationship between practices which are seen as both representative of, and creative of, identity and essentializing discourses of blood, descent, and origins.

It may be useful to understand the relation between relatedness and performance through two examples that demonstrate how identity is understood if one of these aspects is

lacking. Several of my interlocutors noted that there is a burgeoning interest in genealogical work and specifically in searching for Tatar roots. This interest may be tied to the increased openness and ease of doing such research after socialism, a period in which such questions would be difficult or unwise to ask. At one communal gathering a woman mentioned to me that people often come to the mosque looking for more information about their origins, often hearing stories about a possible Tatar ancestor or dimly remembering traditions from their childhood. She told me that recently a man came to the mosque looking for answers, as he believed that he might have Tatar ancestors. She told him that even if they did not find any information on his origins, that you could tell by his face that he was Tatar because the body does not lie (*ciało nie kłamie*). Such people were often looked upon positively by my interlocutors, though their acceptance as members of the community was more varied. Many respondents said since they were not raised in a Polish Tatar household and would not know the traditions or history of the community, they would be considered as someone with Tatar roots (*korzenie*) or origins (*pochodzenie*), rather than Polish Tatar.

On the other end of the spectrum, a story was related to me in which there was a man who was highly involved in the community, but later it was revealed that he did not have any Tatar ancestry; he was performing the rituals and traditions but without consanguinity and thus his belonging was called into question. One interlocutor summed up these issues well. In a conversation about the role of blood in questions of identity, she told me that I ask hard questions, but she does believe that there is some part of biology that makes someone Tatar. However, after taking a second to think, she added rhetorically, who is better, someone who is a full Tatar but prays twice a year and is not involved, or someone who prays and is involved and considerably helps the community? Despite posing these questions she was not able to give a definitive answer, demonstrating that it is not either/or, kinship or practices, but rather that these features are both implicated in complicated and nuanced ways as the infrastructure upon which belonging is built. These stories highlight the limits of this tension between blood/descent and performance—at either end of the extremes identity becomes too ambiguous to define; it is in the spaces in between that identity can be spoken.

### Marriage and Relatedness—What's love got to do with it?

These discussions regarding how kinship and consanguinity relate to conceptions of the group often revolved around questions of exogamous versus endogamous marriage patterns,

and specifically how the resulting children are understood in relation to the community. Many of my interlocutors noted that in the past endogamous marriages, or marriages between two Polish Tatars, were very much the norm. I often heard stories from interlocutors of the social pressures and restrictions which ensured the continued practice of endogamous marriages, including community disapproval and censure, and parents who forbade their children from marrying outside of the community with punishments sometimes amounting to being renounced from the family. One woman I spoke with who is in her 70s said, “Those who did it against—in other words mixed—there were pointed fingers, really there were pointed fingers. And it was restricted and there was discipline, not like it is now,” while another interlocutor described it this way, “There is parental consent for mixed weddings. Once upon a time there was no such thing. It used to be very, very observed. People joined in marriages only with ... with each other, between Tatars and everything was fine. But that is because they knew that a Tatarka [female Polish Tatar] would be better than a mixed marriage.”

Mixed marriages, which generally refers to a marriage with someone outside of the community but most often referenced a Polish Catholic partner, were described as one of the most visible changes within Polish Tatar society and thus were sites of intense contestation and debate. Endogamous marriages were thought to be the best way to ensure the continuation of practices and traditions, such that the trend towards exogamous marriages was seen by some as indicative of an inexorable shift towards complete acculturation. It was a common refrain that in mixed marriages traditions were less often maintained, such that after marriage the Polish Tatar individual would sometimes stop participating in communal gatherings and other rituals, thus losing their identity. Most often however, the mixed marriage itself was not the source of disapproval, but rather the worry that any resulting children of the pairing will no longer participate in communal gatherings, or worse, not undergo the *azan*.

*Azan*, the rite in which a child is given their name and officially entered into the Islamic community, is a practice in which the child is laid on a ram skin with salt, bread, *sadoga* (food offerings) and the Quran, and their name is spoken into their left ear by an imam (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b, 361).<sup>109</sup> Polish Tatars often nominate “*azan* parents” who are expected to be upright, religious models for the child, which Pawlic-Miśkiewicz notes is a

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<sup>109</sup> For a more detailed description of the ritual, see: (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2016b, 360-62).

borrowing from Catholicism and the tradition of having godparents. This practice again points to the long history of Polish Tatars in Poland, in which Catholic practices were adapted and eventually coded as “traditionally” Polish Tatar (Pawlic-Miśkiewicz 2018, 150). This ritual is held up as one of the most important moments in a child’s life and the interpellating of the child as a member of the Polish Tatar community. I was often told that within mixed marriages the practice of azan was less often upheld, and it was due to this lack of performance that the fear the distinctiveness of the Polish Tatar community would be lost was expressed. One participant in our discussion of mixed marriages, said “And there are neutral [people]. And unfortunately a lot. Because then the child goes to church...and they don’t know what is going on in Bajram because who was supposed to explain it to them since their grandparents after all let their daughter or son get married, and later there is a baptized child. How can they know when they already lost their identity a long time ago? Or I do not know, upbringing, or where they come from? It is very important. Our grandparents had so much time...we are shrinking.” This narrative of irretrievable loss and dissolution is countered by an understanding that through the performance of rituals the collective is able to last, that through “remembering their roots” that Polish Tatars will be able to live on as a distinctive community. However, just participating was not enough for this interlocutor. Rather, there must be a transfer of knowledge through the family such that the child understands community traditions, seen as touchstones to connect Polish Tatars to the past and to the future, one that is seen as increasingly uncertain. As one interlocutor stated, “Now there are fewer of us. We would like to maintain it for, I don’t know, a dozen or so years but maybe Tatars are disappearing, already there won’t be any Tatars, they will be only in books.” Here we see the ways in which mixed marriages are positioned as a source of danger specifically due to uncertainty regarding the transgenerational transfer of knowledge in a mixed family.

The fear that mixed marriages will lead to a complete assimilation of Polish Tatars was the forefront reason that many of my interlocutors expressed disapproval of such matches, that the children will no longer be Muslim (or Polish Tatar) and thus the community will “disappear.” Joyce discusses this in her work on the concept of neighbourliness between the Orthodox (prawosławni) minority and the Roman Catholic majority in a town on the border of Poland (2017). She discusses the ways that historical trauma affected narratives regarding conversion, and how discourse surrounding “being a good neighbour” underlines deeper tension regarding the role of conversion in community maintenance. She notes specifically how group identity was implicated in religious identification, such that

conversion was seen as not purely a spiritual choice, but rather as a complete severing of ties—both religious and community. She quotes a participant who says, ““Everyone is worried because the Orthodox in this area are dying out. They marry Catholics and then their children are raised Catholic, every year there are fewer and fewer Orthodox children baptised”” (Joyce 2017, 122). While for Polish Tatars marrying outside of their community was not associated with a pressure for either them or their partner to convert as opposed to the Orthodox community Joyce studied, there is resonance in the fear regarding how the children will be raised and thus what this says about the (dis)continuity of the community. She notes how converts negotiate in complex ways their lives between two communities, until the moment of death when they are officially situated as a member of their converted religion, without the additional nuance of their practices. For Polish Tatars this moment of rupture is baptism, at which time the child of a mixed marriage is officially entered into the Catholic community and for many of my interlocutors, their social ties are severed.

The importance of the family in community identity was repeatedly stressed as the location in which identity is passed on (or not) and thus represents a source of possible renewal or fracture. I was frequently told that the family is paramount to identity (understood here as a nuclear unit of a mother, father, children and sometimes grandparents), as it is these individuals who will teach the child the traditions that are seen as vital to the performance of identity. As Wade notes, following Edwards, “...biology and culture continue to be entangled in everyday life, in large part through the medium of the family, where biological and cultural connections are forged together and where distinctions between what a person is through birth and what he or she is through upbringing become blurred” (Wade 2012, 84; Edwards 2000). The possibility for a lacuna in knowledge, for such traditions to *not* be maintained or passed down, places the nuclear family in a supreme position as both a representation of the strength and continuity of the community and as a potential source of disruption if practices are not preserved.

I was often told that in mixed families traditions such as the azan are generally not practiced, particularly if the mother is Polish Catholic as opposed to the father.<sup>110</sup> My interlocutors suggested that mothers tend to have a closer relationship with their children, and

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<sup>110</sup> While I do not have quantitative data to confirm or deny this common understanding, my observations throughout fieldwork tend to back up this assertion. In a conversation with a Muslim convert, she said that the children of converts are in a more difficult situation and almost never stay Muslim due to the societal pressure of living in a majority Catholic country.

so mixed pairings between a Polish Tatar man and non-Tatar women were understood as more likely to lead to children who do not participate in the life of the community. As one interlocutor told me in reference to mixed marriages, “It is known that a mother is always closer to the children and she will more so, so to speak, arrange the kids to her own side.” Here we see the gendered role that women as mothers are thought to fulfil as transmitters of cultural and religious education. As my participants informed me, Muslim males are religiously permitted to marry any woman of the book, (Muslim, Christian, or Jewish women), and yet for some of them a Catholic mother was thought to be more dangerous as a possible severance of knowledge transferal. Here we see multiple layers as certain pairings are understood to be religiously permitted and yet, for some, are situated as threatening to a chain of transferral through female family members.

While many participants lamented the increase in mixed marriages due to the perceived deleterious effects on the group as a whole, others emphasized the happiness of their children or grandchildren, noting that love is the goal of marriage. In discussing her children, one participant said, “It would be better if they married Tatars, but I can’t force them and I am happy if they find love.” Another interlocutor, in response to the possibility of her son marrying a Catholic, said, “The heart wants whom it wants, but that’s life.” We can see very clearly a temporal shift from the earlier “discipline” emanating from the household and the community in ensuring endogamous matches, to a focus on the wellbeing of the child by ensuring their happiness with their partner. None of the participants with whom I spoke were overtly positive in relation to the possibility of their child entering into a marriage with a non-Tatar, often saying they would prefer if their child married a Tatar, but they relied on a discourse of love to explain their acceptance of such a pairing. This pulls from a very different social geography of the relation between the individual and the wider community; whereas the previous pressure towards endogamous marriages was understood as a way to ensure the continuity of the collective, this change reflects a privileging of the individual’s emotional wellbeing over and above the needs of the group. Of the participants I spoke with regarding this issue, they continued to express a preference towards endogamous marriages as the most important way to ensure the viability of the community in the future, but nevertheless many of them accepted the agency of their children to choose their own partner.

For the children of mixed marriages, this pressure towards endogamy means that they are placed in a liminal space, as they are understood to share consanguinity with other Tatars, but due to their upbringing they may have an ambiguous or unequal understanding and



relation with Tatar practices and traditions. I spoke with Tareq about these issues, a slim, handsome man in his 30s with a broad smile and a quick laugh. As we sat down to begin the interview he immediately opened up, animatedly detailing his life. He gave me a short family history, explaining that his mother is Polish Tatar and his father a Palestinian Muslim, and his grandparents were not happy with the match. He described how he was born in Poland but spent his adolescent years in Palestine before returning to Poland for school. He was a vibrant storyteller, and I was captivated listening to his experiences both in Poland and Palestine. Eventually I asked him about the role of blood in Polish Tatar identity and he answered quickly. He said that people do not consider him Tatar; his mother is, but he is not. He described not feeling totally welcome, illustrating his point through a story in which he attended a communal gathering and tried to sit with various groups but every time he attempted, they would walk away, leaving him on his own. In the end, he explained that he had to sit with his (Tatar) grandparents. I asked why he thought this happened, and he said he did not know, but that it did not bother him. The conversation continued and at the end of the interview I asked the question I posed to all of my participants, “how would you define yourself?” (Kim pan/pani jest? Literally, “who are you?”). He looked at me, grinned, and said “I’m Tareq” (Jestem Tareq).

Looking at his story, we can see how blood, performance, traditions, and family are implicated in the construction of identity and belonging in complex ways, which deny a strict determinative relationship between Polish Tatar identity and blood ties. Rather, we can see the multivarious and sometimes ambiguous ways that the social geographies of relatedness are experienced. While Tareq’s mother was Polish Tatar, raised in a Polish Tatar household with Polish Tatar parents, he spent his adolescence in Palestine and therefore was denied the opportunity to create the social and kin bonds expected of him as Tatar. He noted that he never felt at home in Palestine either, as his initial inability to speak Arabic or do simple tasks signaled to others his outsider status. This liminality betwixt and between positionalities did not hold him back however, as we see him creatively craft his own narrative through defining himself, simply, as himself. His adolescence spent away from Polish Tatars therefore led to an (assumption of) lack of performance and knowledge of Polish Tatar tradition. His kin ties to his Polish Tatar mother and his religious positionality as Muslim were not enough to fully situate him as a full member of the community. This demonstrates how ideas of kinship and relatedness are not simply cultural explications on top of an already existing stratum of biology, but as Tareq’s story suggests, narratives which can be wielded to include and

exclude. As Strathern and Edwards note in relation to their study of kinship in English society, “So a person who could be claimed in terms of blood ties may be disowned through lack of social interest, which might or might not be a matter of consequence. Conversely, someone who was forgotten may be claimed back through resurrected biological links” (2000, 160). Kinship ties can be variously acknowledged, performed, or severed, thus enveloping or excluding those who in another socio-historical context would be considered kin. This underlines the ways in which the very practices that are understood as visible, clear pillars of continuity are also those which can be resignified through community politics or the (lack of) performance.

### “The whole fairy tale falls apart”- Searching for a Partner

Initially, one of the most intriguing aspects of relatedness for me was the dense web connecting my interlocutors in complex patterns of familial ties. The kinship chart I made, with its criss-crossing lines, told the story of the intense social pressure toward endogamous marriages. Thus, as my interlocutors noted, this made the possibility of finding a Polish Tatar romantic partner difficult as potential suitors had to contend with varying degrees of shared relations. Interlocutors told me that marriages between close kin—first cousins or anything closer—were no longer practiced. Pawlic-Miśkiewicz argues that this change was due to genetic worries, as she states “Although as late as before and after World War II, relationships between first cousins had been far from uncommon, a gradual departure from such a close relationship between future spouses was observed, due to the risk of occurrence of genetic diseases as a result of [the] combination of closely related genetic material of parents” (2016b, 364). While one person I spoke with mentioned that they knew of two first cousins who married recently, it was clear that for the people with whom I spoke such a decision is highly discouraged, which they justified using biological and genetic explanations. A move away from condoning marriages between closely related family members means that finding a spouse within a numerically small community that has strictly observed endogamous marriages for some time is made infinitely more difficult.<sup>111</sup> As one interlocutor described it, “maybe, maybe that's why there is a problem to find a wife or husband, you are lucky because let's assume a girl introduces a boy and says Daddy, this is, I

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<sup>111</sup> For the interlocutors whom I asked, “close family” would include grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Anything further than this, for example what we call in English second cousins, would be considered extended family (*dalsza rodzina*).

don't know...Janek, this is my future husband. But this is your cousin. The whole fairy tale falls apart.”

For some of those who are committed to finding a Tatar romantic partner, they may look across the borders in nearby Belarus, Lithuania, or Ukraine. While Tatars in these communities today represent themselves as distinct, autonomous groups, nevertheless they shared a common history up until the border changes of WWII. I heard of people asking various family members if they were aware of any eligible partners in these countries, where some may still have distant relations. I was told that ties between Tatars in Poland and Belarus were maintained for some period after the border changes, but relations have started to diminish as these groups have grown within the boundaries of their respective nation-states and increasingly identify with the national collective. While some interlocutors maintain relations with distant kin across the borders, particularly utilizing technology such as Facebook or Viber, most expressed to me that while they may know they have relations in Belarus, they do not maintain an active relationship with them.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, it was not unheard of for a young Polish Tatar to make a journey across the border, usually seeking a wife.

I spoke with Dżenetta Adamowicz, a prominent member of the Polish Tatar community and the wife of Jan Adamowicz, the president of ZTRP. She was easy to talk with and quick to smile, the glasses she wore around her neck bobbing up and down with her movements. She told me about her son, who has always been interested and proud of his Tatar identity and who wanted to find a wife who spoke Tatar as her native tongue. He met a Tatar woman online who is from Russia, they got married, and they now live together near the Ural Mountains. She told me that her son “fulfilled his dream of living where everyone speaks Tatar and he is learning how to speak it too.” She described how when most people “look to the West” he “looked to the East” for ways to live his life, embracing his *tatarskość*

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<sup>112</sup> One of my interlocutors was planning a trip to Belarus to visit their distant relations and I was planning on joining them on this journey. Unfortunately, COVID restrictions made such an international trip impossible. As discussed in the introduction, Polish Tatars, Lithuanian Tatars, and Belarussian Tatars were once considered a unified community, which was bisected by the border changes as a result of WWII. Many of those who found themselves on the Belarussian side of the border were either relocated to Poland (sometimes forcibly) or made the choice to immigrate across the border to Poland. Not everyone decided to move however, and so some Polish Tatars still have family members in Belarus, though the ties are unevenly maintained. It must be noted that while the ascension of Poland to the EU is often discussed popularly and in the news in positive terms, the hardening of the Eastern border of the EU and Schengen area has made more difficult the maintenance of social and economic ties, which were historically very strong between the Eastern border area of Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania.

in an unequivocal way. Here we see how technology can be utilized in order to bring people together in novel ways, and also how marriage practices, while often being understood as an important source of community boundary maintenance, are also played with in ways which highlight a transnational Tatar identity over and above a Polish identity.

Some younger Polish Tatars are open to finding a Polish-Catholic partner, but expressed some reservations due to questions regarding whether their partner would be able to fully embrace their Tatar heritage. Others noted difficulties in their dating lives, saying that they are treated differently than non-Tatar Poles by potential partners. One young Polish Tatar man in his twenties said that girls he has dated in the past have expressed that their parents would not be happy with them bringing home a Tatar boy, while a woman I spoke with expressed difficulties with dating online, saying that she did not know when to bring up being Polish Tatar, saying “I am afraid to say anything.” Some felt that due to these issues it would be easier to marry a Tatar, as there would not need to be any discussions regarding whether to baptize or give the azan to their children, or what holidays to celebrate (if any). While certainly there were issues discussed among my interlocutors regarding difficulties in dating, the prevalence of mixed marriages also shows that these issues do not significantly preclude the ability for Polish Tatars to marry outside of their community. As discussed elsewhere, when I spoke with non-Tatar Poles about my research their reactions tended to be quite positive, as they highlighted the military sacrifices Polish Tatars made for Poland and their patriotism, often calling them “our Muslims” (*nasi muzułmanie*). However, marriage can be a highly contentious field particularly as, mentioned above, the union of two individuals from different faith traditions can raise questions regarding the upbringing of any resulting children. Dżemil Gembicki, the guardian (*opiekun*) of the mosque in Kruszyniany, married a Catholic Polish woman and found a creative solution for the raising of his children—his daughter is raised Catholic, while his son is raised Muslim.

Historically, finding a Polish Tatar partner could be done in two ways: *swaty* (matchmaking) or attendance at one of the famous Polish Tatar balls. Matchmaking was much more common in the 50s or 60s, in which older women who knew the members of the community could be approached to find a suitable match for a young person. Pawlic-Miśkiewicz writes “Although young Tatars had many opportunities to become acquainted with each other – holidays, balls, youth meetings – the role of matchmakers was hard to overestimate. It was them who knew the situation in their own community, but in other localities as well, and knew where bachelors and girls were. And there was one goal: to

match Tatar boys with Tatar girls, so they would not establish closer acquaintances with persons outside their own ethnic group” (2016b, 363). These older women possessed the knowledge of who had a steady income, who came from a religious family, and the possible kin relations between potential suitors. Once they thought they had found a suitable match, the pair would be introduced and eventually, hopefully, married.<sup>113</sup> At this time the primary factor for a match was not the personal suitability of two individuals, but rather to ensure the future of the community through their union.

Besides the practice of matchmaking, balls were perhaps the most important communal gathering in which Polish Tatars came together with the objective to not only “have fun,” but also make marriageable connections. These balls, traditionally held after Kurban Bajram, were targeted specifically to a Polish Tatar audience and would consist of renting a hall with music, food, dancing, and “always after the ball there were two to three weddings.”<sup>114</sup> This was a Polish Tatar-only space, in which people would travel from all over Poland to Podlasie to (re)affirm connections. I was told that this was particularly vital for young people, who due to their small numbers did not always have the possibility to mingle with other Polish Tatars in social spaces, particularly in cities and villages outside of Podlasie. Therefore, these balls constituted affectively dense moments of interpersonal connections. Balls were consistently described to me as fun, enjoyable events which are the highlight of the social calendar.

While the prominence of these events was continually pointed out to me, people also noted how the role these balls play has shifted throughout time. Interlocutors noted that in the past the balls would happen more often, now only once a year, and that they are no longer one of the most common ways to find a Tatar partner. Perhaps due to younger people moving away from the Podlasie area, or the decreasing social stigma surrounding mixed marriages, the balls no longer function as one of the main matchmaking events. Many of my interlocutors noted that one of the main difficulties for the Polish Tatars in Podlasie to find a potential endogamous marriage partner is the emigration of young people to other areas for

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<sup>113</sup> Here we see the critical role that women have played within the community, as they were turned to as important sources of community history and knowledge, and thus were able to ensure suitable matches. It was vital for these women to know by heart the interconnected family histories that could negatively affect a potential pairing, as well as details about members of the community such as the religiousness of a family or the prevalence of alcohol use disorder.

<sup>114</sup> The food was described to me as a mix of Polish and Polish Tatar food, while the music and dancing was similar to the non-Tatar population. Polish Tatar food was discussed in Chapter Two, while music and dance were discussed in Chapter Three.

increased economic opportunity. “At one time it was easier because there were areas where there lived a lot of Tatars, and now Tatars are dispersed, they left for England, they left for the US, different places around the world they went away and it is very hard to find one’s other half.”

Podlasie remains economically disadvantaged compared to the rest of Poland, with 15.7% of the population in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (the political organization within which the region of Podlasie lies) falling under the legal poverty rate, compared to 9% of the national population (Urząd Statystyczny w Białymstoku 2020). Emigration remains a significant economic factor in the region, as a report by the Marshal's Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship (Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Podlaskiego) notes, “Podlaskie Voivodeship is characterized by a high migration balance (internal and foreign) every year...each individual departure from the region adds up to results that can be compared to the annual disappearance of a town with about 2,000 inhabitants from the map of the voivodeship...the coexistence of both [a low birth rate and emigration] leads to serious demographic problems, including the progressive depopulation of some areas of the region and their increasing peripheralisation” (Departament Rozwoju Regionalnego 2016, 10). The migration of young Polish Tatars, and Poles in general, to economic centres such as the capital city of Warsaw or to the “West” has prompted changes in the social geography of Podlasie, as increasingly limited choices of endogamous marriage partners has put pressure on individuals to search outside of their community—within Poland or without.

While the balls remain a pleasant occasion to (re)develop affective and kin relations between community members, now young people often come to balls with a partner already, thus negating their importance for the continuation of endogamous marriage practices. “And thanks to these balls, now only once a year there is such a ball, Kurban Bajram when this ball is, well, it has changed a bit because most of them are already coming in couples, a boy with a girlfriend and in the past most of them were such [single] girls and bachelors.” While the balls no longer serve as a primary location to meet a Tatar partner, they still exist in the minds of many people as occasions when numerous community members met a significant other in the past, and on this basis still stand as a crucial and affectively poignant moment in which Polish Tatar identity and community is (re)affirmed. Thus, these balls are a complicated interweaving of past, present, and future in which their historical importance for matchmaking has been shifted in the present to a temporary, fleeting moment of togetherness.

Simultaneously they are also moments in which the future viability of the Polish Tatars as a distinctive community hangs in the balance.

### Conclusion

This chapter has looked at relatedness among Polish Tatars and has argued that the concept of kinship (*pokrewieństwo*) is an important scaffolding upon which a sense of community is built. Kinship relations are diffused throughout the community through both knowable and uncertain kin ties, in some ways spreading the concept of family throughout the group. Blood ties are creatively called upon to bolster group conceptions of identity along with practices through which identity is fleshed out and made tangible. Thus, belonging is produced not only through discourses of blood and descent, or the performance of community practices, but rather exists within an ambiguous convergence of these elements. Endogamous marriage practices, conceptualized as one of the ways in which the Polish Tatar community can persist throughout time, are now primary locations of flux, fluidity, and change. The shift towards exogamous marriage patterns means that the children of these pairings can be seen as both the sites through which Tatar future making is ensured and dangerous sources of uncertainty. The ambiguity as to whether they are accepted fully as members shows how belonging is necessarily a contingent practice, in which the inclusion of some means the exclusion of others. Those who choose a mixed marriage need to contest with the possibility of rejection by potential partners or their families, while for those who want a Polish Tatar partner looking across borders becomes a viable option. The transnational economic and labour flows that have reduced the possible number of young Polish Tatars looking for partners in Podlasie means that those who are left find creative solutions to find their other half. By taking seriously the body as the way through which people encounter and experience their world, we can start to understand how both kinship and practices help to craft particular subjectivities, leaving them in tension without attempting to reconcile them.

## You Can't Go Home Again—Concluding Remarks



Figure 11: Informational Poster for Ukrainian Refugees, Warsaw Train Station

In October 2022 I returned to Białystok to attend a Tatar Ball—the first one since the disruption of the COVID pandemic. Returning to my field site was a disconcerting experience, as memories of my research overlaid the city that had changed in my absence. This was visible not only in the physical infrastructure which everywhere bore marks of construction projects, but in major global events that occurred after I left. The war in Ukraine was palpable throughout the city as signs supporting Ukraine sat in windowsills or posters advertising support for Ukrainian refugees were put up around the city. My friends, that group of women who



not only assisted my research but became my close social circle throughout field work had changed as well. Different houses, jobs, partners—it all brought to the forefront of my mind the ways that our field sites, while set in resin in our field notes, nevertheless move on without us.

Due to an unfortunate turn of events, I was unable to attend the ball. After having bought my event and plane tickets, I was informed that the ball was already at full capacity. However, the event dedicated to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ZTRP had a free, un-ticketed introductory talk beforehand, which I was able to attend. Taking place in a restaurant and event hall on the outskirts of town, the event consisted of talks by Jan Adamowicz, the president of ZTRP, Tatar scholar Artur Konopacki, and researcher Michał Łyszczarz. The speeches focused on issues relating to the Tatar community and identity, highlighting both the perseverance of the group through time and their difficulties to overcome; globalization, the movement of young people away from Poland, and a lack of interest by youth were pointed to as sites of danger and uncertainty. As I peered around the crowd in between talks, I caught the eyes of participants I had not seen since I had left—the member of Buńczuk whose speech had moved me that day in Warsaw, Zejnab who had invited me to Bajram dinner and cooked me vegetarian food despite not knowing how, the women from the weekly Islamic classes. After a dance presentation by a combined Buńczuk, the introductory event was over and I milled about the crowd, greeting people here and there with hugs and handshakes. As music started and food began to be served, it was my cue to leave. I spent the rest of the evening with my old friends as we talked, laughed, and watched movies into the early morning hours, but the difference was palpable—I no longer live there, I am a visitor, and I realized that the Poland I knew had changed. The evidence of passing time was visible in the empty store fronts of businesses I once patronized, the signs supporting Ukraine in their struggle against Russian invasion, the joint performance of the two Buńczuk troupes. Difference was visible in the infrastructure of the city, in my participants' lives, and in mine.

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Before looking back on my thesis, I would like for a moment to stay with this question of return, change, and temporality to question how my field site was constituted in

my field notes and my memories, to look at how my return to Białystok over a year and a half later made me revisit assumptions and the contours of my memory.

When I first moved to Poland it seemed like the culmination of a lifelong dream and I was both thrilled by the challenge and overwhelmed by the novel experience. The difference between the language as taught to me in university classes and how it was used on the street was shocking; not only were slang terms used with alarming frequency, Podlasie has its own dialect (gwara) that at the beginning seemed like a tangled web of consonants and vowels, hovering just outside of my comprehension. I seemed to be constantly on edge as I tried to avoid unintentional slights; the use of “słucham” (I’m listening) instead of the direct English translation “Co?” (What?), or the use of the third person “pan/pani” (Mr./Mrs.) instead of the familiar “ty” (you) was a constant battle. Eventually however, everything seemed to click into place. The language became easier as I was able to engage in casual conversations or jokes and the joy of seeing more of the Podlasie landscape constantly caught me off guard in the best of ways. I was in danger of only seeing the good, of lionizing the place and community in which I lived. Eventually however, I was also able to see the rough edges, the shadows which I perhaps avoided when I first arrived. My initial love of disco polo music, the ubiquitous soundtrack to life in Podlasie, became entangled with an understanding of this genre’s relationship to right-wing politics. Beyond the beautiful landscape of Podlasie which flew by the train windows—the forests, rivers, and plains which hung heavy with fog in the early morning air—was also troubling graffiti dotted around the city, including a swastika which was later overlaid with antifa imagery, and then finally covered with a Celtic cross. This unsettling imagery, a literal palimpsest written on the city infrastructure, speaks to the complicated layers that any field site is made up of, and the battles that occur as different voices vie for visibility in Białystok’s complicated physical and political landscape.

After my fieldwork ended, several historic events occurred which changed Poland and Podlasie specifically. The contentious re-election of Lukashenko in Belarus in August 2020 and the later refugee crisis beginning in mid-2021 prompted Poland’s government to declare the eastern border a state of emergency (stan wyjątkowy) in September 2021, effectively banning oversight from international organizations and journalists. While the state of emergency has since been lifted, a border wall has been constructed in a bid to stop asylum seekers from entering Poland from Belarus. Ongoing stories of abuse by Polish and Belarussian border guards have prompted international outrage. Border guards have illegally pushed refugees who have asked for asylum back to the border, while others are stuck

between the countries, forced to survive in cold temperatures and wild terrain. Human Rights Watch, an NGO based in the US, carried out interviews with nine migrants and human rights activists. “People interviewed said that Polish border guards had pushed them back to Belarus in March and April, sometimes violently, and without due process, despite their pleas for asylum. On the Belarusian side, people reported violence, inhuman and degrading treatment and other forms of coercion by Belarusian border guards” (Human Rights Watch 2022). In February 2023, 100 Polish public figures signed an open letter to the government calling for a stop to the violence at the border, decrying the “push-back” policy that (often violently) turns migrants back to the border with Belarus instead of heeding their calls for asylum (Gazeta Wyborcza 2023). As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, some Polish Tatars provided food and supplies to the refugees and the border guards, prompting controversy within the community. This crisis exposed the cracks within the narrativized unity of the community, as differing interpretations of the infrastructure of belonging caused some to highlight Polish national belonging over and above the universal Muslim ummah.

The war in Ukraine starting in February 2022 and the influx of Ukrainian refugees to Poland exposed differences of treatment, as the nation seemed to rally in their support. As Agata Fernc, an activist with the NGO Fundacja Ocalenie said, “Our government has used [the Ukrainians] politically to show we’re a great people, responding to a crisis whose size makes it easy to forget the racism towards very different people crossing from Belarus” (Minder 2022). The difference in how refugees, largely from the Middle East, were treated in comparison to those from Ukraine demonstrate the cracks and tensions in Polish politics, as the right-wing Polish government continues to uphold a particular, exclusionary conception of the Polish nation, which can expand to accept Ukrainian refugees but excludes others. In such a situation, as battles rage among politicians and everyday people as to questions of who belongs to, and in, Poland, it may be an appropriate time to look at the small Polish Tatar community for an insight into how boundary lines are accepted, contested, and (re)confirmed, always already containing the exclusion of others.

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This thesis has attempted to explore how belonging as an affective state is understood, experienced, and embodied among Polish Tatars in Podlasie. Using existing literature on identity among Polish Tatars and the concept of belonging as starting points, I have attempted to argue that belonging and group identity are constituted and made tangible through

practices of the body—a moving, eating, feeling, dancing body. I argue that the leading tripartite paradigm of Polish Tatar identity does not adequately explain the lived experiences of Polish Tatars and how they come to feel belonging towards the wider community, rather extricating categories of religion and ethnicity from lived experience. This thesis has attempted to use a different analytical lens, proposing that investigations of belonging must include and start from the body, as belonging is not simply an intellectual state but rather calls upon the entirety of the body to feel, experience, and create it. I also argue against the usage of theoretical frameworks that distinguish between “high” and “low” or “Orthodox” and “Tatar” Islam, instead proposing that Asad’s discursive tradition can provide a fruitful position through which to understand the differing ways that the various communities in Poland understand and relate to their religious practices without reifying those distinctions. Throughout this thesis, I propose that underlying conceptions of belonging among Polish Tatars is a tension between essentializing discourses and identity as constituted through performativity. I contend that both of these understandings are differentially enacted by Polish Tatars through both narratives of roots, descent and blood, and practices such as food, dance, marriage, and participation in communal gatherings in complicated and intersecting ways. This tension can only be understood when we take the body as the starting point of analysis to see it as the complex, perceptive infrastructure through which life is experienced.

Each chapter focused on various bodily practices to help us understand not only the lived experiences of my interlocutors, but also the ways that affective resonances differentially flow and stick to various individuals through performative practices. Chapter Two explored food practices as a space through which Polish Tatars reaffirm their connections with other group members, while also establishing distance with non-Tatar Muslims through the common consumption of alcohol and non-halal meat. The ways in which food is taken into the body and digested break down the boundaries between the individual and the community, making food a particularly rich space in which identity is enacted. Chapter Three analysed dance as a practice through which Polish Tatars represent their community towards others, while also constituting a location in which belonging is composed through bodily work. Polish Tatar dance practices, while understood as a space in which community identity is predicated, is paradoxically based on inspiration and ties with Tatars across the borders. Chapter Four analysed communal gatherings as spaces in which the dispersed Polish Tatar community comes together in cyclical events to reconfirm their belonging to the group, but uneven participation leads to fears of a lack of performance, in

which intergenerational knowledge transfer breaks down. Chapter Five takes a step back from questions of practices and instead investigates notions of relatedness, belonging, and marriage, trying to understand how narratives of blood and descent are implicated in the creation of identity. Questions of cultural continuity and nostalgia for the past abounded, as interlocutors often expressed fear for the future for Polish Tatars, saying, “we want to continue to cultivate our traditions so that our ancestors’ remnants will not be lost.”

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However, instead of focusing on the anxiety, fear of loss, and the (possible) disappearance of social landscapes, here I would like to highlight the spaces in which Polish Tatars fight to create new, hybrid understandings of identity, vying for a position in Poland in which their voices are heard. Despite perceived impediments such as the increasing emigration of young Polish Tatars from Poland to the “West,” or the lack of a minority language, Polish Tatars throughout their history have pushed for their acceptance as a distinctive Polish minority, creatively drawing from other Tatar communities to create complex traditions which buttress affective ties. Polish Tatar activists such as Dagmara Sulkiewicz, Lilla Świerblewska, Anna Mucharska, and Barbara Pawlic-Miśkiewicz through their activities strive for the visibility of Polish Tatars within Podlasie and internationally. From being a spokesperson for Muslims in Poland, to creating a Polish Tatar restaurant and using that space as a forum for community dialogue, to heading a dance organization, to publishing books on their history and community, they use their voices to find a way to ensure their community persists into the future.

When I spoke with my interlocutors about what they wanted highlighted in my research, they focused on their attachment to Poland, their position as integral members of the national community, and their patriotism. While I do not want to paint a false picture of their positionality within Polish society, as certainly there are instances of Islamophobia, prejudice, and intolerance, I also want to note the ways in which the Polish Tatars with whom I spoke highlighted their love of country as the key to understanding their lived experience. Lehrer, in her ethnography of the complex interactions of memory projects of Jews and Poles in Kazimierz, describes her research approach as not only focusing on conflict, which often gets the most attention from researchers, but to accentuate that “tolerance, just as its many opposites, is also created in the tiniest details of social life, of speech and action” (2013, 18). While it is important to present an accurate rendition of my participants’ lives in Podlasie,

one which includes discrimination, that was not what was emphasized to me. So, I would like to focus where I can on those moments of tolerance, those spaces in which communities are able to come together in all of their complexity and ambiguity and find a way to coexist (współżyć).

In some ways, this work was limited by its specificity on the Polish Tatar community in Podlasie. This was a particular methodological choice, as this area was represented to me as “Mecca,” the region where the majority of Polish Tatars live and manufacture a vibrant social life. However, in the future, additional research on Polish Tatar identity outside of Podlasie would allow us to paint a more intricate picture of identity work outside of this concentrated area of Polish Tatars. Locations such as Western Poland where historic settlements of Polish Tatars are now largely depopulated would be a fruitful landscape in which to understand more clearly the role of communal gatherings for identity, specifically because these are areas where social life is limited. Additionally, work with communities across the border to understand how the Polish-Belarusian border exists both in the imaginaries of the groups and as a physical manifestation would allow us to investigate transnational Tatar relations and connections. Unfortunately, the crisis at the border means that such research is not viable at this time, despite it being all the more vital to investigate.

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When I finished my fieldwork, I had a party to say goodbye to my friends and to thank them not only for their assistance in my research, but their companionship throughout the 18 months I lived there. We ordered pizza from our favourite shop down the road, the shrimp pizza a particular favourite, and reminisced about our times together. Eventually however, every night must come to an end. I said goodbye to everyone in turn, promising to keep in touch. Alija told me that there is a superstition (zabobon) that if you leave an item with someone then you will return to them, the ties between you will never be broken. I put this writing out into the world as an item, connected to the earth of Podlasie and the lives of the Polish Tatars there, so that one day I will return again.

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