Maintaining borders, crossing borders: social relationships in the Shtetl

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Backward and Forward

In the twenty-first century, scholars debate and discuss a phenomenon that represented the absolute antithesis of postmodernity. 'Represented' because, though lasting for centuries, it was made abruptly extinct in the mid-twentieth century and is swiftly escaping living memory. Why does one study shtetl communities today?1[1] As Zborowski and Herzog wrote in their Preface to *Life is with People*, 'It is a culture that is not remote. On the contrary, it is one with which many have had direct or indirect contact, through its representatives or their descendants.'2[2] One might even venture to guess that the majority of those researching the topic have had just such contact, in Jewish as well as non-Jewish families. Increasingly there is a desire to return to one's memories or roots; persons scattered on various continents are visiting places that were 'home' for themselves or close kin. A new nonfiction genre – from Theo Richmond's *Konin* to Diane Armstrong's *Mosaic* to Shimon Redlich's *Together and Apart in Brze|any* – serves as partial evidence of this.

Accompanying the nostalgia, however, is a desire to analyze a model of multiculturalism glaringly different from the one popularly propagated today – one in which, paradoxically, segregation instead of integration was the rule. In examining the shtetl, we find ourselves puzzled. Inconclusive are the debates when historical methodology and rationale are applied to determine whether it was (to paraphrase Ezra Mendelsohn) good for the Jews or bad for the Jews, good for the Christians or bad for the Christians, or (to paraphrase Joel Berkowitz) a dystopia or utopia.

Arguments for calling the shtetl 'backward' abound, of course, if one compares its living conditions to those of the Western world. Who would see as 'forward' the rarity of indoor plumbing, the dominance of dirt roads and dirt floors, or the nonexistence of mechanized public transportation? Moreover, it appears as though these unenlightened folk were content with the way things were and did not want to 'progress.' This was a 'traditional' culture: a conservative society in which the upholding and safeguarding of the status quo is an ideal towards which all members of the group strive.

In it all realms of human social life are very much mutually and intricately intertwined. Religion and language and socioeconomic status and lifestyle and ethnic identity – all constitute components of one whole; religious life is home life is social life, etc. The public and private spheres of individual lives can barely be distinguished: quite the contrary, this is a world in which (to put it colloquially) 'everyone knows everything about everybody' – something considered unnecessarily intrusive by modern standards.

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Still, confusion in judging the shtetl community is roused more by another aspect: not only fiction, but nonfiction accounts as well, ofttimes open with an implication, at minimum, that that there was 'harmony,' that 'those were wonderful times,' that 'all was well until the Germans came.'3[3] In fact, as Rosa Lehmann points out, 'Recent studies have come to address the issue of coexistence between Jews and Poles and conclude that, while it is true that Jews and Poles periodically found themselves in confrontation, most of the time they lived in cooperative symbiosis.'4[4]

Is this pure idealization? Underlying the debates is an imperative: how can one reconcile memory of the peaceful symbiosis of the shtetl with memory of the horrifying conflagration of the Shoah? In wake of that trauma, skepticism is inevitably aroused when shtetl residents recall peace rather than pogroms. Yet if mutual hatred and animosity was the norm, then how was it that Jews and Christians lived side by side for so many centuries in so many different places, under so many different rulers? Moreover, how was it that – instead of assimilating – their cultural differences remained strong, grew deeper, and even flourished? How is it that what looms before our twenty-first century eyes as a retrograde dystopia, could have been a romantic utopia?

If we do not immerse ourselves in this world and look out through its eyes, we cannot comprehend how groups, which should have lived in conflict according to the prevalent theories of the social sciences, built one universe together and lived instead in coexistence. It took an exported and imposed, urban and modern ideology, executing a premeditated mission with technological advancement, to bring this to an end. That fact alone speaks much in favor of perceiving a societal 'forwardness' among the residents of the shetl.

Together and Apart

Nonetheless, a justification for assessing the shtetl as aberrantly regressive has been the observation that it was not only exclusive with regards to outsiders, but also exclusive between groups of insiders. As described by the title of Shimon Redlich's latest work,5[5] the groups were, indeed, together in one sense while, indeed, quite apart in another. And it is especially this 'apartness' which bothers the contemporary Westerner. In the post-assimilation era, with the scorning and shedding of the 'separate but equal' motto, no positive value can be perceived in segregation, even willing self-segregation. Yet the Jewish and non-Jewish residents of the shtetl are seen as having eschewed each other completely, nothing less than impermeable bubbles rebounding away from contact. The smaller the community of the shtetl and its villages, the more distinct appear to have been the boundaries subdividing it within.

Their worlds were two (or more, depending on the number of different groups coinhabiting the area), but these were simultaneously superseded by the one cosmos that they created together. 'What conception could a group have of itself and others, if it ever even meets any? Of course, it is clear that the small world of their community is the entire world for them, that they will attempt to encompass and comprehend it wholly … it is their world … their social group.' 6[6] More precisely, the entire universe extends only as far as their community:

> '"If you live in Shinohata", wrote Ronald Dore, "the 'outside world' begins three hundred yards down the road…" (Dore, 1978, p. 60). We do not have to construe community just in terms of locality, but more properly, in the sense which Dore expresses so lucidly…: the sense of a primacy of belonging. Community is that entity to which one belongs, *greater than kinship* [emphasis added] but more immediately than the abstraction we call "society". It is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home. In it they learn the meaning of kinship through being able to perceive *its* boundaries…'7[7]

A strongly emotional and psychological bond with a specific place (something eliminated by modern mobility) is founded upon the significance endowed a specific natural landscape, the edifices built by its residents or their forefathers, and, above all, the people who are born, live, work, and die there and all the extraordinary and ordinary events they experience individually or together. Of such a connection is made a *heimat*, a *maBa ojczyzna* ("small homeland") or *ojczyzna prywatna* ("private fatherland").8[8] Its borders become the ones which enclose "all the world" for all its residents, bringing them together. At the same time, it also permits the perception of kinship or other boundaries which enclose smaller groups within, keeping them apart.

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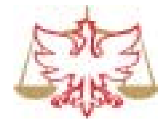
Community and Boundary

How is it possible for identity to be at once durably connected to the same hometown and yet to a different group than represented by one's neighbors? As Anthony Cohen points out, 'community' implies 'simultaneously both similarity and difference.'9[9] Furthermore, 'Organic solidarity is society constituted *by* individuals, where differences which distinguish them from each other become also the bases for their integration and collaboration in a solidary whole.'10[10]

Hence, a single community of place not only permits, but actually requires and thrives on various sets of similarities and differences. Marek ZióBkowski observes how neighboring groups each have separate natural (lakes, hills, etc.) and constructed (monuments, buildings, art and literature, etc.) correlates which meaningfully function solely for each group distinctly; shared correlates which, nonetheless, evoke disparate reactions for each; but, finally, shared correlates which evoke identical reactions.11[11] The first two sets comprise the differences upon which their exclusive boundaries will be built; this last set is what comprises the similarities around which their inclusive, common boundary will be built. Nevertheless,



> 'The important thrust of this argument is that this relative similarity or difference is not a matter for "objective" assessment: it is a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves. Thus, although they recognize important differences among themselves, they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities.'12[12]

Hence, as ZióBkowski elucidates,

> 'A neighbor is someone found in spatial proximity, but concurrently someone with whom one has a certain kind of contact, about whom one has certain knowledge, and with whom one enters into varied interactions. A neighbor is not one of "us" and though he may be treated as "foreign" in the sense of being "other" or "emotionally distant," still he is not completely "foreign" in the sense of being "unknown." A neighboring ethnic group, its products and culture, and the land on which it lives are to some extent the subject of "our" knowledge (and attitudes)….'13[13]

Despite the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences which preclude permeation of one another, the "foreign" can coexist with the "familiar" and there can be permanent and constant exchanges between them.14[14] This feeling is what led both Polish non-Jews to speak of *nasi*, "ours" when referring to the whole population or to the groups of the shtetl community – its Jews, Poles, or Ukrainians, in contrast with some amorphous body of 'Jews,' 'Poles,' or 'Ukrainians' elsewhere.

Establishing borders – on the basis of and for the maintenance of the above-mentioned differences – is extremely crucial in the building of collective identity. Paradoxically, defining oneself or one's group is always easiest to conduct in the negative – stating what one is not. We need the 'other' in order to describe and delineate our 'self,' and to establish the borders of what comprises 'us.' All cultural groups on a given territory define and stress who is 'other' for it; they need this mechanism like oxygen for without it they vanish. 'A certain level of xenophobia is necessary for the very survival of a community for this protects it from dissolving away: the liquidation of any and all distance with regards to others must automatically mean the liquidation of an attachment to one's own group, i.e., its liquidation.'15[15] As Eva Hoffman points out, '[A]mong their fellow Jews, … their most important task was to maintain the continuum of their laws and beliefs, to uphold the faith that made them who they were, that constituted their very selves.'16[16]

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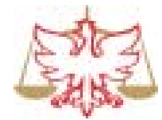
In order to both include and exclude, the community must have 'a sense of discrimination, namely, the *boundary*. …. [which] encapsulates the identity of the community…. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished.'17[17] Some borders do exist physically, but more crucial here will be those which exist psychically. 'At this level community is more than oratorical abstraction: it hinges crucially on consciousness.'18[18] Part of this is a compelling sixth sense regarding all the borders – which ones cannot be crossed or can, but only under certain circumstances.

All this is dictated by religion, tradition, and customs, by the geography, and by the group(s) residing in one locality. Everyone knows his or her place within this landscape because it has been designated from birth and should remain so. 'The matter of xenophobia becomes particularly sharp where parallel communities overlap on each other territorially…. …[B]oth sides, for the right and proper arrangement of mutual relations, must meet specific mandatory and demanding conditions.'19[19]

The incontrovertible priority is preservation and upholding of the given order through the strict maintenance of set divides. Ironically, the more rigorous this is, and the more partitions there are, the more separate identities can exist concurrently. This is of the utmost consequence for the community: without the borders the long-standing order of its cosmos would spin out of control. So as not to disturb the 'natural' and preordained order of things, crossings had to be limited and controlled, and crossing over had to incur severe sanctions.



From our modern point-of-view much of the above (though still at the core of modern nationalisms) constitutes unreasonable restriction on individual freedom and the right to pursue individually-defined happiness. Yet, for the people living in such a society, a divinely-ordained stability rules the world. Close contact with God and nature leads to a 'divine community' and 'unity' on Earth.20[20]

The modern individual operates relatively alone and uncomfortably in the grey area between mythology and fact, between imagination and reality, and between what is within limits and what is taboo. Individuals, things, and phenomena which are opposites, mirror-image reflections, ambivalent, or renegade will, always and within any group, arouse tensions. However, in the traditional community, the means to resolve these are available – through ritual,21[21] or by conferring specified and special status upon them.22[22] Alongside the hard and firm boundaries, are just as hard and firm rules taming contrasts, contradictions, and the in-between. Community and boundary reign comfortably over both similarity and difference.

Some Caveats

In recent years, a wealth of literature – memoirs, biographies, historical accounts, and anthropological research – has appeared, disclosing more and more of the prewar social life of shtetl Jews.23[23] This material is overwhelmingly from a Jewish perspective; extremely underrepresented in contrast is the non-Jewish one. Though research in this area has been and is being done, it should be kept in mind that the majority of surviving, non-Jewish shtetl community residents are semi-literate persons who continue to maintain a lifestyle not much removed from their prewar one.

Though referring to general trends throughout the region of Central and Eastern Europe, most examples provided in this text will be from Galician Polish Jewish culture and its counterpart Roman Catholic one. Though several groups might cohabit with them, these two constituted the paramount, mutually complementary 'other.'24[24] Further, it is recognized that the situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire varied substantially from that in the Prussian, Russian, or Ottoman Empires. Nevertheless, changes of political borders and/or regimes in distant capitals usually brought little if any change to the shtetl community.

Finally, Jews are stereotypically seen as having been 'urban,' but the territory they inhabited in Central and Eastern Europe was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, towns were generally neither large nor modern,25[25] and communities were still compact and isolated enough to be encompassed by a network of interpersonal connections. Even in larger localities such as Konin, Jews found themselves in the same types of relationships, and operating under similar restrictions, with their non-Jewish neighbors as in smaller ones.

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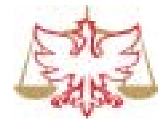
Maintaining Borders, Crossing Borders

The borders separating the two communities were tangible and physical, as well as psychosocial and imagined. They were shaped in the collective imagination over the course of centuries and intimately known to all the residents. This was their *maBa ojczyzna* and they knew every corner of it, and everyone who inhabited it – who belonged to it and who belonged to which group within it.

On the one hand, stressed in analyses of shtetl life is a strongly perceived apart-ness, or, at best, beside-ness. On the other hand, even in the most biased literature, example after example is found of close interaction. The bubbles appear to have burst, or at least have been much more permeable than is generally given. Hence questions arise: What borders did exist between the Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants of the shtetl community? Which persons stood particular guard over them? Who was permitted to cross – how, under what circumstances, and to what extent?

On Religion and Ethnicity

Although crossing of this boundary – inter-religious contact – is the focus of another text herein, religion deserves special attention because of the central role it played in establishing and reinforcing consequent boundaries. Religion relayed history, dictated traditions and customs, set the sacred language as well as the secular alphabet, framed the group calendar and its holy days, and justified the rules of the community.



Both Christians and Jews tended to view their neighbors from perspectives stemming from their religious (though not only) convictions. As Abraham Cykiert notes, ‘The Shtetl was unashamedly Jewish, with life being ordered foremost by orthodox religious observances and then by the rich cultural traditions that developed. The religion was paramount and the Shtetl revolved around the rabbi, the synagogue and the Jewish law.’26[26] Directly stemming from religious law was the concept of kosher which, more severely and strictly than anything else, segregated Jews from non-Jews on a daily basis.27[27]

In Central and Eastern Europe, the land of the shtetl, the concept of separation of church and state did not take root – where it did, the goal was to hamper state intervention in the affairs of a church instead of the opposite. More a verity here, under the rule of vast multicultural empires, one’s ethnicity was (in the most simplified equation) mutually defined by one’s religion. An ethnic Pole was a Roman Catholic and a Roman Catholic was an ethnic Pole in the same way as a Ukrainian was Byzantine Catholic and vice versa, a Russian Orthodox was Russian and vice versa, and an ethnic Jew was a religious Jew and vice versa.28[28]

In most shtetls non-religious persons were a nearly nonexistent category before the 1930s. Secularizing Jews amidst the commonly orthodox communities were few and generally looked upon with disdain;29[29] both Jews and Catholics saw them as renegades breaking unwritten rules. Exceptions might be members of educated elites who had moved in. Such persons were ‘newcomers,’ never quite perceived as ‘insiders,’30[30] but, therefore, allowed more leeway. More complex was the situation of the neophyte convert to Christianity:31[31] he or she became, in the eyes of the Jewish community, wholly excluded, even ethnically from the old group while, in the eyes of Christians, a member of the new group religiously, though remaining Jewish ethnically. This latter border was completely impenetrable and impassable from one side.

In any case – despite centuries of proximity, and despite numerous *goy* men and women remarking upon the (perceived) general beauty of Jewish women – intermarriage was not encouraged by either side. Neither was proselytizing conducted among the Jews of the *shtetl*. The very uniqueness of crossovers leads one to conclude that this border in particular – as the cornerstone of all the others – was fearfully respected.32[32] In fact, more than one instance is found of Christians guarding the border of Judaism – ‘Indeed my mother often told me that she and her sisters were taught their first Hebrew blessings and prayers by their Russian Orthodox maid, who also made absolutely certain that her father’s inn was strictly kosher’33[33] – and Jews guarding the border of Christianity – ‘During the time of the mass, the inns were closed and all the guests chased off to church.’34[34] Significantly, each group instilled among its own a certain trepidation towards the religious accoutrements of the other: Leopold Infeld, born in Kraków, recollected that, ‘He was warned that he would go blind if he gazed at Christian holy images.’35[35]

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Language

From both sides, another demarcation separating Jews and non-Jews was language. This, on a more daily basis than religion, generally serves (purposely or inadvertently) to protect minority identity against the majority. Minority tongues are something the majority does not generally learn or formally study – not only out of ethnocentric, but also practical motivation. As a consequence, however, the minority tongue can serve to keep secrets from the majority.

Nevertheless, even in this sphere there was trespassing. Hebrew remained as enigmatic for the peasant as Latin (another mysterious language of prewar times); these languages were, moreover, tightly hemmed in by the sacrum sphere and did not make it out onto the street but for rare occasions. Yet, on the one hand, it was not so unusual for Jews to speak the dominant language; non-Jews consistently claim that their peers had no difficulties. For instance, ‘About a third of the population of Vary was Jewish…. Many of them knew Yiddish, but all of them spoke Hungarian in and out of the home.’36[36] Shraga Bielawski recalled that his father ‘spoke Polish and Yiddish fluently, which was necessary for dealing with both the Christian and Jewish populations. .... Everyone in my family spoke Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and most of us could speak some German and Russian.’37[37] This opinion is supported by a Carpatho-Rusin villager who wrote: ‘There was no problem at all in understanding one another because Jews spoke in Aemko very well.’38[38]

On the other hand, Yiddish is Germanic, and in both the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, German was the official language whose fundamentals were taught or acquired inadvertently, even after World War I. Knowing some German, one could understand basic Yiddish. Certainly, the market place and the Jewish-owned shops also gave rise to learning the most important phrases and words – from *ganev* and *zBodziej* to *ein*, *tzwei*, *drei*, and *jeden, dwa, trzy* – in each other's language. Anyone who conducted any transactions needed to be fluent enough to negotiate prices.

More interestingly, 'Even the few Catholics in the village spoke Yiddish.'39[39] Cases of non-Jews speaking it fluently were perhaps infrequent, but certainly not unknown. A priest, a mayor, a girl apprenticed to a Jewish tailor, and a girl whose best friend was Jewish – all apparently spoke the language well enough that their command of it impressed both Jews and non-Jews.40[40] Though out of practice for over half a century, Galician peasants recalled words, numbers, or even sentences; some demonstrated Hebrew letters they had learned from friends. Pride was often expressed at having known and regret at having forgotten.

> 'Daniel S. (82), when asked to recall the names and professions of the Jews he had known during his lifetime, was visibly disappointed when he remembered only few of them: "I used to know the names of these people, but I have difficulties remembering them. … [….] I used to know their names like I know my prayers."'41[41]

This was not so stiff a border that crossing it was seen as undermining either community.42[42] Nevertheless, certain subsets of each group were more likely to traverse it. On the Jewish side,

> 'Girls, less cloistered in their education, could communicate more easily with the gentile world. My mother spoke an educated Polish and developed an enduring love for Polish literature, while my father spoke the language awkwardly and felt no affection for Poland. In many Konin homes the daughters spoke Polish while their brothers spoke Yiddish. The Koniners I meet are mostly men and women who attended Polish state schools in the Thirties. They spoke Polish among themselves, Yiddish with their parents.'43[43]

On the non-Jewish side, the Polish Socialist Party in Konin made banners in both Polish and Yiddish.44[44] In the Carpathian region in which Hugo Gryn lived, '…virtually everyone spoke both Yiddish and Malorus, or Little Russian, including the non-Jews.'45[45] When he returned there decades later, both Gryn and his friend still passed through the language border back and forth: 'We also met Vasily, who remembered me from the time he was a young waiter in my grandfather's inn. We spoke in Ruthenian …. He wished me and my family – in a Yiddish that he had barely remembered after a lapse of fifty years – *mazel* and *bracha*, good luck and blessing, for the time ahead.'46[46]

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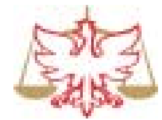
Public Space

The modern world abounds with markers which announce to the passerby where he is located; shtetl community dwellers did not need signs. Town was where the most important public and semi-private spaces were located: the marketplace, the places of worship, the school, and the cemeteries. The shops, inns, and teahouse served as local news centers as well.

The shtetl's topography was a landscape imbued with deep meaning which brought its inhabitants together. As Cohen puts it, 'The "community", in this regard, is a cluster of symbolic and ideological map references with which the individual is socially oriented.'47[47] Researchers observe the sentimental detail with which former residents describe each component of a symbolic geography. The precise portrayal, or, rather, a reconstruction of the shtetl in the mind's eye has become a key theme.48[48] It is not odd that this would be the case: physical things remind and bring to mind memories and emotions attached to them.



Although markers could be 'physical,' not all would be evident – and certainly not evocative – to anyone but the insiders: an almost dry creek, the bottom or top of a hill, the shrine at a crossroads, etc. These markers also reinforced the psychosocial ones between groups. Long established and long maintained, all residents would be fully aware of the boundaries and unequivocal in acknowledging them. Districts were drawn by official administrations in some distant provincial or national capital (often so as to encompass more Christians), but this had no effect on local knowledge of the 'real' boundaries.

Roads, buildings, and spaces were divided into those exclusively Christian, exclusively Jewish, or mixed. The *sacrum* of the synagogue(s), mikvah, church(es), and vicarage had to be respected, as well as the *profanum* of the cemeteries, and the most treacherous area: the border of the community demarcating the end of the familiar and the beginning of the strange. Some spaces – the synagogue or church – belonging to one group were a taboo for the other(s); most spaces were shared wholly or partly.

The *Rynek* (the market square) was generally a predominantly Jewish space: the chain of Jewish-owned enterprises possibly interrupted, as it were, by a smattering of Catholic-owned ones, and the church. All public areas around the center were shared at nearly all times by all. During a Jewish wedding or a Corpus Christi procession, however, this space was temporarily transformed into the sacrum of one group.

Nevertheless, the fact that these were held in the open made observation or even participation in the ceremonies less sacrosanct. At times this meant celebrating in unison. This pertained to non-Jewish guests (or, in a sense, to observers) at a Jewish wedding, but extended to other occasions as well. When, in the summer of 1905, the Russian czar granted permission for elections, Roman Catholics carried banners of saints, Jews carried the *Sefer Torah*, and members of the socialist party carried bilingual signs.49[49] While Christian processions might evoke fright – '…we ran away as though from a fire…'50[50] – a Jewish informant from Ja[liska recalled the visit of the bishop to the town in a different tone. 'He spoke of the event as a very rare and special occasion during which the Jewish and Polish religious elites met in public. Within the Jewish community the meeting was a topic of discussion long after the event had taken place.'51[51] In many places, local residents recall joint commemoration ceremonies upon the May 1935 death of the Polish leader and field marshal, Józef PiBsudski, including stops at both the main synagogue and church.

Private Space

Those privy to the lay of the land (including the villages) – knowing it 'like the back of one's hand' – also felt an intimate connection to it and the people who lived there. Each home or shop bore not a number, but the name of its owner; residents of former shtetls will still refer to a successor business by its prewar holder's name.

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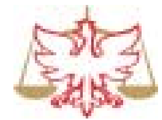
Border crossing 'invasions' into these more private areas were possible and even necessitated by normal, recurring situations. As shops were quite often located in the front part of people's homes, entering meant literally crossing the threshold into the space of the 'other.' Additionally, on most weekday mornings Jewish merchants and peddlers needed to ride to market days elsewhere. Not possessing a horse and wagon, and not wealthy enough to afford a driver alone, a group of Jews would set out before dawn, saying their morning prayers en route. Hence, the Catholic peasant's wagon was not only a shared space, but also briefly became a Jewish sacrum.

Wandering peddlers crossed the border into village homes to present goods, conduct sales, and relay community gossip. Welcome guests who saved the Catholic villager a long walk into town, these Jews were invited inside, and often also offered tea served in a cup the peddler brought himself. Jewish homes were, in turn, entered by non-Jews on a regular basis; a non-Jew might even be a member of the household. There might be the wet nurse present always, the *shabes goy* who came each *Shabat* and on other holy days, the apprentice who came nearly every day for instruction, and the tutor who came systematically during the school year.

Finally, there were not uncommon cases of genuine friendships developing especially between young Christians and Jews, entailing daily visits to each other's homes. Sometimes parents would deter contact: '



"My father would not let me bring *shikses* into the house," one woman remembers, "and he would not let me go to their homes in case I ate *treyf*."' 52[52] Precisely for reasons associated with kosherness, the Jewish friend generally came to the home of the Catholic one, though this was not the only direction of border crossing into private space.53[53]

Social and Political Organizations

Exclusivity, however, did appear – sometimes by design, sometimes not – in the founding of institutions, agencies, clubs, etc. serving one group solely or primarily, or to which only its members could belong. Most of these would be more social, some more political in nature. Boundaries thus shaped were built by non-Jews and Jews alike.

Where politicized sentiments and political awareness ran high, Polish nationalism (feeling its oats once long lost sovereignty had been regained), along with Jewish nationalism (Zionism organized and shaped in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair) would serve to reinforce a sense of need for separate structures.54[54] The traditional shtetl, however, did not prove fertile ground for homegrown activism. Socially and/or politically engaged individuals and local leaders, were always few in number and tended to be members of an imported and transplanted intelligentsia, often teachers. Moreover, Zionists could be disdained and harassed by an Orthodox Jewish community, while nationalists promulgating economic boycott would be ignored or derided by Christians.55[55]

In Poland, a *SokóB* or *Klub Strzelecki* troupe – patriotic, nationalistic, and somewhat paramilitary youth organizations – could materialize even in the smallest of shtetl communities, though usually appearing and disappearing in correspondence to a specific person's term of residency in the community. In Ja[liska, Jews did not participate in 'festivals or fraternities organised by Poles. The local Hunters Club and Soccer Club, for example, by the nature of their activities, did not attract a single Jewish member.'56[56] Yet elsewhere in the former Austro-Hungarian empire, there was '… the Berehovo football and tennis club, BFTC, which had its own semi-professional football team and whose players were both Jewish and Christian.'57[57]

But the degree of actual engagement is illustrated by examples from Jedwabne. A man there 'usually assisted at ritual slaughter', 'used to speak Yiddish', and 'socialised with the family of the Jewish butcher and attended their parties and wedding receptions.' Yet this same person '…was also a member of the 'Zwizek MBodzie|y Katolickiej' (Catholic Youth Association) which was hostile to the Jews.' When Marta Kurkowska 'asked him what activities he undertook within that association, he replied, 'Well… we were being taught how to march nicely in fours.'58[58] In fact, it seems that belonging to this specifically non-Jewish organization, did not at all influence the stance or actions of its members:

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> 'Another interviewee was Zofia N., born in 1918, who had been head of the women's section of the Catholic Youth Association. She remembers amateur theatricals in which she took part. She liked to go to social meetings in the Catholic Community House, but, at the same time, she liked meetings in the Jewish clubroom. She said she became fond of Jewish dancing ('plsy'), and after the war, working as a 'Praktyczna Pani' (community household advisor), she taught Jewish dances to the children of the neighbourhood village schools.'59[59]

In Brze|any, however, exclusion could be aimed not only at Jews, but other non-Jews. The Polish scouts there 'hated the Ukrainians. They picked on us and did not give us a chance to speak Ukrainian.'60[60] The dominant Poles there in fact forbade Jewish or Ukrainian pupils membership in the more politically-oriented, and therefore unapproved, minority organizations. But Bela Feld knew that her Ukrainian friend, HaByna Dydyk was in *PBasta* while she herself was in *Hanoar Hatsioni*.61[61] More significantly, however, belonging to apparently rival nationalistic clubs seems again not to have precluded close friendship: when Batia Prizand's close girlfriend, a Polish Christian girl, Wikta Jakielanka wanted to kill herself, a group of *Hashomer Hazair* members hired a sleigh and rode to her home to successfully talk her out of it.62[62] Perhaps even more incongruously, the *Klub Strzelecki* in Ja[liska met in a room rented from a Jewish shopkeeper.63[63]

Stratification

For numerous and various historical and social reasons, each ethnic group tended to dominate in a different socioeconomic stratum. Irrespective of this, there was a sharp cross-ethnic divide between the tiny elite and the many more poor, and one between the townpeople and the villagers. Among the Jews were to be found *sheyne*, *baleboste*, and *proste Juden*; among the non-Jews, there were wealthy landowners, clergy, intelligentsia, middle-class craftsmen, and peasants. Age-old divides existed within the groups themselves: the water-carrier's son not only knew he would not be a schoolteacher, but did not realistically aspire to become a rabbi; the peasant's son not only knew that he would not be a shopkeeper, but neither did he aspire to become a postman.

In the Brze|any area, nevertheless, it appears that athletic abilities could be a ticket into the local, mostly ethnic Polish elite. Such was the case with Natan Goldman as well as with Adam Goldszlag who played tennis in the mid-30s.64[64] In Konin, there was the family of the man known to both Jews and non-Jews as *dziedzic* – the 'sir' or 'lord' – who owned a vast village estate. His son spoke perfect Polish, no Yiddish, learned to ride horses, and enjoyed shooting events.65[65]

In the village, this family's contact would be more frequent with peasants and hired laborers; the father's involvement in the town council and other elite circles also necessitated Polish fluency. Overall, Jews who lived in the villages of a shtetl community – regardless of whether they were innkeepers, landowners, or farmers – crossed borders daily and frequently. Their ties to the Jewish community would be correspondingly weaker: for lack of transportation and other reasons, attendance at the synagogues in town was infrequent, limited usually to the highest of holy days; town Jewry also especially looked down upon the *dorfisher* innkeeper or farmer.66[66]

Guardians and Trespassers

Though all groups maintain their boundaries, majority-minority relations are inevitably imbalanced in favor of the former which has less to fear from outside influences, subsequent change, or even assimilation. As one might expect, then, the leaders of the cultural minority(ies) would be the most fervent guardians of the boundaries.

The rabbi – if he was Orthodox and certainly if he was Hassidic – maintained no contact with members of the other group. As sentinel of the minority, he would even protect his brethren from deviation (e.g., Zionism, Reform Judaism, etc.) within. Likewise the rabbi's wife would also be standing guard at the border, serving as a model for all Jewish women. In turn, her children would be expected to play a similar, exemplary role and might not attend the public school so as to avoid worldly seductions.

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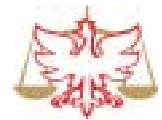
Age and Gender

In general – apart from the rabbi and his family – age and gender were the most important factors in guardianship. It was, above all, the elders of the community whose job it was to maintain the borders – especially adult men. They were firm in their convictions and not tempted by any curiosity about each other's faith and customs; interactions would be restricted to the utilitarian or matters of utmost consequence.67[67] Furthermore, Christian men served, almost without exception, in the armed services. This not only strained or severed ties to their home community and the Jews in it, but introduced them, if at all, to Jews quite different from the ones they had known heretofore.

Among the adults, it was women in the shtetl community who moved about more freely in both worlds as Judaism placed little restriction upon the female members of the group. Many tended shops and businesses while their husbands studied in *shul*. They chatted with customers whom they knew very well, and engaged in everyday conversations with Christian neighbors.

The younger generation, the adolescents – as befits their role in any society – would simultaneously test the strength of the borders, and begin to take up the responsibility of guarding them. Here as with the adults, it was more the duty of young males to secure the borders between the cultures than young females.



As boys, town Jews had to attend cheder before and/or after public school, restricting chances for normal play with Christian peers. Later, though still teenagers in fact, Jewish males after their *bar mitzvah* were adults in the eyes of Judaic law. They were expected to delve deeper into religious study (sometimes at the price of the secular), to marry soon and start families. These obligations curbed their liberty, limited free time, and thus precluded daily interactions with their non-Jewish peers. Young Jewish women, on the other hand, could continue to attend public school and play or do homework with non-Jewish girlfriends; along with their mothers, they often staffed the family shop, resulting in their consistent exchanges with the Christian clientele. Overall,

> 'Jewish boys carried the symbols of Judaism, as they dressed differently, wore earlocks, were circumcised, and attended Jewish religious school (*kheyder*). And Jewish boys were the guardians of Jewish norms and values. In other words, the cultural differences that distinguished the two ethnic communities were far more conspicuous with the Jewish boys than with the Jewish girls. This may help to explain why it was the Jewish boys and not the Jewish girls who frequently fell victim to Polish teasing. In like manner, a Polish informant would disapprove of the unfriendly and haughty attitude of her one-time Jewish (male) schoolmates, but at the same time she would judge her Jewish girlfriends as very cordial and sympathetic.'68[68]

In general, it was the youngest of children of either sex who were devoid of any safeguarding duties and thus freest to make all manner of connections. The younger the child, the greater the liberty to traverse boundaries, even of the most private of spaces. They could approach any and all members of other groups – from the nanny to the priest, from one's playmates to neighbors – regardless of belonging. '"Look at me!"' – exclaims one Roman Catholic informant – '"A Jewish woman carried me when I was still a baby!"'69[69] On the other side, Miriam Grossman recollects how:

> 'We were a [Gerer Chasidic] middle-class family and it was a custom that middle-class families had maids. I remember another non-Jewish woman, who was my beloved nanny for maybe ten or thirteen years, and she had her bed in the kitchen, and I slept many times with her because I loved her, and she loved me too.'70[70]

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Perhaps it was precisely because children would be more naturally curious and likely to break rules each group instilled a bit of fear toward 'strangers.' Tales of, for instance, Jews or Roma stealing them away would serve to inhibit contact and keep the youngest from crossing borders too freely. In fact, time and time again, when asked whether they believed the 'blood libel' legend, Catholic informants in Galician Poland laughingly discounted it as just 'humbug' intended to frighten children.

All things considered, non-Jewish and Jewish youngsters were much more likely to meet informally – at play and at school – than were their adult counterparts. In addition, children were more easily admitted into the social and family life of the 'other' than were adults. Finally, thanks to their age, children were able to bypass socially accepted norms without serious risk. More generally, they 'gave expression to the social tensions between the ethnic communities by teasing and attacking "the other side". .... The interaction between Polish and Jewish children, including attempts at provocation and mischief, might very well have stimulated a certain degree of social exchange between both communities….'71[71]

Status and Locus

There was another component, however, in the granting of passage: the socioeconomic status of a person, and where his or her home was located. These were decisive, too, in whether, how much, and within which circles Jews and non-Jews straddled or cleared the walls erected between them.

Specifically most devoted to protecting and maintaining the borders would be the conservative middle class religious Jews living in the center of the shtetl (more the lower rather than the upper strata here), along with the Christian intelligentsia (especially middle class administrators and teachers), and peasants, especially

those living in villages where there were few Jewish families. These men had the least, unstructured day-to-day contact with their peers from the other group, had fewer or no social acquaintances among them, and were less likely to possess more than a minimum vocabulary in the other's language.

Different frames of reference applied to the high elites, to the nobility and the affluent. In Central and Eastern Europe, these were always a mix of various ethnicities – German, Austrian, Russian, Polish, Czech, Lithuanian, etc. It was obvious that individuals of this socioeconomic and political class were a separate category with different rules applying. The prosperous and established *sheyne* Jews were members not only of the *kehillah* but also of the town council. The non-Jewish elite (few though they were) comprised the other half of the council, hence acquaintances and even cordial friendships became matter of fact. The less populated the community, the more political or economic relationships were inseparable from social and cultural ones. Those who sat on the various councils met informally to play cards or chess or simply socialize:

> 'The Jewish informant Josko S. (75), for instance, recalled the evening walks of his father with the priest. While walking, both men would discuss all kinds of subjects. Harmonious contacts between the "learned" priest and "lay" Jews were customary in other towns and villages in the region as well. Pearl O. (82), recalled the long walks and discussions of her father with the priest. She also remembered the weekly meetings at her parent's home, to which all members of the village elite were invited, among them the priest and teachers of the local primary school.'72[72]

The upper classes generally circulated amongst each other, and were held in esteem by the rest, regardless of religion or ethnicity. The Jewish owner of the quarry and forests in St'pina and Cieszyna was spoken of in the same respectful tones as the Catholic owner of the manor in Kobyle.73[73]

Weddings and other festivities of a religious origin became occasions to strengthen ties, especially with the nearest neighbors:

> '"During the summer, Jews organised dancing on the fields, which they first decorated with firewood. They put the wood on the ground and danced on it. This holiday was called Haman. They used to offer food and delicacies to the police, border guard, their neighbours and the mayor. They took this food to these houses. Also during wedding parties they invited some Poles, my uncle and father among them."'74[74]

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Everyday relationships became very easy and matter of course when Jews and non-Jews lived under the same roof. One non-Jewish family in Brze|any rented out rooms in their building to two Jewish families.75[75] In Twierdza near Frysztak, a wooden domicile was shared half and half by a Catholic and Jewish family.76[76] Far away in Konin, Miriam Grossman recalled 'our gentile neighbour, Mr Wodzinski, the attorney,' who lived next door to her family, who discussed various matters with her father, and onto whose balcony she and her sister climbed one evening to be able to watch the stars.77[77]

Shared interests built bridges, and so the upper and lowermost classes of all groups usually enjoyed the most interaction with peers. Hence it was more likely that a *sheyne* Jew would cross borders and enjoy contact with the local non-Jewish intelligentsia than even with the *proste* Jews of the same community. The same held for the Christian intelligentsia where class divisions precluded anything but the most formalized relationships with peasant villagers. Szyja Bronsztejn deemed 'Relations were undoubtedly best between the non-Jewish liberal intelligentsia and the Jewish intelligentsia.'78[78]

Mixing was especially true if professions went outside the norm: the non-Jewish entrepreneur and the Jewish farmer continually crossed borders by virtue of the lifestyle demands of their work. Their contact with the 'other' was daily and usually became highly typical and ordinary. On the one hand,

> ‘When Christian and Jew did try to break down the barriers that separated them, the outcome was not always a happy one, as Jozef Lewandowski relates. Around 1934 his father, an upholsterer in Konin, went into partnership with a Polish upholsterer, his friend Mr Boguslawski:
>
> “…the worthy gentlemen failed to take account of social considerations. Father became unacceptable to the Orthodox Jews, Boguslawski non-kosher to some of his Catholic customers. Both went beyond the limits imposed by unwritten but harshly binding statutes. Rich folk such as landowners and industrialists could join forces, but not the poor masses. After a few years they split up.”’79[79]

On the other hand, more successful in their joint ventures, two Polish Roman Catholic brothers in Frysztak recalled card-playing and drinking with their fellow leather traders who happened to be Jewish.80[80] Karol Codogni’s father in Brze|any was a blacksmith who worked with Jewish craftsmen; though they needed one another, they also sometimes, naturally, quarreled and even took each other to court.81[81]

Due to proximity as well as relative isolation in the physical landscape, fellow villagers bonded with each other rather than any elite in town. Among other things, Jews here forsook the strict orthodoxy – impractical in rural life – of those in town; as Eva Hoffman puts it, ‘Culturally, these Jewish villagers cum townsmen were a hybrid species.’82[82] Less hindered by the social control in town, Jews and Christians in a village were guided more by a sense of belonging to it, and by their own needs and those of their local compatriots. As Henry Kaplan relates:

> ‘It was a completely different life from the Jews living in Konin. …. We participated in country life. [….] We were not very religious …. …we did not go to the synagogue every Friday and Saturday, and my father did not lay *tefillin*. He had seats in the synagogue and Rabbi Lipschitz was a friend of our family. At the same time, my father had seats in the village church near Glinka, for our workers, and his name was on the seats.’83[83]

The non-Jewish peasants valued their Jewish equals as good, hardworking people not unlike them; it was only natural that the Jew and non-Jew in Cieszyna would hitch horses and plough their respective fields together.84[84] Bronsztejn notes how, ‘Andrzej Burda described the attitude of the peasants to the Jews from the village of Ryszotara near Kraków as friendly and says that “in the countryside, good will was something quite natural in the common lives of people bound by the land”.85[85]

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Finally, school brought and kept children together – the border here so permeable that schoolmates of different faith and ethnicity sat next to one another, whispered answers, copied homework, and played, teased and tussled with one another. There was a difference, too, between the school in town and the one-room schoolhouses in the villages: the latter made any segregation irrelevant and contact continuous. School attendance on Saturday meant a need for Jewish children to make up lessons with their non-Jewish classmates; inclement weather would mean that Christian religion classes could be overheard by non-Christians. Walking home from school meant more time together – play was always outside more than inside. Israel Ne’eman recalled that he went to school with practically only Ukrainians, ‘but we [the Jewish pupils] had good relations with the rest. My friend was a Ukrainian, the son of a plasterer, a communist.’86[86] His non-Jewish counterpart, Karol Codogni spoke some Yiddish and played with Jewish boys: ‘Life next to Jews and in close contact with them was something completely natural for him.’87[87]

In Conclusion

Indeed, it was only natural. The Jews and non-Jews of the shtetl communities could not and did not live as adjacent forbidding fortresses. To paraphrase Roskies,88[88] what each side wanted in particular was not isolation from the other, but insulation from its religion. As Bronsztejn writes,

> 'Jewish distinctiveness and difference ought not to be identified with being foreign. When there are no internal tensions, good material conditions, no professional competition, comfort of life, then distinctiveness forms part of the social scenery, is an accepted condition of unity in variety. Distinctiveness can become something foreign when it is in isolation, when there are no professional and personal contacts and no cultural interaction and diffusion of cultures, and when the economic environment turns hostile.'89[89]

Likewise, Shimon Redlich ascertains that, 'Regardless of any differences, these three [Ukrainians, Poles, Jews] ethnic groups were joined by a tradition of local coexistence.'90[90]

In the shtetl communities the distinctiveness was very familiar and present on all sides. As Cohen points out, 'The community boundary is *not* drawn at the point where differentiation occurs. Rather, it incorporates and encloses difference and … is thereby strengthened.'91[91] An illustration is provided from Andalusia: 'The members of a community recognize their common interests and values *vis-à-vis* those of other communities. But, at the same time, they cherish their differences from each other for, to a substantial extent, these provide the very stuff of everyday social life within the community.'92[92] Groups preserve different religions, different languages, a different style of dress, and some spatial segregation; the distinctions are strengthened and reinforced because this is a mutually desired value.

Living primarily in the very center of the town, Jews were nevertheless able to build and maintain the strongest border possible between themselves and the Other, the *goyim*. Under these conditions their separate culture could and did bloom and grow; ignoring or destroying the boundaries would mean its self-destruction:

> 'Yet, in order to survive for centuries in a foreign environment – among people professing a different faith, possessing different customs – one had to maintain one's separateness. The guests could not mimic the hosts. They had to create their own community within the community within which they lived, create it with great effort because societal conventions can be austere (stern, uncompromising). And out of necessity they had to – in order to exist – love more their own community than that of the host and realize, in first order, the interests of their own, internal community. And they created that community due to this astounding strength of their national bonds.'93[93]

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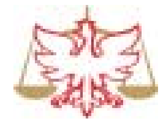
An unwritten principle dictated that one would and should remain in the community – religious, ethnic, and social – into which one was born. Assimilation of the minority to the majority – or even much acculturation – was neither encouraged nor even desired in the shtetl. Furthermore, as Lehmann argues, '…the strict ethnic boundaries … were of crucial importance in the maintenance of a political and social equilibrium.'94[94]

There was closure and continuity in this neighboring with one another. Despite political border shifts, migrations, and slighter or greater conflicts, one's neighbors were generally the same as one's parents and grandparents had had. And so the terrain which various compatriots inhabited became 'our land,' 'our homeland,' and its residents *nasi* – 'our people.' The Jews and non-Jews saw their countrymen and women as persons who differed in faith, language, and custom, but not in their loyalty, connection, and belonging to the community. In the shtetls a Polish Jew was not primarily a Jew: he or she was primarily someone *tutejszy*, 'from here,' a *landsman* from the same community like all of its other residents. As Cohen describes it,



'Rural society ("community") was small, parochial, stable, and "face-to-face": people interacted with each other as "total" social persons informed by a comprehensive personal knowledge of each other, their relationships often underpinned by ties of affinity and consanguinity. It was a traditional and conservative way of life, in which people valued custom for its own sake and, given a reasonable degree of potential self-sufficiency in the production of their subsistence, felt substantially in control of their lives, subject, of course, to the vicissitudes of nature and the divine.'95[95]

Having shaped over centuries a cosmos in which coexistence was possible without blurring and assimilation, of paramount import to all its residents was preservation of its order and stability. Those of us living in twenty-first century urbanized environs find it hard to look beyond the rigid structure of traditional cultures; we see them as lopsided and limiting. Yet they served a comforting security not provided by boundless postmodernity. The sturdy construction was hardly questioned at all until the end of the nineteenth century – in many shtetl communities not until the 1930s. As Hoffman deduces, 'Perhaps the main virtue of the shtetl for its inhabitants was the extent to which it was a community – small, closely interwoven, reassuringly familiar. Nobody in these rural enclaves needed to suffer from the modern malaise of uncertainty and nonbelonging.'96[96]

'Progressive' ideas brought with them secularization, decline of traditional authority, the rejection of inherent group belonging and preordained individual destiny, and heightened geographical and social mobility. Modern social phenomena such as intermarriage, conversion, or non-confessional assimilation would, in time, place more Jews on the cusp between the traditional Jewish and Catholic cultures; class and spatial mobility would also shift non-Jews across the boundary. All this undermined the age-old balance of power between the Jewish and Christian communities within the shtetl, and began eroding the borders of the small and comfortable *ojczyzna prywatna*, the private homeland of the shtetl, in favor of the large and unfamiliar *ojczyzna ideologiczna*, the ideological one of a nation-state.97[97] All that knit the community together unraveled and insecurity seeped in.

The price of this progress, however, was a loss of community and kinship. 'If the members of a community come to feel that they have less in common with each other than they have with members of some other community then, … the integrity of the "community" they enclose has been severely impugned.'98[98] Individuals lost their intimate connection to a landscape and to all those who inhabited it. Until new understandings and new networks could be established, ambiguity and anxiety reigned, tensions rose and conflicts erupted. Referring to the troubles at the dawn of this process, Kelly Stauter-Halsted deduces, 'It is, I believe, this pattern of transitional group identities and parallel but conflicting attempts to bring about economic improvements that confounded relations between peasants and Jews, setting the stage for the violence of June 1898.'99[99] By the late 30s – especially in the two years after Józef PiBsudski's death, and more frequently in the largest metropolises – intergroup relations became combustible.

Moving up in society was possible after the emancipation of the Jews and peasants near the end of the nineteenth century, but in the case of the latter gathered more adherents in the 1930s when the economic depression forced many to consider options other than farm work. It was also then that political and economic antisemitism, rife in the programs and publications of various conservative parties, began to infiltrate the shtetl. This broad problem deserves separate treatment, but perhaps a few general observations could be made here. For the most part, the peasants were not reading these materials and troubles did not break out in the villages. Rather, anti-Jewish behavior and actions were apt to take place in town, especially on market day when crowds appeared and outsiders could incite a riot; the larger the town and the larger the throng, the less social control and the more likely the taking up of a call.100[100]

Nevertheless, antisemitic views did not necessarily mean an absence of good professional and personal relationships with Jews known to a person since this antisemitism did not have a social component with regards to those who were 'insiders,' were 'one of our own.'

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Furthermore, in a major sociological study regarding antisemitism among Poles, '… researchers were surprised to find that the oldest respondents (born before 1923) were more well-disposed towards Jews than younger generations.' 101[101] These informants would have had less formal, but much more informal, firsthand knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture, and interpersonal relationships with Jews, than the later-born. As Grekowa discerns in her home society, 'In the case of the most general form of the "familiar"-"foreign" relationship, in … a closed traditional community, highly significant was what was "familiar." And the meaning and value of this in and of itself could neither be destroyed nor even questioned while the traditional community existed regardless of the strength and nature of the contact with the "other."' 102[102]

The Shoah was in no way a consequence – avoidable or inevitable – of the joint inhabitancy of the shtetl by Jews and non-Jews. Even in the opening months of German occupation, Jewish villagers continued transactions and contact with their Christian neighbors. Regardless of the outcome, positive or negative, the fact that many Jews left their valuables in the safekeeping of their non-Jewish neighbors meant that these persons were known well and trusted deeply. The Shoah, however, did forever put an end to the life and lifestyle that such co-inhabitance entailed.

'The further one moves along [the] continuum from "folk" to "urban" society, the greater becomes the loss of community.' 103[103] Where they live together today Jews and Christians find themselves primarily anonymous residents of urban areas; what they know about one another's culture (e.g., customs, religion, language) is superficial and derived primarily from infrequent lessons about groups, not from daily contact with individuals. Connections are more often utilitarian and relationships easy to end. As scholars and public discourse focus on discord, fading evermore quickly into the distance is living memory of accord: how people so different could live so closely and know each other so intimately for so long in relative (though admittedly not perfect) harmony.

No matter what the faith or ethnicity of the author, accounts of a shtetl community in memoirs, *yizkhor* books, or histories are most often penned in absence of the 'other.' This fact is a reflection of the boundary between Jews and non-Jews but does not at all indicate lack of a local community, nor of a lack of border crossing. Both sides did strongly mark themselves off from the other. Borders – visible as the *eyruv* and as invisible as the middle of a stream, and built on the levels of religion, history, tradition and customs, language, and geography – were known to and maintained by everyone. It was known who possessed the most unrestricted passport, and who should be the strictest of sentries. Yet numerous persons on both sides crossed them – at various levels, by various means, and to various degrees. All in all, however, the golden rule was 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

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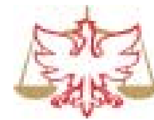
Why did they live so apart? Because they needed to, they wanted to, and because they could. Firstly, without a strong sense of difference, group identities and the groups themselves would dissolve. Secondly, and paradoxically, the more dissimilar and separate the groups are, the more easily they maintain the boundaries between them; in turn, the more strongly those partitions are protected, the more easily can cohabiting communities feel safe and secure.

'The most striking feature of the symbolic construction of the community and its boundaries is its oppositional character. The boundaries are *relational* rather than absolute; that is, they mark the community *in relation to* other communities. It has been suggested that *all* social identities, collective and individual, are constituted in this way, "to play the vis-à-vis"' 104[104] The purpose was to preserve a vital sense of different communities simultaneously: the ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic community to which one belonged from birth, and the community of *tutejszy* to which one also belonged from birth. The Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and still more groups were thus able to speak of 'us' and 'ours' when referring to those who believed as they did and spoke the same language as they, and of 'us' and 'ours,' too, when referring to those they saw as their compatriots from the same shtetl community as they.

'Jews trading horses in a small market town, speaking in haphazard Polish – that was the shtetl. Poles gradually picking up a few words of Yiddish and bits of Jewish lore – that was also the shtetl. Jewish bands playing at Polish weddings and local aristocrats getting financial advice and loans from their Jewish stewards – all that went into the making of the distinctive, mulchy mix that was shtetl culture.' 105[105] 'The very realm of neighboring proximity is one of a true celebration of differences; it is a realm in which that which is "familiar" and that which is "foreign" mutually grant each other the right to differ. As a consequence, human dialogue is made possible and real.' 106[106]



A peasant born in 1902, who completed his fourth-grade education in a one-room village schoolhouse before the First World War, made reference in an interview not only to the rabbi and cantor, but also to the *shames* and *chazan*. As a hen and her chicks perambulated across the dirt floor of his wooden cottage, I asked him if the Jews were guilty of killing Christ: 'No,' he answered, 'it was the Sanhedrin.' 107[107] No teacher nor priest had provided him with such information and insight; it had come from close relationships and crossing borders with his Jewish friends and neighbors. Without access to formal, modern instruction on multiculturalism, they had found a way to live it: 'In the shtetl, pluralism was experienced not as ideology but as ordinary life.' 108[108] The very fact of physical and geographic neighboring inevitably leads to some cultural contact, diffusion, and exchange. 109[109] The Jews and the non-Jews, created a 'forward' model of coexistence through (not despite) conservative traditionalism, creating something – at least in this sense – closer to utopia than dystopia.

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(Footnotes)

1[1] In this work, the word "shtetl" will not refer exclusively to the town, but inclusively to the whole community formed by the localities ascribed to it by custom and law.
2[2] M. Zborowski and E. Herzog, *Life is with People* (New York, 1952), 22.
3[3] See, for instance, J. Gross, *Neighbors*, (Oxford, 2001), 37-38, 40; R. Lehmann, *Symbiosis and Ambivalence* (Oxford, 2001); and cases cited in S. Redlich's *Razem i osobno*, (Sejny, 2002), 86-95.
4[4] R. Lehmann, *Symbiosis and Ambivalence* (Oxford, 2001), xxi. Citing (Rosman 1990; KamiDska 1991; Wróbel 1991; Orla-Bukowska 1994; Lehmann 1997; Hoffman 1998).
5[5] Cf. S. Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brze|any: Jews, Poles, Ukrainians*, (Bloomington, 2001).
6[6] J. BystroD, *Megalomania narodowa*, (Warszawa, 1995), 15. See, too, M. Zborowski and E. Herzog, *Life is with People*, 158.
7[7] A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985), 15.
8[8] S. Ossowski, *Analiza socjologiczna poj'cia ojczyzny* (Warsaw, 1967), 203.
9[9] Cohen, 12.
10[10] Ibid. 25.
11[11] M. ZióBkowski, 'Wspólnota przestrzeni i odmienno[tradycji – Ssiedzkie kultury etniczne', *Kultura i SpoBeczeDstwo*, v35, nr4 (1991), 60.
12[12] Cohen, 20-21.
13[13] ZióBkowski, 59.
14[14] M. Grekowa, 'Blisko[przestrzenna bez ssiedztwa o stosunkach buBgarsko-tureckich w BuBgarii', *Kultura i SpoBeczeDstwo*, v35, nr4 (1991), 118.
15[15] Z. MusiaB, B. Wolniewicz, 'Ksenofobia i wspólnota', *Arcana*, 43 (2002), 5.
16[16] E. Hoffman, *Shtetl*, (New York, 1998), 85.
17[17] Cohen, 12.
18[18] Ibid. 13.
19[19] MusiaB and Wolniewicz, 6.
20[20] K. WiecBawska, '"…tajemnicze wn'trze ludnego miasteczka…" Obraz sztetl w prozie Szaloma Asza i Izaaka Baszewisa Singera', *Obyczaje – magazyn mi'dzynarodowy*, 8 (2002), 6-9.
21[21] Cf. A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, (Chicago, 1960).
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22[22] Cf. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London, 2002).
23[23] Often, unfortunately but understandably, as a prelude to Holocaust literature: Cf. M. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, (Syracuse, 1997), E. Hoffman, *Shtetl*, (New York, 1998), and H. Gryn, *Chasing Shadows*, (London, 2001).
24[24] Though Roma were also a diaspora group living throughout Poland, their population was never so high in any one locality; also, because their population wandered, Roma could not be a permanent and stable 'other.'
25[25] For a description, see A. Orla-Bukowska, 'Shtetl Communities: Another Image', *POLIN*, 8 (1994), 92-93.
26[26] L. Wolowski, text by A. Cykiert, *Memories of the Shtetl: Sculptures by Leon Wolowski*, (Fitzroy, Australia, 1982), 13.
27[27] The segregation was one-way: non-Jews were quite often treated to and did consume kosher food such as matzot, hamentaschen, and wedding or other delicacies.
28[28] Here it should be noted that the word „Jew' describes, in most languages, both the believer in the faith as well as the person of such descent. An equivalency between these two aspects was natural in the traditional world though causing confusion now.
29[29] Orla-Bukowska, 93-94.

30[30] Nor perceiving themselves as fitting in: *vide* Leopold Infeld's comments in T. Richmond, *Konin* (London, 1995), 105 et seq.
31[31] The procedure was simpler than conversion to Judaism, and being a member of a Christian group generally offered more advantages.
32[32] See the case of Felicja, the Jewish convert in Ja[liska, and the sanctions against her, the priest who baptized her, and her family in Lehmann, 115, 125.
33[33] Gryn, 53.
34[34] A. Krzewniak, '{ydzi na polskiej Orawie', *PBaj: Zeszyt krajoznawczy towarzystwa karpackiego*, 5 (1993), 47, quoted in Orla-Bukowska, 107.
35[35] Richmond, 105.
36[36] Gryn, 63.
37[37] S.F. Bielawski, *The Last Jew from W'grów*, ed. L.W. Liebovich (New York, 1991), 5.
38[38] T. Gocz, '{ydzi w Zyndranowej', *PBaj: Zeszyt krajowznawczy Towarzystwa Karpackiego*, 5 (1993), 89, quoted in Orla-Bukowska, 108.
39[39] I. Beller, *Life in the Shtetl: Scenes and Recollections*, trans. A.D. Pannell (New York, 1986), 10.
40[40] Cf. the above-cited works by Orla-Bukowska (1994), Lehmann (2001), and Redlich (2002).
41[41] Lehmann, 61.
42[42] Crossing by speaking an additional language did not constitute crossover; learning solely the language of the 'other' did.
43[43] Richmond, 161.
44[44] Ibid. 95-96.
45[45] Gryn, 53.
46[46] Ibid. 60-61.
47[47] Cohen, 57.
48[48] Cf. opening pages in Richmond, Redlich, or Yehuda Piekarz' map in Gross.
49[49] Richmond, 95-96.
50[50] Ibid. 161.
51[51] Lehmann, 112.
52[52] Richmond, 161.
53[53] Cf. Orla-Bukowska, 99-101.
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54[54] Elsewhere it could be Czech, Hungarian (cf. Gryn, chapter 8), or other non-Jewish nationalism, accompanied usually, unfortunately, by antisemitism.
55[55] Cf. OlszaDski and Schoenfeld, quoted in Orla-Bukowska, 93-94, and A. Orla-Bukowska, *Coexistence: Polish Jews and Polish Catholics, Jewish Shtetl and Catholic Villages*, unpublished dissertation, (Jagiellonian University, 1995), 152.
56[56] Lehmann, 94.
57[57] Gryn, 45.
58[58] M. Kurkowska-Budzan, 'My Jedwabne', *POLIN*, volume nr? (2002), page?.
59[59] Ibid. page?.
60[60] Redlich, 90.
61[61] Ibid. 92.
62[62] Ibid. 91.
63[63] Lehmann, 97.
64[64] Redlich, 89.
65[65] Richmond, 53-54.
66[66] Orla-Bukowska, 96.
67[67] Exceptions were made for emergencies such as described in Orla-Bukowska, 105-106.

68[68] Lehmann, 102.
69[69] Ibid. 96-97.
70[70] Richmond, 261.
71[71] Lehmann, 96-97.
72[72] Ibid. 98.
73[73] Author's research: FG, Cieszyna, interviewed 1990; PL, Kobyle, interviewed 1991. Cf., Richmond, 53-54.
74[74] Lehmann, 97.
75[75] Redlich, 85.
76[76] Author's research: ZP, Twierdza, interviewed 1991.
77[77] Richmond, 260, 262.
78[78] S. Bronsztejn, 'Polish-Jewish Relations as Reflected in Memoirs of the Interwar Period', *POLIN*, 8 (1994), 86.
79[79] Richmond, 162.
80[80] Author's research: JC & SC, Twierdza, interviewed 1990.
81[81] Redlich, 85.
82[82] Hoffman, 84.
83[83] Richmond, 54.
84[84] Author's research: FG, Cieszyna, interviewed 1990.
85[85] A. Burda, *Lata Walki i nadziei* (Kraków, 1970), 13, quoted in Bronsztejn, 78.
86[86] Redlich, 87.
87[87] Ibid. 85.
88[88] D. Roskies and D. G. Roskies, *The Shtetl Book* (Hoboken, 1975), 34.
89[89] Bronsztejn, 74.
90[90] Redlich, 61.
91[91] Cohen, 74.
92[92] Ibid. 88.
93[93] W. SiBa-Nowicki, 'Janowi BBoDskiemu w odpowiedzi', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, v41, nr8, 22 Feb 1987, 5.
94[94] Lehmann, 169.
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95[95] Cohen, 25.
96[96] Hoffman, 12.
97[97] Cf. Ossowski, *Analiza socjologiczna poj'cia ojczyzny*.
98[98] Cohen, 20-21.
99[99] K. Stauter-Halsted, 'Priests, Merchants and Political Activists: The Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism in the Galician Polish Countryside', unpublished manuscript, 2002.
100[100] Cf. Redlich, 88-89; for an account, however, of the ineffectiveness of a boycott, see page 92.
101[101] I. KrzemiDski, *Czy Polacy s antysemitami?* (Warsaw, 1996), 301.
102[102] Grekowa, 120-21.
103[103] Cohen, 27.
104[104] Ibid. 58.
105[105] Hoffman, 12-13.
106[106] Grekowa, 117.
107[107] Author's research: JC, Twierdza, interviewed 1991.
108[108] Hoffman, 12.
109[109] ZióBkowski, 60.