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Neighbors. About the Multiculturalization of the Polish Past

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This article discusses the problem of neighborly coexistence in religiously and ethnically diverse settings. It tackles some widespread assumptions regarding the importance of religious/ethnic factors in shaping neighborly relations as well as the question of broader sociopolitical contexts and their impact on neighborly coexistence. In so doing, it argues against those approaches that place "neighborhood" at the center of debates on the breakdown of societal coexistence and use it as a tool of explanation of interethnic and interreligious conflicts. More specifically, the article engages critically with the way the idea of "neighborhood" is used in debates on Polish history. It argues that the idea of past harmony and peaceful coexistence in "multicultural" settings reinforces the image of the Polish society as tolerant and diversity-friendly and stresses that the harmonious neighborly coexistence was brought to an end by "outsiders." As a result, not only does it serve the dominant group rather than minorities, but it precludes the understanding of the dynamics of ethnic/religious pluralism. The article therefore suggests that the studies of diversity in Poland should pay closer attention to the context of the dominant—Polish and Catholic—culture in which the diversity has been accommodated. Striving to address this problem, it presents some findings from an ethnographic study of a multireligious and multiethnic neighborhood in rural Poland and provides some comparative insights.

(Abstract from the publisher's website)

Full article as pdf

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