Intercultural Neighbourly Encounters in Warsaw from the Perspective of Goffman's Sociology of Interaction

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Neighbouring as a type of social interchange and multi-dimensional social phenomenon is of fundamental importance in the social sciences and problems associated with intercultural and interethnic neighbouring are currently on the increase. Contemporary migration processes and ethnic diversity in Poland are relatively new issues that are reflected in the experiences of both migrants and representatives of the host society. The aim of this article is to analyse intercultural neighbourly contacts between Poles and migrants in Warsaw in the context of Erving Goffman's sociology of interaction. These contacts and the social processes they involve are of great importance when it comes to migrants' integration in their new place of residence. The article considers how glances, gestures and behaviours are interpreted, leading to the formation of specific opinions and attitudes between migrants and Poles. Both 'unfocused' and 'focused' interactions are analysed, with an emphasis on expectations and definitions of tactful behaviour in intercultural neighbourly encounters and the concept of 'polite indifference.' Conclusions are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with Poles and migrants from Vietnam, Turkey and African countries living in Warsaw, Poland.

Keywords: interaction; intercultural contact; neighbourly contact; Goffman; Warsaw

Introduction[1]

Culture – as a social phenomenon – constitutes a fundamental resource of values, opinions and interpretations that influence individuals' ways of perceiving and experiencing the world, and their interactions with others. Intercultural contacts occur when people of different cultural backgrounds interact with each other, such as when migrants and representatives of the host population come into contact but follow their own specific, culturally grounded norms and conventions of behaviour. Such encounters can be diverse in character and take place in various social settings. One such setting is the neighbourhood, where people of different nationality or ethnicity, holding different values or speaking different languages, live in close proximity to each other. In the social context of the neighbourhood these neighbours perceive and identify each other, interpret each other's actions, define mutual obligations or expectations and undertake more or less direct interactions (see also Winiarska 2012).

The aim of this paper is to investigate intercultural contacts and encounters between Poles and Vietnamese, Turkish and African migrants in neighbourhood settings in Warsaw, Poland, from an interaction theory

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perspective. It examines how Poles experience contact with 'others' in their neighbourhood and how these 'others' experience contact with Poles. The analysis, based on qualitative research, will focus on the process of interaction, different meanings that Poles and migrants attribute to each other's behaviours and especially interpretations of gestures and eye contact, as well as neighbourly greetings and chat.

The context for interaction is specific because diversity is not commonplace in Poland, a highly homogeneous country in terms of ethnicity and religion; thus various aspects of intercultural encounter remain unacknowledged. Warsaw cannot be called a multicultural city in the Western European sense, as immigrants constitute only around 2–3 per cent of the population.[2] However their numbers are growing and various migrant groups are slowly becoming more visible, which is focusing attention on issues of adaptation, integration and migration policy. The Polish case study is therefore significant, as it deals with contemporary ethnic diversity as a relatively new phenomenon, reflected in the experiences of both migrants and representatives of the host society, with intercultural contact becoming more and more important despite a lack of significant multiculturalism in either the descriptive or political sense. Although there have been numerous studies of the increasing presence of migrants in Poland, intercultural encounters from a micro-sociological perspective seem somewhat under-researched and this study aims to complement existing literature in this respect. Such perspective is especially important given the fact that much of the contact between migrants and hosts takes place at local level – in neighbourhoods and in public spaces – and it is everyday encounters that may facilitate, or impede, mutual understanding and integration.

The situation of migrants, as newcomers settling among the host population, resembles the position of 'strangers' in Alfred Schuetz's (1944) sense: people who are aware of the diversity and relativity of existing cultural norms due to the fact that they observe specific behaviours, habits and lifestyles, and experience norms of conduct which might be surprising or strange to them, both in a positive and negative way (Ossewaarde 2007). Even when migrants comply with the social norms pertaining in their new country (which often requires abandoning norms that they previously held), it is often difficult for them to be accepted as 'locals.' Intercultural encounters constitute an important experience not only for 'guests' but also for representatives of the host society. For Poles, unexpected contact with ethnic difference in their place of residence might cause surprise or interest, or lead them to reflect on specific social definitions and rules of conduct in neighbourly relations. Intercultural contact on a micro-sociological scale can thus influence ways of perceiving and interpreting the surrounding world, and can both support and hinder the integration of migrants in the host society.

I intentionally refer here to the concept of 'intercultural contact,' which I sometimes use interchangeably with the notion of 'interethnic contact', though these terms emphasise somewhat different aspects of the social situation of contact. Ethnicity is related mostly to descent, identity and sense of community. Interethnic contact emphasises interactions between representatives of groups that are diverse in terms not only of culture, but often also of physical – visible – characteristics. Intercultural contact accentuates differences resulting primarily from tradition, customs and ways of thinking about the surrounding world. It is these different interpretations and perceptions related to culture that are the focus of this paper. The concept of 'interculturalism' emphasises processes that take place between culturally different individuals during their encounter (such as communication and cooperation) and thus represents one of the challenges of multiculturalism that have recently started to be debated in Poland. However, intercultural dialogue remains closely associated with tolerance, which manifests itself in a readiness to engage in contact with diverse others (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2002).

This study draws on the theoretical concepts inspired by Erving Goffman's sociology of interaction and developed in later works by various authors. I will explore perceptions of neighbourly encounters among representatives of different cultural groups in an urban context. Neighbouring will be defined as a specific,

multi-dimensional social phenomenon resulting from physical proximity in the place of residence. In this sense social interactions between neighbours constitute the essence of neighbouring. I will explore how the behaviours and motivations of both Poles and migrants (both in establishing and in avoiding contact) are influenced and organised by the meanings they ascribe to the actions of their neighbours. The study aims to contribute to current micro-sociological work that draws on Goffman's theories (e.g. Jensen 2006; Wessendorf 2014), which focuses on the analysis of common rituals and behaviours, rather than on more indirect forms of contact and the definitions of specific everyday occurrences given by social actors. In drawing distinctions between different forms and aspects of interaction, the study seeks to develop existing research by further nuancing issues of encounter.

The theoretical introduction to the paper references interaction theories to situate the research in a classic sociological context, while also considering current debates concerning the micro-sociological issues of contact, encounter and intercultural interaction, with a particular focus on neighbouring. The specific context of Warsaw will be outlined with reference especially to issues of migration and attitudes towards different groups of migrants among the host society. The research findings presented are based on interviews with Poles and migrants from Vietnam, Turkey and African countries living in Warsaw. A strictly micro-sociological perspective will be adopted throughout the text, and intercultural neighbourly contact will be analysed in the specific context of Goffman's interaction theory. Conclusions will be focused on insights into migrant integration in the host society at local level.

Erving Goffman's sociology of interaction and contemporary perspectives on issues of encounter

The concept of interaction as the mutual influence of individuals on each other is related to the extensive field of humanistic sociology and interpretative theories in the social sciences, which develop the notion of 'self' and focus on social processes of ascribing meaning to actions. Interaction denotes a type of social action where individuals interrelate through communication – they interpret each other's behaviour and modify their conduct according to how they define the situation (see Hałas 1981: 111), which is a continuous process. Symbolic interactionism regards people in interaction as the basis for all interpersonal relationships. A most important characteristic of such relations is that participants during their contact *take each other into account*, where *taking another person into account means being aware of him, identifying him in some way, making some judgment or appraisal of him, identifying the meaning of his action, trying to find out what he has on his mind or trying to figure out what he intends to do* (Blumer 1986: 109). Individuals organise their conduct on this basis, sometimes restraining certain tendencies or inclinations, and taking into account specific definitions ascribed to the situation as well as judgments and expectations concerning the actions of interaction partners. In neighbourly relations this type of social control mechanism often manifests itself in such questions as *What will the neighbours think?* or *What will the neighbours say?* Individuals may also be aware of the existence of informal rules, norms or standards of conduct but knowingly violate them, stating: *I don't care about the neighbours* (see Vaitkus 1994).

Erving Goffman, widely regarded as representing the dramaturgic perspective within symbolic interactionism,[3] states that interaction exchange (interchange) *seems to be a basic concrete unit of social activity and provides one natural empirical way to study interaction of all kinds* (Goffman 2005: 20). Goffman identifies two main types of interaction: 'unfocused' and 'focused.' The first is defined as a type of interpersonal communication where two or more people are co-present, observe each other and adjust their behaviours according to these observations (Goffman 1963: 24; see also Goffman 1961). The second takes place when two or more people effectively maintain for a certain amount of time a single visual and cognitive focus of attention, as when talking to each other (Goffman 1963: 24; see also Goffman 1961).

In the case of unfocused interaction individuals do not come into direct encounter, although they are aware of each other's presence, manage this co-presence and gather information about the other person *by glancing at him, if only momentarily, as he passes into and then out of one's view* (Goffman 1963: 24), as when neighbours pass each other in the corridor or observe each other through the window. In the second situation, participants of the interaction engage into some form of direct contact (e.g. conversation), during which they *openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention* (Goffman 1963: 24). Goffman refers here to the concept of encounter, which begins when individuals become aware of their co-presence and ends when they mutually acknowledge the fact of their disengagement from the interaction (Goffman 2005).

In many social settings individuals perform specific interaction rituals and in the case of neighbourly relations this ritual begins with mutual recognition of individuals as neighbours – people who live in spatial proximity, in one building or neighbourhood. A next step is the manifestation of this recognition through greetings and courteous conversation. In order for such actions to be possible, the existence of an 'occasion' is essential. Erving Goffman (1983: 6) defines an occasion as a situation in which an individual *comes into an other's response presence*. He also states that *situations begin when mutual monitoring occurs, and lapse when the second-last person has left* (Goffman 1963: 18). During social occasions contact can occur in the form of a glance, greeting or conversation. Such contact transforms an unfocused interaction (in which individuals are co-present in a public place, where they can observe each other and organise their behaviour based on these observations) into a focused interaction, where individuals maintain a common focus of attention. Neighbourly conversation constitutes a fundamental form of face engagement which sustains the encounter.

The course of the encounter is governed by certain rules, which are relativised according to specific contexts (Woroniecka 2010: VIII), both social and cultural. Culture, tradition, social conventions and norms constitute a frame of reference within which individuals select strategies of conduct in a given situation. Goffman (1986) points to the existence of interpretation frames within which interactions take place. These frames are socially constructed and constitute a resource of definitions used by individuals in the course of negotiating mutual perceptions of the contact situation and possible ways of performing their roles in it. Individual behaviour is influenced by various personal experiences, opinions and beliefs; however, during the interaction actors are embedded in a specific social and cultural structure, which they take into account in both their intentional and unconscious interpretations and choices (see Goffman 1986; Manterys 2008). It should be added that these structures *don't 'determine' culturally standard displays, merely help select from the available repertoire of them* (Goffman 1983: 11). In other words, these structures do not directly determine how a given interaction ritual should be performed in a particular culture, but they constitute a frame for selecting possible ways of doing this.

The social context in which interaction takes place is thus of great significance, as it provides 'interpretation frames' for the encounter. In the case of intercultural neighbourly contact – in the specific social context of the neighbourhood – migrants and representatives of the host society often have different definitions of how actors ought to behave. Concurrently these frames, which include appropriate and acceptable modes of conduct or ways of being, constitute a 'cultural obviousness' (Słodownik 2006) for representatives of each group. What is important in this context is that research shows that there are clear expectations in Polish society that migrants will adapt to the values and norms of the host population (Nowicka, Łodziński 2006). On the other hand, researchers also observe a process of 'getting accustomed to strangeness' when it comes to encounters with migrants, which evokes feelings of familiarity towards 'others' and their ways of being present in different social arenas (Nowicka, Łodziński 2001; see also Wessendorf 2013; Wise 2005).

Many authors, inspired by Goffman's work, now focus on specific forms of encounter in diverse urban settings – or even 'super-diverse' in Vertovec's (2007) sense – and explore the patterns and practices of 'eve-

ryday multiculturalism' (Wise, Velayutham 2010) and living with difference that include identity management tactics as well as strategies for dealing with diversity, whether physical, social, ethnic or cultural (Nowicka 2006; Piekut, Vieten, Valentine 2014; Valentine 2013; Wessendorf 2013; Wilson 2014). An important concept in many studies is the notion of 'conviviality' explored among others by Susanne Wessendorf (2014), who develops the idea of 'commonplace diversity' drawing on such concepts as 'civility towards diversity' (Lofland 1989) or 'cool conviviality' (Neal, Bennet, Cochrane, Mohan 2013), conceptualising this type of attitude as an avoidance of deeper engagement in the encounter in order not to evoke interethnic tensions. Such strategies help people co-exist when their cultural values and interpretation frames are to some extent incompatible.

Contemporary studies focus also on habitual practices and 'routinised civic virtues' developed in response to living in culturally diverse settings (Noble 2013), and refer to Goffman's (2005) notion of 'face-work' that implies appropriate face engagement and social obligations to demonstrate recognition and respect towards others during social interactions (Wessendorf 2014). Researchers apply this concept to everyday practices of mobility in cities (Jensen 2006) and explore the existence of specific social norms, such as the occurrence of an 'ethos of mixing' in diverse communities (Wessendorf 2013). It should be emphasised however that some authors indicate that courteous encounters do not necessarily lead to 'meaningful contact' (Valentine 2008; see also e.g. Devadason 2010; Watson 2006) that can transform attitudes and lead to actual, not merely manifested, interest, engagement and respect for difference.

Given the fact that social context influences the course of interaction, authors have distinguished and investigated various zones of contact and encounter (Mayblin, Valentine, Andersson 2015; Wood, Landry 2007). One such setting is the neighbourhood, conceptualised as a specific form of semi-public or 'parochial' space (Wessendorf 2014) where specific types of encounter occur (Blokland 2003). Amin and Thrift observe that *the everyday city provides the prosaic negotiations that drive interethnic and intercultural relations in different directions (...). Its sites of banal encounter and embedded culture are central in any attempt to foster interethnic understanding and cultural interchange* (Amin, Thrift 2002: 292) which corresponds with the need to research *local micropolitics of everyday interactions* (Amin 2002). Although studies of neighbouring as social interaction can be found in Western European and American literature (see e.g. Unger, Wandersman 1982, 1985), in Poland such work still needs to be developed.

The basic research question set in this study concerns experiences of neighbourly contact in Warsaw, on the part of both Poles and migrants from three specific groups: Vietnamese, Turks and Africans. The aim of this paper is to focus on perceptions, meanings and definitions of gestures and behaviours constructed by social actors, while less emphasis will be put on everyday practices, habits or routines, which have been thoroughly explored by other scholars. Of particular interest are indirect – or, using Goffman's terms, 'unfocused' – interactions, and especially the interpretation of particular gestures or glances in the context of neighbourly contacts. Facial expression and body language seem to be fundamental in establishing (intercultural) contact, because *by sustaining a publicly oriented composition of his face and a suitable organisation of the more material aspects of his personal appearance, the individual shows himself a person ready for social interaction in the situation* (Goffman 1963: 194–195). Focusing on these aspects of interaction may give insight into attitudes and motivations that influence encounters between migrants and representatives of the host population at local level.

Warsaw as context for intercultural neighbourly encounters

As Poland's capital city, Warsaw has experienced steady population growth in recent years due to immigration – both internal and external. Data from the 2011 national census indicate that around 20 per cent of all

foreigners residing in Poland live in Warsaw, where the largest groups of migrants include Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Belarussians, Russians and Chinese (GUS 2013). The actual number of foreign migrants to Warsaw is very difficult to estimate, since most migration is temporary and includes also a number of irregular migrants who do not hold a legal residence or work permit (see Górny, Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2011); however rough assessments suggest it could be around 2–3 per cent of the city's population (Winiarska 2014). Some migrant groups, especially those who are culturally remote from Polish society such as the Vietnamese, tend to form clusters (Halik 2011). However this does not take the form of strictly ethnic enclaves due to the quantitative dominance of the host population.

Foreign migrants to Warsaw can be divided into two specific groups, conceptualised by Aneta Piekut (2012) as 'invisible' and 'visible' ethnic others. The first group includes highly skilled expatriates from Western Europe and the United States, whose encounters with representatives of the host society are limited, while the second group includes economic migrants from Eastern European, Asian and also African countries, who often encounter Poles in their daily lives, in their local areas, in shops or markets, institutions and public space (Piekut 2012). Another division – to a large extent coinciding with the one above – concerns attitudes to foreigners within the host society. Surveys show that Poles have more positive attitudes towards representatives of Western and Central European countries, but more negative attitudes towards representatives of Eastern European, African and Asian countries (CBOS 2014). The three migrant groups included in this study belong in many cases to similar analytical categories ('visible' others, coming from the 'East,' most often economic migrants, culturally and religiously remote from Polish society). They will therefore often be referred to jointly, as 'migrants,' as opposed to Poles as representatives of the host population.

It should also be stressed that recent studies indicate a general *declared* increase in acceptance of representatives of the largest national immigrant groups settled in Poland (CBOS 2014, 2015), although attitudes are polarised (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007). Until the occurrence of political and social events in Poland, evoked by the refugee/migrant crisis of 2015, overt racism was relatively infrequent,[4] and both researchers and non-governmental institutions pointed to the relative openness of Polish society to migrants already present in the country. Nevertheless they indicated that some foreigners – especially those 'visible' among the host population – occasionally experience discrimination (also on the part of institutions), verbal aggression, and sometimes even physical violence, although the scale of such incidents was still relatively minor compared to other European countries (Klaus, Wencel 2008; Łotocki 2009). The social distance *declared* by Warsaw residents towards foreigners seems very small, with 95 per cent of respondents stating that they would accept a person of different nationality, skin colour or religion as their neighbour (*Barometr Warszawski* 2013). It might be presumed, however, that such declarations are to a large extent based on abstract conceptions, due to Poles' experiences of a highly homogeneous society and limited actual experience of diversity. This last assumption is corroborated in recent social debate concerning the European 'refugee/immigration crisis,' where highly negative attitudes towards the settlement of new groups of foreigners in Poland, especially from African and Arab (Muslim) countries, have been exposed. The research presented in this paper, however, was conducted before these events occurred.

A brief look at neighbourly relations in Poland in general provides the background for the analysis of intercultural neighbourly encounters in Warsaw. Studies show (e.g. Borowik 2003; Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska 2002; Lewicka 2004) that such relations are often limited, especially in cities, to conventional and courteous exchanges, with neighbours very rarely engaging in any common activity. Declarations, however, suggest neighbourliness that manifests itself in talking to the neighbours and spending time together is valued by Warsaw residents (*Badanie jakości życia…* 2013). Interethnic neighbourly contact has recently been of interest to researchers, whether quantatively or qualitatively (Górny, Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2011; Winiarska 2012).

Initial analyses show that such contacts in neighbourhoods are limited, and at the same time that neighbours play a more important role for immigrants than for representatives of the host society.

(Intercultural) neighbourly encounters: method

Empirical findings presented in this paper are based on interviews conducted by the author between 2009 and 2011 with Poles and migrants from Vietnam, Turkey and African countries, living in Warsaw. The full research material includes a total of 61 semi-structured interviews,[5] of which 52 were individual interviews and 9 were conducted with dyads of respondents (who were family or friends). 39 interviews were conducted in Polish, 21 in English and one half Polish and half English. During the interviews, neighbouring practices were discussed, together with perceptions concerning neighbours and meanings attached to their different behaviours. The group of respondents included 18 Poles (10 women and 8 men) – who declared having migrant neighbours, 16 migrants from Vietnam (8 women and 8 men), 20 migrants from Turkey (5 women and 15 men) and 16 migrants from African countries (1 woman and 15 men), such as Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Congo or Senegal. These foreigners had diverse migration histories (although all were first-generation migrants) and had been living in Poland for periods ranging from a couple of weeks to over 30 years. In this study I also include additional empirical material based on interviews conducted in 2009 and 2010 by students attending a research workshop run by the author at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Relations, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw.

It should be stressed that respondents resided in different parts of Warsaw, as the research did not concentrate on any specific area of the city. There were two reasons for this. First, my focus is interpretations and perceptions of neighbouring as a form of social relation in general. Scholars emphasise the important influence of personal characteristics on neighbourly relations, regardless of the features of the place of residence (Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska 2002), so the aim was to focus on the diverse perspectives of people living in different parts of the city (most of them in blocks of flats and apartment houses). Second, immigrants constitute a very small minority of the population of Warsaw, but it is difficult to give precise numbers due to limited administrative data and to undocumented migration on a significant scale. The exact areas of residence for foreigners are also difficult to assess, though existing data show that migrants generally tend to reside in central districts of Warsaw (see Winiarska 2014), or else on the outskirts of the city, near trading locations. Although some ethnic groups, such as Vietnamese, clearly prefer living close to each other, this concentration of groups does not make for strictly ethnic enclaves, which distinguishes the Warsaw case from those of Western European 'superdiverse' societies, as it does not have strictly multiethnic neighbourhoods within the city.

Intercultural encounters and the neighbourly interaction ritual in Warsaw: findings

Initially, it should be explained that although the research concerned three diverse groups of foreigners – Vietnamese, Turks and Africans – in many cases they will be referred to jointly as 'migrants,' as opposed to Poles. There are two reasons for this binary, which complement the ones indicated earlier. First, the social context positions migrants as guests or even 'strangers' (who may also have a visibly different appearance) and Poles as hosts in culturally and ethnically homogeneous Poland. Second, migrants from all three groups could be perceived as representatives of rather collectivistic cultures, whose expectations of social relations in the neighbourhood are different to those of the more individualistic Poles. The research proved that opinions and experiences of many interviewees from all three migrant groups were in many cases convergent. Where more cultural sensitivity is necessary, nuances will be acknowledged in the text.

Unfocused interaction – non-verbal acts (glances and gestures)

People co-present in a specific social situation (e.g. neighbours passing each other in the corridor) take account of and refer to each other, if only by exchanging glances or avoiding intrusive observation of others. This mutual monitoring complies with certain culturally sanctioned rules and conventions that define appropriate ways of behaving and communicating and thus organise the interaction (Manterys 2008). Mutual recognition and neighbourly greetings proceed according to specific, informal rules, which can be differently interpreted by Poles and migrants. Much of neighbourly conduct is non-verbal in character, and actors (neighbours) form attitudes towards each other by interpreting these signals, which in turn enables them to define their mutual relations. In the following paragraphs I aim to distinguish mutual expectations and the meanings ascribed to non-verbal acts by both Poles and migrants.

Migrants in the research study described the reactions of Poles, ranging from friendliness to aversion, on identifying them as neighbours. Neighbourly attitudes were defined largely on the basis of observations of glances, gestures, body language and behaviour on the part of Poles. Eye contact proved to be a very important element of interaction and both its lack and excess ('obtrusive observation') were perceived by migrants as negative. Many interviewees, especially Africans and Turks, disapproved of the fleeting glances and lack of greeting which they interpreted as a manifestation of indifference. This might constitute a confirmation of Goffman's thesis (after Georg Simmel) that eye contact plays a specific role in social communication – for many migrants, establishing such contact is an important step towards positive neighbourly relations in the host society. Poles avoiding eye contact and not exchanging glances in neighbourly interactions can be viewed as withdrawing from any closer kind of engagement, which is not necessarily their actual intention.

While migrants perceived reluctant and 'closed' attitudes, some Poles explained they were attempting to show 'polite indifference' – or, in Goffman's terminology, 'civil inattention' – and deliberately not showing excessive interest in foreigners, so that they could feel at ease in their new environment. The same behaviours were thus accorded different meanings, depending on the interpretation frame applied. Tactful behaviour, often culturally influenced, can be misunderstood by people whose expectations of the rituals of neighbourly interaction are different.

At the same time, many Poles observed their migrant neighbours closely, drawing conclusions about their lifestyle, daily routines and everyday activities. Although in many cases direct – or focused – interaction was missing, the accumulated resource of knowledge about neighbours situated them in specific categories and social roles and led to specific judgments (such as that the Vietnamese are hard-working people). This indicates that the interviewees took their neighbours into account in everyday actions and we might assume that this knowledge gave Poles a sense of security and 'acquaintance' with foreigners living in their neighbourhood. We may define this situation as some form of unfocused interaction (although participants may not even be directly co-present in a situation). However, migrants were not necessarily aware of the existence of such observations and may or may not have adjusted their own behaviours in the light of co-presence in the neighbourhood. The following interview excerpts[6] are indicative of Polish interviewees' observations:

The Vietnamese, I mean men, appear late afternoon, early evening. In my common sense I think that it's related to their working routine, they leave very early in the morning, I also get up early, at five, six in the morning they're already pushing their carts and going somewhere, yes (male, 36, Polish).

And they have their stall there, where they trade. It's like that with them. They leave very early, then they come back, but at early dawn they quietly leave. With those bags, everything. And come back at around

2 p.m., because that's about when it ends, they close it. Then clearly they sleep. Because it's quiet. And later in the evening they apparently wake up and do something. Cook or prepare themselves or something. Because you can hear that (female, 70, Polish).

Certain activities on the part of migrants were interpreted through the lens of values held by representatives of the host society, who attributed meanings that were ideological or religious in character, as in the case of the following interview excerpt:

I know that although he is from somewhere in Africa – I don't remember the country – I know he is a Christian. I mean he didn't tell me, but I saw him go to church with an Easter basket. And that surely means something (female, 28, Polish).

Observing neighbours does not necessarily lead to establishing interaction, and the research material shows that for Poles this is often the case. Many migrants, especially those of Turkish descent, attempted to maintain courteous relations with their neighbours, and the perceived lack of reciprocity in this respect was felt as a personal insult. Erving Goffman (1963) notes that to treat others as if they were not there, as well as using intrusive glances (staring) and 'unseeing eyes' (ignoring), is to treat individuals worse than other 'ordinary' actors, often to perceive them as non-persons. In the case of interethnic neighbourly interactions, however, it is difficult to pinpoint whether such behaviours are a manifestation of hostility, inappropriately low engagement in the situation or actually a form of 'civil inattention' which is an important and culturally influenced element of unfocused interaction.

The discomfort experienced by some migrants in neighbourly interactions might result from the fact that some of their expectations are not met. Goffman (2005: 6) writes that *if the encounter sustains an image of him that he has long taken for granted, he probably will have few feelings about the matter. If events establish a face for him that is better than he might have expected, he is likely to 'feel good;' if his ordinary expectations are not fulfilled, one expects that he will 'feel bad' or 'feel hurt.'* It may be that migrants expect friendly interest from their neighbours in the form of specific 'rituals of respect' that prevail in the migrants' cultures, but are not typical for Poles who tend to keep their distance in neighbourly interactions. Foreigners feel uncomfortable when these expectations are not met and this was especially the case for Africans and Turks who, unlike the Vietnamese, often have no other migrants living in their immediate neighbourhood, who might take up social acts of this kind.

These differences in approach, with distance experienced as negative by many migrants, can appear positive to Poles where – from the Poles' point of view – migrants are unexpectedly 'open.' Some Polish interviewees remarked that even indirect contact with foreign neighbours can positively influence interpersonal relations in the neighbourhood, especially when it comes to friendliness and smiling, and this was particularly apparent in the case of the Vietnamese. We could assume that Poles particularly noticed such behaviours because they are not a common element of neighbourly interaction in the country: 'better' treatment than expected makes people 'feel good.' Furthermore, friendliness can create an obligation to reciprocate, and reactions can be spontaneous, as in the following case described by a Polish woman:

They [the Vietnamese] were always smiling so wide in the corridor, that these smiles and good humour were contagious. Many times after meeting them I kept smiling to myself. (...) I sometimes notice, I'm speaking sarcastically now, that some neighbours also start to smile. Unnaturally, but they try! And that is an improvement. Poles are very gloomy and we could learn a lot about cheerful mood and politeness from Asians (female, 40, Polish).

Contrary to many migrants' impressions, some Poles say they would like to interact with their foreign neighbours, but have difficulty in finding culturally acceptable ways of doing this. One of the interviewees expressed her need to manifest friendliness towards a migrant neighbour from an African country and admitted to feeling curious about this person. She noticed, however, that the foreigner behaved in a way that made starting a conversation difficult, which she perceived as reluctance to establish any form of more direct interaction or closer encounter. The situation here is thus the reverse of those described earlier, however interpretation schemes seem similar. Using Goffman's terminology we might say that the person who is reluctant to enter the encounter self-distances, applying specific strategies to avoid engagement, such as passing by quickly, behaviour characterised by the interviewee as 'sneaking' or 'fleeting,' and avoiding eye contact. The Pole then feels anxious that starting a conversation might be perceived as intrusive or as a way of stigmatising the visible otherness of the neighbour. On the other hand, the interviewee's observations lead her to the conclusion that the foreigner feels like a stranger in the neighbourhood. In this case avoiding engagement might thus be a form of defensive behaviour. We might assume that the African is experiencing some form of acculturation stress which leads to the violation of standards of neighbourly conduct.

> *Well I have the impression about these people in general that they are a bit frightened… For example when I see him, I am very happy that I have a neighbour who looks different… I feel benevolent about it that somebody from Africa has appeared in our neighbourhood and lives here, this is so… unusual and… that his black-skinned child is going to grow up here. I have a lot… I would like to make him feel welcome here and that generally it's good that he's here. And I have the impression that he is kind of ambushed. Maybe not exactly sneaking… but he walks quickly and doesn't look around. He doesn't look for… really I would be really willing to talk to him… what he's doing here… where he's from… somehow welcome him… and he definitely doesn't demonstrate such a willingness. So I decided not to be obtrusive either, because it's also some form of discrediting and stigmatising him if I would start fraternising with him… Does he somehow mark out, I think that due to this attitude, that he passes so quickly, as if he were not at home* (female, 33, Polish).

We might consider this last interview excerpt with reference to an opinion expressed by an African interviewee that mutual distance between Poles and foreigners is a kind of vicious circle resulting from various assumptions present in the heads of the participants in the interaction. The 'guests' do not want to commit a *faux pas* or manifest tactlessness, while the hosts do not want to seem intrusive or disturbing and sometimes also feel apprehensive towards 'strangers.' In the opinion of this informant, Poles keep their distance towards foreigners, but at the same time are open to contact if such an initiative should come from the other side. It seems that Poles wait for foreign guests to be the first to 'become available' in the interaction ritual: *We keep a distance to them because we are the guest, they keep a distance or don't want to disturb, or are afraid… these are such various… such internal… in the head* (male, 54, Somalian). The opinion of a Vietnamese woman confirms these observations and interpretations. The interviewee states that Poles lack socially sanctioned 'justifications' to initiate contact, and taking the role of hosts they expect newcomers to make the first move.

> *Poles rarely want to meet new Vietnamese neighbours, because they are afraid… that… they won't be able to communicate, or that… there is no basis, because nobody introduced them, and why would I have to go to them really. They are the new ones after all, and also foreigners, so they should come to me and not like that…* (female, 20, Vietnamese).

Many migrants, observing the kinds of behaviour described above, think that Poles lack readiness for interaction, although whether they accurately assess this readiness – or rather the lack of it – is questionable. The elements of non-verbal communication (glances, facial expressions, gestures, and so on) comprising what Goffman (1963) describes as 'body idiom' make up a form of conventionalised discourse. In social relations we usually expect that others will demonstrate tact, courtesy and friendliness through their physical actions, at the same time reaffirming the existing norms of social conduct. Goffman notes that *there is typically an obligation to convey certain information when in the presence of others and an obligation not to convey other impressions, just as there is an expectation that others will present themselves in certain ways. There tends to be agreement not only about the meaning of the behaviours that are seen but also about the behaviours that ought to be shown* (Goffman 1963: 35). Migrants expect to see manifestations of friendliness on the part of Poles, but often interpret the latters' facial expressions and gestures as demonstrations of indifference or even aversion. We need to establish whether such manifestations on the part of Poles are intentional (in other words, whether they constitute meaningful actions), and also whether Poles' interpretations of their own behaviours coincide with those of foreigners – which, as the examples above show, is not always the case, due to different interpretation frames.

Focused interaction – neighbourly greeting and conversation

Greetings are a very important element of the neighbourly interaction ritual from the point of view of many migrants. An interviewee coming from an African country noticed that Poles often look surprised when a stranger greets them in the street, while for immigrants such behaviour is often obviously appropriate. Erving Goffman's analysis of neighbourly exchanges of courtesies includes the concept of a 'nod line.' He concludes that:

> *any community below the line, and hence below a certain size, will subject its adults, whether acquainted or not, to mutual greetings; any community above the line will free all pairs of unacquainted persons from this obligation. (Where this line is drawn varies, of course, according to region.) In the case of communities that fall above the nod line, even persons who cognitively recognise each other to be neighbours, and know that this state of mutual information exists, may sometimes be careful to refrain from engaging each other* (Goffman 1963: 132–133).

From this perspective exchanging situational courtesies is a matter not of spontaneous friendliness or good manners but of institutionalised relations that bind people into specific gatherings. Neighbourly interaction rituals thus include greeting others near home, in communal corridors and when getting into or out of the lift. Some Poles (especially older people) saw this as fundamental to good manners and politeness in neighbourly relations, but younger Poles also noticed such behaviours:

> *About such rules, well when I first came to Warsaw, I noticed such a thing that when you get on the lift you say 'good morning.' And when you get off you say 'thank you' though I don't know for what. And this habit spread also to Bemowo [a district of Warsaw], because I came across this when I was living in… [a street in Warsaw]. And this spread also to Bemowo, though on Bemowo it's rather 'good morning' and 'goodbye' and over there it was more 'thank you'* (female, 23, Polish).

This expectation was shared by many migrants, who saw the absence of greeting and conversation on the part of neighbours as a sign of Poles' reluctance and 'closed' attitude towards them (see also Winiarska

2012). It can thus be assumed that a friendly greeting will be perceived as a sign of positive relations. In this context the opinion of a Vietnamese man who had been living in Poland for many years seems especially interesting. This man, together with his Polish wife, had moved to Warsaw some years previously and settled in a residential district where some other Vietnamese people also live. This interviewee can be classed as a representative of the first wave of Vietnamese migration to Poland, while his younger neighbours represent the second wave. In such a case Vietnamese tradition requires that the latter should initiate a greeting in the street. Migrants did show initiative in this matter, but only in relation to the Polish woman (the interviewee's wife), at the same time ignoring the Vietnamese man, which he regarded as impolite. The interviewee justified his countrymen's behaviour by explaining that their intention was probably to gain acceptance in their new social surroundings, and assuming that he himself – due to his Vietnamese origin – was seen by these neighbours as a representative of the 'in group' whose goodwill and positive opinions did not need to be sought. Once again we may refer here to Goffman's observations that *each individual can* see *that he is being experienced in some way and he will guide at least some of his conduct according to the perceived identity and initial response of his audience* (Goffman 1963: 16). In this situation the Vietnamese obviously identify that Poles expect them to behave courteously, whereas they do not have the same attitude towards their countrymen.

> When we moved into this block and we sometimes met in the street or in front of the block with these Vietnamese, they always gave greetings to my wife but never to me (laugh) (...). In our culture the custom is that the younger should simply give greeting to the elder, so if they don't say 'good morning' to me then of course I don't say it back. But they do say it to my wife (laugh).
>
> Researcher: What does this result from, what do you think?
>
> I think that they simply try to ingratiate themselves more with the locals than with their own. With your own you don't have to (laugh) (...) That's what I think because there is simply no other explanation (male, 53, Vietnamese).

Such thinking would suggest that the Vietnamese in Poland perceive neighbourly greetings as an important contribution to their positive image and to gaining acceptance in their Polish milieu: *Even if I don't know somebody I also say 'good morning,' sometimes I don't know if this person actually lives in our block or not, but just in case (laughter)* (male, 53, Vietnamese). On the other hand, Poles seem to appreciate such behaviour, although at the same time in many cases they do not demonstrate any inclination to establish closer relations with foreigners: *They smile, say hello and that's completely enough for me, because I don't have any contact with them. Apart from saying 'Gut-moning' [the interviewee relates here to the distinct pronunciation of Vietnamese] in the lift* (male, 70, Polish).

At this point we should return to the issue of who should initiate a greeting and possibly also conversation in a neighbourly contact situation. Both Poles and migrants from all three researched groups believed that the initiative should be on the side of the 'guests,' because they are new to the neighbourhood, often also younger than most of the other residents, so they should be the first to introduce themselves. Some migrants seem convinced that unless they take the initiative themselves, Poles will fail to offer any kind of neighbourly greeting. It should be added that initiating contact does not necessarily need to involve striking up a conversation – sometimes a meaningful glance is sufficient. Goffman observes that:

an encounter is initiated by someone making an opening move, typically by means of a special expression of the eyes but sometimes by a statement or a special tone of voice at the beginning of a statement. The engagement proper begins when this overture is acknowledged by the other, who signals back with his eyes, voice, or stance that he has placed himself at the disposal of the other for purposes of a mutual eye-to-eye activity... (Goffman 1963: 91–92).

Thus for an interaction to be established, actions initiating contact should, first, be noticed and acknowledged, and second, there must be some form of response to these actions.

As stated earlier, conversations between neighbours (Poles and immigrants) most often take place in communal corridors or lifts. Such contacts however typically do not lead to inviting neighbours into one's home, and if such an offer should occasionally be expressed by Poles – for example when organising a party – then neighbourly ritual rather suggests the invitation should be politely declined, since this is usually a form of courtesy that plays an important ceremonial role in sustaining the social relation, not an actual attempt to establish personal contact. Goffman remarks that *a person can thus make himself available to others in the expectation that they will restrain their calls on his availability and not make him pay too great a price for being accessible* (Goffman 1963: 106). There is a kind of implicit agreement to manifest mutual openness and an assumption that the parties will not actually put relations to the test by accepting the apparent invitation to establish closer contact. In this context a Turkish woman notices that Poles say 'good morning' to their neighbours but do not take it further by asking 'how are you today?' showing, in her view, that neighbourly contact is actually insignificant. As a Polish woman suggests, questions about personal feelings might open the way to a conversation that could violate the boundaries of 'ordinary' neighbourly contact: *Just a purely polite 'good morning,' 'goodbye,' but not 'how are you doing?,' because in the case of 'how are you doing?' the subject might expand* (woman, 43, Polish).

An important conclusion here is that courteous neighbourly conversation in Poland does not usually lead to an exchange of personal information or even names. Goffman refers to this kind of strategy as 'thinning out' the encounter: participants intentionally do not exchange names in order to keep the contact impersonal (Goffman 1963: 139). This is most often the case in fleeting encounters, when although social norms suggest entering into a polite casual conversation, participants might not want to identify each other as acquaintances in the future. In the neighbourhood setting, however, even if conversations are fleeting, a mutual recognition and localisation in common space does nevertheless take place, so any reluctance to manifest recognition in the future might be seen as inappropriate behaviour.

An interesting observation is that migrants sometimes intentionally ignore differences in neighbourly interaction rituals, acting instead in accordance with their own norms, even if they fail to observe any reaction to their actions on the part of Poles. The story of a Turkish man who consistently said 'good morning' to an elderly neighbour until one day he finally received a courteous reply might serve as an example here. A Somalian man expressed his opinion that a foreigner is like a mirror – if he smiles and acts in a friendly manner, then Poles will do the same. This interviewee emphasised that migrants should create a positive image of their own country abroad, spreading positive views about it to conquer existing stereotypes. This suggests migrants' possible motivations for initiating interethnic contacts in their neighbourhood. However, intercultural neighbourly encounters in Warsaw do not seem meaningful in terms of changing attitudes, although at times they are an important part of people getting accustomed to each other.

Intercultural neighbourly encounters: conclusions

Intercultural neighbourly encounters from a micro-sociological perspective seem under-researched in the context of Poland, where diversity is a relatively new phenomenon. The city of Warsaw is ethnically highly homogeneous, and researchers are only just beginning to take an interest in the intercultural interactions that occur in semi-public spaces between neighbours.

A micro-sociological analysis of individuals' perceptions of their contacts with neighbours provides valuable insights into how interpretation of gestures and behaviours causes specific opinions and attitudes to be formed between migrants and representatives of the host society. Throughout this paper Erving Goffman's sociology of interaction has been used to analyse intercultural neighbourly encounters, taking into account both non-verbal actions such as gestures and glances, and verbal actions such as greetings and conversation. These constitute the two main aspects of interaction – unfocused and focused. The analysis has enabled us to ascertain that although neighbourly contact in an urban setting appears to be characterised by mutual indifference (see also Winiarska 2012), neighbours do actually take each other into account, if only by observing each other's actions and forming opinions on this basis. This analytical distinction complements existing studies on encounter which often emphasise direct contact, overlooking more indirect aspects of interaction and social actors' own definitions of such occurrences.

An important social norm in neighbourly contacts is tact, and participants in the encounter, in their eagerness not to commit a *faux pas,* often refrain from conversation or even greeting in order not to appear intrusive. Moreover, the encounter needs to be started in a socially acceptable way, and both sides have specific expectations concerning the rules of initiating contact, the interaction ritual apparently assuming that foreign 'guests' make the first move. This corresponds with the fact that migrants usually have a greater motivation to initiate encounters in neighbourhood settings than representatives of the host society, which has been observed in other studies. Furthermore, as 'ordinary' neighbourly contact in Warsaw requires personal boundaries to be maintained and undue intrusiveness avoided, a façade of openness on the part of Poles can be observed, which is sometimes inconsistent with migrants' expectations of neighbourly rituals. Encounters in this case can lead to changes in everyday practices on both sides – migrants may refrain from their habitual ways or Poles may take up non-standard ways of behaving when it comes to neighbourly greetings or conversations.

From the migrants' point of view, eye contact and small gestures are highly significant and are used to interpret Poles' attitudes towards them and provide guidelines for managing neighbourly conduct. Some migrants interpret Poles' lack of response to their greetings as a sign of aversion, a desire to exclude or even a manifestation of non-acceptance in the neighbourly community. We should, however, also consider how Poles interpret their own actions. Moreover, we should remember that Goffman's considerations relate to American culture; the 'nod line' will be differently defined and situated according to culture. This is illustrated by a Polish person's surprise at being greeted by a person whom they do not cognitively recognise as a neighbour, since the high degree of anonymity in neighbourly relations in Warsaw limits the exchange of courtesies.

As the research shows, gestures intended to show tact and courtesy can sometimes be perceived as unfriendly or 'closed' when different interpretation frames are applied. Poles' and migrants' interpretations of 'body idiom' in Goffman's sense sometimes differ when it comes to assessing readiness to engage in encounters. From the Poles' perspective their conduct is frequently a manifestation of 'polite indifference,' closely associated with the concepts of 'conviviality' or 'civility' towards diversity that have been developed in the literature (Wessendorf 2014). From the migrants' point of view, however, these gestures can be interpreted as a demonstration of negative indifference, rather than desirable 'civil inattention.' This proves that

specific, often implicit, social norms governing neighbourly interaction rituals do exist and, due to different cultural interpretation frames, can become evident in interethnic relations, potentially influencing integration processes at the local level. Although diverse expectations can at times cause misunderstandings or negative experiences, both focused and unfocused neighbourly interactions do nevertheless play an important role in getting accustomed to each other both by Poles and representatives of migrant groups.

Notes

[1] Parts of this paper were presented at the 15th Congress of the Polish Sociological Association *What After Crisis?* that took place at the University of Szczecin on 11–14 September 2013, within the research group: 'Poles' intercultural contacts' chaired by Agata Bachórz and Krzysztof Podemski.

[2] Precise estimates are difficult and this issue will be elaborated on below.

[3] Elżbieta Hałas points to existing doubts as to the definitive classification of Goffman within the symbolic interactionism perspective (see Hałas 2006, 2007).

[4] Social tensions have risen in Poland in relation to the European 'refugee/immigrant crisis' of 2015. Extensive public debate on these issues has exposed highly negative attitudes towards refugees and migrants, especially Muslims, and opinion polls show a decrease in acceptance of these groups in Poland.

[5] The empirical data and further analysis are part of a doctoral thesis written by the author.

[6] All interviews cited in this paper were originally conducted in Polish and translated into English for the purpose of this text by the author.

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