

MATERIAL, POLITICAL AND POSTSECULAR
DIMENSIONS OF POLISH CATHOLICISM.
INTRODUCTION

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The set of works featured in this issue presents the most recent anthropological insights into Catholicism – a complex and varied phenomenon, which has proved fascinating for the researchers, as is apparent from this collection. The idea to publish the series of articles arose from the grant of the National Science Centre¹ (NCN) entitled *Multisensory Religious Imageries in Selected Catholic Shrines in South-Eastern Poland* (DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/01443). The research team included Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, Magdalena Lubańska (Principal Investigator), Iuliia Buyskykh and Konrad Siekierski.

The scope of the research encompassed Catholic sanctuaries in south-eastern Poland, however, the insights into the materials gathered during the study exceed the focus of the grant, entering into a polemic with the most recent trends in anthropological research on Catholicism. The following set of articles is an attempt to present a part of results of the project², as well as to delve into a deeper reflection on religiosity in Poland. Our focus was on showing the multidimensionality of Catholicism and its many faces, especially on the fact that this denomination has not yet been sufficiently researched by anthropologists (Mayblin, Noget, Napolitano 2017, 1). We wanted to use the study of Polish Catholicism, which is incorrectly deemed homogeneous, as a starting point for outlining the directions of reflecting upon the creed and the multitude of possible approaches to interpreting it.

Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in Poland (Pasięka, Sekerdej 2013), and as such determines the hierarchy of other religions (Pasięka 2015). Due to its preeminent role in Poland, the Catholic Church serves as an intermediary between Catholicism and other religions, making the country a unique case from the academic point of view (Casanova 1994; Luckmann 1967). At the same time this dominant

¹ A government agency, supervised by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, set up in 2011 to support basic research in Poland (<https://ncn.gov.pl/o-ncn/zadania-ncn?language=en>).

² The outcomes of the project are also presented in the special issue of *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2/2 (2018), <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc/>.

Catholicism is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but rather has many facets and sub-groups (Niedźwiedź 2014). Although the media is dominated by the politically-active, conservative face of the Church in Poland (see Golonka-Czajkowska in this issue), there is far more to this phenomenon than just strand of the religion. Moreover, the research on Catholicism demonstrates that it includes many forms and rituals, which seep through to everyday life. In the case of Poland this includes the everyday life of both believers and non-believers, since Catholicism is the dominant source of the country's cultural and political capital. This allows us to see it as something more than just a denomination – it is also a strong culture-forming factor (Cannell 2006, 5; Robbins 2007), a basis for building identities, and a system of ethical values. All the while, Catholicism in Poland is a strongly polarised phenomenon: on the one hand it is open and liberal, on the other closed-off and supportive of nationalistic tendencies. Between these polar opposites of Catholicism exists a whole gamut of attitudes towards, opinions on, and interpretations of the role of religion in everyday life, which are a constant, but also dynamic and developing subject of academic study.

While Catholicism dominates in south-eastern Poland, the area that was the starting point for our research, it is not the only denomination present there. It interacts with other creeds and local Catholics come across members of other religions, both in peaceful coexistence and as a result of conflicts and mutual misunderstandings (see Buyskykh 2016, 2018; Buzalka 2007; Hann 1998a, 1998b; Pasięka 2015). This makes this region particularly fruitful for anthropological interpretations. Materials gathered there allow researchers to deepen the study of religiosity to include such aspects as identity, a complex history, memory, the coexistence of religions, politics, and spiritual experience, which is dependent on the entirety of the social context and not only limited to participating in religious rituals.

The desire which governed the entire grant project, and which is reflected also in the present set of articles, was to portray the uniqueness of the region itself and the role of the Catholic religion in the lives of its inhabitants. Thus, the bulk of our insight concentrates on the directness of religious experience, as well as ways of managing it and the meaning of religious forms which serve as intermediaries for experiencing the sacred (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2016a, 2016b, Lubanska 2017, 2018). In doing so, we reference the current discourse concerning pilgrimages and the special power this type of religious practice exudes (Coleman and Eade 2004; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Eade and Katić 2014; Eade and Katić 2018; Coleman 2002), the role of the clergy and sacred spaces in the creation of religious imaginaries (Csordas 1990), and the performativity of religious phenomena. Through concentrating on the forms, which mediate between and govern religious experience (Meyer 2006, 2010; Niedźwiedź 2015), we show how the material sphere and the landscape influence spiritual experiences. At the same time we reference studies on identity, memory, and stereotypes (Buyskykh 2016, 2018). Drawing upon anthropological works discussing the multi-denominational history of the region (Hann 1998a, 1998b; Buzalka 2007; Lubańska 2007; Pasięka 2015; Zowczak

2011) we show the changes caused by the recent social and political currents in Poland. The conflict over sanctuaries between different religions allows us to showcase the research on shared places of worship, a topic crucial for the anthropology of religion (Bowman 2002; Hayden 2002; Hayden and Walker 2013; Lubańska 2012).

We also want to showcase how a particular territory inspired us to broaden our insight, to try to compare our observations with that of other researches, both those working in this region and those analysing other parts of Poland. This need arises from the nature of the subject matter and in each case the study of Catholicism(s) requires the use of slightly (or even significantly) different research tools. Despite its great potential, this research topic is yet to become a proper academic subdiscipline, which would focus on the multifaceted anthropological study of Catholicism³. This explains the calls for creating an anthropology of Christianity which would keep balance between the inspirations leading to insights into religious phenomena within the various denominations of Christianity, and counterbalance the “protestant bias” (Asad 1993).

This bias hidden in anthropological epistemology awarded certain privileges to some particular forms of religious expression, while snubbing others. Worship as a state of trusting in God has been favoured over all other sensual and tangible forms of building a connection with God, which in turn affected the anthropological definitions of religion as such (Asad 1993; Needham 1972). As far as Polish anthropology is concerned, this bias has long been visible in the popularity of terms referencing the material aspect of religiosity – terms such as “naïve sensuality” (Czarnowski 1956, 91–91), or “non-differentiation” (Tokarska-Bakir 2000). This first category suggests that entering a sensual connection with such objects as images is a sign of cognitive inferiority. The second one assumes *a priori* that the connection is created due to the nature of the perception of a religious image, in which a person does not distinguish between the *signans* and the *signatum*, thus identifying the depiction of the character with the character as such. The most recent research, however, points to the existence of aforementioned bias in anthropological theory, rather than the existence of naivety in those who express their worship in a sensual manner (Lubańska 2007; Lubańska 2014; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2017).

The realisation that the categories and terms they had been using were tainted by certain anthropological theories (Asad 1993) finally prompted anthropologists to treat more seriously both the influence of Christianity on the Christian communities they were researching and on the anthropological theory itself. Consequently, the culture-forming nature of Christianity became far more apparent⁴ (Cannell 2006; Robbins 2003, 2007).

³ Although one ought to mention Norget *et al.* 2017.

⁴ To change the optics of research and emphasise the culture-forming role of Christianity, Joel Robbins and Fenella Cannell created a new research subdiscipline, namely the anthropology of Christianity. It can be further subdivided into the anthropology of the Orthodox Church, anthropology of Catholicism, etc.

It is worth noting here that similar observations about ignoring the potential influence of Christianity on the everyday life of the communities studied by anthropologists were made by the Polish anthropologist Ludwik Stomma in the early 1980s. He noticed that ethnographers researching religiosity in the Polish countryside disregarded everything that was occurring in church space. He was of the opinion that the reason for that was

“more or less (usually less) subconscious inclinations of the ethnographers to try and separate the core from the later additions, to extract from the Christian culture of the countryside those elements which were supposedly folkloristic, therefore by definition rough and ancient Slavic” (Stomma 1986, 204).

This tendency was partially related to the roots of European ethnography as a discipline focusing on recording beliefs and practises which were disappearing. This field used to be governed by Herder’s claim that the essence of a nation has been hidden in its folklore seen as idiosyncratic to the given national community (Wilson 1973). Another reason for the ‘blind spot’ in anthropology of Catholicism, were the attempts to minimise the importance of Christianity in the countries of the Eastern Bloc because it was deemed to be an ideological enemy of communism.

In western countries Christianity became the “repugnant other” (Harding 1991) due to slightly different reasons. The origins of this attitude may be found in the guilt stemming from the perception of Christianity as the religion imposed upon colonised communities. Generations of anthropologists, cognisant of the symbolic violence, preferred to look at this extraneous Christianity as a surface level accretion, beneath which existed hidden local beliefs, ingrained in the structures of *longue durée* (eg. Comaroff 1985). Joel Robbins called this research mannerism “continuity thinking” (Robbins 2007), which became so ingrained in anthropological research that practitioners stopped noticing how problematic it was. This attitude fails when it is used in a context in which the described community actually denounces its former beliefs and engages in the newly acquired religion with neophytic fervour (Robbins 2007).

In the case of research conducted in Catholic communities in Poland, the category of “continuity thinking” remains relevant, since certain aspects of Christianity have stayed the same in the country, for instance the messianic aspect (Zubrzycki 2006; Lubańska 2018, 117). This stems from the fact that Catholicism has over 1000 years tradition in Poland and it has been used multiple times in an ideological context as an element of a political resistance strategy against authorities imposed by outside forces.

That said, the growing popularity of charismatic movements within Polish Catholicism is a form of renouncing its typical imagery, and opening up to a new way of experiencing faith, one which is perceptive, for instance, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts – glossolalia and prophecies – as well as “mass in the intention of healing or liberation”, which incorporates the above mentioned gifts, have become a natural part of many Catholics’ religiosity, despite not being part of the local habitus (Biernacka,

this issue; Lubańska 2018, 108). As a part of the growing popularity of charismatic movements, the belief in the existence of Satan has become more prevalent; this can be seen in the substantial popularity of exorcist priests in the Subcarpathian region (Lubańska 2018, Siekiński 2018b). The charismatic components of Catholicism coexist with the long lasting forms of cult surrounding religious images. The images are considered to have miraculous properties and often become the destination of pilgrimages (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2016a, 2016b). Another form of religious expression which is new in the Polish context are the so called extreme Ways of the Cross: an annual collective form that usually takes place on the Friday before Holy Week.

“The Way is a night-long march, preceded by a Holy Mass, along a route of 30 to 100 km (most routes are 40–50 kilometres long). Participants walk in silence, alone or in small groups, but next to one another rather than together” (Siekiński 2018a, 109).

The present volume constitutes our attempt to outline the development directions of an anthropology of Catholicism. In choosing a small geographical area as our starting point, we encourage comparisons with Catholicism around the world, at the same time trying to analyse the research methods used to describe this phenomenon. Such endeavours are important, firstly because acknowledging the variety within Catholicism leads to many possible interpretation lines. Secondly, as is apparent from our experiences during this project, the beliefs of the researchers and their (non)religion influence not only their reflection upon the researched subject, but also their ability to reach interlocutors or to get access to particular materials (see Buyskykh 2016). For this reason we invited Adrianna Biernacka⁵ to contribute to this volume. She described her research on a group that was completely culturally alien to her, namely the Catholic Charismatic Renewal group from Przeworsk. The author is an atheist who conducts research among people of deep faith, for whom religion, the Church, and the values propagated by it are among the most important aspects of their lives. Having noticed the significance of the difference between her own world view and the one held by the people she studied, she tried to transform it into an added value of her study by choosing to use the research methodology proposed by Martin Holbraad and Morten A. Pedersen (2017) in their conceptualisation of “the ontological turn”. The authors indicate that this turn in humanities is to be the answer to exactly the issue at hand, namely: the existence of a difference between the world of the researchers and the world of their subjects. Biernacka guides her readers through her research process and the doubts arising from it, all the while showing the openings which can be created when the ontological turn is incorporated into research on modern Catholicism. At

⁵ Together with Przemysław Gnyszka, Mathew Schmalz and Monika Golonka-Czajkowska, who were among the participants of the scientific workshop “Politicization, heritagization and sensualization in contemporary Catholicism”, which we organized at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences on 13th November 2017.

the same time she points out the limitations of this method and the dominating force of the said difference in values held by her and the people she researched.

The problem of the distance between the beliefs of the researched people and the researcher can also be clearly seen in the article by Monika Golonka-Czajkowska. As well as the issue of religious values, it also presents the problem of political ideology. The author convincingly shows that in the social reality it is impossible to conduct research on religion *sensu stricto*, and any insights will have to include various other aspects of life. The subject of her research was the so called Smoleńsk anniversaries in Krakow, marches which are a form of manifesting one's political and religious views and involve several dozen people. Golonka-Czajkowska analyses them and shows the intersection of national and religious symbols and the way they are manipulated for political reasons, at the same time taking into consideration that these symbols belong to the religion experienced by the participants and are a part of their religious culture. Thus, she describes how religion and politics can become assigned to the same order of phenomena in the practical social context.

The relation between religion and politics is also present in the article by Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, who notes that the existence of this intersection is overused, for instance as the dominant interpretation framework for religious phenomena in border regions. Through presenting how Polish pilgrims view pilgrims from Ukraine, who come to the sanctuary in Kalwaria Paławska, the author recognises the possibility that it is the scholars themselves who evoke the categories of stereotypes and biases while conducting field research, and bring out problematic histories in the way they describe the related religious phenomena. In this, her goal is not to reject these categories or phenomena completely, since they provide context – both historical and current – for research in the region, but to emphasise their limitations. In her work she showcases the shortcomings of such tools in interpreting the manner in which the presence of pilgrims from Ukraine is perceived in Kalwaria Paławska.

An alternative approach to discussing the relationship between religion and politics can be found in the paper by Mathew Schmaltz. The author uses his position as a researcher from outside of Poland – he is American – to employ anthropological interpretation in presenting his understanding of the (for him culturally alien) sanctuary on Jasna Góra, which he visited on the 11th of November 2017⁶. He notes the lavishness and dynamism of the place, as well as the very clear references to Polish history and current politics. Significantly, however, Schmaltz does not concentrate on the relationship between the Catholic Church and politics, but interprets the temple in Częstochowa in a broader context. He writes: “one of the most striking aspects of Jasna Góra was its positive celebration of Polish culture”.

⁶ 11th November is an anniversary of regaining independence by Poland in 1918. There are special celebrations in Jasna Góra sanctuary on this date.

The epistemological perspective of post-secular anthropology is another important interpretative path that enriches the research on Catholicism and which is, in our view, worthy of consideration. By problematising not only religiosity, but also secularity, and studying them in correlation to one another, it allows researchers to avoid certain thought patterns which emerge when these spheres are considered separately. Significantly, this epistemological approach makes it clear that secularity was wrongly perceived as an exclusively prescriptive category in the social sciences. A critical look at this category by the post-secular thinkers reveals that it is actually a “crypto-western-Christian” category, and thus in no way a neutral one (Asad 1993). Researchers associated with this school of thought see it as obvious that secularity and religiousness shape one another and cannot be studied separately. Thus, while remaining sceptical and critical towards the existing language of anthropological theory, the post-secular school of thought involves seeking out new terms which would manage to describe the areas of interaction between the religious and the (seemingly) secular orders that have been neglected in ethnographic research so far.

Two articles in this book – those by Przemysław Gnyszka and Magdalena Lubańska – attempt to use this approach to present particular materials collected in the field. Gnyszka references post-secular theory while analysing the conflict around a chapel in Przeworsk, where (perhaps surprisingly) the Church representatives have repeatedly sided with the supporters of relocating the chapel and have accepted the secular argumentation for the move. The secular council members and other lay defenders of the chapel opposed the move, by referencing the miracles taking place there. The other issue that Gnyszka discussed is the fact that the proposed new location was deemed unworthy, as it is located in a hospital basement, very close to a mortuary (Gnyszka, this volume).

Lubańska, on the other hand, references the category of “ontological penumbra” and “counterpoint” and depicts them as post-secular moments in which believers turn towards secular language to reinforce the presentation of religious meaning so that they could be experienced more deeply. The combination of these languages and sensibilities creates the context for the difficult memories about the post-war murders committed in the Dębrzyna woods near Przeworsk, where members of local gangs robbed and murdered people who were returning from forced labour from Germany (Lubańska, this volume).

The articles collected in this volume of *Ethnologia Polona* are devoted to Polish Catholicism, but they by no means exhaust the possible research avenues into this phenomenon and it was not our goal to even attempt that. Rather, we aim to show that even reflections on a single phenomenon – in this case modern Catholicism in south-eastern Poland, a region marked by common history – can open up many other, separate avenues of academic inquiry, which ripe to be explored in the much broader comparative context of researching Catholicism in other parts of Poland. At the same

time we wanted to show that research into religion and religiosity is not limited to studying this one phenomenon exclusively, and cannot successfully be conducted in this manner in the anthropological context.

Writing over ten years ago about the condition of pilgrimage studies, Simon Coleman (2002, 363) predicted its further development, showing its continuous evolution and the fact that research is not conducted simply on pilgrimage, but through pilgrimage, thus encompassing such subjects as for instance: gender, power relationships, and mobility. Similar patterns can be seen in the studies on modern Catholicism. Increasingly often they are conducted not on Catholicism, but through Catholicism, commencing discussion on identity, memory, politics, secularity, the concept of culture, and also the methodology of ethnographic research. Thus was the aim of presenting this set of texts to our readers in this issue.

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