

IN THE SHADOW OF THE SACRED BODIES. THE MONTHLY SMOLENSK COMMEMORATIONS IN KRAKOW¹

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The monthly Smoleńsk commemorations (pol. *Miesięcznice Smoleńskie*), organised in Krakow, are a special case of politico-religious rituals, which commemorate the tragic event of the presidential plane crash on the 10th April 2010. While for external observers these gatherings appear to be primarily a kind of political demonstration, they mean something more for its participants. Compared to the Warsaw monthiversaries, the Krakow commemorations differ mainly in terms of the nature of the celebration, which is a consequence of the space of national heritage (the mausoleum of Polish kings and National Memorial Cross) and the type of participants. References to religion here are not just a regular, ritual scenography. On the contrary, by referring to the authority and power of the sacred, they are, in great measure, a source of inner strength for this ideological group supporting the governing revolutionary right-wing camp in Poland. This paper will analyse the role of religion in this ritual in order to uncover both the official and vernacular religious practices that create the phenomenon of the monthly Smolensk celebrations in Krakow.

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Organizowane co miesiąc w Krakowie uroczystości upamiętniające tzw. katastrofę smoleńską są szczególnym przypadkiem rytuałów o charakterze religijno-politycznym. O ile dla zewnętrznych obserwatorów celebracje te wydają się być przede wszystkim rodzajem manifestacji politycznych, o tyle dla samych uczestników stają się także okazją do przeżycia intensywnego doświadczenia religijnego. Uczestnictwo w uroczystościach, których ramy przestrzenne wyznacza z jednej strony Katedra na Wawelu, z drugiej zaś Krzyż Pamięci Narodowej, jest dla nich niezwykle ważnym sposobem cyklicznego odnawiania i potwierdzania spójności własnej grupy, dzięki czemu, mimo wewnętrznego zróżnicowania, są w stanie funkcjonować jako zwarta i gotowa do politycznej walki wspólnota ideologiczna. Szczegółowa analiza przebiegu tych uroczystości ma za zadanie opisać rolę religii w tym procesie, a także przybliżyć zarówno te oficjalne, jak i lokalne praktyki, odwołujące się do doświadczenia sacrum, które współtworzą i podtrzymują fenomen miesięcznic smoleńskich.

Key words: politics, religion, nationalism, ritual, heritage, Miesięcznica Smoleńska, Poland

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¹ This work is part of HERILIGION project within the HERA program: *Uses of the Past*. This project is financially supported by HERA, NCN, AHRC, FCT, DASTI, NWO and the European Commission through Horizon 2020, under grant agreement No 649307. The project's Polish section is based at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of History, the Jagiellonian University.

- 22:12. Behold, I come quickly: and my reward is with me, to render to every, man according to his works.
- 22:13. I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
- 22:14. Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb: that they may have a right to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city.
- 22:15. Without are dogs and sorcerers and unchaste and murderers and servers of idols and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

[The Apocalypse of St. John the Apostle, 22:13–16 NIV]

Research on the relationships between politics and religion, conducted within anthropology since its constitution as a scientific discipline, seems to be one of the most important subjects within the field, especially within the context of studies on nationalism and its violent nature (Appleby 2000; Lindquist and Handelman 2011). A considerable amount of heated debate about this issue is also taking place beyond the ivory towers of academia, focussing on the ‘politicisation of religion’ or ‘sacralisation of politics’, as some people term this phenomenon. In Poland, this is shown by the media debates which politicians, priests, and journalists have engaged in over the last seven years, concerning the impact of the Smolensk Crash on the shape of Polish social and political life. The first monthly commemorations of the tragic event of the presidential plane crash on the 10th April 2010² did not stir up many strong emotions, as they were seen as spontaneous attempts to deal with a national trauma. However, their repetition subsequent months and years has made them a bone of contention between supporters and adversaries of this kind of religious and political practice of remembrance of the Smolensk crash, and are ever-present in political rhetoric. An entirely new group of pejorative phrases referring to the monthly commemorations has been introduced to the media discourse, among them ‘Smolensk religion’, ‘Smolensk heresy’, ‘Smolensk mythology’, or ‘Smolensk people’. This language has been insightfully analysed by Marcin Napiórkowski (2017), who pointed out its elitist and prejudiced nature, marked with the critics’ exclusiveness and tribal solidarity. In this discourse, religious themes are described in terms of compensatory behaviours (using the scapegoating theory), kitsch aesthetics, irrational conduct (conspiracy theories about the crash), and with Catholic clergy assuming the role of the leaders of the nation. Within such a rhetorical framework any religious reference is considered some kind of intellectual aberration which is an affront to the rational order of today’s world.

² On this day, a Polish Air Force plane crashed near the city of Smolensk, Russia, killing all 96 people on board. The group was flying from Warsaw to attend an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre, a series of mass executions of over 21,000 Polish nationals (among them the 10,000 military and police officers) carried out in Spring 1940 by the NKVD. Among the victims of the crash were the presidential couple Lech and Maria Kaczyńscy, members of the Polish Parliament, members of the Armed Forces General Command, and high-ranking state officials.

Different kinds of arguments are put forward by the authorities from the Catholic Church. In terms of political views, their comments are much closer to the beliefs of the monthly commemoration [pol. *Miesięcznica*] participants. This reasoning does not raise the question of irrationality, which negatively prejudices religion *per se*. Instead it points out the issue of dogmatic abuses which lead to the contradiction of core Christian values. Critics then focus on the fact that the nature of these practices is schismatic in terms of the official teaching of the Catholic Church, and accuse the commemoration participants of using religion as a means of political battle. The excerpt below from an article by Zbigniew Nosowski (2017), a Catholic journalist and activist, may serve as an example. Nosowski draws attention to the lawlessness demonstrated by the organisers of the events taking place every month outside the Presidential Palace, as they manifest their own religious beliefs, which by no means represent the Roman-Catholic Church's position:

[I consider scandalous] the fact that national authorities use religion as a means of achieving their particular goals, by applying the staffage of Catholic mourning and prayer to an unequivocally political event, and then setting the pseudo-argument of 'religious practice disruption' to fight their ideological opponents. Such practice leads inevitably to the political trivialisation of what is profoundly sacred, and in a long-term perspective, to complete secularisation (Nosowski 2017).

To highlight the ambiguity and complexity of this phenomenon, we should mention the commotion about the title of the article cited above. The paper was intended by Nosowski to be titled 'Smolensk Monthiversary as a religious act?', as he later advised in his disclaimer published on the website of the Catholic magazine 'Więź' ['Bond']. Although the editorial staff of 'Tygodnik Powszechny' ['Community Weekly Magazine'] decided to put the explicit title 'Pseudo-religious act' instead.

Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek puts forward yet another argument against politicisation of religion by the monthly Smolensk commemorations, emphasising that the purpose of these gatherings is not to pray for those tragically departed in the air crash, but to fight a current political battle, geared towards fuelling conflicts. It is worth mentioning that the bishop, along with other cited critics, focuses solely on the monthly events outside the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. Do these critical assumptions apply to the Smolensk commemorations held in Krakow? Are the events conducted outside Wawel Castle a carbon copy of the Warsaw celebration, or are they unique? How can the specificity of these commemorations be described in order to avoid simplifications and not omit their constitutive meanings? I will try to address these questions – briefly, out of necessity – drawing on my own field research material. I will refer to a common understanding of *religion* as a special sort of experience of being-in-the-world aimed at ultimate, irreducible reality, as well as the deepest, yet at the same time particular, truths, which define core and unquestionable values that people are, or want to be, guided by (Lambek 2013, 2).

RESEARCH IN PROCESS: EXERCISES IN SELF-REFLECTION

Before presenting the analysis of the monthly commemorations, I would like to share a personal reflection, which may be significant when researching such hybrid phenomena as political and religious rituals. Regular monthly participation in these events allowed me to familiarise myself with the field of research itself, and to notice the nuances which would be difficult to observe even if I attended only two or three times (assuming that I would conduct the research). And this is not only about the project's two main aims, which is (a) to reconstruct the scenario of the ceremony, the identification of participants, and the network of significant relationships, and (b) define the process of changes which happen during the practice of commemoration. In this case, 'to familiarise' meant, on the basic human level, to contain emotions, and teach myself to maintain a sufficient level of detachment to the events by suspending my personal political beliefs, which turned out to be quite difficult.

Reading my notes from the first period of research, I recall how depressing these events looked from my perspective, since I had begun following them in Autumn 2016, and what a perplexing exercise in self-reflection this process was. Despite sparing no effort to keep a distanced, non-emotional attitude, my focus was almost entirely on the most – as I perceived them – controversial (and political) elements of these ceremonies, which individually and collectively affected my interpretation. The organisers' speeches: passionate, filled with nationalist rhetoric; committees; the laying of flowers to tape recorded drum roll sounds; the songs considered 'patriotic' played on loudspeakers, intertwined with religious singing, all looked extremely pompous and disturbingly anachronistic to me, since it resembled the atmosphere of the political protests in the 1980's against the Communist regime. The visual setting of the demonstrations: red and white flags, armbands with the *Kotwica* (the Anchor, the emblem of the Polish underground army in the Second World war) and *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej* [the Confederation of Independent Poland] emblem, placards with the 'Gazeta Polska' [Polish Gazette] logo, and, finally, a huge banner with the photo of Donald Tusk and Vladimir Putin bearing the text: 'The Crime – Treason' all indicated clear and direct political associations with national conservative ideology. They all seemed to be crowning examples of national religion in action, which Magdalena Zowczak referred to in 2015, when she was discussing the demonstration of the defenders of the cross in front of Presidential Palace in Warsaw:

Conservatism, which is a distinguishing feature of national religion, can be observed not only among older people, but mostly within socially marginalised groups which have been excluded from, or thrown out beyond, the margins of the kaleidoscopic reality of the Third Polish Republic, and feel deceived by its establishment. They exist in a permanent, dramatic state of confrontation with compounding cultural strangeness, becoming more and more confined to their attachment to a national form of religiousness, and conspiracy theories, even if it contradicts the Catholic Church's

authority. They demonstrate extraordinary social commitment in different forms, and their eschatological moods coincide with a traditionalist trend which has risen since the beginning of Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate (Zowczak 2015, 224).

The events, in which I participated, were deeply rooted in the government project of total reconstruction of the 'matrix of a collective conscience' in Poland³. Still, it remained a mystery to me as to what their exact place was on the 'map of the complex social reality', as ideology was once metaphorically described by Clifford Geertz (2005, 250). Accustoming myself to the specificity of participants' moods, language, and behaviour, I began to notice less evident details, which might have become significant tropes for an anthropologist making an effort to understand the phenomenon of the monthly commemorations in Krakow. I sensed that taking a closer look at all these moments, in which the references to religious sphere were made, would help me understand the sources of the integrity and the world of values of this, after all, small group of people⁴, who, on the 10th of every month, without fail marched from Wawel Cathedral to the Katyn Cross, paying little heed to the weather or the mocking bystanders.

Act I. The Prayer over the Sarcophagus

To fully understand the religious symbolism of monthly Smolensk commemorations in Krakow, it is necessary first to briefly describe the site and proceedings of these ceremonies. On the one hand, a physical and, at the same time, symbolic framework is established by the Wawel Cathedral, the coronation temple and royal mausoleum, overlooking the city from the top of Wawel hill (Niedźwiedz 2018). The other point that maps out the march is the wooden cross-shaped monument at the top of the castle, dedicated to the Polish soldiers murdered by the NKVD (Soviet secret police) in Katyn Forest, to expatriates, political prisoners of communist regime, and to workers shot during pacifications of the general strikes in the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast to the monthly Warsaw commemorations, no long police cordons, railings or loud counter-protesters are present during the Krakow commemorations. There is no persistent and obstructive paralysis of city traffic, except for those few minutes when the column moves from Wawel hill to the Katyn Massacre Memorial on Studzinski Square, near to the exit of Grodzka Street on the Royal Route.

The official opening, a prayer meeting, takes place in the vestibule of the Crypt under Wawel Cathedral in the Silver Bell Tower. The atmosphere of this part of celebration is intimate, quiet, yet solemn. Apart from the organisers and official committees, only a limited number of the 'regular' participants enter the vestibule. The prayer meeting is conducted by one of the priests most committed to the celebration's

³ It is a concept introduced by the conservative right-wing camp, governing Poland since 2015 under the leadership of Jarosław Kaczyński, with the support of President Andrzej Duda.

⁴ The group usually consists of around 80–100 people, most of them in their 60s.

organisational aspects. In the end, participants sing ‘Boże, coś Polskę’ [‘God Save Poland’], and then, in silence, they file past the sarcophagus, kneel, and make the sign of the cross, gently touching the receptacle. Some of them enter the adjacent room to visit the Joseph Pilsudski’s final resting place.

Act II. The Mass in the Wawel Cathedral

The next act of the commemoration is set in Wawel Cathedral. Here, at the Ara Patriae altar of Saint Stanislaus, the patron of Krakow and Poland, a Holy Mass for, as the organisers phrase it, ‘the late Presidential Couple and All the Victims of the Tragedy of the Smolensk Air Crash’⁵, is conducted. A photograph of the presidential couple, girded with a red and white ribbon, stands next to the altar. The Mass is usually concelebrated by three priests, two of whom are regular monthly conductors of the ceremony. All participants of the monthly commemorations are engaged at this point, filling up the central nave, from the entrance, up to Saint Stanislaus confessional. Rolled up flags stand peacefully against the wall; placards and banners wait outside the church.

The people gathered before the altar form, above all, a community of believers, vividly engaged in the course of events. The liturgical service is conducted within the usual fixed structure, with the exception of the sermon, dedicated to the question of faith as an important part of life of an individual and the nation, and is filled with references to heroic and martyrological moments in Polish history. The act of giving each other the sign of peace, when the worshippers warmly shake as many hands as possible, seems symptomatic. Most of the Mass participants receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and all sing songs of praise. The epilogue, and, at the same time, the moment of symbolic connection between the Mass and the upcoming Memorial March, is the joint singing of the national song ‘Boże, coś Polskę’ [‘God Save Poland’]. It is worth mentioning, that this patriotic and religious hymn has served in Polish tradition as an unofficial national anthem since the January Uprising of 1863, and had been considered for the role in 1918, along with the current national anthem ‘Mazurek Dąbrowskiego’ (‘Dąbrowski’s Mazurka’, also known as ‘Poland Is Not Yet Lost’)⁶.

Act III. The Memory March

Following the Mass, the participants of the ceremony leave Wawel and exit through the Herbowa (Coat of Arms) Gate, where they form a marching column. The solemn atmosphere dissipates significantly, with people chatting about various issues – both personal and political, often commenting on current political events, among them the

⁵ The religious service is paid for by the organisers – members of the Gazeta Polska club and the Confederation of Independent Poland – from their membership fees.

⁶ The song is a version of the hymn ‘Pieśń narodowa za pomyślność króla’ (‘The National Song for The King’s Prosperousness’), written by Alojzy Feliński in 1816 in honour of Aleksander I – the ruler of the Kingdom of Poland (see: Łątka 1997, 117–119).

advancements in the Smolensk Crash investigation. Some of the participants carry red and white grave candles, lit earlier by the organisers. The police on the pavements halt the traffic for the marching crowd, and photojournalists rush into action. The casual atmosphere changes again, when, among the flashes, the column or, rather, the ‘funeral procession’⁷ moves towards the National Memorial Cross, also known as The Katyn Cross, on Grodzka Street. The aforementioned colour photo of Maria and Lech Kaczyński is carried at the head of the column, accompanied by a sizeable black and white portrait of the presidential couple, girded with a black ribbon, and the plaque and banners of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs participating in the event. The ever-present signs are those pertaining to the notion of the Smolensk coup and the high treason of the previous government⁸. Over recent months, banners of ‘Solidarność’, ‘Solidarność 80’, and a plaque commemorating the Katyn massacre could also be seen⁹. The sonosphere, usually filled with chaotic sounds of tourist life, is suddenly taken over by the marching crowd. A portable loudspeaker set, carried on the back of one of the KPN [Confederation of Independent Poland] members, crackles into life, playing songs of the Polish Legions, insurgent songs, and underground ballads of Jacek Kaczmarski and Jan Pietrzak from the communist period. When the crowd reaches the Katyn Cross, the funeral march ‘Panie Prezydencie, do apelu stań’ [‘Mr President, Assemble for the Parade’], inspired by traditional Żywiec Highlanders’ music, is heard¹⁰. This is when the participants freely join in with the singing.

Act IV. The Gathering at the National Memorial Cross

The fourth and the last part of the monthly ceremonies commemorating the casualties of the Smolensk crash takes place at Studzinski Square. Firstly, a red and white cross is formed at the base of the Memorial out of lit grave candles by people who carried them from Wawel castle. After that, one of the main organisers, playing the role of the master of ceremonies¹¹, gives an official welcoming speech to the gathered crowd.

⁷ I use the notion of ‘funeral conduct’ according to Marcin Napiórkowski’s use in his book [English transl. *Raising of the Dead. The History of Memory 1944–2014*] (Napiórkowski 2016, 53): ‘A conduct, just like a procession, moves forward, yet is constantly focused on the past it has left behind. In this way of perceiving history, the past occurs to be much more important than the present. Time is moving towards tomorrow, yet it is yesterday that conceals all the significant values’.

⁸ In addition to the above-mentioned banner with the photograph of Donald Tusk hugging Putin, and the text ‘THE CRIME – TREASON’, there are also placards saying: ‘WE WANT THE TRUTH, THE TRUTH CANNOT BE KILLED; BEFORE THE PRESIDENT WAS MURDERED IN SMOLENSK, HE WAS BETRAYED... IN POLAND’ (*Gazeta Polska Club in Chicago*).

⁹ The reading on the plaque says: ‘Katyn is an integral part of the fight against totalitarianism of every independent human being’.

¹⁰ The song is performed by the band of Marcin Pokusa, who dedicated it to the memory of Lech Kaczyński and the passengers of the tragic aviation accident in Smolensk in 2010.

¹¹ The host is Marek Michno, the president of the Janusz Kurtyka *Gazeta Polska* club in Krakow.

He starts by evoking the events of 10th April 2010, when ‘in the Smolensk coup the Polish President Professor Lech Kaczyński, along with his wife and 94 other people was murdered’, and after that he names the primary demands¹² put forward by the commemoration’s organisers. He closes his speech with a strong intonation of ‘Boże coś Polskę’, now sung for the third time during the celebration.

The participants’ attention is now focused on the Katyn Cross and the portrait of presidential couple next to it. Accompanied by the pre-recorded snare drums, the Katyn Cross is approached by delegates from the President Lech Kaczyński Civil Academic Club in Krakow¹³, The Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union ‘Solidarność’ (Lesser Poland Section), the President Lech Kaczyński Association of Krakow, and delegates from the various *Gazeta Polska* clubs. After laying flowers, a letter from the Lesser Poland Province Governor with words of support for commemoration participants is often read. Then, a priest, who has been asked to conduct the prayer service¹⁴, sometimes gives a sermon, in which not only does he remind the participants about the tragedy of the events of 10th April 2010 – when ‘the heavens cried’, ‘the Polish state, one might say, ceased to exist, and certainly was in a bad shape’ – but also comments on current political events in a blunt, national conservative style¹⁵. After the sermon, he initiates the joint saying of a prayer: firstly, for the Fatherland (‘Our Father, Who Art in Heaven’, ‘Hail Mary, Full of Grace’, and ‘Glory Be to the Father’), and then for ‘all the victims of the Smolensk crash’ (again ‘Our Father Who Art in Heaven’, ‘Hail Mary, Full of Grace’, and ‘Eternal Rest Grant unto Them’). Finally, the priest entrusts the victims’ significant others to Our Lady of Sorrows; participants say ‘Under Thy Protection We Seek Refuge’ in chorus, and they make the sign of the cross.

As we can see, political speeches intertwine with canonical Catholic set forms of prayers. The latter create a sort of scaffolding for the celebration’s proceedings, on which, depending on current political events and developments in the Smolensk Crash investigation, a secular narrative is built. This intertwining continues until the end of the celebrations: next to the priest (granted the title of Professor), among several moral authorities who take the floor, appears Jacek Smagowicz, who is a member of the

¹² In short, the demands concern revealing the ‘truth about the Smolensk coup’, ‘punishing the guilty’, and erecting a monument to the victims of the crash.

¹³ The person laying flowers at the cross on the Civil Club’s behalf is Professor Jan Tadeusz Duda, a father of the current Polish President Andrzej Duda.

¹⁴ This role is often played by one of The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Henryk Majkrzak, Ph.D.

¹⁵ The constitutive characteristics of the newspeak, discussed by Michał Głowiński (1990, 8–9) within the context of the language of propaganda, can be easily found in the discourse of the currently governing right-wing camp. Głowiński epitomises them in four ways: 1) manifestation of a clear symbolic value; 2) synthesis of pragmatic and ritual elements; 3) the magical nature of the language and its creative power; 4) the arbitrariness of the style.

anti-communist resistance movement¹⁶ and also an activist engaged in the life of the Catholic Church. He is currently a member of the Company of the Chivalric Order of John Paul II¹⁷, and is widely known in right-wing circles in Krakow. His speeches resemble sermons, full of teachings about matters of ethics, religion, and politics, with many references to his own personal experiences. He begins his emotional, passionate speeches with the Catholic greeting 'God bless', and, as opposed to the main master of ceremony, who uses the notion 'civic gathering', Smagowicz often addresses the gathered crowd at the Cross with the more familiar 'my dear community'. His anti-communist past, noticeable social, political, and religious activity, and above all, his exceptional energy and a refusal to compromise, highlighting his crusade he wages against the enemies of the Fatherland and Catholic faith under the Katyn Cross – all of this makes him a charismatic leader. His speeches are a permanent component of the commemorations' proceedings; the gathered crowd listens intently and applauds thunderously afterwards. To understand the role which Jacek Smagowicz plays in these monthly commemorations, it is important to carefully witness to his words. Here is a short, but representative final excerpt from the speech Smagowicz gave during the 78th monthly commemoration in 2016:

The fight for the truth is our duty, the commemoration of the heroes is our responsibility; the concealment of the truth breeds new crimes. (...) I can see with my old eyes, but my soul still youthful, that my country becomes more and more pagan; I wish you all the strength to clearly witness our Jesus Christ, as the time is short. God bless you.

One of the permanent components of the commemorations' proceedings is the occasional appeal made by the vice-president of the Krakow Gazeta Polska club, which is in fact a variant of the policy statement of the political environment of the commemo-

¹⁶ Jacek Smagowicz was one of the most committed members of the opposition movement in Lesser Poland. He founded the unit of NSZZ 'Solidarność' (the Independent Self-governing Labour Union 'Solidarity') in his work place, organised strikes and pickets. He was detained during Martial Law in Poland, and repressed afterwards by the Polish People's Republic authorities. After 1989 he was involved in many social and government initiatives concerning society and politics, i.e. battling the negative impact of the transformation from Communism on the labour market. He was one of the initiators of aid efforts for Chechens in Krakow, the co-organiser of commemorations of the victims of the communist regime in Krakow, and the co-organiser of the erection of the Katyn Massacre Memorial on Studzinski Square and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism on the Rakowicki Cemetery. In 2006 he was awarded with the Order of Polonia Restituta by President Lech Kaczyński.

¹⁷ The Krakow Company of the Chivalric Order of John Paul II is a religious association of Catholic laymen, who venerate John Paul II. The Company was founded in Krakow on 3 December 2016. Currently there are 28 such companies in Poland, totalling 330 brothers (see: <http://rycerzejp2.com.pl/o-nas/nasza-misja>, access: 28.01.2018). Smagowicz manifests his membership not only with his words, but with his appearance. He attends the monthly commemorations dressed in his 'battledress': a black T-shirt and a fleece sweatshirt with a black and yellow coat of arms inscribed with a cross with a Marian symbol, and on anniversaries he wears his formal dress: a black mozzetta with golden and yellow emblems of the company.

rations' organisers, and, at the same time, a short, condensed lecture about political theology of the national conservative camp¹⁸. This is one of the examples – the appeal from 10th October 2016:

Our gathering is a sensation on an extraordinary social scale, resembling the phenomenon of the Holy Masses for the Fatherland conducted by the blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, and by other priests long after his death. The independence of Poland was attained by prayers and the indomitable fight of thousands of people. That pilgrimage, and the path we follow today, are rooted in faith in God who listens to those who are patient. The attacks on those who are invincible in their efforts to solve the mystery of the Smolensk coup, increase. The forces of evil are consolidating and aim to bring back the rule of lies and political egotism at any price. (...) Our goal is to unite all those who aspire to the truth, and who serve our Fatherland. We have accomplished something considered impossible. It has been a year since the greatest victory in the history of the patriotic camp. Let's allow these fruits to ripen. One of them needs to be a full disclosure of the Smolensk coup and a dignified commemoration of its victims (Michno 2016).

After the appeal, the main master of ceremonies takes the floor once again. As well as the thread of the Smolensk coup on 10th April 2010 – the topos of every speech – references to the current political situation are also present in his address. Apologetic comments on the actions of the current government intertwine with the harsh critique of the politics of Pan-European, left-wing and liberal environments. The master of ceremonies announces upcoming events, such as cyclical Masses for the intention of the President Andrzej Duda's well-being, the collection of money for the memorial of the Smolensk coup victims, and on-going trials conducted 'against patriots'.

Finally, after about two and a half hours, the commemoration draws to a close. After singing the full five stanzas¹⁹ of the national anthem, the master of the ceremony announces the end of the 'civic gathering'. The gathered crowd calmly disperses, and the square is plunged back into the usual sounds of city life. The only signs of the ritual that just took place are the grave candles and the flowers laid at the base of the Cross.

Within the context of the investigation of religious motives it is also worth mentioning the distinctive personae in the 'background'. Even though they are never heard over the loudspeakers, and they are not institutionally associated with the groups involved in organising the event, they are quite active during the proceedings. They carry out their own mission, independent from the official gathering's, introducing eschatological and soteriological motives into the symbolic commemorations' universe. As Victor Turner remarks:

¹⁸ I use the term 'political theology' in reference to the philosophy of Carl Schmitt, who elaborates on the conception of politics based on the triad: revelation – authority – obedience (see: *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. (George D. Schwab, Trans.). [MIT Press, 1985 / University of Chicago Press; University of Chicago edition, 2004 with an Introduction by Tracy B. Strong. Original publication: 1922, 2nd ed. 1934].

¹⁹ The gathered crowd sings the fifth stanza as well: The German nor the Muscovite will settle, When, with a backword in hand, "Concord" will be everybody's watchword, And so will be our Fatherland.

Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, “edgemen”, who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure (Turner 2010,140).

Every month a certain Mr A. distributes copious leaflets among the crowd with prophetic orations and calls from the enthronement movement, while Ms M.²⁰ prays fervently for the fate of the fatherland and its current leaders, the President, and Prime Minister, regarding them as heavenly envoys, able to save not only Poland, but the whole world from a certain doom. Occasionally, Mr W. joins the event, bringing a red and white cross with the caption God-Honour-Fatherland and a quote from the Gospel, reading ‘Lord, Increase Our Faith!’ (Luke 17, 5–10). His multi-part Cross kit, of his own inventive design had been previously blessed at the main St. Mary’s Sanctuary at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. He is among the ones who regard their participation in the ceremonies as a testimony of faith, and a fulfilment of a mission, passed on to him in a personal vision by John Paul II himself.

THE SYMBOLIC SPACE OF THE NATIONAL MAUSOLEUM

I am well aware of the fact that the above account of the monthly Smolensk commemorations in Krakow could have been slightly tedious. However, I have opted for such a formula in this paper with the clear aim of demonstrating how ambiguous, complex, and dynamic the relation between religion and politics actually is within the context of these events. As shown, the participants of the monthly ceremonies operate within the space of a symbolic potential which is extraordinarily powerful in the national Polish imaginary (Kubik 1994, 77–102). The participants draw certain codes from it and transform them according to their ideas and needs. Thanks to their dialectical nature, these codes become the object of social negotiations, and a part of interaction between the subjects and their space and environment. The organisers of the commemorations use them to build their own Great Narrative about the coup, at the same time manifesting and legitimising the authority of their own political community, whose ideological framework is comprised of the radical nationalist narrative, complete with a vision of the Catholic Church as the maker and guardian of the national identity (Smolik 2017, 344).

The power of the sacred bodies, of which the holy relics of St Stanislaus and John Paul II, placed in the centre of the Cathedral, are material representations, sacralises the political bodies lying in its crypts. Due to their symbolic potential, the bodies give

²⁰ The name of my interlocutor has been changed at her request.

the celebrations an extraordinary importance. The mausoleum of the Piast and Jagiellonian Dynasties, nowadays considered one of the most significant elements of national heritage, and at the same time a tourist attraction of special historical importance, is treated as a major sacred national site, around which the social memory of the past glory of the country is cultivated. Commemorative practices in the crypt under Wawel Cathedral in the Silver Bell Tower next to Lech and Maria Kaczyńscy's sarcophagus – another tourist attraction surrounded by a veil of mystery and political scandal – are of great importance for the participants of the commemorations. These practices not only begin the whole ceremony, but they form a community out of individuals, and help them cultivate the memory of their heroes, and therefore of the new history of their nation²¹.

At the same time, they can be seen as involved in the sacralisation of the dead President, which seeks to legitimise the decision to entomb his body within the national pantheon and is extremely significant given the criticism and the cyclical opposition protests under the slogan 'Stop to the politicisation of Wawel castle'²². In fact, from the angle of the semantics of space, it can be said that placing the presidential couple's sarcophagus near to the exit of the mausoleum, in the close vicinity of Josef Pilsudski's grave completed the national pantheon of Polish rulers and nominated Lech Kaczyński as Pilsudski's direct successor. This gives material form to the idea, created by Law and Justice ideologists, that Lech Kaczyński was the last great Polish leader and the maker of the Fourth Republic of Poland, the reviver of a truly independent state and the patron of the governing political camp.

IN THE CIRCLE OF NATIONAL MARTYRS

By contrast, the Katyn Massacre Memorial, commemorating Polish soldiers murdered by the repressive communist regime, but also workers shot during the pacifications of the strikes, evokes another set of social ideas – formative for national identity – concentrated around the romantic cult of martyrdom, and the concept of dying for one's country. Smolensk commemorations prove clearly that the blood sacrifice,

²¹ Within the context of the disputes over the decision of choosing Wawel as the presidential couple's final resting place, it is worth mentioning Catherine Verdery's remark on the phenomenon of the significant intensification of mourning practises connected to burials of well-known persons in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Verdery identifies this phenomenon as one of the characteristic elements of the transformation process. By venerating the remains of significant persons, one uses their biographies for revaluation of the national past (Verdery 1999, 18).

²² On the 18th of every month, when Jarosław Kaczyński, President Lech Kaczyński's twin-brother and the president of the reigning Law and Justice party, comes to visit presidential couple's grave, the protesters gather to express their opposition to the decision to bury Kaczyński and his wife in Wawel castle's crypts.

considered the most superior form of heroism, is one of the main elements of the current canon of cultural and social reality for many Poles (Janion and Żmigrodzka 2001; Robotycki 1992; Buchowski 2010). From the angle of identity processes, it can be seen as a constant disposition of the past (Assmann 2009), serving as a foundation of the reconstruction processes for the collective memory, and co-organising the imagination framework of the ceremonies conducted between Wawel castle and the Katyn Massacre Memorial. The romantic-messianic myth, strengthened by religious ascetism (Zowczak 2015, 224) incorporates Lech Kaczyński into a circle of national martyrs, treacherously murdered on the orders of the Muscovite, who wears, depending on the historical context, the face of the Czar, Lenin, Stalin, or Putin. The myth heralds the Smolensk Crash to be another Katyn, with all the wealth of social ideas built around it.

Within this context, every celebration is actually a cyclical return to the days of mourning, and a repetition of ritual practises conducted in this very place right from the day after the crash on 10th April 2010. Maria Kobielska accurately describes the atmosphere of that time, pointing out the Katyn Massacre as a symbol which took over the collective memory of Poles:

Krakow memorial sites, and the Katyn Massacre Memorial in particular, outlined the space which, at the moment right after the crash, was spontaneously filled with flowers and lit grave candles; the photography of the dead President was put on the cross itself. The placards with the slogans such as 'Katyn 1940–2010' not only designated the time which had passed since the Katyn Massacre, but also underlined the continuity and identity of those events. Among flowers, there was an obituary with the name of Lech Kaczyński written as 'Katyński' (with the sign of the cross instead of the letter 'ć': this literary practise, widely present on Katyn plaques, indicates the inextricable link between the crime and the religious interpretation, and merges the fates of the crime's victims with the martyrdom of Christ). Therefore, the gesture of blending his commitment to the Katyn Massacre case with the crime's victims reached the very basic and literal level – the proper name (Kobielska 2016, 142).

RECAPITULATION

The image of the 'besieged fortress', created and inhabited by the right-wing activists engaged on a daily basis in the reformation movement, makes the monthly commemorations a perfect chance for the participants to be able to go through an intense, far from everyday go through. The ceremonies make it possible to cyclically return to the days of Smolensk mourning, which, after all, is the foundation of the etiological myth of the governing revolutionary right-wing camp. Therefore, paradoxically, even though Law and Justice won the election over two years ago, the situation of the crisis of 10th April 2010 is constantly reconstructed and relived, and the imagined barricade is continuously built by the march's leaders. Each ceremony is a polyphonic event, a schema of heterogenic practices taken from liturgical, funeral, and All Soul's Day's, as well as political rituals (the march, rally, and obsequious ceremonial). Working through

the symbols and myths with an intensity that distinguishes these ceremonies, allows participants to exist afterwards in a complex and kaleidoscopic everyday reality. It helps them recover their equilibrium weakened by factional competition, and strengthens their sense of ideological community.

In other words, it consolidates the root paradigms, defined, after Victor Turner, as acknowledged but not fully controlled patterns of cultural behaviours, referring not only to the current state of social relationships existing or developing between actors, but also to the cultural goals, means, ideas, outlooks, currents of thought, patterns of belief, and so on, which enter into those relationships, interpret them, and incline them towards either alliance or division. These root paradigms are not systems of univocal concepts, logically arrayed; they are not, so to speak, precision tools of thought. Nor are they stereotypical guidelines for ethical, aesthetic, or conventional action. Indeed, they go beyond the cognitive and even the moral, into the existential domain, and in so doing become clothed with allusiveness, implicitness, and metaphor – for in the stress of vital action, firm definitional outlines become blurred by the encounter of emotionally charged will (Turner 2005, 50).

From the formal angle, for the participants every monthly commemoration is an intense, multisensory, performative experience, imbued with symbolic meanings, motion, sounds, touches, and images. Participants pray, march, carry candles and flowers, placards and flags, they sing, clap their hands, and hold aloft huge banners during the event. These commemorations can be thus considered a complex configuration of sensational forms, which can strongly influence those taking part. As Birgit Meyer, the author of the term, explains (2006, 40), by evoking certain emotions, feelings, and associations, ‘sensational forms’ take over a person as a whole, allowing them to reach beyond the visible world and open up to what falls outside rational cognition²³. In the case of the Krakow commemorations, the ceremonies, repeated cyclically now for over ninety months, strengthen the community and its deep belief that it has been sanctioned by God, and sacralise the political mission it has been given.

The participants gathered for the prayer at the tomb of Saint Stanislaus form a sort of elite group with their own ceremonies, hierarchy, dogmas, inquisitorial strategy, and a clear picture of what heresy looks like²⁴. References to religion are not, in my opinion, only a regular, ritual scenography the above-mentioned critics of the commemoration claim. On the contrary, by referring to the authority and power of the sacred²⁵, they are, in great measure, a source of inner strength for this group, as for many other radical nationalist movements, aimed at physical or symbolical fights in different parts of the

²³ I refer, after Anna Niedźwiedz, to Brigit Meyer’s concept of ‘sensational form’ (Niedźwiedz 2015, 133).

²⁴ Within this context, it is worth mentioning Jacques Ellul’s thoughts on political religion (Ellul 1983, 83–94).

²⁵ After Rudolf Otto (1993), I understand this term as a notion of a sanctity which evokes contradictory feelings of dread and fascination (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*).

world (Appleby 2000, 27–29). Thanks to them, in large measure, the participants of the monthly commemorations can play the role of the guardians of sacred principles, expressed in the Polish military motto ‘God-Honour-Fatherland’, and can set off for the crusade with the unshaken belief that they are the true patriots, the defenders of Christianity, and the successors of the fight for independence²⁶. Therefore, being present at the Katyn Massacre Memorial is, for them a mission, a form of the fight against the enemies of the country, who they identify as everyone not sharing their worldview. In conclusion, let the master of ceremonies speak once more, with the words he addressed to the crowd gathered by the Cross of National Remembrance before the Independence Day on 11 November 2016:

We need to defend the government, our President, these authorities, who are treading on very dangerous ground because of the traitors, who lead people out on the streets time after time, and who are now are preparing themselves to disrupt the Independence March. Let us not forget about it: only united do we stand undefeated, able to rebuild and make use of the sovereign (Michno 2016).

To sum up, compared to the monthly Warsaw commemorations of the Smolensk crash, those in Krakow differ mostly in terms of the nature of the celebration, which is a consequence of the type of participants and the specificity of the space, considered to be one of the most important for national heritage. The space in which the proceedings occur is not an arena for an open political battle, as no direct or violent confrontation between the members of the ruling PiS elite and its opponents happens here – unlike in the capital or as soon as a week later in Krakow, during Jarosław Kaczyński’s monthly visit to the Wawel crypt. Therefore, in spite of the firm political tone of the speeches, the lack of protestors during the Krakow commemorations allows their participants to fully focus on the ritual itself. Besides pursuing particular political goals, they also have an opportunity for an intense religious experience of the celebration, aimed at an ultimate and irreducible reality. At the same time, the experience of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – before the mighty Wawel Cathedral and thus granting a symbolic connection with Polish saints, rulers, and martyrs – serves as an immensely effective way of practising an ideology in which religious notions inextricably intertwine with political goals and which are therefore also considered ultimate and indisputable. The propounded exclusive model of an ideal state (assumedly materialised in the imagined *IV Republic of Poland*), features them paradigmatically

²⁶ Recruited from the most radical factions of anti-communist opposition in Polish People’s Republic, (e.g. ‘Solidarność 80’, the Confederation of Independent Poland, Republican Ligue), not accidentally they include in their pantheon of national heroes such figures as participants of the January Uprising and the Warsaw Uprising, members of the Polish Legions, WiN (Freedom and Independence) and the Cursed Soldiers, and they appoint Lech Kaczyński, who died tragically, as the patron of their mission, as ‘the first truly Great President after the World War II, treacherously murdered by the enemies of Poland’.

as an emanation of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ on Earth, and the nation which has inhabited it as His people ready to fight against the forces of Evil, so that the mission of moral and spiritual renewal may be completed.

Translated by Magdalena Kunz

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