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Author(s): Katarzyna Stokłosa

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Katarzyna Stokłosa

# Catholicism and Patriotism in Poland during the First World War\*

## Introduction

All countries have their own myths regarding the First World War. The myth of neutrality is a famous Danish myth: that Denmark has always been neutral and has never gone to war.<sup>1</sup> In many European countries, faith has played a very important role in the construction of national myths related to important historical events. The relationship between religion and nationalism is particularly strong in Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Poland, the connection between the Catholic religion, the Roman Catholic Church, patriotism and an emphasis on suffering is something that characterizes Polish attitudes to the First World War. This is consistent with Poland's long-standing account of itself as a nation that has always suffered, always been suppressed by other countries. Poland has consistently presented itself as the "Christ of nations". In school, children learn about the heroes of the fight for independence.<sup>3</sup> The myth of a strong Polish nation that would not be oppressed unified the Polish people during and after the First World War. And the Polish Catholic Church was and remained an integral part of that myth.

## The First World War in Poland

Before the First World War, the feeling that an important event was coming that would positively change the course of Polish history and influence the existence of the Polish nation, was very strong in Poland.<sup>4</sup> Polish national consciousness,

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1 See Carsten Bach-Nielsen, Danish Christian and theological responses to the World War and post-war reconciliation, in: *KZG/CCH* 28 (2015) 1, 63–79; compare also Steen Bo Frandsen, *Dänemark – der kleine Nachbar im Norden: Aspekte der deutsch-dänischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Darmstadt 1994, 119–124.

2 See Martin Schulze Wessel, Religion und Nationalismus in der Geschichte Tschechiens und der Slowakei im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Zur Einführung, in: Kristina Kaiserová / Eduard Nižňanský / Martin Schulze Wessel (eds.), *Religion and Nation: Tschechen, Deutsche und Slowaken im 20. Jahrhundert*, Marburg 2015, 7–15; here: 12.

3 See Włodzimierz Borodziej / Maciej Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1: *Imperia 1912–1916* [Our War, vol. 1: *Empires 1912–1916*], Warszawa 2014, 7.

4 See Tomasz Nałęcz, *Polska i sprawa polska w I wojnie światowej* [Poland and the Polish Issues in the First World War], and Piotr Łossowski, 11 listopada 1918 – święto niepodległości [11 November, 1918 – Independence Celebrations], both in: Krzysztof Persak / Paweł

political thought and political activity among the Polish people had evolved during a period of lack of freedom and the non-existence of the Polish state after the third partitioning of Poland, which in 1795 had divided its territories between Austria, Prussia, and Russia.<sup>5</sup> This fact played an important role in the shaping of Polish perceptions of national goals, and in the consistency of means and method required to achieve them. As a consequence, various Polish authors each have their individual interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

A sense of euphoria was dominant in Poland immediately before the First World War. Once it was clear that war was about to break out, Poles saw the coming war as a miracle that would liberate the nation from imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> Even though it was widely recognised that the war would entail great devastation, suffering and death, hopes for a renewal of the world and a rebirth of humanity were more powerful than any fear of the imminent military conflict. People believed – or hoped – that a purified and reformed generation of the human race would arise from the epic battles.<sup>8</sup> Ideas like these were based on apocalyptic writings from the Bible, and 1914/18 was not the first time that war-like, military conflicts had been utilised for the purposes of Christian interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

However, against these hopes, the early frustrations at the realities of the war were much stronger. Polish military troops, organized by the Polish Marshal, and later Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, with Austrian support, met with distrust from the Polish inhabitants of the Russian occupation zone. The battle of August 1914, which was expected to become a massive manifestation of patriotism and to open the gate to an independent Poland, ended in fiasco. Polish soldiers were divided into three brigades of the Polish legion. One year later, the German army entered Warsaw, and the German occupation of Congress Poland began; it was to last for over three years. Poland's Eastern area was occupied by Austria. Former Polish territories previously under Russian government were subject to German occupation under the leadership of the renowned Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, granted to him after his success in leading German troops to victory against the Russian Second Army at the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914. These territo-

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Machcewicz (eds.), *Polski wiek XX: II wojna światowa* [20th Century Poland: The Second World War], Warsaw 2010, 27–48 and 51–70 respectively.

5 See for instance Jerzy Lukowski, *The partitions of Poland, 1772, 1793, 1795*, London 1999; and idem / Hubert Zawadzki, *A concise history of Poland*, Cambridge 2006.

6 See Romuald Szeremietiew, *Siła złego... Niemcy-Polska-Rosja* [The Power of Evil: Germany – Poland – Russia], Warsaw 2015, 20.

7 See Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Wars and Myths: the Polish case*, in: *KZG/CCH* 28 (2015), 106–112; here: 107.

8 See Maria Jolanta Olszewska, *Człowiek w świecie Wielkiej Wojny: Literatura polska z lat 1914–1919 wobec I wojny światowej – Wybrane zagadnienia* [A human being in the world of the Great War: Polish literature from the time period 1914–1919 and the First World War – selected aspects], Warsaw 2004, 16.

9 Cf. Ingo Loose, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Eschatologie: Staatliche Einheit und Sinnstiftung in der Zweiten Polnischen Republik 1918–1939*, in: Natali Stegmann (ed.), *Die Weltkriege als symbolische Bezugspunkte: Polen, die Tschechoslowakei und Deutschland nach dem Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Praha 2009, 39–57.

ries therefore fell under the German war administration which sought to create a favourable economic, social and political conditions for the German army.<sup>10</sup> Battles between the great powers on the Eastern Front laid waste to the country. On its retreat, the Russian Army left behind only ashes and ruins.<sup>11</sup> Poles and Ukrainians became the enemies of the Russian military. For many of them, the journey ended in Siberian forced labour camps and their property was distributed to Russian soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

Also during the First World War, German-Polish negotiations took place regarding border demarcation. Antagonistic claims on the part of Prussia found strong acceptance in many circles in Poland, and the protests of the Social Democrats and Pacifists had little impact. In 1917, Woodrow Wilson offered the Germans the possibility of territorial expansion towards the East. For this reason, German policy regarding the East became a threat to Germany's Eastern relations,<sup>13</sup> and after 1918, Poland's Eastern border came to be considered a "bloody border"<sup>14</sup>.

In the interwar period, however, Poland's perception of the First World War were focussed primarily on glory and on Poland's subsequent independence. Since the late eighteenth century, Poland had longed for national independence and this was achieved as a result of First World War. During the war, President Woodrow Wilson had supported Polish hopes for an independent state with access to the sea,<sup>15</sup> and in Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of January 1918, the thirteenth point concerned the reestablishment of "an independent Polish state" with a guaranteed right of existence.<sup>16</sup> Poland was invited to the peace talks in Versailles as one of the victorious powers (*Siegermacht*), even though the nation had actu-

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- 10 See Robert Traba, *Zapomniana wojna: Wydarzenia lat 1914–1918 w polskiej i niemieckiej pamięci zbiorowej* [Forgotten War: Events from 1914–1918 in the Polish and German Collective Memory], in: Andreas Lawaty / Hubert Orłowski (eds.), *Polacy i Niemcy: Historia – kultura – polityka* [Poles and Germans. History – Culture – Politics], Poznań 2008, 58–66; here: 60. Compare also: Paul Roth/Wilhelm Stein, *Die Politische Entwicklung in Kongresspolen: Während der Deutschen Okkupation*, Leipzig 1919.
- 11 See Julia Eichenberg, *In fremden Uniformen: In Polen wird ein vergessener Krieg wiederentdeckt*, in: *Mittelweg 36. Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung* 23/4 (August/September 2014), 74–88; here: 76–77.
- 12 See Jochen Böehler, *Generals and Warlords, Revolutionaries and Nation-State Builders: The First World War and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, in: Jochen Böehler / Włodzimierz Borodziej / Joachim von Puttkamer (eds.), *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, Munich 2014, 51–66; here: 53.
- 13 See Christhardt Henschel, *Territoriale Expansion und "völkische Flurbereinigung": Überlegungen für einen "polnischen Grenzstreifen" im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: Karoline Gil / Christian Pletzing (eds.), *Granica: Die deutsch-polnische Grenze vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*, Munich 2010, 61–74; here: 72–73.
- 14 Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *Kriegsland im Osten: Eroberung, Kolonisierung und Militärherrschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Hamburg 2002, 301.
- 15 See Anita J. Prazmowska, *Poland*, in: Robert Boyce / Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Origins of World War Two: The Debate Continues*, New York 2003, 155–164; here: 157.
- 16 Willson's Fourteen Points are online at: [http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President\\_Wilson%27s\\_Fourteen\\_Points](http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Fourteen_Points) [accessed 21.04.2018].

ally only come into being following the war.<sup>17</sup> Polish collective memory seemed conveniently to have set aside the facts that two million Poles had served in the Russian, Austrian and German armies,<sup>18</sup> that 400,000 soldiers had been killed, and that Poles had shot at Poles.<sup>19</sup> Ordinary people had not died in a battle for a Polish nation – as was often suggested by post-1918 Polish historiography – but primarily because there was too little to eat, not enough medication and a general lack of health care.<sup>20</sup> The myths of Polish glory and of Marshal Piłsudski as Poland's saviour were much stronger than actual reality.<sup>21</sup>

The role of Polish war veterans in this process should not be underestimated. They constantly sought to keep the First World War alive in Poland's collective memory, and to define its positive contribution to the fight for freedom.<sup>22</sup> Even today, the First World War is often presented as having brought liberty to Poland and it is argued that, for this reason, Poland profited from the war.<sup>23</sup> That is, despite the extensive damage caused to the country and the significant human losses, the war quickly came to be perceived as a time of preparation for independence. The Polish sovereign state was finally created in November 1918, 123 years after the third partition of Poland.<sup>24</sup>

17 See Egbert Jahn, *Sprengkraft Selbstbestimmungsrecht: Der Erste Weltkrieg als Katalysator der Nationalstaatsbildung*, in: *Osteuropa* 64/2–4 (February–April 2014), themed issue, *Totentanz: Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten Europas*, 73–90; here: 82.

18 Exact figures are difficult to determine, because army statistics were compiled the administration of each relevant state and Polish citizens were not deemed to form a distinct or separate group. While Kossewska speaks of 3.5 million (Elżbieta Kossewska, *Związek Legionistów Polskich 1922–1939* [Association of Polish Legionnaires 1922–1939], Warsaw 2003, 7), Jabłonowski reports the number as 3 million (Marek Jabłonowski, *Sen o potęgę Polski: Z dziejów ruchu byłych wojskowych II Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939* [Dreams of Poland as a Great Power: History of the Actions of Former Soldiers in the Second Polish Republic 1918–1939], Olsztyn 1998, 5). Alexander Watson estimates that the number of Polish soldiers in the German army alone to have been as high as 850,000 (Alexander Watson, *Fighting for another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914–1918*, in: *English Historical Review* 126 [2011], 1137–1166). See also: Stanisław Czerrep, *Straty polskie podczas I wojny światowej* [Polish Losses during the First World War], in: Daniel Grinberg et al. (eds.), *Lata Wielkiej Wojny: Dojrzewanie do niepodległości 1914–1918* [The Years of the Great War: Maturing towards Independence 1914–1918], Białystok 2007.

19 See Loose, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Eschatologie* (as note 9), 43. The numbers vary in different publications. Julia Eichenberg refers to 800,000 fallen Polish soldiers: Eichenberg, *Söldner der Besatzer oder Helden des Unabhängigkeitskampfes? Die Debatte um die polnischen Veteranen des Ersten Weltkrieges*, in: Stegmann (ed.), *Die Weltkriege als symbolische Bezugspunkte*, 147–168; here: 153.

20 See Borodziej/ Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1: *Imperia 1912–1916* (as note 3), 10.

21 See Traba, *Zapomniana wojna* (as note 10), 63.

22 See Eichenberg, *Söldner* (as note 19).

23 See Tadeusz A. Kisielewski, *Wielka Wojna i niepodległość Polski* [Great War and Poland's independence], Poznań 2014, 131–277; Janusz Pajewski, *Pierwsza Wojna Światowa 1914–1918* [First World War 1914–1918], Warsaw 1998, 772.

24 See Loose, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Eschatologie* (as note 9), 39; 57.

The reunification of Poland changed the balance of power in Eastern Europe, despite the fact that the country did not become a great power. It was, however, important enough to pose a problem for the great powers as they planned territorial expansion. For these reasons, the First World War is perceived in Poland not only as a “humane European catastrophe”, but also as a significant impulse for the resurrection of the Polish state. Wilson’s legend of the USA as Poland’s great ally was based on this latter interpretation. In Poland after the First World War, art and literature also strengthened the myth of the Polish legion, further contributing to the glamorisation of the Great War.<sup>25</sup> While Western European artists and writers often presented World War I as absurd and meaningless, the myth of independence long dominated Polish art and literature.<sup>26</sup>

In the years following 1918/19, Poland’s western border was relatively secure, since Germany had lost the war and therefore had not only come under the supervision of the Allies, but also been forced to reduce its armaments massively. Nonetheless, in the post-1918 era, Poland was not prepared to trust German and other minorities living in the new Polish state and as a result these suffered oppression. Control of the “inner enemy”, specifically the German minority, was seen as the continuation of the battle against the external enemy, over which the Polish people in any case believed they had secured a military victory.<sup>27</sup> The new sovereign Polish state emerged as a far more stable state than many would have assumed at its formation in 1918. However, most of the Republic’s initial challenges still remained unresolved two decades later. In particular, Poland’s overestimation of its military capabilities proved in 1939 to be a serious mistake.<sup>28</sup>

### The Great War as the fulfilment of Adam Mickiewicz’s dream for Poland

In 1832, the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian national poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) expressed his deep desire for Poland’s independence in the words of a prayer, the *Litania Pielgrzymiska* (the Pilgrim’s Litany):

For a universal war for the freedom of the peoples, we beseech thee, O Lord.  
 For the arms and the eagles of our nation, we beseech thee, O Lord.  
 For the independence, unity, and freedom of our Fatherland, we beseech thee, O Lord<sup>29</sup>

25 See Lidia Głuchowska, Der “fremde Krieg” und der “neue Staat”: Polnische Kunst 1914–1918, in: *Osteuropa* 64/2–4 (February–April 2014), 291–316; here: 315.

26 See Traba, *Zapomniana wojna* (as note 10), 64.

27 See Loose, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Eschatologie* (as note 9), 49.

28 See *ibid.*, 56.

29 Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation], Paris 1832, 93; English translation by Dorothea

Mickiewicz realised that the pre-requisite for Poland's independence was conflict between the partitioning powers, which would turn into a European war. This is why he prayed for a "universal war for the freedom of the peoples".

The partitioning of Poland between Prussia, Austria and Russia which had been imposed in 1772, 1793 and 1795, led to the development of a particularly strong national consciousness among the Polish population. This was primarily expressed through the common faith of Catholicism. The Polish people's sufferings were seen as messianic, in analogy to Christ's suffering and sacrificial death. Stories of heroes and victims were related with religious pathos. Patriotism, the struggle for freedom, victim status, and religion were very closely connected with one another.<sup>30</sup> In the era of the partitions, the "messianic stigma of martyrdom" dominated the Polish people's collective identity; this was only intensified in the run up to the Great War.<sup>31</sup>

Adam Mickiewicz elevated his country into the "crucified Messiah of the world":

And the Polish nation was crucified and laid in its grave. [...] [But] the Polish nation is not dead! Its body, indeed, is in the tomb, but its soul wanders the earth, in the public life of the people, and into hell, in the everyday life of those who endure distress and oppression, whether in their country or far from their country, to witness to their suffering and their misery. [...] And just as at Christ's Resurrection from the dead all bloody sacrifices ceased, so too, after the resurrection of the Polish nation shall all warfare among Christians come to an end.<sup>32</sup>

Every Polish child had to learn by heart this text and other patriotic poems written by Adam Mickiewicz. This role of Poland as the Christlike, sacrificial victim had established itself deeply in Polish cultural identity and memory.

Between 1914 and 1920, Polish patriotic-emotional literature attached itself to the myth created by Adam Mickiewicz. The First World War became a catalyst for the consolidation of a religiously ardent shared social experience and national sentiment. The divided and torn-apart nation became a nationally-inspired and passionate community of agitation, fighting in the struggle for sovereignty. The deaths of the soldiers of the Legion were stylised as inevitable and necessary, heroic and sacrificial. These deaths earned the highest admiration and served the realisation of a higher, national goal. They were glorified, idealised, declared sacred and mythologised.<sup>33</sup> The so-called "Legion literature" of the First World War does not so much offer a representation of events on the various battle fields

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Prall Radin, in *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, ed. George Rapall Noyes, New York 1944, 414–415.

30 See Paweł Zimniak, *Großer Krieg kleiner Leute: Perspektivierungen des Ersten Weltkriegs in der polnischen Literatur 1914–1920*, Göttingen 2016, 34.

31 See Olszewska, *Człowiek w świecie Wielkiej Wojny* (as note 8), 73.

32 Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego* (as note 29), 23; English translation idem, *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation*, tr. by Krystyn Lach-Szyrma, London 1833, 20–21 (amended).

33 See Zimniak, *Großer Krieg kleiner Leute* (as note 30), 213; 216.

or developments at the Front, but rather witnesses to the creation of a patriotic, national-emotional sentiment. This emotional response was intended to lay a foundation for the battle for freedom and self-sacrifice, producing “a desire for martyrdom for the sake of belief and conviction.”<sup>34</sup> This idealisation involved a balancing act between the need for Polish self-sacrifice and the expectation of a prophetic fulfilment of the dream for independence.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, a number of Polish writers broached the issue of the renewal of humanist thought in their wartime writing. They effortlessly integrated elements from secular rationalism, psychology, philosophy and religion, albeit mostly in the “baptised” version of Catholic modernism.<sup>36</sup> The Christian notion of having been chosen by God also played a significant role: it was transferred to the Polish nation, emphasising the charismatic character of Polish victimhood, as well as Poland’s role as the redeemer.

At the same time, in the spiritual process which sought to assimilate the reality that there was, in fact, no geographical Polish state, use was made of another element of Christian symbolism, whereby the journey is the goal.<sup>37</sup> An effective example of this is the poem by the Polish author, poet and dramatist, Jerzy Żuławski (1874–1915) who directed the following appeal to his descendants:

I went into battle, my dearest sons, like your grandfather and his father and grandfather, who marched with the Legions through the world, through blood and scars in the search for the path to our free fatherland! And if the Lord has not yet beheld the dawn of freedom in the blood of our wounds, then there is still blood in your chest, my dear sons, for new seeds of hallowed freedom: and, stepping up to the legacy of your fathers, you will also wage the war for our fatherland.<sup>38</sup>

For generations, a free fatherland had been the long-term vision and was considered the highest goal for Polish military efforts.<sup>39</sup> Death was stylized as a sweet and beautiful experience. The Polish Legion soldiers were said to be freedom fighters, apostles of freedom, martyrs, the nation’s saviours and rescuers, and national heroes.<sup>40</sup> This romantic-martial tradition of the Polish understanding of history was reflected in the diary of a soldier from the Great War, Roman HERNICZ (1880–1938): “When the general mobilisation was announced, I felt a curious excitement surge through my body.”<sup>41</sup> More explicitly religious elements are clearly

34 Ibid., 43.

35 See Olszewska, *Człowiek w świecie Wielkiej Wojny* (as note 8), 456–457.

36 See *ibid.*, 16.

37 See *ibid.*, 45.

38 Jerzy Żuławski, *Do moich synów [Krag I Brygady]* [To my sons: From the circle of the First Brigade], in: Andrzej Romanowski (ed.), *Rozkwitały pąki białych róż: Wiersze i pieśni z lat 1908–1918 o Polsce, o wojnie i o żołnierzach* [And the rose’s buds bloomed: Poems and songs about Poland, war and soldiers from the period 1908–1918], Warsaw 1990, 199–200.

39 See Zimniak, *Großer Krieg kleiner Leute* (as note 30), 44.

40 See *ibid.*, 46.

41 Roman HERNICZ, *Z pamiętnika żołnierza wielkiej wojny: Nowele i szkice* [From the diary of a soldier of the Great War: Novellas and sketches], Cieszyn 1915, 3–4.



present in many works. One of the characters in a novel by the Polish socialist politician and author Andrzej Strug does not idealise the First World War, speaking instead of fratricide, but also bringing God into play in this context: “[...] Polish hands, stained from committing fratricide and put into new chains, are folded once again in prayer, yearning for a new, true God.”<sup>42</sup> The necessity for Poles to be willing to make sacrifices was not limited to any one generation, but cut a swath through all the generations. In a story written by Juliusz Kaden (1885–1944), it is the children and young people who have developed a particular sensitivity for the concerns of the vanished fatherland, and who are prepared to give up their few precious possessions for the sake of the Polish soldiers:

The girls had already gathered in a friend’s apartment, a good dozen of them. They sat on the sofa, on chairs and on the bed, well-behaved and quiet, as though they wanted to stand up all of a sudden and chant the Lord’s Prayer. [...] We came to the decision [...] to give away our possessions to help our soldiers, anything of beauty that any one of us had [...] – And we would drink our tea with just one sugar cube at the most, so that we could donate the leftovers to our soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, in “The True War” by Edward Słoński (1872–1926), children and young people are placed into a state of national-patriotic euphoria, in a heightened, rapturously intoxicated, almost ecstatic state of mind.<sup>44</sup>

The poet Mickiewicz’s dream of a “universal war” was finally fulfilled 142 years after the first partition of Poland, and 119 years after Poland disappeared from the European political map. The First World War was seen as an opportunity for Poland’s rebirth. Four more years would pass after the outbreak of the Great War before the fruits of the war could be harvested in the form of “freedom for the people” and the free fatherland. After 123 years of non-existence, with the proclamation of the Second Republic on 11 November 1918, Poland was once again a sovereign state.<sup>45</sup> November 11 is still classified as the Polish National Day (Independence Day).

## The Polish Catholic Church and the First World War

A number of descriptions of the occupation of Polish cities during the First World War survive, recorded by Polish priests. These make clear the close connection between the Polish nation, strong Polish patriotism and the Polish Catholic Church. This connection served the priests’ patriotic-religious survival, but, at the same time, it was directed against other nationalities and religions, especially the Jews.

42 Andrzej Strug, *Chimera* [Chimaera], Warsaw-Cracow 1918, 245.

43 Juliusz Kaden, Staś [The little Stanislav], in: *Widziały to sępy i kruki: Wybór nowel wojennych – Z przedmową Stanisława Lama* [Vultures and ravens saw it: A selection of reports from the war, with a preface by Stanisław Lam], Poznań 1916, 28–29.

44 See Edward Słoński, *Prawdziwa wojna: Ilustrował Bogdan Nowakowski* [The Real War: Illustrated by Bogdan Nowakowski], Warsaw 1917, 86–87.

45 See Kisielewski, *Wielka Wojna i niepodległość Polski* (as note 23), 131.

Polish anti-Semitism was very widespread during the First World War. A 30-year-old priest, Jan Czuj-Borzęcki, who would later become Professor of Patrology with Homiletics at the Catholic University of Lublin (from 1922) and the University of Warsaw (from 1938), chronicled the Russian occupation of the city Tarnów in South Eastern Poland during 1914 and 1915. His chronicle did not accuse the Russians of any repression of the population, war-crimes or persecution of the Jews; rather, Czuj-Borzęcki denounced the Russians' lenient approach to the Jews. Czuj-Borzęcki suggested, "Cunningly, they only pretended that they oppressed the Jews, in order to lure our oppressed citizens onto their side."<sup>46</sup> In Czuj-Borzęcki's view, during the occupation, the Jews experienced "the best of situations."<sup>47</sup>

Czuj-Borzęcki's chronicle is one of many examples of Polish anti-Semitism, which not even the war could put a stop to. In Poland, the suffering and tragedy of the war were only theoretically a shared fate. In reality, conflicts between groups within the population, which before 1914 had already been clearly divided on the basis of ethnic origin and religious belief, increased. Citizens seem to have regarded the suffering of members of other with a degree of satisfaction. The war was deemed to be a natural and a just catastrophe, not least because it finally punished their neighbours, rewarding them with a punishment, it was felt, they had long deserved.<sup>48</sup>

Shortly before the end of his life, the Russian writer and journalist Szlojme Zajnwel Rapoport (1863–1920), writing under the pseudonym Szymon An-ski, reported the intense suffering of Galician Jews during the First World War. He highlighted the collective violence meted out by various nationalities and religious groups on the Jews: "A Pole with a false smile, a naive Ukrainian refugee, and Austrian or Hungarian prisoner of war and a Russian soldier – they are all unified in their hate of the Jews."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the different groupings were united in their scapegoating of Jews: "the Jew, who fought none of them, who killed none of their people, [...] they will nevertheless unanimously agree that the Jew is the one responsible for everybody's misfortune."<sup>50</sup> An-ski described how the Polish people offered a blessing to Russian soldiers as they went to war: "May God protect you from the Germans and the Jews."<sup>51</sup> Priests incited members of their congregations against the Jews, explaining at every opportunity that the ultimate aim was the extermination of the Jews from Poland.<sup>52</sup>

46 Jan Czuj-Borzęcki, *Moskale w Tarnowie: Od 10 listopada 1914 do 6 maja 1915 roku* [Muscovites in Tarnów, from 10 November 1914 until 6 May 1915], Tarnów 1915, 39.

47 Ibid. This passage can also be found in an extract published in *Rocznik Tarnowski* [Yearbook of Tarnów] 11 (2006), 211.

48 See Borodziej/Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1: *Imperia 1912–1916* (as note 3), 343–344.

49 Szymon An-ski, *Tragedia Żydów galicyjskich w czasie I wojny światowej: Wrażenia i refleksje z podróży po kraju* [The tragedy of the Galician Jews during WWI: Impressions and Reflections after Journeys through the Country], Przemyśl 2010, 197.

50 Szymon An-ski [Semyon Ansky], *The Enemy at his Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*, New York 2003, 115.

51 Szymon An-ski, *Tragedia Żydów galicyjskich* (as note 49), 27.

52 See *ibid.*

## Conclusion

The example of Poland would appear to be eminently suitable for analysing the virulent connection between patriotism and religious-mystical elements during the First World War. It is apparent from the analysis offered here that this symbiotic relationship is far older; however, it was able to develop and take its greatest effect in the course of the World War, because the war was regarded as a matter of the existence or non-existence of the Polish nation. The myth of Poland as the “Christ of all nations”, which had been created at the time of the partitioning of Poland, was seized on during the First World War and moulded into a dramatic movement. The Catholic Church and diverse intellectual circles, especially artists and writers, steered the course of events. Their interventions ignited highly patriotic feelings and combined these with an appeal for deeper involvement in the battle for freedom. From a religious perspective, ideas about sacrifice and redemption were added to the mix, effectively elevating the fight to restore the country to the status of a sovereign nation to a crusade. In the majority of literary texts from the time of the First World War, this ideological construction was used to good effect. This ideological construction proved highly effective because it was already entrenched in the hearts and minds of the Polish population. This battle, fought under the sign of the cross, led to the resurrection of the Polish nation and – as the ultimate highlight – to the victory of Polish troops over the Red Army in 1920. The undoubted distortion of actual historical events during the First World War meant that the foundation of the Second Polish Republic could be viewed as fulfilling the myths that had grown up around the vision of the re-established sovereign nation. It is not surprising that the period between the wars saw regular commemorations of the foundation of the Second Republic with ostentatious celebrations. Following the “miracle” of the First World War, the “resurrected” Polish nation considered itself to be militarily invincible, and was proud of that fact. However, in 1939, it would again have to retreat from the concept of Poland as the triumphant saviour and return to the image of Poland as the suffering Christ. Even today, the nation continues to see itself in terms of this ambivalent Christian paradigm, constantly handing down and updating these legends of Poland as both sacrificial victim and redeemer.

*Katarzyna Stokłosa*, Associate Professor, Border Region Studies, Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark, Alsion 2, 6400 Sønderborg, Denmark; E-Mail: [stoklosa@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:stoklosa@sam.sdu.dk)