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## **Roman Catholic Poles and Mariavite Poles**

### **Religious Divisions as a Source of Differentiation of Local Structure**

*Abstract:* This article presents a two-denominational village community in central Poland (Roman Catholics and followers of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church). The author strives to combine an anthropological interpretation of her field studies with a broader historical and social perspective. Mariavitism emerged from Roman Catholicism a hundred years ago. Today it no longer provokes the spontaneous social sanctions of the followers of the mother Church. The structural dichotomy, indistinguishable in everyday life, has been channelled in the local political division. Celebrations of holidays in the village public space are a site of fractional rivalry between political actors and they also serve as a symbolic means of expression for different social forces. Because of the dense local relations and symbols and their interpretations, the local community is easily manipulated politically and this is weakening their civic activity.

*Keywords:* two-denominational communities, religious minorities, Mariavitism, factionalism, local policy, Mazovia.

Several men gathered in a pub. Drinking one beer after another they kept uttering the same toast: “There is one God, let’s have a drink!” On the way home one of the men fell, and his pals, unable either to bring him to consciousness or carry him, abandoned him where he lay. And it so happened that he had fallen at the gate of the Catholic Church. Shortly after, two clergymen, a Catholic and a Mariavite who had been making some arrangements, passed by. The Mariavite was the first to notice the drunkard lying at the church gate. He took a closer look at the wretched man and could not help commenting: ‘He’s not my man. How are you bringing up your congregation, father, eh?’ The Catholic priest also took a look at the man. ‘I don’t know him, unfortunately ... I don’t think he’s one of my congregation. But let’s arouse him and ask. Let him tell us himself who he is.’ And that is exactly what they did. They brought the drunkard to his senses and asked him what his religious denomination was. He replied: ‘I’m a Mariavite!’ The Mariavite priest lost his countenance and saying no more took his leave and went home. The Catholic priest entered the priory. Not even half an hour had passed when he heard someone knocking loudly on his door. He opened it and, lo and behold, there stood the drunkard who had been prostrate at the Church gate. He muttered fearfully: ‘Father, I must go to confession because I have renounced my faith!’ ‘No you haven’t, son, you have defended it!’ replied the priest. (An anecdote I heard from the Roman Catholic parish priest in a two-denominational village)

### **Introduction**

This is a study of a two-denominational community in a Polish village in eastern Mazovia.<sup>1</sup> The whole community numbers two thousand. One-third are members of

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted this field study (nearly fifty in-depth interviews and over a dozen participant observations) in the presented village in 2005 and 2006 within the requirements of my doctoral thesis.

the Old Catholic Mariavite Church and the rest are Roman Catholics. This denominational division has many historical, social and political roots, all of which have a specific effect on the locality and it is necessary to interpret the data in a broader context. In order to capture the complexity of the community, I shall therefore do my best to outline the appropriate contextual references.

First of all, the region in which the studied village is situated is one of the most religiously homogeneous regions in a country already perceived as a Roman Catholic country. It is therefore worth having a look at local coexistence from the perspective of the dominant religion in Poland, i.e., Roman Catholicism.

Second, and I would like to emphasise this very strongly, the religious minority in this village has original Polish roots. Yet because of its specific origin and its later break with the dominant, and therefore powerful, Roman Catholic community, Mariavitism is still struggling with its entanglement with unfavourably interpreted ideological contexts. I believe that insight into the history of Mariavitism and its complex interpretation will provide a very important context for our field analysis.

The ultimate focus of this article is on selected aspects of locality but in my attempt to outline its patterns of functioning I shall try to illustrate some more global determinants. Both factors, the dominant position of the Roman Catholic Church and the complicated wider ideological discourses have contributed to politicisation of the two communities whereas political divisions have helped to maintain the existing denominational differences. Local political factions have discovered that their most effective strategy is to reach for their most valuable resource, i.e., inhabitants who are distinguished on the basis of their faith. The village is a place where group interests clash. These interests are particularly obvious in local symbolic communication and we really begin to understand them when we take the broader determinants into consideration.

In the following narrative I shall use two terms, “local community” and “locality” interchangeably, drawing upon the theoretical distinction made in *community studies* and formulated by Joanna Kurczewska who has adopted an interpretative strategy in which

(...) description of the ‘local community’ or ‘locality’ and their derivatives is the effect of contrast or opposition against various social or cultural inventions which the researcher believes to be an important frame of reference for a particular concept of locality (...) (Kurczewska 2004: 91).

### **The Village: Regional Determinants**

Mazovia, where the village presented in this article lies, used to be a very autonomous borderland region. It has been in central Poland since the sixteenth century. Rooted in traditional, petty-gentry culture, it produced a specific people—rather conservative in world-views and mores. This particular line of development was the result of the coexistence at the same level of two overlapping structures, the impoverished petty-gentry and the peasantry (Kurczewski 2005: 169). Jerzy Bartkowski argues, meanwhile, that the concept of region as a frame of reference is not as well defined in Polish social

consciousness as the concept of nation (Bartkowski 2003: 29 ff.) yet many currently observed regional differences in Poland do not derive from traditional, natural differences but are the continuation of cultural traditions rooted in the partition of Poland<sup>2</sup>. These differences manifest themselves in social ties, social consistency and prescription, political culture, mores and morality (Bartkowski 2003: 199).

The history of the studied village is typical for many Mazovian settlements. The village was granted a town charter in the fifteenth century and experienced a period of rapid albeit short-lived growth. Feudal property was very fragmented in this part of Mazovia and therefore villages were rarely further apart than a dozen or so kilometres. This restricted settlement and market range and the settlement gradually degenerated.

Global politics consolidated the local crisis: after the third partition of Poland in 1795 nearly the whole of Mazovia was under Austrian rule (until 1809), then was briefly incorporated in the Duchy of Warsaw and subordinated to Napoleon (until 1813) and was finally annexed by Tsarist Russia as part of the Kingdom of Poland (until its liberation in 1918).

### **A Brief history of Mariavitism Including the History of the Local Religious Community**

After the January Uprising (1863–64), the unsuccessful attempt to liberate the nation, the Tsar introduced terror and repression.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Church was also a target. As early as 1819, permanent dissolution of religious orders<sup>4</sup> on behalf of the orthodox clergy began, establishment of new religious orders was forbidden and Roman Catholic seminaries were closed. The relatively high population growth at the time<sup>5</sup> and the exile of Roman Catholic priests led to a shortage of clergy. Poorly educated and intimidated priests were unable to minister to their parish and their conduct also left a lot to be desired.

This is how things were when the Mariavitism idea was born in the Russian partition: in 1893 a young Roman Catholic nun, Maria Franciszka Kozłowska,<sup>6</sup> mystic and founder of the movement, had her first revelation in which she saw the moral

<sup>2</sup> By three neighbouring powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia in 1795–1918.

<sup>3</sup> Nearly 700 death sentences, mass exile to Siberia, incorporation into the Russian army, confiscation of property, widespread Russification and liquidation of the Kingdom of Poland's administrative autonomy.

<sup>4</sup> All in all, in 1773–1900 423 male monasteries (98.8%) and 76 female convents (93.9%) were completely dissolved on Polish territories annexed by Russia whereas the respective figures for the Kingdom of Poland are 186 (98%) and 17 (23.6%) (*Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN* [New Comprehensive PWN Encyclopaedia] 1995; entry "dissolution of religious orders").

<sup>5</sup> The population of the Kingdom of Poland was 3.3 million in 1816, 6.1 million in 1870 and 10 million in 1900. The Kingdom of Poland was established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It encompassed part of the territory of the Duchy of Warsaw. It was to remain under the direct rule of the Tsar as King but it was practically unable to conduct any independent internal or external policy. After the failure of the November Uprising in 1830 it was incorporated in the Russian Empire and systematically Russified from then on (*Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN* [New Comprehensive PWN Encyclopaedia] 1995; entry: "Russification").

<sup>6</sup> The Mariavites called her by the pet name "Holy Mother."

degeneration of the contemporary world and particularly the crisis of the Roman Catholic clergy. Kozłowska believed that, according to God's plan, she was to organise the Mariavite Priest Order<sup>7</sup> which was to undertake missionary work within the Church. The revelations had a direct effect on the further development of Mariavitism in terms of religious doctrine, social institutions and legal-formal organisation.

Within just a few years Mariavite ideas spread to the neighbouring dioceses of the Russian partition. Young, ambitious priests, graduates of the elite Theological Academy of Petersburg, the only seminary in the Russian partition accessible to Poles, joined the secret order. Meanwhile the first signs of resistance among the Roman Catholic hierarchy began to show. Mariavite priests were sent to neglected village parishes but, rather than losing their enthusiasm, they won the hearts of devoted parishioners.

The Mariavites tried to legalise their movement with the Vatican but in December 1906 the Inquisitor Roman and General issued a decree excommunicating Kozłowska and her collaborators.<sup>8</sup> The decision was proclaimed in all Roman Catholic Churches in the Russian partition. Contrary to hierarchy expectations, however, after the excommunication Mariavitism was institutionalised in the form of a separate church. Whole parishes sometimes left their mother denomination, led by their parish priests. The community presented in this article also had such a rebellious episode and just a few families remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile the state authorities (i.e., the Russian Tsar) legalised the Mariavite church and granted it the status of a religious denomination<sup>10</sup> thus giving rise to Roman Catholic propaganda which portrayed the Mariavites as anti-Polish renegades.<sup>11</sup> By 1908 there were more than 120 thousand Mariavites in Poland (Mazur 1991: 41).

Why were people so willing to join the Mariavites? Stefan Czarnowski may help us to explain the emergence and popularity of the movement. Czarnowski (1982: 383–384) argued that social and moral factors rather than dogmatic, mystic and anticlerical ones determine the success of new religious movements. The Mariavite priests' signature was their active work on behalf of the community (they organised orphanages, canteens, schools, workshops, nursing homes, co-operatives and mutual assistance funds) and they used their profits to buy and distribute land. The priests' superior conduct was another significant determinant of their popularity: they did not charge

<sup>7</sup> The name "Mariavite" means "follower of the life of Mary—*Maria vitae imitans*."

<sup>8</sup> Maria Franciszka Kozłowska was the first Roman Catholic ever to be excommunicated by name by the Vatican. The radicalism with which her revelations were rejected has no equal in the contemporary policy of the Roman Catholic church.

<sup>9</sup> In February and March 1906 16 parishes and 50–60 thousand parishioners rebelled against the Polish Roman Catholic hierarchy (Rybak 1992: 66).

<sup>10</sup> The decree said that spontaneously appropriated parishes were to be returned, however. The Mariavites then began to build their own churches on a mass scale, all over the Kingdom of Poland. In the presented village the new church was ready in 1907. By 1908 54 churches and 166 chapels had been erected (Mazur 1991: 42).

<sup>11</sup> The fallacy of this accusation is attested to, for example, by the fact that the Mariavites introduced the Polish language into the liturgy in 1907 whereas the Roman Catholic Church did not order that the Holy Mass be said in the national language rather than Latin until the nineteen-sixties, by decree of the Second Vatican Council.

for their services, they just accepted voluntary donations. They also popularised the principle of clergy-people partnership and asked to be addressed as “brother” and “sister” rather than “father” which smacked of paternalism. Also, their devotion to the Virgin Mary, already suggested by their name—a very prominent feature in folk religiousness in Poland—was a central element of the Mariavite cult in addition to their mystic adoration of the Holy Sacrament.<sup>12</sup> The Mariavites argued that Kozłowska’s revelations should be accepted on the force of faith rather than law and the people shared this mystical, “common-sense” approach (Warchoń 1997: 17). We will by no means be exaggerating if we say that, up to World War I, Mariavitism emancipated the peasant masses and confirmed the emancipation of the working masses—its clientele.

The ideological-legislative conflict fuelled by the stubbornness of the clergy on both sides eventually led the Roman Catholic Church to sanction the renegades who—often inspired by their parish priests—organised crusades to neighbouring Mariavite villages.<sup>13</sup> Persecutions rather than doctrinal differences were probably what had the greatest effect on later mutual animosity which lasted until the nineteen-seventies and found expression in such social behaviours as name calling, bleating<sup>14</sup> and fighting.

Mariavitism began to experience a crisis when Poland regained independence after World War I. The social program which had made the movement so popular was now obsolete. Under the new democratic governance working class and peasant party factions gained new horizons and developed new forms of activity. A pro-worker right wing emerged alongside the left-wing parties. The Roman Catholic Church was very actively involved in political and public affairs. One of the clergy’s priorities was to combat Mariavitism and rebuild the weakened Catholic parishes in “Mariavite” villages. Roman Catholic anti-Mariavite propaganda was constructed around the idea of regained independence and the Mariavites were accused of pro-Russian inclinations. Direct missionary work was conducted in most Mariavite parishes in order to reconstruct the decimated or abandoned Roman Catholic parishes. Just like present-day door-to-door salespersons, priests went from door to door threatening people with hellfire for the mortal sin of Mariavitism and proposing indulgence in exchange for immediate re-conversion.

In the presented village railwaymen who willingly settled there helped to reconstruct the Roman Catholic community. Roman Catholic parishes began to organise grand fairs with picnics and orchestras to which the railway brought people free of charge from Warsaw and Terespol. The Mariavite parish organised equally grand fairs.

Mariavitism was badly hit by the death of its founder, Maria Franciszka Kozłowska, in August 1921. Her close colleague, Bishop Jan Maria Kowalski took her place. At

<sup>12</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church the precise forms of cult of the Virgin Mary were finally legitimised and explicated in 1962–65 during the Second Vatican Council. In the early twentieth century the hierarchy accused the Mariavite priests of paying too much attention to the cult of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>13</sup> The so-called Mariavite pogroms of 1906–1908. The worst year, however, was 1906, the year of the schism when there were 24 conflicts, 18 people lost their lives and several hundred were wounded on both sides (cf. e.g., Mazur 1991: 57–58).

<sup>14</sup> Some Roman Catholics punished the Mariavites by bleating at them to make fun of the name of their founder, Maria Franciszka Kozłowska (the name Kozłowska is derived from the word “goat” in Polish).

first he tried to implement the deceased's spiritual will but he soon began to introduce reforms which were too radical and in 1935 there was another schism, this time within the Mariavite church itself.<sup>15</sup> Its leadership evoked the sharp, derisive criticism of the Roman Catholic public opinion. The tabloids in particular frequently wrote about the Mariavites and the Catholic Church took advantage of the outrage. So many followers defected that only about 40 thousand were left after the schism (Mazur 1991: 105; Warchoń 1997: 117).

The Second World War naturally meant many human and material losses but after the war, as real socialism was introduced in Poland,<sup>16</sup> the situation was not conducive to intensive reconstruction. Even so, from the mid-sixties on, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church began to stabilise with a congregation of about 23 thousand. It is more or less the same today.<sup>17</sup>

If we look at the history of Mariavitism and its relations with the Roman Catholic Church we see that from the very beginning there was rough political competition between the two religious denominations. Even today, the Mariavites cannot get over the fact that they were excommunicated but at the same time independence from the hierarchy and the primacy of faith over jurisdiction and bureaucracy gives them a sense of superiority. Roman Catholics still doubt the validity of Kozłowska's revelations and they also accuse the Mariavites of collaboration with anti-Polish structures in Tsarist Russia and with the communist regime after World War II.

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<sup>15</sup> Bishop J. M. Kowalski introduced many very controversial reforms. He lifted celibacy and permitted priests to marry nuns (1924); he allowed women to be ordained as priests and bishops and allowed priests to marry (1929); and he changed the canonical structure of the church, leading to popular priesthood (1935). At the cult level Kozłowska was increasingly divined. On Holy Thursday on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1929 the first 12 nuns were ordained and Izabella Wilucka, the prioress of the Sisters' Congregation (who was also Bishop Kowalski's wife) was ordained bishop. All in all, by 1935 13 female bishops and 162 priestesses and deaconesses had been ordained. Meanwhile Kowalski's style of life was evoking increasing criticism and he was accused of straying from the model of humble Mariavite priest. The loudest accusations of immorality and depravation led to the so-called "Plock lawsuit" in 1928. After the 1935 schism Kowalski's adherents established the minority Catholic Mariavite Church (with 7 thousand followers, 10 priests and 50 priestesses). His opponents established the more conservative, majority Old Catholic Mariavite Church (with 40 thousand followers, 48 priests and 87 priestesses who were degraded to nuns). The latter church reverted in its dogma and cult to the state before Kozowska's death (Warchoń 1997: 117).

<sup>16</sup> Like Irena Borowik, I use the term "real socialism" in the meaning given to it by Jerzy Szacki: "I don't think communism, the most frequently used term, is appropriate because in the strict sense it means an ideology which, first, has never been realised anywhere and second, was dead long before 1989 (...) This is why I use the term real socialism, bizarre as it is and coined in communist newspeak where it was introduced in Brezhnev's days with the intention of convincing people that although the system established in the name of socialism is not what we would want but we cannot count on any other one ('socialism with a human face' or something like that). But it is good in that it clearly shows what historical reality we are thinking about" (Szacki 1994: 5).

<sup>17</sup> The Old Catholic Mariavite Church had a congregation of 23,894 in 2004 (Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2006: 129). The Church now has three dioceses in Poland (and two parishes in Paris). They cover nearly half of the country but the largest number of followers is clustered in the Church's original territories, i.e., Mazovia and Łódź region. The Church has a synodical system. It does not recognise the primacy of any bishop, nor does it claim that any man is infallible as far as faith and morality are concerned. The Church's teaching is based on the Old and New Testaments and the dogmas of the first seven general councils. It is a member of the following organisations: the Polish Ecumenical Council, the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. It is on friendly terms with the Utrecht Union of Churches. Celibacy is not obligatory ([www.mariawita.pl](http://www.mariawita.pl)).

### **Pole and Catholic: the Social Implications of Religious Homogeneity**

If we want to interpret local dual religiosity accurately we must analyse it in a broader context. To do so, I shall first outline some of the tendencies in Polish society. Poland is definitely a predominately Roman Catholic country—over 90% of the Polish population are declarative or formal Roman Catholics.<sup>18</sup> Roman Catholic identification, a “cultural constraint” (Mariański 2004: 134), is motivated by traditional-environmental factors and as such may be the result of a sense of obligation (cf. Ossowski 1966: 81). This gives rise to the following question: how socially significant is institutional religious identification in Poland?

Researchers who have studied the correlation between faith and other social attitudes have found that declared religious identification has a powerful effect on Poles’ cultural identity.<sup>19</sup> Even Stefan Czarnowski (1982: 372) called Polish religious culture ‘the most prominent ethnic factor.’ Irena Borowik points out that institutional religion in Poland took shape definitively during the partitions when group-formative religious socialisation mainly took place in the family whereas the Church fulfilled a patriotic mission in a country which was under foreign occupation (1997: 69). This way, religious heritage mixed with national values which—independently of the occupants’ state structures—took the form of messianic patriotism which was in active opposition to the official ideology.<sup>20</sup> Under real socialism with its secular ideology, Roman Catholic religiosity was still strong and once more became the vehicle of cultural values which were rejected by the system imposed by a foreign empire.

In demographic terms, the contemporary religious homogeneity in Poland is the outcome of the cataclysms and political consequences of World War II: extermination of Polish Jews by the Nazis, the shifting of Polish territorial boundaries to the west in 1945, the post-war exile of Orthodox and Uniate Ukrainians and Belarussians and the emigration of the Germans (most of whom were evangelicals).

Needless to say, religious homogeneity, supported by the ubiquitous identification of one’s faith as a part of the national cultural heritage, affected the scarce religious minorities. Other churches, particularly the Mariavite Church which had been established in times of turmoil and continues to carry the odium of recent false propaganda,

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<sup>18</sup> The formal indicator of religious identification is baptism. nearly all Poles were baptised: “Comparison of the data (...) on baptism of children up to seven years old in 1969–1990 revealed that 96.6% of all children born then were baptised in the Roman Catholic Church” (Mariański 2004: 135). Data published by the Main Statistical Office (GUS)—also based on the number of baptisms—suggest that the number tended to decrease after 1990: 90.1% of Poles were Roman Catholics in 1999 and 89.7% in 2005 (*Mały Rocznik Statystyczny* 2000: 103, 122; 2006: 112, 129). Polish national surveys have also estimated religious identification and their findings corroborate the presented data.

<sup>19</sup> Studies of the two communities, the religious one and the national one, support the existence of a contemporary Pole and Catholic stereotype. “When nearly every inhabitant in this country admits to having Polish nationality and the vast majority confirm their relations with Catholicism, these two sets cannot possibly be disjunctive,” says Krzysztof Kosela. “(...) The figures legitimise the claim that at the turn of the century the inhabitants of this country were very homogeneous in terms of citizenship, nationality and religion” (2003: 25).

<sup>20</sup> Polish Messianism was particularly pronounced after the November Uprising (1830–31); it was a mystic faith which adopted the symbolism of the Gospel and believed that God had chosen the Polish nation to fulfil his mission of salvation.

do not fit into the basic correlation of Polish–Roman Catholic identity. Echoes of the Pole and Catholic stereotype can also be found in the two-denominational community where the Roman Catholic parish priest voices his negative opinions about the Mariavites who, allegedly, “have always been collaborators.” In light of the historical facts this is not true yet the priest takes advantage of the ubiquitous combination of religious and national values in order to erode trust in the local minority.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of Poles identify themselves as Roman Catholics, we are now observing a new process. Faith is being privatised and this is showing up clearly in the believers’ moral attitudes. The RAMP study<sup>21</sup> revealed that over 72% of Poles think of themselves as definitely religious people whereas no more than 10% declare that they are atheists or religiously indifferent (Borowik & Doktor 2001: 92). Yet a survey conducted in 1988–1990 revealed that about half of the respondents were unwilling to respect religious injunctions which they personally thought to be incorrect (Mariański 2002: 486).

Another issue which is closely related to Polish society’s religious homogeneity and its approach to minorities is the attitude towards religious “outsiders.” A study of tolerance conducted by CBOS in 2001 asked respondents about their attitude towards representatives of other religions in Poland. The general data on religious context “justify the conclusion that Polish society is quite tolerant of other faiths (Jakubowska-Branicka 2002: 134–135). Yet it was found that respondents had “confused identity” (Koseła 2003). This confusion was also found in the domain of moral attitudes. The same study requested respondents to share their opinions concerning three statements pertaining to the concept of tolerance. Two statements associated tolerance with permission for behaviour which did not violate anyone’s rights or did not conflict with the respondent’s values. Both statements were quite strongly endorsed (88.9% and 74.4% respectively). Typically, however, respondents had quite different opinions about tolerating behaviour which conflicted with Polish national traditions: as many as 36.1% declared that this would be an abuse of tolerance and fewer than half agreed that such behaviour fitted into the concept of tolerance. “This means,” concludes Stanisław Zapaśnik, “that a considerable number of respondents changed their opinion on the limits of tolerance when the object was at odds with their national values” (Zapaśnik 2003: 326).

Would the Mariavites who do not fit into the Pole and Catholic equation be more tolerant of behaviour which violated Polish national tradition, we wonder. Their responses could be determined by the minority perspective, however, and this perspective may have meant a more lenient approach to other minorities. The strength of the dominant group and its manifestations are most visible at the local level where the tendencies which emerged seem to shape mainly the political aspects of coexistence.

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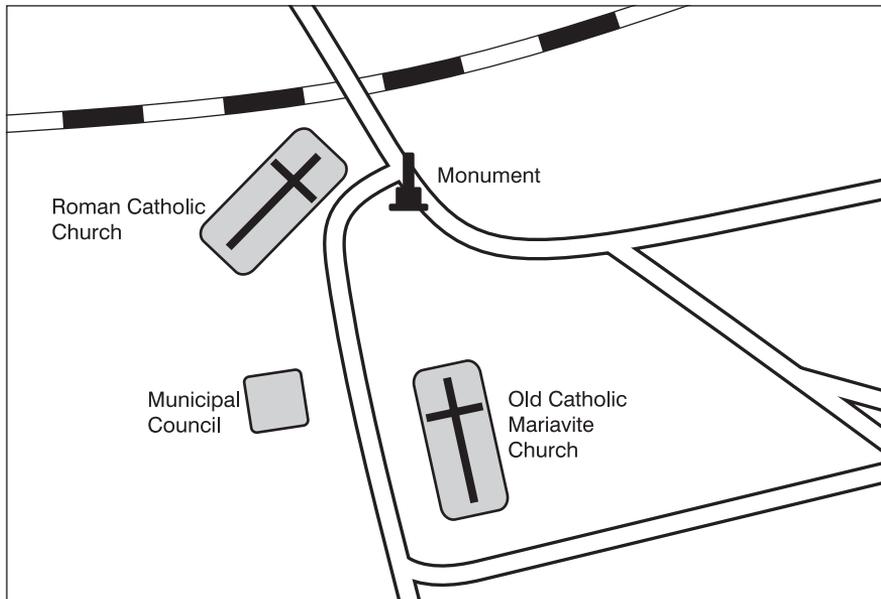
<sup>21</sup> *Religious and Moral Pluralism*—an international research project conducted in the nineteen-nineties (for a report of the Polish findings see: Borowik & Doktor 2001).

### Two Religious Denominations: Spatial and Temporal Aspects

In the village I studied both church buildings soar high above the parishioners' houses. The churches are about a hundred metres apart. The Roman Catholic one has been here for many centuries. It is Gothic and very grand. The Mariavite one is a hundred years old. It is soaring and has a high tower. Between one church and the other, squeezed in as if by accident, stands the Municipal Council, a humble, ugly building. The structural division into Catholics and Mariavites is tellingly reflected in the situation of these buildings. The Municipal Council, like the vertex of a triangle, closes the space occupied by the main street and a small square.

The houses of the Mariavites and the Catholics are interspersed. Their dividing fences do not resemble a front line. I did not get the impression that the Mariavite minority's houses were concentrated on any particular streets. The division of the local community in public space is emphasised by the symbolism of the church buildings. In the eyes of the two communities these have automatically become distinct religious centres.

The public space in the village is presented on the following map which shows the situation of the two churches, the Municipal Council and the monument together with the street layout.



I have based my working model of time segments on one major criterion, i.e., its function in the religious differentiation of the local community.<sup>22</sup> When I write about the everyday life and perspective of the ordinary inhabitants I am therefore referring

<sup>22</sup> I feel that—for interpretative reasons—it would be abusive to adopt the sacred—profane temporal distinction (Eliade 1996). The obvious anthropological approach should, however, include the notion of

to time intervals in which social order is expressed in spite of the structural dichotomy. I understand special time as intervals or moments in which identification with one or other church becomes important, e.g., elections to the local government and the preceding electoral campaign or public celebration of holidays. At times such as these the social forces inherent in the community are expressed (Kurczewski 2007: 21).

The villagers themselves also recognise that there are times when different religious affiliations come to the fore. “Ordinarily, religion is not a problem in interpersonal relations but when there are elections, for example, then it begins to matter whether a candidate is »ours« or not,” they say. As far as holidays are concerned, paradoxically the ones which make the greatest difference are not the ones relating to the liturgical calendar but the ones which are organised in public space to celebrate state holidays. Religious denomination is also important during so-called “religious holidays” such as the funeral services commemorating the death of John Paul II or the celebration of the centenary of the local Mariavite parish.

### **Dual Denomination: Local Institutions**

Nowadays nearly every family in the village with a population of two thousand is two-denominational and mixed marriages are the order of the day. The Mariavite parish church married 8 couples, 6 of which were two-denominational, in 2004, 7 couples in 2005 (all two-denominational), 3 couples in 2006 (all two-denominational) and 10 in 2007 (half of which were two-denominational). Every year, the priest also issues several baptismal certificates to parishioners who plan to get married at the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, rights of passage (baptism, marriage, funerals) are the factors which provide the impulse to cross the denominational boundary (and the other church’s threshold). The village population also celebrates All Souls’ Day in a similar vein by visiting relatives’ graves at the two local cemeteries.

Although passage from one group to the other is no longer difficult, there are still distinct boundaries between the two communities. Religious contours are no longer important in everyday life, especially in mixed marriages and families. Dichotomous tendencies are still strong in the local community, however, although the search for structure in social and neighbourly relations is not fuelled by rivalry or mutual animosity. “We must tolerate each other,” admits a member of the Farmers’ Wives’ Association, a Roman Catholic. “Its normal here—I belong to this religion and he belongs to that one,” agrees a fireman from the Voluntary Fire Brigade, a Mariavite. “Thank goodness there are not many fanatics among us,” responds the village leader from the neighbouring hamlet, a Mariavite.

Inevitable segregation at school, if only during religious instruction, is smoothed out by the fact that the teachers are also two-denominational. Both priests can be

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time as the backdrop for rituals which—according to the interpretation suggested by Max Gluckman and his school—by revealing contradictions in a community leads in fact to the expression and discharge of tension and maintenance of the status quo.

seen at school if they teach religion in person.<sup>23</sup> At the time of study no special educational measures were being undertaken at school to foster religious integration, e.g., competitions, but the school did present nativity plays where children representing both religions performed.

There is a Social Welfare Centre in the village. This Centre co-operates with the Mariavite priest who organises summer camps and winter collections for children from poor families. The Centre indicates the recipients of the donations. I was told that children representing both denominations attend the summer camp but I was unable to obtain any precise data. According to the Mariavite priest, compulsory Mariavite Holy Mass is a form of daily assembly and the parents of the Catholic children must give their written consent if they want their child to go to camp. Therefore we have a conflict between the child's objective welfare (going away for the holidays) and the subjective religious criterion. At the time of study a new opportunity arose: children could go to a camp organised by the Roman Catholic Church but not directly by the local parish.

The village budget is run according to the principle of "ecumenical frugality" (to quote the local administrative officer, a Roman Catholic). If one church is to be repaired, work must also begin on the other church immediately. "The district is poor, we are beggars and they are beggars," the Catholic priest summed up the situation contritely. The car park adjoining the Catholic Church was overhauled on the pretext that it is also used by patients of the nearby clinic. A year later, a new pavement was laid on the street connecting the Mariavite church and priory. It so happened, that this was the centenary of the Mariavite parish.

"Kantylena," a choir in which members of both parishes sing, has been operating for over a dozen years. The repertory includes religious, patriotic and popular songs. The choir sings at local celebrations of state holidays (the 3<sup>rd</sup> May—the anniversary of the passing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May Constitution—and the 11<sup>th</sup> November—independence day) and also at important masses at both churches. There are also two parish choirs which have performed together so far but many of their members also sing with "Kantylena."

Several traditional Polish civic organisations are also active in the village, e.g., the Voluntary Fire Brigade and the Farmers' Wives' Association. Members of both churches belong to these structures.

One interesting institution is the Local Branch of the Association of Veterans and Former Political Prisoners of the Polish Republic. The few veterans who are still alive are managing the division in an exemplary way. They take part in ecumenical processions organised by each church, Catholic and Mariavite, always in uniform, always with their banner.

A new youth organisation, "Cultural Friendship," has been operating in the village since 2006. It takes care of the new community centre where it organises activities for children, exhibitions and events (mainly rock concerts and discos). Members of both churches belong to the organisation and visit the community centre.

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<sup>23</sup> At the time of this study only the Mariavite priest taught religion himself whereas the Catholic priest delegated a catechist because—he explained—he himself "had no teaching skills."

Generally speaking, the local community is not very active in civic terms. There seem to be two major reasons for this inactivity. First, there is a shortage of models of active civic work due to the learned helplessness of the communist days. For example, despite the encouragement of the local authorities, the Farmers' Wives' Association is reluctant to legalise its activity and therefore does not have access to EU funds. Second, the local inhabitants are unwilling to be active in the public sphere for fear of automatic political interpretation.

### **The Political Meanders of Dual Denomination<sup>24</sup>**

The present discussion of the range of local policy was inspired by theories which recognise the widespread nature of local policy in the social environment (Balandier 1967: 29–30). Marc J. Swartz (1969: 6) has also argued in favour of the need to apply a broad definition of political impact in the analysis of small localities. According to Swartz, political influence includes not only traditional forms of political life and power structure but also all those activities which extend beyond the narrow sphere of private or family life. His distinction between public and private space is very useful here. In a locality where dual religious denomination has sensitised people to such values as justice and tolerance, every activity which transcends the private sphere, i.e., *de facto* reaches into public space, becomes a form of political activity because it affects the community.

If we want to analyse the local political structures we must pinpoint the local political actors. In political theory in the broad sense, these actors include not only the representatives of the secular authorities but also the two parish priests because they render public services. Also, the powerful ideological anti-Mariavitist propaganda, practised for many years by the Roman Catholic Church for discriminative purposes, has left a permanent mark, leading to politicisation of the two communities.

One of the most striking features of the local actors is how “strange” they are for the local community because most of them are newcomers. This strangeness is relative, of course (Znanięcki 1990) and the local community soon gets accustomed to it. However, this gives the actors a margin of “freedom not to become involved” and their private local connections and interpersonal relations are much shallower and much less dense. Both parish priests have lived in the village for over a dozen years. The present village local officer only lived here as a child. The example of the previous local officer is quite telling. Although he had lived in the village all his life he was unable to navigate the structure, familiar as it was, and committed suicide. Meanwhile, his nearest collaborators were—as they say here—“imported” and had no trouble making their own decisions behind his back.

The religious division of the local community has been politically channelled into “left” and “right.” The two divisions coincide, leading to the stereotyped linkage of political sympathies with religious denomination. Customarily, Roman Catholics are associated with the “right” and the Mariavites are automatically associated with the

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed discussion see: Herman 2007.

“left.” This attribution is rooted in recent Polish history—the years of real socialism and the 1989 breakthrough. The following comment by the Roman Catholic parish priest is a good example of the local way of thinking: according to him, transformation did not take place in the village in 1989, it took place in 2002 when Roman Catholic politicians came to power.

The terms “right” and “left” apparently have little in common with the traditional political definitions of these wings and the labels have nothing in common with the actors’ policies. The division is biased with the tendency to associate the leftist orientation with sentiment for pre-1989 real socialism and is therefore treated as an epithet and automatically ascribed to political adversaries in order to discredit them whatever the opinions (or religion) of the one who labels and the one who is labelled. Since models of a mature democratic Left are lacking, nobody on the local political scene wants to be associated with the Left so defined.

A slightly different mechanism is in operation when someone is labelled “rightist.” This label is reserved for those political actors (e.g., the local administrative officer, the parish priest) who are connected with the Roman Catholic Church. Once again, however, the term need not reflect the actors’ political ideas. It takes on a pejorative hue when it is used by the adversaries of the political actors who are on good terms with the Roman Catholic priest.

Finally, the already complex local “right” and “left” labels are complicated even further by the skewed political proportions: for several years now, the Roman Catholic camp has been at the helm in the village; previously the Mariavites governed for more than a decade.<sup>25</sup> It looks as if there is no room on the political arena just now for a shared or third power. Because the political and religious divisions overlap, this seems to support the factional power struggle model.

As Swartz has pointed out, the political arena means not only territory and processes, it also means mores, i.e., blueprints for effective action, code of ethics and patterns of political interaction. However, the studied community acts in ways which can hardly be classified as “decent” but which at the same time seem to serve the actors effectively, particularly in the competitive sphere. Also, some of them—despite their disintegrating effect on the two-denominational community—have been institutionalised and included in their political toolbox.

An adequate category in this context is the category of so-called counter-mores introduced by Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan (*Power and Society*, p. 49; quoted after Kurczewski 2006: 20–21): “Mores are cultural attributes and deviation from them—it is to be expected—will meet with relatively strict sanctions whereas counter-mores are cultural attributes which are to be expected even though the group recognises them to be deviation from mores. (...) In this sense, a certain level of counter-mores activity is »normal« and the reliable observer must see them as part

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<sup>25</sup> A major power switch took place during the 2002 elections to the local government when, in accordance with the new act of parliament whereby local executive authorities (here: the local administrative officer) were to be elected directly. Previously the village population could only directly elect the local Council and then the Council elected the local administrative officer.

of a culture.” A whole parade of such counter-mores can be observed in the studied locality during public ceremonies.

### **Dual Denomination in Public Space**

The “ecumenical processions” which are celebrated twice a year are an example of such local public ceremonies. For well over a decade now they are organised to celebrate two secular anniversaries: passing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May Constitution in 1791 and regaining of independence on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. Although both are state public holidays, it is on these two days that affiliation with one or other church comes to the fore. Many elements of the celebrations clearly highlight the dichotomy of the local structure, the celebrations are held in public space and are attended by many people in the presence of the political actors. The private sphere practically comes to a halt in the locality during the processions.

The Mariavite priest did not take part in either of the processions in 2005 and a priest from a nearby parish took his place. According to some of the inhabitants, the parish priest came to the conclusion that he was too quick tempered to “risk public confrontation.” The tactic which was to protect the priest made his parishioners vulnerable, however. Faced with such defensiveness, the Catholic priest adopted an offensive tactic. This resulted in a very poor turnout of the Mariavites—much smaller than e.g. at Holy Mass on Palm Sunday. But Palm Sunday is not abused for political purposes and remains a liturgical event. The fact that so few of the Mariavite minority were present weakened social control and enhanced the assertiveness of the oppositional, governing faction.

Many symbolic elements could be observed during the procession. The governing camp, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, used them to demonstrate its power. Although the procession was to walk no more than 200 metres, the route was divided into two parts. The Mariavites were to walk the first part, from their church to the Catholic Church, alone and then—at the road bend—join the second group. Together the two groups were to walk to the monument for the joint celebration. The first strategy, clearly adopted to enhance the rank of one’s own group, is to manipulate time just before the two groups join up. Each procession can dawdle to keep the other group waiting.

In 2005 only the Roman Catholic camp dealt the cards. In May, the Mariavites had to wait several minutes at the road bend, mincing about impatiently and glancing at their watches while in the other church the congregation sang hymn after hymn, intoned by the priest. But when the congregation finally left the church together with members of the local authorities who carried a decorative wreath, they found that the celebrations could still not proceed. The main actor, who held everybody up for the next few minutes, was the Roman Catholic parish priest. By then about 150 people had reached the monument, including all the Mariavites who had left church and walked in procession to the monument, and fewer than half of the Catholics who had been to Mass and many of whom simply went home.

Another element which emphasises the structural dichotomy is the order of speaking. When the congregation finally reached the monument and the secular authorities laid the wreath with its white and red ribbon, the speeches began. A microphone had been provided. The Catholic priest had carried it from the very start and therefore spoke first. He talked of patriotic and ecumenical matters and ended his oration with the prayer "Our Lady." The Mariavite priest spoke second, in a similar vein, and also ended with a prayer with everybody joining in. Unfortunately a passing train drowned most of his words. The local administrative officer spoke last although he was most entitled to speak first because he represented the secular authorities and the occasion was a public holiday. He uttered just two sentences and invited everybody to a concert of the local choir, "Kantylena." The first speech was the longest and lasted 10 minutes, the second one lasted about 6 minutes and the last one lasted no longer than 2 minutes. Very few people, among them the local authorities and the Catholic priest, went to the concert. The Mariavite priest returned to his own church with a few members of his congregation.

In my opinion, the behaviour of the local actors is an example of counter-mores. It has become part of the patterned, institutionalised realisation of the structural dichotomy of the local community. Contrary to appearances, they give rise to a certain social order, the continual effort to achieve a difficult balance in the two-denominational village, especially in politics. The situations outlined above do not have a disintegrating effect on the local community. Such factors as poor turnout, waiting together for the priest or the opportunity to walk home together all help the community to regain a common status quo.

The events during the November procession later in the year are a poignant example but this time it had a much more disruptive effect on the social order. The same priest from the neighbouring village led the Mariavites. The turnout was even lower than in May. As always, the procession walked to the meeting place and a period of uneasy waiting began. Meanwhile the first members of the congregation began to leave the Roman Catholic Church through the main door. Just like in May, they stopped outside, obviously waiting for the priest and the rest of the congregation. All of a sudden, however, they discovered that the priest, several altar boys and representatives of the local authorities had left the church by the side door and taken the shorter route to the monument leaving the waiting group far behind. Most of the congregation, probably misled, followed the priest and representatives of the local authorities out of the church. In no time at all, the authorities, priest and altar boys were standing beneath the monument.

Surprised and discomfited by this breach of plans, spontaneously interpreted as a "Catholic affront," the Mariavites wanted to turn back and somebody shouted: "If so, then we're going back to our own church!" Just then a local clerk, a Roman Catholic and one of the first to have left the church by the main door, ran up to the group. As she later explained, she felt impulsively that she had to "rescue the situation." After a moment of hesitation the Mariavites quickly headed for the monument. By the time they reached it, the wreath with the white and red ribbon was already in place.

The order of speeches was exactly as before and so were the contents and the prayers. The Roman Catholic priest stressed the value of ecumenism (!), the Mariavite priest ignored the incident. As the latter spoke, his microphone began to crackle and most of the audience drooped their heads. The Mariavites stood much closer to each other than six months earlier. The local administrative officer spoke last and the microphone went silent three times during his three-minute speech. It was impossible to say from his behaviour whether this “non-ecumenical” incident had been deliberate or whether the man had been manoeuvred into the Roman Catholic faction’s conflict. He was newly elected and had been away from the village for many years although he had been born here.

As soon as the celebrations ended people rushed home, as if they were ashamed, and very few went on to the performance. Nobody commented the situation aloud but you could feel the tension in the air. Not until the participants had left the monument and returned to the private sphere did they begin to talk about what had happened. Many Roman Catholics condemned their own parish priest for violating the traditional agreement. On the one hand, the incident highlighted the symbolic advantage of the “rightist” secular authorities who—as if nothing had happened—calmly followed their priest out of the side door and on the other hand it exposed the weakness of their secular legitimisation because they were unable (or reluctant) to distance themselves from the demonstration of religious dominance. Disintegration hit both the participants of the celebrations and those who, wanting to avoid their politicisation, stayed at home. After this incident, the Mariavite priest lifted the political gauntlet and decided that he himself would lead his congregation during future processions.

### **Followers: Holy Father versus “Holy” Mother**

Ewa Nowicka said that we can measure the distance to other religious denominations by sounding the perceived similarity or difference between the in-group and out-group (Nowicka 1991: 43, 54–55). This suggested to me that the factor which now structures the two churches most strongly is the attitude towards papal primacy.

It so happened, that Pope John Paul II died when I was conducting this study.<sup>26</sup> The events and their echo in the two-denominational local community made me aware that when I interviewed the Roman Catholics they told me that the most important difference between them and the Mariavites had to do with their attitude towards the pope. When I analysed the utterances of respondents from both denominations I noticed that the juxtaposing of John Paul II and “holy Mother” Kozłowska always evoked an emotional response.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II died on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the mechanisms of sanctification of Kozłowska which developed in the Mariavites when Kozłowska was still alive, incomprehensible to Roman Catholics, are in fact similar to the spontaneous sanctification of John Paul II by many Roman Catholics (when the crowd shouted “santo subito” at the funeral).

When the pope died, a memorial service was held in his intention. Although this was a Roman Catholic occasion, followers of both churches took part. The ecumenical spirit prevailed. Holy Mass was held on the school playground. The Catholic priest celebrated mass and the Mariavite priest was asked to give a sermon. (“Of course it couldn’t be shorter than the Catholic priest’s sermon”—the priest commented later). The Mariavite priest boldly declared: “Holy Mother Kozłowska lights my way and John Paul II lights your way. But remember that over and above them is Jesus Christ and that God’s love is supreme and must kindle in us if there is to be understanding above divisions. Belief in dogmas has divided nations and only love can unite them.” The Catholic priest gave Holy Communion to the Mariavites in the pope’s intention although Catholic canonical law forbids giving communion to believers of other religions.

Another example of such a “religious” event was the celebration of the centenary of the local Mariavite parish in June 2006. To summarise, it must be mentioned that a scattering of Catholics attended the festive Mass and a few of them later went to the unveiling of the monument commemorating the founders and staff of the Mariavite primary school, the first educational establishment in the village. There were flowers, an orchestra, speeches and even an open-air exhibition. Representatives of the Polish Ecumenical Council Churches, to which the Old Catholic Mariavite Church belongs, attended and other Mariavite priests also came. Employees of the Municipal Council and representatives of the local teachers and pupils laid flowers under the monument. Unfortunately the Roman Catholic parish priest and the most important Roman Catholic political actors were absent at this important cultural event. The local authority officer arrived just in time for the unveiling but he did not participate in the official part of the ceremony. He stood back, over a dozen metres behind the main celebrants.

In my opinion, such separate religious celebrations are a good occasion to test the genuineness of Christian ecumenism because they are attended by members of the other community and the decision to do so is individual and not intended to manifest factional preferences. Only political actors who are used to constant rivalry can break out of this pattern.<sup>28</sup>

One Roman Catholic lady who had participated in the Mariavite celebrations explained the motives underlying her decision and pointed out that she attended the other church’s jubilee because she wanted to feel a part of the territorial cultural community:

I was very interested and of course my husband and I went and I even mentioned this to the Mariavite priest because all in all we get on very well together: ‘And what do you think? Why did so few people come?’ Because he said hello, happy to see us attending the celebrations. I said, ‘Well, after all, we are a community here. And it’s a shame—such a lovely ceremony and the unveiling of the monument—that it was so poorly advertised, there should have been posters or something, then most people, even Catholics,

<sup>28</sup> Yet when the pope died the Roman Catholic priest took the opportunity to compete cryptically (it would not have been proper to do so openly). According to his words, on the eve of the pope’s funeral the bells did not ring in the Mariavite church. “But they rang in the whole of Poland,” the priest argued. “Now, when you interview him [the Mariavite priest—A. H.], ask him, “And what about your church? I understand the bells rang in both churches?” If he says nothing, you will see for yourself how they respect the Pope.”

would have come.' I just can't believe that all Catholics are so orthodox! Yes, there are orthodox ones but you cannot look at it this way, after all, this is the parish's centenary. It's on our territory and we should all celebrate it and respect it.

This woman's accusation of poor promotion is noteworthy. One would have thought that such events, including those which were just being planned, would be widely discussed in such a small local community. So perhaps although the Roman Catholics and Mariavites talk to one another on a daily basis they only mention common issues and avoid talking about the uncomfortable structural dichotomy and about matters which are unique and should not be discussed in two-denominational company or perhaps even in public space at all. This hypothesis supports the validity of the working functional distinction between everyday harmony and tense special occasions where emergence into the public sphere leads to disharmony and disintegration.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The presented locality is an example of a community with a complex network of social relations, symbols and references to processes at a higher than local level and historical processes. This is why I thought it was necessary to view the local community in a broader context, one which would help to grasp the specific nature of the dichotomy.

Both the dramatic history of religious schism and the Pole-as-Catholic stereotype in a country where the Roman Catholic Church plays a predominant role affect the form and lives of the two-denominational community and the functioning of the minority group itself. Religious interest groups take advantage of the local division and do not hesitate to abuse sensitive human identifications unceremoniously. Mutual gossip and comments, aimed at undermining the position of "those others," are infrequent but significant. They are largely rooted in the past (the locals call them "historical leftovers"), in the partitions of Poland and real socialism. Today most of the villagers are Roman Catholics. The main political actors are Catholics and therefore this faction dominates the public space. Because they are so strong, they tend to superimpose their counter-mores to symbolically demonstrate their superiority.

Nowadays competition between the two communities is not very prominent but it is detectable and has affected mutual relations ever since the Mariavite idea emerged. It has been channelled in public life, however, and become an instrument of political manifestation. Political actors who do not actually live in the village are particularly prone to use these instruments because they do not sense the complex structural dichotomy which is part of the experience of so-called ordinary inhabitants who have lived in the village for generations. The "imported" secular politicians are either elected by the local community itself, or rather the Roman Catholic majority, in direct democratic elections to the local self-government or invited by the elected authorities. Perhaps the strategic goal here is to give the authorities a useful margin of freedom but political practice also shows that imported actors are the ones who are particularly willing to violate the principles of local status quo. We may therefore

risk the conclusion that the inhabitants of the two-denominational village wish to continue the historical rivalry but they want to do so more diplomatically, not by means of independently meted out sanctions.

Perhaps this is the reason for the civil passivity of the local community. Lack of appropriate models of stable “middle-of-the-road” behaviour is automatically politicising relations and segregating civil initiatives into mainly “Mariavite” or “Catholic” categories. As long as the village’s internal policy, based on mutual opposition, is not rooted in ideology (local “rightist” and “leftist” factions), it will continue to be largely an attempt to obtain more resources and retain power within one’s own faction.

To summarise, on a daily basis ordinary inhabitants seem to ward off the problematic dichotomy and maintain harmony but periodical expression of social forces maintaining existing divisions takes place on special occasions such as feasts and holidays, in the presence of and with the contribution of the local public. Common processions (automatically called “ecumenical”) are a mixture of sacred and profane, religion and politics. The clergy lead the celebrations of national anniversaries and—probably in line with the stereotyped correlation of crucial values—the Roman Catholic priest bears the palm. At the same time the rivalry which is part and parcel of the local structures allows the political actors to take advantage of the villagers at such moments and to treat them as potential faction resources. People react by withdrawing into the private sphere and remain inactive in the civic sphere. All this has a detrimental effect on social integration.

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