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Juraj Buzalka, *Nation and Religion. The Politics of Commonwealth in South-East Poland. Halle Studies in Anthropology of Eurasia*. Vol. 14, LIT Verlag, Berlin 297, 236 pages, with Index. ISBN 978-3-8258-9907-3

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The work reviewed is the upshot of field research conducted by the Author in Przemyśl and the surrounding areas in 2003 to 2005. Generally, the work deals with relations between religion, politics and nation conceptions formulated by the borderland residents, Ukrainians and Poles. The monograph is an important voice in scientific discussion on the role of religion in Europe's post Socialist region and in diagnosis of religious and ethnic situation in the borderland under study. This is connected with the theoretical perspective adopted by the Author and the research method applied.

Theoretical frame of analysis as proposed by Buzalka is defined by politics of commemoration, broadly understood, including daily practices, public rituals and symbols as well as interpretations of users and creators of these symbols and rituals which are dominantly national in character. Another element of theoretical perspective is a conception of post-peasant populism, seen as a kind of contemporary political culture in Central-Eastern Europe, based on religion and peasant nostalgia, a yearning for the past. The conception is an instrument explaining commemoration policy manifestations.

The author has applied a traditional method of field research, with systematic participant observation, conversations with regular informants and people met by chance or chosen purposely. These data have been completed with prior materials—scientific and source works alike.

The work's outstanding quality is the combination of the comprehensive subject of ethnographic description—above-mentioned commemoration politics—with in-depth comments on public rituals and national and religious events (this also includes so-called Karmel conflict and its social background, pp. 91–97), and correct identification of Polish and Ukrainian intellectual circles in Przemyśl. This makes it an interesting review of religious, national mass folklore events of importance to that community, offering a spectrum of views represented by that town's community of Poles and Ukrainians. This perspective makes the work richer in content regarding

the religion-people feedback, interethnic relations and identity change generated by European and global factors, than appears to the author himself. This applies particularly to the dominant role of Polish culture in the life of Ukrainian minority (Babiński 1999); differentiation of national attitudes in representatives of both ethnic groups and the surfacing of modern ways of promoting Ukrainian culture at Podkarpacie (Stopa 2005; Wojakowski and Bieniecki 2007). It is noteworthy that although the religious and ethnic situation at Polish-Ukrainian borderland has already been fairly well mapped-out sociologically,[1] Buzalka's study is the first to deeply penetrate ethnic groups in Przemyśl itself, groups which have always been quite distrustful of Polish researchers.

Evidently less impressive is his knowledge of phenomena and opinions occurring out of Przemyśl and out of the Przemyśl intellectual circles, a drawback to this study. It can be seen in sections dealing with phenomena in local rural environments (except St. John's/Kupaly night, an ethnic event at Rybotycka Posada, which was however staged by Ukrainians from Przemyśl!), and in social response to commemoration politics proposed by elites. This work is in fact meant to create national and local memory, rather than put it in ordinary practice. The everyday practices described are for the most part observed primarily by members of creative ethnic elites.

Focusing on elites and not on the common man taking part in social life, falls within political anthropology perspective referred to by Buzalka. Yet it is regrettable that the author failed to use e.g. source materials from earlier field researches, available in Annex to Grzegorz Babiński's work (1997), which depicts the other perspective better. Particularly as it is in our part of Europe that finding out views of "ordinary citizens" is coming into vogue, as seen from Elizabeth Dunn's research (1997) on industrial class conducted at Podkarpacie too. Above remarks are important in that the perspective referred to seems desirable in the case of *Nation and Religion* also because the author regards post-peasant populism as crucial to interrelations between the title phenomena. It is useful to show how post-peasant ideology is perceived by the addressees: farmers and workers living at the ethnic borderland today. I think that if the author would consult materials on above-mentioned research conducted at the Polish-Ukrainian border he would certainly find, in common knowledge, the missing examples of elements he includes into the framework of post-peasant populism: "peasant nostalgia," multiculturalism, religion-steered national memory, and political and social mobilization based on religion too, with a distinctly pro-society and anti-capitalist orientation. With this populism seen as essential in explaining phenomena in question, one is unsatisfied with the work's analytical aspect. And the Author's sound ethnography does invite a more profound interpretation. Views and events presented in the work are, however, employed as illustrations of respective aspects of post-peasant populism, rather than arguments showing convincingly that they do occur. I believe that an empirical work of this type ought to modify an introductory conception and present it in greater detail, and not use it as a handy tool to produce short conclusions. The theoretical conception seems somewhat impaired by the way it is applied in the analysis.

[1] I mean first of all research of many years' standing conducted and inspired by Grzegorz Babiński (Babiński 1997; Wojakowski 2002).

These critical remarks do not mean that phenomena described by Buzalka in categories of post-peasant populism do not occur at the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. But is it populism and is it post-peasant? Employed in political rivalry, a specific medley of religious, national and folk notions does occur in Central-Eastern Europe. However, it would be a good thing to consider relations between components of this ideology, as they appear more complex than the author would have them. This short review will not accommodate an extensive presentation of all aspects of the complexity as far as the process of social memory creation is concerned. However, peasant tradition, which—the Author frequently emphasizes—is of key importance in understanding the way of thinking of contemporary Central-European Europeans, deserves a closer look.

Pondering these topics, Buzalka refers to the interwar period when folk political movements played an important role in this European region (pp 18–22). "Peasant ethos," proposed by those parties is not, however, a pure product of tradition of that social class but is consequent on central European societies evolving towards democratisation and modern nations. As described by Gellner (1983) when addressing the emergence of "Ruritania's" national tradition, even at that time was "peasant tradition" more national than agrarian in its form. Such interpretation perfectly explains Buzalka's concluding remark that the phenomenon of "peasant nostalgia" as he puts it, is common throughout Europe. This is exactly what Tim Edensor (2002) describes as ideological rural national landscapes. That rustic, if not necessarily peasant, aspect of nostalgia will be perfectly obvious anyway once Polish notions, not exclusively Ukrainian, are taken into consideration, because irrespective of their peasant origin, the former have gentry-related national culture instilled in them, and that culture also uses the rural landscape.

In spite of these remarks I do share the Author's opinion that the impact of agrarian, pre-national tradition on contemporary ideology and politics in our region is significant. Yet the essence of those traditions is to be found in anthropological and ethnographic works which are not known to the Author: works by Józef Burszta (1974; 1985), Ludwik Stomma (1986) and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz (2000), (also Jan S. Bystroń's studies (1995) in the early 20th century). It is noteworthy that distrust of external world was dominant in peasant view of the world depicted there, as were relations within small social groups. These characteristics allow of other interpretations of material collected by Buzalka but they lead to far less optimistic conclusions (Buzalka believes post-peasant populism can be an effective alternative to liberal democratic society).

Referring to some reflections presented in the work in some detail, one must appreciate Buzalka's remarks that the official version of borderland multiculturalism is merely recognition of "multinationalism" there. This, however, does not seem to be specific to this part of Europe (vide Canada; Babiński 1998), nor to be an only model of multiculturalism in the region (Wojakowski 2002). Various forms of multiculturalism appear in *Nation and Religion* in the context of two conceptions of tolerance: artificial and ordinary. But this distinction seems to be a research artefact proceeding from notions of people surveyed. Tension between ethnic and local artificiality and

naturalness (ordinariness) functions in the minds of borderland residents, as does dichotomy of religious syncretism and purity, described by Buzalka (in chapter 7). A pivotal example of ordinary tolerance—the tradition of joint observance of the Lord's Baptism Feast (Jordan), unbroken throughout communism in villages around Przemyśl (p 135), is actually a myth which may have been created by Przemyśl intelligentsia. It was only after 1989 that joint processions to Jordan were inspired by the clergy, and in some villages (like Chotyniec) they have been held for some years. It is regrettable that other forms of multiculturalism, different from those based on clear distinctions drawn between ethnic groups, are practised in that region under something like "structural coercion." Such multiculturalism can follow for instance from the fact that the Polish majority consists largely of persons of Ukrainian origin, and those very persons show "ordinary tolerance" towards their neighbours (relatives, in many cases), who had borne the expense of "remaining Ukrainian." Consequently, "ordinary agrarian tolerance" (p. 157) is a product of contemporary social relations as much as is intelligentsia's artificial tolerance. By the same token, references to the past by people practising tolerance are no more than conversion of the past into mythology.

In spite of above remarks I must emphasize that the book inspires reflections going beyond discussion on local problems of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. It also comprises valuable ethnographic material testifying to the Author's high competence.

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Dariusz Wojakowski
University of Rzeszów
e-mail: darek.wojak@wp.pl